

## THE RUSSO-CHECHEN WAR: A THREAT TO STABILITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND EURASIA?

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While ethno-confessional conflict has broken out in several of the newly independent republics of the former USSR since the devolution of Soviet power in 1991, none of the conflicts in the Commonwealth of Independent States has had the destabilizing impact of Russia's two destructive wars with the tiny secessionist republic of Chechnya. The negative impact of Russia's bloody conflicts in the northern Caucasus needs to be enumerated for those unfamiliar with the recent war. In terms of democracy, the latest Russian invasion of Chechnya has represented a set-back for the construction of civil society in post-Soviet Russia. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has clamped down on the independent media's reporting on the recent war and has ridden to power on a wave of military adventurism and xenophobic nationalism in Russia.<sup>1</sup> As to human rights, the Russian assault on Chechnya has seen the obliteration of Grozny (once the largest city in the northern Caucasus) in the heaviest bombing campaign in Europe since the destruction

of Dresden. The campaign has cost thousands of civilians lives; tens of thousands have been maimed or wounded in the conflict; close to a quarter of a million people have been displaced and are now living in squalid refugee camps.

In financial terms, Russia's earnings from oil export and production, which could be used to update its decaying infrastructure and further privatization, are being squandered on its exorbitant campaigns in the Caucasus. Most alarmingly, the Chechen conflict has the potential to spread to the Middle East, as Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev has threatened to strike at Taliban-controlled Afghanistan (which it accuses of supporting the Chechens) from bases in the former Soviet republics of Tajikistan or Uzbekistan.<sup>2</sup> The Russian government has also accused various governments in the Middle East of supporting the Chechen side and has threatened sanctions against any government found guilty of aiding the Chechen separatists.

Considering the larger ramifications of the current Russo-Chechen war to the

stability of a considerable portion of post-Soviet Eurasia and the Middle East, it is surprising how little in-depth coverage the recent war has received in the West. Little effort, for example, has been made to analyze the succession of events that led to the outbreak of the recent warfare between the Chechens and the Russians, and few attempts have been made to understand the subsequent progression of the war taking place on this volatile fissure between the Slavic-Christian and Muslim worlds. What little most Westerners do understand of the conflict is often based on Russian government reports that glibly portray Russia's military operations in Chechnya as "anti-terrorist actions" against "bandit formations" or simplified views of the war as a small people's struggle for independence against a trans-continental imperium. A more nuanced understanding of the background to this conflict and the subsequent course of the war is needed if the West is to assess its importance to American and European foreign-policy concerns.

## BACKGROUND

The seeds of the current war in Chechnya lie in unfinished business stemming from the previous 1994-96 Russo-Chechen war. In that war, the newly elected nationalist president of Chechnya, Djohar Dudayev, attempted to separate his Connecticut-sized republic from the Russian Federation at a time when the Russian center was weak. President Yeltsin belatedly decided to directly invade the secessionist republic in November 1994. For Russia's generals, who resented the Russian army's loss of prestige after the Soviet debacle in Afghanistan and the decline of the Soviet empire, the invasion

of Chechnya was to be a "small victorious war" that would both boost the military's tarnished prestige and send a message of strength to Russia's other restless minorities such as the Tatars.

Far from resembling America's successful intervention in Haiti (to which Russian chiefs of staff compared their own invasion of Chechnya) Russia's cobbled-together conscript army soon found itself facing determined bands of Chechen fighters who seemed prepared to give their lives to defend their self-declared independent statelet, known as Ichkeria. In December-January 1994-95, poorly led Russian troops stormed the Chechen capital of Grozny and were slaughtered in the hundreds by skilled Chechen street fighters who ambushed their columns and wiped out whole units. A stunned Russian nation mourned as almost 2,000 Russian soldiers were killed during the first two months of fighting alone.

What had started off as a military "intervention" designed to topple the eccentric president of a wayward republic quickly devolved into full-scale warfare against the entire Chechen people. By invading the republic and brutally bombing civilian areas in their clumsy attempt to overthrow the Dudayev regime, the Russians inadvertently awoke the long-dormant fighting spirit of the Caucasian highlanders. The Chechens, who have a long martial tradition stemming from almost a century of stubborn warfare against the expansionist Russian Empire during the nineteenth century, rallied to their embattled president's once-hopeless cause and took to street fighting and urban warfare with relish.

As Russia's losses mounted in the winter of 1994-95, its increasingly frus-

trated generals responded to the unexpected Chechen resistance by unleashing an indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombardment on the Chechen capital. The rain of bombs and shells that fell on Grozny surpassed that of the much-publicized Serbian bombardment of Sarajevo in its scale, intensity and, most important, its death toll on civilians in the city. Tens of thousands of Russian and Chechen inhabitants lost their lives as Grozny was leveled block by block during Russia's campaign against the elusive Chechen defenders of the city. It was only after most of Grozny had been virtually destroyed that the Chechen guerrillas deployed from the city on February 23, 1995.

This date is replete with significance for the Chechens. It was on February 23, 1944, that their entire nation was ethnically cleansed from its republic by Stalin and sent into exile in Central Asia for thirteen

years (for alleged "collaboration" with the Nazi invaders in World War II). The memory of this brutal ethnocide, which saw as many as one in three Chechens perish on the steppes of Kazakhstan, may help explain their unexpected resistance to the Russians, who were equated with the Soviets in the Chechens' collective memory of "The Deportation."<sup>3</sup>

Following their evacuation from Grozny, Dudayev's forces withdrew southward to the Caucasus mountains, which make up the southern third of the Chechen republic, to launch a guerrilla war.

By the summer of 1995, however, it looked as if the Russians' mopping-up operations were coming to a successful conclusion.

It was at this time that a daring Chechen soldier sneaked through Russian lines and launched what should have been a suicide assault deep into the heart of Russia itself. On June 13, 1995, Field Commander Shamil Basayev infiltrated the neighboring Russian province of Stavropol with a band of 150 suicide fighters and took 1,500 Russian civilians hostage in a hospital in the town of Budenovsk, over 200 kilometers north of Chechnya. Basayev demanded an end to military operations in Chechnya and called for immediate talks with Russian Prime

Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin.

The latter assumed control of negotiations and agreed to Basayev's demands to bring an immediate cessation to military actions. Basayev, along with his unit and several

hundred hostages, subsequently made their circuitous way back to the safety of the mountains of Chechnya, where Basayev was greeted as a hero.

Although the cease-fire did not last, it allowed the Chechens to train the scores of new recruits who flooded into their army in response to Russian troops' attacks on civilians throughout Chechnya. Although President Dudaev himself was killed during a Russian bombing raid in the spring of 1996, his brand of anti-Russian nationalism spread throughout Chechnya as the Russian occupation forces arrested civil-

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ians and sought to eradicate “bandits” by destroying Chechen villages.

It was at this time that a new dimension entered the conflict. Small bands of Arabs who had previously fought as international *mujahideen* (holy warriors) against the USSR in Afghanistan during the 1980s began to join the Chechen fighters in 1995 and 1996.<sup>4</sup> Most prominent among them was a fundamentalist from Saudi Arabia, known by the *nom de guerre* Emir Khattab, who brought his brand of Islam and a small group of Arab fighters with him. Khattab gained great notoriety in Russia for his April 1996 ambush and annihilation of a Russian military column on a narrow gorge in the south Chechen mountains.<sup>5</sup>

While the Chechens were uniting behind such charismatic anti-Russian leaders as Basayev and Khattab during the winter and spring of 1996, the Russian public had begun to turn against their own leaders. Hundreds of Russia’s sons continued to stream back to their hometowns in coffins, and the continued bloodshed in distant Chechnya began to sicken many Russians.

Then the unthinkable happened. On August 6, 1996, thousands of Chechen fighters under the control of Shamil Basayev and Aslan Maskhadov, the head of the Chechen army, came out of the mountains and infiltrated Russian-occupied Grozny. Once inside Grozny, the Chechen bands were able to surround and pin down the approximately 12,000 Russian troops scattered in pockets throughout the city. The trapped Russian soldiers, untrained conscripts for the most part, were in effect made the prisoners of the smaller number of battle-hardened and determined Chechen fighters. A checkmate had been achieved.

By August 22 a desperate Yeltsin was forced to sign another cease-fire and begin the gradual withdrawal of his beleaguered troops from Grozny. With the Russian public staunchly against the war and his troops humbled, Yeltsin had to admit that the war in Chechnya had effectively been lost. Yeltsin later described the war as the biggest mistake of his career.

On August 31, 1996, Kremlin Security Council Secretary Alexander Lebed signed a peace treaty with the chief Chechen field commander, Alsan Maskhadov, in the town of Khasavyurt. This shelved discussion of Chechnya’s status for five years. By November 1996 Yeltsin had withdrawn all Russian troops from the republic, and Chechnya had achieved *de facto* independence. Further recognition of Chechnya’s status came in 1997, when Russia and Chechnya signed the “Treaty of Peace and Principles of Mutual Relations between Russia and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria,” which effectively recognized Chechnya as a *de jure* independent state.

Although the Chechen side could officially claim a stunning David versus Goliath victory in the first Russo-Chechen war, there were in reality no winners. According to the most accurate estimates, 4,000 Chechen fighters and 7,500 Russian soldiers lost their lives and as many as 35,000 civilians had been killed during the course of the two-year conflict.<sup>6</sup>

#### **CHECHNYA INDEPENDENT: 1996-99**

Perhaps in recognition of its flimsy moral basis for launching the brutal war, Moscow adopted a conciliatory post-war attitude towards the republic. The Russian government signed a treaty with the Chechen leadership promising to help reconstruct the ruined republic’s infrastruc-

ture. Russia's actions appear to have resonated with the war-weary Chechens, who overwhelmingly elected Aslan Maskhadov, a moderate field commander known for his willingness to compromise with the Russians, as president of their republic in elections held in January 1997.

Initially, great hopes were placed on the pragmatic Maskhadov, who made an admirable effort to bring Shamil Basayev and other powerful field commanders into his government. Maskhadov was, however, faced with a difficult balancing act, since Chechnya was ruled by several clan-based regional warlords who had refused to be decommissioned at the war's end.<sup>7</sup>

To make matters worse, the republic's industries had been deliberately destroyed during the war, and 80-90 percent of Chechen men found themselves without jobs. In an ultimately self-defeating policy, Russia never fulfilled its commitments to rebuild the republic's economy and instead treated Chechnya as a quarantine area.<sup>8</sup> In these conditions it is not surprising that many impoverished but armed Chechens gradually turned to the old highlander tradition of kidnapping lowlanders for money. Chechnya quickly became notorious throughout the northern Caucasus as hundreds of Russian citizens from the neighboring regions, as well as a few foreigners, were held for ransom by Chechen gangs. Ordinary Chechen citizens grew frustrated with Maskhadov's inability to rein in the lawlessness and rebuild civil society. Chechnya came to be seen by most analysts as a failed proto-nation-state at best, and a mafocracy at worst.

If these problems were not sufficient to stymie the weak Maskhadov government as it sought to stem the anarchy, a

new source of internal dissension appeared in the form of fundamentalist Islam. As mentioned previously, hundreds of Arab militants, such as Emir Khattab, had arrived during the war in a show of Islamic solidarity. Many of these veterans of the Afghan war began to propagate the Wahhabi version of Islam (of the sort found in Saudi Arabia). Subsequently there were several armed clashes in eastern Chechnya between the traditionalist elements and those drawn to the new Islamic fundamentalism. As a result, the Maskhadov government launched a drive in 1998 against both the Wahhabi fundamentalists and the kidnapping gangs.

### **ISLAMISTS IN THE MOUNTAINS OF DAGESTAN**

Many of those drawn to Wahhabi Islam soon joined Emir Khattab and his Arab mujahideen in four training camps located near Nozhai Yurt in a rugged area in southeastern Chechnya close to the border of the neighboring Russian republic of Dagestan. It was at this time that Khattab began to make contacts with militant Wahhabis who had also begun to appear in several villages in this mountainous Muslim republic.

Dagestan separates the Chechen republic from the Caspian Sea and is one of the most multiethnic regions in the world. Its many minorities have kept peace by maintaining a power-sharing agreement. The delicate balancing act that prevented Dagestan from going the route of the multiethnic Yugoslavia was, however, threatened in the early 1990s by the arrival of Arab Wahhabite missionaries.<sup>9</sup>

The Dagestani government's problems with the Wahhabi fundamentalists began in several villages south of the capital of

Makhachkala in 1997. In response to perceived repression by the local police, who considered this alien version of Islam a threat to the status quo and traditional forms of Sufi Islam, the Dagestani Wahhabis of the villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar armed themselves, expelled the local police and declared their area an “independent *shariah*-based territory.”<sup>10</sup>

Tensions to the northwest of Karamakhi, along the Dagestani territories bordering Chechnya, also continued to rise at this time, as many Dagestanis in the mountainous border district known as Avaria turned to Wahhabism. As with the Wahhabis in central Dagestan, those in Avaria also rejected the central authority of the Dagestani government. Rather than recognizing the central authorities in Makhachkala, the Dagestani Wahhabis of Avaria and central Dagestan had earlier begun to look for leadership to maverick field commander Shamil Basayev, who had joined the anti-Maskhadov opposition in Chechnya.

Both Chechen president Maskhadov and the Dagestani leadership began to fear this alliance of opposition groups in their respective republics when it declared that its stated objective was nothing less than the re-establishment of the nineteenth-century *Imamate* (theocratic state) led by the legendary mountain warrior Imam Shamil. The great Imam Shamil was not only an implacable enemy of Christian Russia but was the first leader to successfully unite the divided peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan against the expansionist Russians by forging a unified state based on a strict form of fundamentalist Islam.

Shamil Basayev has claimed to cherish the memory of Imam Shamil, and his new

language of *jihad* resembled that of the great anti-Russian *gazi* (holy warrior). Throughout the spring and summer of 1999, Basayev, who began to style himself an Islamic Che Guevera, began to call for the “decolonization” of Dagestan by the Russian unbelievers.<sup>11</sup> Under the influence of Khattab and his Arab mujahideen, Basayev, who was not himself a Wahhabi but rather a member of a traditional Chechen Sufi order, appeared to have gradually metamorphosed from a Chechen nationalist to a Chechen Muslim. His stated objective of reviving the theocracy of his nineteenth-century namesake offered the perfect arena for fusing his new brand of anti-Russian Islamism with romantic notions of liberating his “colonized” Dagestani brothers and sisters from infidel rule.

This combination of Chechen and Dagestani Muslims united against Russia under the banner of militant Islam fulfilled Russia’s worst nightmare. Dagestan contains 70 percent of Russia’s Caspian Sea coastline. It possesses its only all-year warm-water port of Makhachkala and is the conduit for oil transported by pipeline from Azerbaijan. Its loss would be a strategic calamity.

## THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES

In August 1999, as Dagestani federal officials began operations aimed at restoring central authority in the western mountainous area of Avaria claimed by the increasingly militant Wahhabis, Russia’s worst fears were realized. A group of approximately 1,200 Chechen, Dagestani and Arab militants retaliated by launching a full-scale invasion of the neighboring region. The militants soon gained control of nine villages in the high mountains in

Avaria's two main provinces (Tsumadan and Botlikh). Shocked Russians watched on television as bearded militants wearing combat fatigues and armed with rocket-propelled grenade launchers and heavy machine guns easily routed local security forces.<sup>12</sup> The next day, Russian President Yeltsin fired his prime minister, Sergei Stepashin (percieved as too irresolute in his dealings with the Wahhabis in Dagestan) and replaced him with a rather unknown ex-KGB apparatchik, Vladimir Putin.

Putin was known as a hard-liner, and those studying the region saw the pieces being put into place for a potential second Russo-Chechen war. Not surprisingly, Putin vowed to deal mercilessly with the militants and to prevent the spread of the Islamic contagion to Dagestan.

On this second account, however, the newly appointed prime minister need not have worried.<sup>13</sup> Throughout Muslim Dagestan, thousands of volunteers of all Dagestani nationalities flocked to join defense militias, which quickly mobilized to

repel the invaders threatening the precarious stability of their multiethnic republic.

In both the Kremlin and Dagestan, many accused Maskhadov's government of being behind the invasion, and there was considerable speculation as to who the invading militants actually were. Speculation ended on August 9, 1999, when Shamil Basayev and Emir Khattab appeared in the Dagestani Republic and reviewed their troops, known as the "Islamic Peace-Keeping Battalion." Basayev then went on

to issue a declaration to the Dagestani people calling on them to rise up and end 140 years of occupation by the "Muscovite unbelievers."<sup>14</sup>

After sustaining considerable losses in their initial attempts to repel Basayev's forces, the Russian air force took control of operations and began to pound the invaders' trenches and hardened positions in the highland crags and ravines of Avaria. As the invaders determinedly resisted Russian air assaults, Putin decided to use fuel-air explosives, known to the Russians as vacuum bombs, against the militants. This horrifying weapon, which was not used in the first Russo-Chechen war, has the effect of a tactical nuclear weapon without the residual radiation. Fuel-air explosions involve dropping a bomb which spreads aerosol over an area that is

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subsequently ignited. This has the primary effect of incinerating those caught in the explosion itself and the secondary effect of creating a vacuum that sucks the air out of the lungs of its indirect

victims, killing even those hidden in defensive cellars. Even hardened Chechen veterans who had withstood Russia's assault on Grozny in the Russo-Chechen war considered this weapon fear-inspiring. As losses among the invading militants mounted, their commanders decided that a retreat to fight another day was preferable to martyrdom on the unforgiving mountain slopes and on August 23-24, 1999, the militants withdrew to Chechnya.

Those Wahhabi villages occupied by

the invaders were totally obliterated by the Russian air force. The mood in the rest of the republic in the aftermath of the failed invasion reached a fever pitch, and there were calls for outlawing Wahhabism in Dagestan and destroying those Wahhabis who had declared an “Islamic territory” in the villages of Chabanmakhi and Karamakhi to the south of the capital.

Buoyed by their success against the feared Basayev, on September 29, 1999, the Russian air force began to use the same bombing tactics against the Wahhabis in Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi that had been so successful against the Wahhabis in Avaria. As their losses mounted, the desperate village leaders sent an urgent plea for assistance to Basayev and Khattab, who were still massed in south-eastern Chechnya.

It was at this stage that Basayev and Khattab launched their second invasion of Dagestan on September 5, 1999. The operation was intended to relieve the pressure on the besieged Wahhabi villages. The Chechen militants launched this invasion to the north of their previous incursion and crossed over into Dagestan’s central region, the Novolak district.

On this occasion, however, Basayev’s “Islamic Peace-Keeping Brigade” of 2,000 fighters did not limit itself to the occupation of frontier villages. Its objective appears to have been nothing less than the capital of the Novolak district, Dagestan’s second largest city, Khasavyurt (population 100,000). The invaders were, however, repulsed by federal forces on September 8 and began a retreat back to the mountainous border region. By September 12, the Chechens had begun to fall back into Chechnya. On the following day, the Wahhabi villages of Karamakhi and

Chabanmakhi fell.<sup>15</sup>

Few were surprised when the Russian government followed up its victory in Dagestan with a bombing campaign in the areas of southeastern Chechnya that were seen as staging areas for the militants. This action elicited strong protests from the Maskhadov government, which saw the bombings as an attack on its hard-won sovereignty. It should also be noted that on August 16, 1999, during the height of Basayev’s first invasion of Dagestan, President Maskhadov led a mass rally of as many as 5,000 people in Grozny *against* Basayev’s actions in Dagestan.

Like most Chechens, President Maskhadov was horrified by Basayev’s military actions in Russia, and the Chechen government was uncharacteristically critical of Basayev as it sought to distance itself from his dangerous actions against the Russian Federation. Maskhadov saw all too clearly that Basayev’s reckless actions in Dagestan gave an increasingly aggressive Russia a pretext for intervening militarily in Chechnya and scrapping the 1996 Khasavyurt peace agreement. In an interview, Maskhadov later spoke of Basayev’s actions:

After the war I was tired, I was dreaming about a rest, as was the rest of the Chechen nation. But even then it looked like war was imminent. With dismay I listened to the speeches of a variety of politicians and commanders. These calls for holy war, the liberation of the Caucasus, flying Islamic green flags over the Kremlin! I knew everything was heading towards war.<sup>16</sup>

While the trend toward armed conflict may have been unpopular in war-weary

Chechnya, the Russian government's competent handling of Basayev's invasion won it wide support in Russia, and most Russians backed punitive strikes against the despised Chechens. But, as high as anti-Chechen sentiment ran in Russia, there were few calls for renewing full-scale war.

### THE BOMBING SPREE IN RUSSIA

By mid-September 1999, the Russian public's mood had, however, fundamentally changed. The events that led to the rise of war fervor (and a sense of collective amnesia concerning the terrible losses in the first Russo-Chechen war) can be traced to a series of mysterious terrorist bombings that swept Russia in that month. The horrific explosions, which took the lives of close to 300 civilians, occurred September 4-16 in Moscow, Buianaksk (Dagestan) and Volgodonsk (southern Russia). Russia reeled as news footage captured the images of innocent men, women and children being dragged from the ruins of their homes in the now unsafe heartland of Russia.

As panic swept the country, there was considerable speculation as to who was responsible. Many Russians attributed the explosions to Kremlin power struggles, the mafia or government agents attempting to destabilize Russia as a pretext for the declaration of a state of emergency. Independent State Duma Deputy Konstantin Borovoi gave further credence to such conspiracy theories when he announced that he had been warned in advance about the bombings by an agent of military intelligence.<sup>17</sup> The Russian government, however, quickly blamed Chechen warlords Shamil Basayev and Emir Khattab. Basayev was declared "enemy

number one" in Russia, and a bounty of \$1 million was placed on his head. Although the Russian government has still not presented any proof to substantiate this theory (one can assume that if the Kremlin had evidence it would be widely publicized), Putin began a campaign to paint the Chechens as "terrorist-bombers."

In many ways, Russia's knee-jerk scapegoating of the Chechens resembled America's reaction to the Oklahoma City bombing, which was widely blamed on Muslims before American extremists were arrested for the crime. The entire Chechen people were in effect tried and convicted in the eyes of Russian popular opinion, and any action against this hated nation, no matter how barbaric, was seen as morally justified. Russia's most popular newspaper, for example, called for the "physical extermination of the whole (Chechen) republic using strategic air strikes, biological weapons, psychotropic gasses, napalm and everything at the disposal of our once-powerful army."<sup>18</sup> The relatively unknown Putin (whose poll ratings gave him a mere 2 percent of the Russian vote in early September 1999) saw his popularity skyrocket as he talked of dealing mercilessly with Chechnya and eradicating "terrorist and bandit formations."

For their part, the objects of Putin's accusations, Basayev and Khattab, adamantly rejected accusations of involvement in the bombings. On a pro-Chechen website, Khattab vehemently denied responsibility for the bombings and declared, "We as Muslims are *mujahideen* fighting only against the disbelieving soldiers. It is not permissible for us to kill women and children. This is part of our religion."<sup>19</sup> An analysis of the two field commanders' previous activities tends to

support their claims of innocence, and most military analysts say the blasts do not look like their work. One observer has written of Basayev and Khattab, "Their reputation for military skill and audacity requires that they take responsibility for the raids they inflict on their opponents. Yet they have denied responsibility for the bombings."<sup>20</sup>

Basayev and Khattab derive their prestige and notoriety from their widely publicized raids and military exploits. Their actions are in effect carried out to bring publicity to their cause, and their reputations for audacity rest on taking responsibility for their actions. In addition, Basayev and Khattab clearly had little to gain by terrorizing the Russian public and turning it against Chechnya. Most important, it should be noted that there were no bombings of this sort when they would be expected, i.e. during Russia's subsequent military campaigns against Chechnya. Significantly, as of fall 2000, while 33 people have been arrested in conjunction with the fall-1999 bombings, not one of the suspects is a Chechen.

Basayev claimed that the Russian government was involved in the bombings. This theory was bolstered by a strange event that took place in the city of Ryazan in late September 1999. On September 22, 1999, the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* reported that residents in an apartment complex in the city noticed three suspicious strangers entering the building's basement.<sup>21</sup> They quickly called in the police, who arrested the men and discovered three detonators in their possession and three sacks of the explosive hexagon, traces of which had been found in the previous explosion sites in Moscow and Volgodonsk. The story grew even more incredible when it was discovered that the

culprits were actually members of the FSB (Federal Security Service) who claimed to be engaged in an anti-terrorism "exercise."

While the *Novaya Gazeta* story was widely known in Russia, it did not create much of an impact in the West. For the most part, the American press seems to have swallowed the Kremlin's axiomatic statements claiming that Russia was bombing Chechen villages as punishment for "Chechen terrorist bombing activities" against Russian citizens.

Although the Ryazan incident shook the country's confidence in its leaders, approximately half of Russians polled blamed the Chechens for the bombings.<sup>22</sup> Most of Russia was still very willing to see the Chechens as the enemy, and in late September 1999 the progress towards war took on an inexorability of its own. Although many accused the Putin government of pursuing a "wag the dog" agenda, a small punitive war against the detested nation of Chechen bombers was just what the Russian public wanted, and the man who could offer it might be able to ride the resulting popularity to the presidency.

## THE SECOND INVASION OF CHECHNYA

By September 24, 1999, Putin had escalated the "anti-terrorist" campaign against Chechnya and commenced the bombing of the capital itself. As civilian casualties in Chechnya soared (and soon surpassed those suffered by the Russians in the fall-1999 bombing spree), a desperate Maskhadov appealed to Moscow to begin talks aimed at averting full-scale war. Maskhadov's entreaties, however, fell on deaf ears, and Putin appeared by October to have abandoned dialogue with Maskhadov, whom he no longer recognized

as a legitimate head of state.

By October 1999, Russian armored brigades had begun to pour across the border into the plains of northern Chechnya, and President Maskhadov was calling for full mobilization of Chechen men. At this time, Putin announced that the Russian troops would advance only as far as the Terek River, which cuts the northern third of Chechnya off from the rest of the republic. Putin's stated intention was to take control of Chechnya's northern plain and establish a *cordon sanitaire* against further Chechen aggression.

The Russian army moved with ease in the wide open spaces of northern Chechnya and soon reached the Terek River. Having quickly gained control of the north Chechen plain, the army chiefs crossed the river on October 12, 1999, and began a two-pronged advance on Grozny to the south. The Russians appeared to be taking no chances with the Chechen population in its rear areas, setting up notorious "filtration camps" in October in northern Chechnya for detaining suspected Chechen "terrorists." As hundreds of Chechen men disappeared into the prison camps and the Russians continued their indiscriminate bombing, the anti-war sentiment in Chechnya began to be replaced by the traditional highlander antagonism to the Russians and unity in the face of aggression. Many Chechen men found it safer to join the militants than run the risk of being thrown into a filtration camp. One such Chechen recently claimed "It's safer to be a fighter than an ordinary citizen" because a fighter "can hide, is armed and knows the little paths [that can avoid capture]." <sup>23</sup>

It should also be noted that, during peacetime, Chechnya's many independent

clans had been a threat to the state's unity. However, they had an extraordinary ability to unite in the face of an external danger to the larger nation. In following this tradition, Basayev and other opposition commanders made a point of reconciling with Aslan Maskhadov and announced that their forces were under the unified command of the Chechen president.

As the Russians began an all-out assault on Grozny (by November 1999) it became obvious that the Chechens would need this sense of unity if they were to resist Russia's superior forces. With approximately 100,000 troops supported by a powerful air force, the Russian army vastly outnumbered and outgunned the Chechen defense militia, comprising approximately 3,000 fighters, and was considerably larger than the Russian force that had been defeated in Chechnya during the previous war. In addition, Russia's tactics in this second campaign were drastically different.

In the first war, Yeltsin had thrown ill-trained conscripts against fighters with a strong martial tradition, and the results had been disastrous for Russia. The fighting skill, courage and *esprit de corps* among the Chechen fighters, who were defending their homeland, religion and way of life, contrasted dramatically to that of the average Russian soldier, who had low spirits, little training and poor leadership. Putin's generals recognized this fundamental fact. The strategy in the fall of 1999 was to hold back tanks, vulnerable armored personnel carriers and infantry and subject the entrenched Chechens to an intensive barrage of heavy artillery and aerial bombardment before engaging them. <sup>24</sup>

Putin hoped to minimize losses by relying on Russia's superior firepower to

soften up Chechen positions. Putin's generals also used a variety of exotic new weapons: the new KA 50 Black Shark night-vision helicopter; the feared Mil 24N Hind assault gunship armed with infrared sight and thermal-imaging equipment; and TOS-1 aerosol vacuum shells, which are banned in civilian areas by the Geneva Convention. Armed with this new technology and confident in the new tactics following his army's easy push through northern and central Chechnya, Russia's chief of the general staff, Anatoly Kvashin, predicted that Grozny would surrender without a fight.<sup>25</sup>

Grozny did not surrender, however, and the Russian generals, very aware of the danger of losing public support as a result of heavy casualties, commenced a bombardment of the city. The Russians claimed to be using new strategies and technology that imitated NATO's tactics of "pin-point precision" strikes used against the Serbs in Kosovo in the spring of 1999. But Russia did not have the laser-guided technology used by the U.S. air force, and the Russian army's clumsy efforts to destroy the Chechen fighters more often than not led to civilian deaths. As many as 40,000 civilians remained trapped in Grozny during the Russian siege of the city, and they suffered tremendous losses during the indiscriminate Russian assaults in fall and winter 1999.

The worst case of civilian loses took place on October 21, when 60 people were killed by the Russian shelling of the central market in Grozny.<sup>26</sup> While a similiar

slaughter of civilians in a market in Sarajevo had galvanized the West to end the Serbian siege, no such sympathy was directed towards the Chechens. They, unlike the Kosovo Albanians of Yugoslavia, were considered an internal Russian problem by Western leaders.

Russia's moral high ground, which stemmed from Western sympathy with the Kremlin's stated desire to protect its citizens from terrorist bombings, gradually dissipated, however, as reports from the war began to trickle past the censors. It soon became apparent that terrible war crimes were being perpetrated in the

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**[Western leaders] were intent on mending bridges with Moscow following NATO's spring-1999 campaign against Russia's historic Slavic ally Serbia.**

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Russian-occupied areas of Chechnya. Western reporters interviewing demobilized Russian soldiers found that summary executions were commonplace and that there was little accountability for those perpetuating atrocities.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the most damning accusations against the Russians concerned the running of such "filtration camps" as the notorious Chernokozovo camp in northern Chechnya. Andrei Babitsky, a Russian reporter for Radio Free Europe, was caught up in such a camp. His widely reported account of beatings, rape and torture in the camps was an acute embarrassment to the Putin government.

If the abuses by Russian security forces against Chechen civilians were not sufficient to turn the Chechen people against Russia, the army compounded matters by twice shelling civilian motorcades attempting to leave besieged areas

via Russian-guarded "safe corridors." While the Russian government tried to cover up the massacre of civilians traveling under white flags, news of the Russian attacks on the columns spread, and many in Grozny feared to leave the city. Over 200,000 Chechens fled to neighboring Ingushetia. It is estimated that one in four Chechens is now a refugee.

When news of the human-rights abuses in Chechnya seeped out, Russia was roundly condemned throughout the world (only China with its restless Tibetan and Uyghur populations appeared to condone Russia's actions). At the November 1999 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Conference in Istanbul, in one of the harshest east-west confrontations since the end of the Cold War era, a defiant President Yeltsin bitterly denounced Western criticism as interference in Russia's domestic affairs. For the most part, the Russian government was given an informal green light by Western leaders to continue its brutal campaign against Chechnya. They were more intent on mending bridges with Moscow following NATO's spring-1999 campaign against Russia's historic Slavic ally Serbia.

The Chechen side was not without guilt for its own crimes against humanity. During the siege of Grozny, Chechen fighters often forced civilians to dig trenches or forceably recruited them into their ranks. The street fighters also had no qualms about drawing retaliatory bombardments on civilian areas by firing on Russian forces.<sup>28</sup> While the mobile Chechen "hunter" units quickly moved on after firing on Russian positions, neighborhoods were subsequently destroyed by Russian return fire, which resulted in a great many civilian casualties. In southern Chechnya, village

elders pleaded with the fighters in their midst to evacuate their villages and spare them from the inevitable Russian retaliatory bombardments.

Despite such pleas, Grozny itself was transformed into a veritable fortress under the leadership of the able Chechen field commander Aslambek Ismailov. The Chechen fighters in the capital put up a fierce resistance to the Russians throughout the months of November and December. Grozny's Chechen defenders laid mines throughout the city, placed machine guns on rooftops for ambushes and withstood the heavy Russian bombardment for the chance to finally come to grips with the enemy in an environment of their choosing.

During the height of the campaign, the Russians lost as many as 25 soldiers per day as they attempted to move into the city. The Russian mortality rate was higher in Chechnya than that of the Soviets in Afghanistan. Although the Russians made several probes into Grozny, they were repeatedly repulsed. Time and again the Chechens proved that in conditions of modern urban warfare those with numerical and technical superiority do not necessarily have the advantage. Armed with rocket-propelled grenades, wireless anti-tank missiles, mines and machine guns, the Chechens often intimidated Russian units in close combat.

Perhaps the greatest set-back to the Russians came on the night of December 15-16, when a Russian tank column blundered into an ambush in the heart of Grozny. Over 100 soldiers were killed in the ensuing three-hour firefight in Minutka Square. Eight tanks and seven armored personnel carriers were destroyed. The vulnerability of heavy armor in urban areas was once again displayed.

In response, the frustrated Russian general staff began dropping leaflets in Grozny in December announcing that everyone who did not leave would be considered “bandits and terrorists” and would subsequently be destroyed by aviation and artillery. The Russians began to flatten the city using the feared vacuum bombs. When news of the Russian army’s ultimatum reached the West, Russia was confronted with a chorus of condemnation. As the world prepared to move into the twenty-first century, the idea of a G8 member annihilating civilians it claimed as its own with horrific new weapons proved unpalatable for the West. In the face of international outrage, Russian spokesmen mumbled something about being misunderstood and withdrew the ultimatum, but the campaign against Grozny continued with renewed vigor.

At this time a startling revelation appeared in the widely read Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. In January, former Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin admitted that the Russian government had begun preparations for a late August invasion of Chechnya as early as March 1999.<sup>29</sup> He claimed to have personally visited troops massing north of Chechnya to oversee the buildup. Many felt that Stepashin’s declaration weakened the Russians’ position in its war against Chechnya. As one observer noted, “If Russia indeed began planning its operation last spring, Basayev’s attack on mountain villages in Dagestan in August and September could be interpreted as preemptive strikes rather than gratuitous aggres-

sion.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, Basayev’s invasion of Dagestan may have thrown the Russians off their invasion schedule and given the Chechens time to mobilize their defenses in preparation for an invasion that was no longer a surprise.<sup>31</sup> In retrospect, it would have been more surprising if the Russians *had not* formulated plans for an invasion of the anarchy-ridden republic that increasingly threatened the security of surrounding Russian areas.

While the former prime minister’s revelations certainly weakened the Kremlin’s moral justification for invading Chechnya, they did not affect Russia’s growing determination to take Grozny at any cost. By late January 2000, Russia’s heavy bombardments had finally begun to take their toll. Using the

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**The Russian mortality rate was higher in Chechnya than that of the Soviets in Afghanistan.**

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dreaded vacuum bombs, surface-to-surface missiles and massed tank and artillery fire, the Russians flattened most of Grozny in preparation for a mass assault.<sup>32</sup> By mid-January, tens of thousands of Russian soldiers began a cautious advance on the smoldering ruins of central Grozny from three directions. With their supply routes interdicted by an increasingly effective Russian blockade, ammunition running low and their losses mounting, the Chechen leadership began to contemplate an escape.

Having held off the much larger Russian army against considerable odds for over three months and, in the process, shattering Putin’s dreams of a swift and politically expedient campaign, it was decided that taking on the Russians in frontal combat was becoming too costly.

As the Russian army closed in on their positions, the Chechen commanders decided on a desperate gamble, to break out of Grozny. Success was not assured, for the city was encircled by mine fields and three layers of Russian forces whose primary objective was to exterminate the Chechen “terrorists.”

### **PHASE TWO: CHECHEN GUERRILLA OPERATIONS**

The Chechens began the breakout on the last day of January and first day of February under intense Russian bombardment. The Russians had previously boasted that “not even a fly could get out of Grozny” and had made it clear that their primary objective was not to obliterate the city but to capture or kill the Chechen “terrorists” trapped there. As the Chechen fighters broke out, moving in a southwesterly direction, they were met with hellish artillery fire. The main retreating unit, led by Shamil Basayev, hit a mine field. As Russian artillery fire homed in on their position, several of the Chechens’ more charismatic field commanders personally led their retreating soldiers in a desperate charge across the mine fields. Volunteers were asked to run ahead of the main force to clear a path for their retreating comrades. Scores of Chechen *shaheed* martyrs were killed in the resulting carnage.

As over 2,000 Chechen fighters (including 200 women), dressed in white to camouflage them in the snow, began to pour into the village of Alkhan Yurt twelve miles southwest of Grozny at the foot of the Caucasus mountains, rumors of the Chechens’ horrific losses in the retreat began to spread through the village. Several prominent Chechen commanders were killed, including Aslambek Ismailov,

the mastermind behind the brilliant defense of Grozny. In addition to these commanders, scores of rank-and-file Chechen fighters appear to have been killed in the bloody escape. The Russians later claimed to have killed 200 “bandits.”

Rumors that the notorious Khattab had been killed in the retreat were soon dispelled when the media-savvy Arab issued an interview from the southern mountains declaring that he would continue a guerrilla *jihad* against the unbelievers from the highlands. President Maskhadov also made it to the mountains unscathed. He proudly spoke of the Chechens’ successful redeployment from the capital despite the Russian army’s best efforts to prevent it.

News of injuries sustained by the most famous of the Chechen field commanders, Shamil Basayev, began to spread like wildfire in Alkhan Yurt. Basayev had hit an air-dropped “butterfly” mine and lost the front of his right foot. The always flamboyant field commander let the video camera roll as his right foot was amputated under local anesthetic in a primitive field hospital in Alkhan Yurt (he later had it amputated up to his knee to prevent the spread of gangrene). Russian television viewers were treated to vivid images of Russia’s most wanted enemy calmly telling a doctor in Alkhan Yurt to cut his mangled foot off while he vowed to carry on the struggle against the Russians regardless of his injuries.<sup>33</sup>

Exhausted Chechen fighters gathered outside the hospital to hear news of their commander’s fate. A post-operative war council was held in Alkhan Yurt, where it was decided that the Chechen forces would retreat into the inaccessible Vedeno and Argun gorges in the southern mountains to carry on a classic hit-and-run guerrilla

war against the more powerful Russians. Although Alkhan Yurt was nominally in Russian hands at the time of this meeting, the local Russian forces feared a clash with the desperate Chechens who had suddenly appeared in their midst and allowed them to regroup for a tactical retreat to the south. The Russian army's last chance to destroy the rebels in a concentrated position was thus lost. The Chechens scattered into the southern mountains to continue their struggle.

In Grozny itself, the stunned Russian generals initially refused to admit that the Chechens had escaped from the blockaded city. Russian military spokesman Sergei Yasterzhembsky claimed, "If they had left Grozny, then we would inform you."<sup>34</sup> It was not until February 6 that the cautious Russians were able to raise the Russian flag above the city. There was, however, little sense of triumph or fanfare, for the Russian military's goal had not been to obliterate the already ruined city but to wipe out the bands that appeared to have eluded them.

The frustrated Russian troops who entered the pulverized Grozny appear to have taken out their wrath on local inhabitants who emerged from basements and cellars. A particularly brutal massacre was carried out in the suburb of Aldi in February.<sup>35</sup> Witnesses speak of women being burnt alive and seeing more than 60 corpses in the neighborhood's streets. Western governments, however, appeared wary of being too critical of Putin. In a trip to Moscow three days after the fall of Grozny, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright called Putin a "problem-solving Russian patriot."<sup>36</sup>

The greatest problem for Putin to solve following the embarrassing escape from

Grozny by the Chechens was to eliminate the "bandit formations" now scattered throughout the mountains of southern Chechnya. Despite the failure of the Russians to destroy the resistance, there is no doubt that the Chechen retreat represented a turning point. The Russians took control over the Chechen flatlands as they had in the previous war.

Russian army claims that the taking of Grozny represented a transition from full-scale warfare to a police action, however, appeared to be premature. Events in spring 2000 vividly demonstrated that, while the Russian forces officially claimed to control the northern two-thirds of Chechnya, they were still vulnerable to ambushes. In March, for example, a column of OMON (specialized paramilitary) troops belonging to the 76th Pskov division was ambushed in the south Chechen mountains by Khattab's force and annihilated. Over 80 crack OMON troops were killed in the textbook ambush made famous by the anti-Soviet mujahideen in the mountains of Afghanistan. In another audacious March attack, a group of Chechen fighters, led by field commander Ruslan Gelaev, came out of the mountains and seized the village of Komsomolskoe in the Chechen foothills. They held off a full-scale Russian attack on the town for over two weeks. In that same month 20 OMON soldiers were also killed in an ambush in Grozny. It also soon became apparent that as many as 500 urban guerrillas led by Isa Munayev had remained in the city's ruins to harass Russian forces stationed there.

By late March 2000 the Russian commanders desperately tried to wrap up military operations, as they feared what was known as the "greening effect" in the

southern highlands. Spring foliage began to hide the Chechens' movements from hovering helicopters. Bands of the mountain fighters began to move freely in the southern highlands. The Vedenov and Argun Gorges (the two main ravines in the mountains of southern Chechnya) effectively became the domain of Basayev and Khattab. In addition, hundreds of young Chechen men from throughout the republic who had previously blended back into their villages following the fall of Grozny dug out their Kalishnakovs and went to fight with the guerrillas.

Since April, the Russians have lost 15-25 soldiers per week to sniper attacks, ambushes and mines throughout the republic. By autumn 2000, the Russians had to acknowledge that even in Gudermes, the *de facto* Russian capital of Chechnya, they were unable to control the situation. Chechens bombed cafés frequented by Russian soldiers, cut off the town's water and electric supply, and freely moved through the city at night.

### FUTURE PROSPECTS

Russia's war operations in Chechnya have essentially ground to a halt. By contrast, the Chechens have adopted a tactic that shows just how determined their fighters have become in their aim to make the Russians' continued occupation of their homeland as costly as possible. In June, Basayev announced that he would unleash a wave of "kamikazes" against the Russian army. Soon thereafter, suicide bombers (including two women) drove into guarded Russian bases in Chechnya and blew up their vehicles, killing scores of Russian soldiers.<sup>37</sup> In an interview with a Czech reporter, Basayev ominously declared:

The fact that Chechnya has not been granted independence will result in big tragedies . . . . Moscow has entirely destroyed our country without paying a single penny in war reparations . . . . Our young people blame Russia for everything. The feelings of hatred and contempt for Russia are growing among our teenagers, and we shall be nurturing this contempt and developing it in every way.<sup>38</sup>

Morale among the Russians at this time has reached a new low. Russian officials admit that Russia has lost 2,500-2,700 soldiers and seen another 7,000-8,000 wounded since the hostilities began (the Chechen side acknowledges 1,800 killed as of summer 2000).<sup>39</sup>

Increasingly, the Russians have adopted a defensive approach to Chechnya that resembles the Soviet tactics used with so little effect in Afghanistan. Confining themselves to their bases and defensive positions and moving through the countryside only in well-protected armored convoys, the Russians are attempting to defend themselves from guerrillas while launching the occasional bombing raid against the fighters in the southern mountains.

By contrast, in a sign of growing Chechen boldness, in August 2000 Russian military sources claimed that 800 Chechen fighters had descended into the Chechen plains to launch attacks and ambushes on Russian forces in this comparatively secure zone. A communiqué by the Russian military stated: "The guerrillas are increasingly active in gathering information about the location of federal forces and probing the defenses of checkpoints and the entrances to temporary bases."<sup>40</sup> Russia's recent "mopping up" operations aimed at searching out suspected snipers have

forced many Chechen men to join the resistance in order to avoid “disappearing” into the dreaded filtration camps. While the outnumbered Chechens still appear to be avoiding large-scale clashes with Russian forces, they have launched a deadly mine war and have kept up a daily barrage of ambushes and sniper attacks. As recently as October 11, 2000, the Russian side suffered a loss of 15 in the heart of Russian-controlled Grozny when a remote-control mine went off at a police station.

To make matters worse, Russia cannot afford to keep so many units fighting in the field at once. The army, which numbered 100,000 during the peak of the campaign, had by the fall of 2000 been whittled down considerably. The long-term Russian plan is to leave only 35,000 troops in Chechnya. The remaining forces will in effect be an occupying army consisting of one Interior Troops Brigade, one army division and a detachment of border guards.<sup>41</sup> This much-diminished force will not be able to hold territory and launch major offensives; it can only control the areas around its static positions.

Moscow’s current efforts to sponsor pro-Moscow proxies in the country, such as the former *kadi* (head cleric) of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov, and warlord Bislav Gantemirov, have failed. These unpopular representatives of the very government that has prosecuted the destructive war in Chechnya will never have a wide following among people who have experienced so many losses at the hands of the Russian Federation.

For Russia, then, the short-term prospects for military success in Chechnya look bleak. Unfortunately, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (and with him the

Russian army’s chiefs of staff) have closely tied their fates to the success of their much-publicized campaign to eradicate Chechen terrorists and bring Chechnya to heel. To an extent, the Russian public, which brought Putin to power on his confident promises to crush the Chechen threat to Russia, has also tied itself to the campaign in ways it never did in the 1994-96 Russo-Chechen war. But even they have begun to weary of the war and, in a recent poll, a full 79 percent of Russians believed that the war had “failed to produce results,” while 40 percent believed the war should be ended and talks held with the Chechen side.<sup>42</sup>

Only by opening dialogue with the moderate Chechen leadership can Putin attempt to end the apparently unwinnable conflict. By amnestying Chechen president Maskhadov, negotiating a peace treaty with the pragmatic Chechen leadership and constructing a policy designed to bolster his moderate government, the Kremlin may, in the long run, be able to achieve some of its objectives: the weakening of the most militantly anti-Russian elements in the society and the long-term stabilization of the Chechen Republic. This cannot be done if the Chechens continue to be demonized as a nation of Islamic militants.

While militant Islam in the northern Caucasus has been strengthened by the recent war, the West risks error in subscribing to Russian propaganda designed to depict the Chechen resistance as crazed, Osama bin Laden-funded terrorists.<sup>43</sup> The U.S. State Department and CIA have found no links between Osama bin Laden and the Chechens during their extensive investigation following the bombings of American embassies in east Africa. Russia’s shrill accusations of an unholy

alliance between the fundamentalist Taliban government in distant Afghanistan and the Chechens are just as far-fetched. Ultimately, the Chechen people have suffered far greater losses than the Russians have, and they are, for the most part, traditionalists who do not wish to see the formation of a theocratic state with an anti-Russian agenda in their homeland. Many elements in Chechen society would accept a curtailed version of their former sovereignty in return for stability and peace.

It is not too late to encourage dialogue between moderate Chechen elements and the Russian government (perhaps by linking further IMF loans to Russia to an ending of the war) and thereby preventing both the further waste of Russia's scarce financial resources and the spread of anti-Western fundamentalist Islam in Russia's borderlands. In a recent interview with Chechen Foreign Minister Ilyas Akhmadov (who has himself fought in both wars and experienced the loss of family members to the Russians), I asked about the willingness of the Maskhadov government to negotiate with the Russians and found him to be quite open to discussion on means to end the war. He felt that the continuation of the conflict empowered the very fundamentalists that Moscow fears most and that the Maskhadov government has also sought to marginalize.

While the Putin government has linked itself closely to the war, it is obvious that it will have to negotiate with the moderate elements in Chechen society if it hopes to achieve real peace. There have been some encouraging signs from Russia that indicate it may be changing its position. Most recently, for example, Putin refused to level blanket charges against the Chechens for an unexplained bombing in

Moscow on August 8, 2000, that killed seven Muscovites (subsequently found to be crime related). On this occasion Putin's judicious comment that "terrorism knows no nationality" contrasted dramatically to his unsubstantiated accusations against the Chechens following the bombing spree of fall 1999.<sup>44</sup>

There have also been hints that the Russian government may be interested in using Chechen intermediaries such as Aslambek Aslakhonov, the Chechen representative to the Russian *Duma* (parliament), to open negotiations with Maskhadov and other moderate leaders.<sup>45</sup> Such an approach is perhaps symptomatic of a growing awareness in the Kremlin of the army's inability to end the conflict through strictly military means.

In the final analysis, it is Russia's continued bloody warfare against the Chechens in the region that has the potential to make its depiction of the Chechens as "Taliban-style terrorists" a self-fulfilling prophesy. From the bombed-out mud villages of post-Soviet Afghanistan, (which spawned the likes of Emir Khattab and Osama bin Laden) to the smoldering ruins of Chechnya's highland hamlets, the USSR and the Russian Federation have planted the bitter seeds of jihad. These, as bin Laden has demonstrated, have the potential to harm not only Russia's interests but the West's as well. In the long run, it is therefore in the West's interest to prevent the spread of radical Islam in the strategic northern Caucasus. This can best be done by encouraging Russia to both end its brutal campaign in Chechnya and engage the republic's moderate leadership in a dialogue designed to strengthen this element in Chechen society and bring an end to the dominant role of anti-Russian

militants. In the long run, a stable Chechnya is the best solution for Russia's legitimate search for security on its volatile border with the Muslim Caucasus. As

events in the region from the fall of 1999 to the fall of 2000 so vividly demonstrate, this cannot be achieved by force alone.

<sup>1</sup> David Hoffman, "Putin Gains New Doctrine to Tighten Kremlin's Authority Over Media," *International Herald Tribune*, September 15, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Chazam, "Russia Threatens New War on Afghanistan," *The Sunday Telegraph*, May 28, 2000, p. 31. Vladimir Ermolin, "Vtoroe Prishestvie. Rossiia Vnov' Gotova Vypolnit' Internatsional'ny Dolg v v Afganistane." *Izvetsiia*, May 25, 2000, p. 1. It should be noted that Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov vehemently rejects accusations that his fighters are being trained in Afghanistan as the Russians accuse. "Maskhadov Denies Chechens Training in Afghanistan," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 26, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Glyn Williams, "Commemorating 'The Deportation' in Post-Soviet Chechnya: The Role of Memorialization and Collective Memory in the 1994-96 and 1999-2000 Russo Chechen Wars." *History and Memory*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Evgenii Kruteka, "Khattab. Chelovek Niotkkuda" *Izvetsiia*, December 3, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief biography of Khattab, whose real name is Habib abd-al Rahman, see "Ibn ul-Khattab: Commander of the Foreign Mujahideen in Chechnya" on the Chechen fighters' home page: [www.qoqaz.net](http://www.qoqaz.net).

<sup>6</sup> John Dunlop, "How Many Soldiers and Civilians Died During the Russo-Chechen War of 1994-1996?" *Association for the Study of Nationalities International Convention* (New York: Columbia University, April 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Blandly, "Chechnya: A Beleaguered President," *Conflict Studies Research Center*, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, No. OB 61.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Matveeva, *The North Caucasus: Russia's Fragile Borderland* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1990), pp. 66-70.

<sup>9</sup> Igor Rotar, "Islamic Radicals in Dagestan," *The Jamestown Foundation Prism*, March 20, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Enver Kisriev and Robert Bruce Ware, "Social Tradition and Political Stability in Dagestan and Chechnya: Developments Since September 1999," paper given at Association for the Study of Nationalities International Convention, April 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Tomas Valasek, "Dagestan," *Osterreichische Militarische Zeitschrift*, No. 6, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> "Islamic Shura Declares Shamil Basayev the Overall Commander of the Dagestani Mujahideen," *IANA Radionet. Daily News*, August 11, 1999, [ianaradionet.com](http://ianaradionet.com).

<sup>13</sup> Nabi Adullaev, "A Conflict Foretold." *Turkistan Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 20, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Glyn Williams, "Shamil Basayev: Russia's Most Wanted Man." *Central Asia Caucasus Analyst*, August 2, 2000, available online at [www.cacianalyst.org](http://www.cacianalyst.org).

<sup>15</sup> For the best analysis of these twin invasions, see C.W. Blandly, "Dagestan: The Storm," *The Conflict Studies Research Centre*, Sandhurst Royal Military Academy.

<sup>16</sup> *Gazeta Wbyborcza*, June 17, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> "Deadly Bombings Fuel Political Intrigue," *Jamestown Monitor*, September 24, 1999, Vol. 5, No. 18.

<sup>18</sup> Andrei Piontkowsky, "Russia Goes Nuclear Over Chechnya," *The Jamestown Foundation Prism: A Monthly on the Post-Soviet States*, September 1999, No. 17, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> "World Exclusive Interview with Ibn-ul-Khattab," [www.dawacenter.com/dagestan](http://www.dawacenter.com/dagestan).

<sup>20</sup> Miriam Lansky, "Chechnya: Time To Redress Some Hasty Judgements," *Newly Independent States Observed*, Vol. IV, No. 15, September 27, 1999, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Novaya Gazeta*, September 22, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> "Half of Russians Blame Chechens for Bombings." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 1, 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Sophie Lambroschini, "Eyewitnesses Give Accounts of Terror in Chechnya," Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, September 8, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> "Spasaisia kto Mozhet, Nachalas' Tret'ia Faza Chechenskoi Kampanii," *Izvestiia*, December, 7, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ian Traynor, "Russians Predict Grozny Will Give in Quietly," *The Guardian*, November 23, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Cockburn, "60 Dead as Russian Missiles Hit Grozny," *The Independent*, October 22, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> For the most damning account of Russian war crimes in Chechnya, see Maura Reynolds, "Russian Forces Fighting in Chechnya, Troops Admit Committing Atrocities Against Guerrillas and Civilians," *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> "Chechen Fighters Endanger Civilians Lives," Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2000. Russian Federation*.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Cockburn, "Russia Planned Chechen War Before Bombings," *The Independent*, January 29, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Marcus Warren, "Russian Generals Deny Plotting the War," *Sunday Telegraph*, January 30, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, "Terrorists Didn't Start War," *St. Petersburg Times*, January 21, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Lester Grau and Timothy Smith, "A 'Crushing' Victory: Fuel-Air Explosives and Grozny 2000," (U.S.) *Marine Corps Gazette*, August 2000.

<sup>33</sup> "Noga Terrorista v Imperskom Kapkane," *Argumenty i Fakty*, February 9, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> "Rebels Claim Withdrawal from Grozny," Reuters, February 2, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> "War Crimes in Chechnya and the Response of the West," *Turkestan Newsletter*, Vol. 4, No. 59, March 3, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Ian Traynor, "Albright Warms to Putin Despite War," *The Guardian*, February 3, 2000, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> "Separatists Continue Suicide Attacks," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty News Report, June 13, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> *Lidove Noviny*, Prague, September 9, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> *AVN, Russian Military News*, June 22, 2000 (for latest Russian mortality statistics), Chechen statistics from a July 19, 2000, interview with Shamil Basayev by ANS TV, Baku (Azerbaijani Television).

<sup>40</sup> "Chechen Rebels Intensify Campaign Against Russian Troops," AFP (Russian Armed Forces Press), August 10, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Simon Saradzhyan, "Troop Withdrawal May Allow Rebels to Take Over," *Moscow Times*, June 23, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> "Support for Chechen War Drops Sharply States Poll," Agence France Presse, August 2, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> For an analysis of the West's misunderstanding of Islam in Chechnya and other former Soviet republics, see Thomas Valasek, "Demystifying the Role of Islam in the Former Soviet South," *Weekly Defense Monitor*, The Center for Defense Information, Vol. 3, No. 33, August 26, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> "Terrorism Not Considered Prime Motive of Metro Bombing," Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, September 8, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> For the Chechen perspective on talks with Russia, see the Chechen resistance website, September 2, 2000: "The Government Turns to Negotiations to End War," [www.qoqaz.net](http://www.qoqaz.net).