

# CHECHNYA: FEDERAL RETRIBUTION “ENCIRCLEMENT, FORCEFUL INTERVENTION & ISOLATION”

C W Blandy

## *Synopsis*

*This paper analyses the early part of the Federal military counter-terrorist operation into Chechnya up to the time of the almost complete encirclement of Grozny by Federal Forces<sup>1</sup>, namely the period 1 to 30 October 1999<sup>2</sup> in some detail; of far greater importance, it examines certain decisions initiated in the political sphere by the Federal Centre during this period. It could be argued that the consequences of these decisions have not only been instrumental in prolonging the war and hindering the search for peace in Chechnya up to the present, but the conflict itself has deteriorated to a level of continual internecine fighting in Chechnya itself. This is precisely the ‘Afghan’ situation that Aslan Maskhadov sought to avoid, casting a shadow over the whole of the North Caucasus and impinging on the Transcaucasus.*

*The paper begins by looking briefly at the ‘hangover’ of events from Dagestan and how the military and the in-fighting in Moscow’s political circles produced a negative reaction in Makhachkala. There follows a short comparison of Chechen preparations for war in 1994, the Chechen Armed Forces in 1998 and the situation in 1999. Concentrating on the early part of military intervention by the Combined Group of Federal Forces (OGV), the paper examines: first, the period of intense speculation fuelled by the use of reflexive control to create perceptions, images and doubts about the real intentions of Federal Forces throughout the period of the military build-up, the implementation of a **cordons sanitaire** and security zone around Chechnya; second, Federal ground intervention onto Chechen territory from various border locations around Chechnya; third, the ground advance southwards and the subsequent occupation of the northern third of Chechnya and the situation in the central plain of Chechnya up to the Federal military encirclement of Grozny.*

*Whilst the paper concentrates on the operation during October these events illustrate some general matters. For example, the reason for the establishment of 42 Motor Rifle Division; the continuing policy of deploying Ministry of Defence and Interior Ministry troops, OMON composite detachments and militia to garrisons in some 200*

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<sup>1</sup> By 30 October 1999 80% of the encirclement of Grozny had been completed.

<sup>2</sup> This paper does not cover all of the second stage of the counter-terrorist operation as depicted by Colonel General Valeriy Manilov, First Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, “Then the second stage of the operation, ie the clearing of Chechen territory itself took place from 1 October to 20 November 1999...” “*The War in Chechnya*”, RUSI Journal June 2000, p29.

*populated points in Chechnya<sup>3</sup>, whose limitations or due to lack of combat training, experience of operations with the military, general movement discipline and anti-ambush drills have become apparent. Also examined are the actions of a particularly controversial general, Vladimir Shamanov<sup>4</sup>, the question of atrocities against the civilian population and the scale of damage inflicted by artillery and aviation strikes.*

*Insights into the political decisions by Prime Minister Putin cover: the gradual discarding of Maskhadov and apparent refusal to include him in any negotiations; the examination of the Chechen diaspora in Moscow with regard to the re-establishment of possible leaders in Chechnya in place of Maskhadov and the release of Bislan Gantamirov to assist Federal Forces in beating the Chechen extremists. None of the methods employed by Moscow has as yet produced a readiness for peace. Instead, the situation in Chechnya is in many respects far worse than that before the initiation of armed intervention.*

## Introduction

*“Today it is already apparent that in Russia it is much easier to win the presidential elections than the Chechen War”<sup>5</sup>.*

As a direct result of forceful Federal intervention into Chechnya, the situation there is now worse than in 1999. The ‘God of War’ and Federal aviation have wrought havoc, ensuring almost complete destruction of the Chechen infrastructure, exacerbating the plight of Chechens remaining in Chechnya, and not forgetting the aged Russian pensioners unable to leave the squalor of Grozny. Following a fact-finding mission to the Chechen Republic at the end of November 2000, Ruslan Khasbulatov wrote a report about the state of affairs in the region and forwarded it to the government of the Russian Federation. The report was published by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on 29 December 2000. Not unexpectedly the report makes devastating reading. For a start:

*“The Chechen Republic as a unified social-economic organism does not exist any more. Industrial, commerce, sustenance and any other form of connection between populated points which operated over centuries has either disappeared completely, or exists in a rudimentary form, occasionally breaking through the powerful ‘blockers’. The population of the republic is in a state of god-forsaken isolation from the outside world. Isolation is the most successful part of the counter-terrorist operation being carried out, which in fact has been transformed into a war against all the peaceful population of the republic. It is a fact, it is reality”<sup>6</sup>.*

<sup>3</sup> *Itogi*, No 2, 16 January 2001, p16-18, “Welcome to the New Phase – Garrisons in Chechen villages will spell trouble for everyone” by Alexander Golts and Galina Kovalskaya.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant General (Retd) Vladimir Shamanov is now the Governor of Ulyanovsk.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nns.ru/press-file/dagestan/expert/dag991.html> *Vedomosti*, 22 December 2000, p1, “God Chechni – V Rossii gorazdo proshche vyigrat’ prezidenskiye vybory, chem Chechenskuyu voynu” by Vitaliy Portnikov.

<sup>6</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 247 (2309), 29 December 2000, “Situatsiya v Chechenskoj Respublike” by Ruslan Khasbulatov. Khasbulatov’s report spreads itself over the whole of page 8. In addition to the subjects mentioned above, other sub-headings include: sources

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Life for the population in the republic is under real threat from every direction. Contrary to the Federal view, this means that all the concepts and entities which one takes for granted in a normal state are simply non-existent:

*"From the point of view of security, the availability or presence of conditions to support life (food, water, medical aid), the possibility of movement, access to information etc. Unemployment has reached more than 80% of the population capable of work. No form of the economy exists, conditions are not being created for the revival of primary, hand-made forms of management in the village, people have utterly lost the opportunity of working for a living. The actions implemented for the recreation of a system of education and medical care are far from adequate for the scale of the tasks, and the workers occupied in them are in no position to fulfil their responsibilities. Schools, higher education establishments, hospitals in fact are not ready (although official sources maintain the opposite) for normal operation. In the republic all types and forms of disease are raging, to the extent it is patently obvious that absolutely the whole population is in need of medico-psychological treatment on an in-patient basis. To experience two dreadful wars, and in the three year period between them the conditions of a concentration camp of the Maskhadov regime ... all that remains are deep psychological deterioration and trauma. This problem is hushed up".<sup>7</sup>*

Moreover, Chechen separatist and Islamic extremist are inter-twined in an uneasy alliance consisting of President Aslan Maskhadov, Shamil' Basayev and 'Emir' Khattab, formed solely as a result of Federal armed intervention and the need for a unified, coordinated command, and are not only waging a guerrilla war against the *Federaly* but also conducting a campaign of intimidation and murder against the Moscow nominated Head of Administration in Chechnya, Akhmed Kadyrov, and Muslim clerics belonging to the traditional religious establishment. Thus the ordinary Chechen and his family suffer from the actions of separatist and extremist elements as well as from the excesses of Federal troops. Earlier, the weakness of Maskhadov's position was such that he could neither curb the aspirations of Basayev for the creation of a unified Islamic state of Chechnya and Dagestan nor the wider objectives of Khattab in the furtherance of Islamic radicalism running counter to traditional Caucasian Muslim tenets and practice. Both Basayev and Khattab regarded the removal of Russia from the North Caucasus, particularly the North East Caucasus, as a matter of prime importance.

Federal forces still seem unable to normalise the situation. Having come to regard the legally elected President of Chechnya as a person of no consequence some 15 months before elections were due, there is now speculation over meetings, reportedly with President Putin's approval, between Duma Deputies under Boris Nemtsov and representatives of President Maskhadov, and a possible three variant

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of existence; military-political situation in the republic; imitation of positive actions including military ones; testing of new forms of weapons; cruelty to the population; barbaric destruction of Grozny; marauding is the most developed side in actions of soldiers and officers; the monetary factor in the policy of an 'imitation' of war; the policy of isolating the population.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

plan to normalise the situation<sup>8</sup>. Akhmed Kadyrov's view is that the time has come for Federal troops to withdraw from Chechnya. There is more than a sense of *déjà vu*. Kadyrov is officially supported by another Russian-nominated Chechen as his Deputy, Bislán Gantamirov, a man of doubtful integrity<sup>9</sup>, who served part of a six year sentence for fraud (the misappropriation of 25 mlrd roubles from the budget for Chechnya) until his pardon by President Yel'tsin and early release from prison in October 1999. Gantamirov also appears to be conducting his own personal campaign which is neither in line with that of the Federal force grouping nor with that of Kadyrov. Weaving into the general confused state of affairs are various members of the Chechen Muscovite diaspora.

It is possible to take the view that the present state of affairs in Chechnya is due to the policies initiated by Vladimir Putin when he was Prime Minister, endorsed by the power-wielding structures in Moscow, and in particular championed by the military from the beginning of October 1999. Perhaps, after only two months as Prime Minister, an appointment by no means possessing security of tenure, Putin had to be especially wary of Presidential whim and of the military. Catapulted to power in the middle of an armed conflict, it would not be surprising if he required a period of time to develop the necessary personal authority in dealings with forceful generals: Sergeev, Kvashnin, Rushaylo, Ovchinnikov, Troshev and Shamanov. Even now as President there still appears to be a need for him to tread with caution in relations with the military over the course of operations in Chechnya. In the attitude of President Vladimir Putin there would appear to be nothing new, as he repeats, *"to depart, to plunge in again - would be an unforgivable mistake, it was necessary to drive on to the end from the military point of view"*.<sup>10</sup>

To understand the reasons for the deterioration of the situation in Chechnya to the present level, it is necessary to go back to October 1999 and examine the conduct of the so-called counter-terrorist operation and the subsequent implementation of a political strategy which has brought nothing but poverty and want to the people of Chechnya. The crucial period for Kremlin decision-making in this respect was 1 October to 20 November 1999.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nns.ru/press-file/dagestan> Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, 9 January 2001, "*Kavkazskiy krizis*". Synopsis: Variant 1 - Withdrawal of Federal Troops from Chechnya not possible at the moment, President Putin sees the necessity of maintaining military bases at Shali, Khankala, Gudermes and Kalinovskaya. Remainder of Federal Forces will be withdrawn from the republic. Variant 2 - Chechen side would voluntarily give up Naurskiy and Shelkovskiy rayony in exchange for a full withdrawal of Federal Troops from Chechen territory. Variant 3 - both sides would refrain from combat operations for five years, maintaining the status quo in Chechnya and initiate a continual political process with the participation of Kadyrov.

<sup>9</sup> Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: *Kommersant-Daily*, 6 November 1999, p1, "*Yel'tsin pomiloval Bislana Gantamirova. On prigoditsya*" by Leonid Berres.

<sup>10</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 245 (2307), 27 December 2000, p1, "*Chto ozhidayet Chechnyu v novom godu*" by Il'ya Maksakov.

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Map 1 - Chechnya



## The 'Hangover' From Dagestan

### Less than Favourable Impression of the Military

Within a few days of the Federal intervention into Chechnya at the beginning of October 1999 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published lessons from the counter-terrorist campaign in Dagestan. Zagid Varisov and Il'ya Maksakov made the point that, whilst the actions of the power structures during the Dagestan war in the end prevented the attempt of the extremists to remove significant slices of territory from Dagestan, "it is true to say that their actions did not leave an entirely favourable impression in the republic".<sup>11</sup> It was very well known at all levels that the *boyeviki* had for some time been concentrating their forces very close to the Dagestani border, so the evident inability of the power organs to take effective preventive measures or appropriate and timely action contributed to the breakdown of trust between the authorities in Dagestan and the Army. This was intensified not only by the destruction of villages occupied by the *boyeviki* but also by the fact that their leaders could return to their bases in Chechnya at will. Furthermore, after Dagestani villages and settlements had been liberated, the Federal Forces had no right to destroy 'terrorist bases' in the republic. This caused a large number of Dagestani villagers to leave their rural areas as refugees, and meant that no maintenance of the mountain terraces was carried out, leaving rural life, subsistence agriculture and the local economy in an even more unsatisfactory situation. The breakdown of confidence in the Army was also facilitated by the attempts of a few highly placed general officers, "in particular the Commander of 58 Army Vladimir Shamanov"<sup>12</sup>, in accusing local inhabitants of assisting the bandits to construct fortifications over a long period of time. The view could be held that the military attempted to off-load their shortcomings onto the republic structures and the population in general.

In the opinion of many observers, according to Varisov and Maksakov, the combat operations in Dagestan demonstrated the vital urgency to transform the Army from a low-level conscript basis to one of professional excellence. They noted that in direct clashes with the terrorist professionals the greatest number of casualties were inflicted not so much on the newly-joined servicemen not long out of training but on the older servicemen, as their training had left much to be desired. It was felt that the absence of specially trained mountain subunits in combat operations against the new form of the legendary Caucasus mountain warrior<sup>13</sup> was a serious deficiency.

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<sup>11</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 187 (2003), 7 October 1999, p5, "Dagestantsy predosteregayut Moskvu" by Zagid Varisov and Il'ya Maksakov.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> In *Slovar' Russkogo Yazyka*, Moskva, 1978, p19, S I Ozhegov defines the Russian word 'Abrek' thus: "In the period of the attachment of the Caucasus to Russia: a mountain man who participated in the struggle against tsarist troops and administration". The word used in this article is 'Abrechestvo' - banditry. See also Moshe Gammer in "Muslim Resistance to the Tsar - Shamil' and the Conquest of Chechnia and Dagestan", Frank Cass & Co, London, p436: "Abrek (Caucasian, migrant, refugee). In Shamil's terminology, a person who escaped from Russian-controlled territory and settled in the area under Shamil's rule. (See also *Muhajir*). The Russians adopted this word giving it the meaning of bandit, robber, outlaw".

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An earlier article by Igor' Strelkov also made a number of interesting deductions from the performance of Federal Forces in Dagestan, but weighted towards the impending campaign in Chechnya, for these shortcomings by now had become public knowledge. Doubtless, they would also have been very much in the minds of the officers conducting the campaign against the bandit formations: much was at stake, not only from the point of view of their own military reputations and those of the Russian Armed Forces, but also the future cohesion of the Russian Federation was possibly in peril. *"The Chechen war which was about to start could terminate not in the annihilation of the boyeviki and not even in a prolonged mountain war, but with a defeat, the direct consequences of which would not only be a complete discreditation of state power, but also the removal of the North Caucasus from the Russian Federation".*<sup>14</sup>

**Box 1 – Shortcomings in Dagestan**<sup>15</sup>

The average command component of special subunits and aviation operating in Chechnya had extracted serious lessons from the last conflict and operated in an adequately competent and professional manner; the overall leadership of the operations remained at a low level.<sup>16</sup> The coordination of actions of units and subunits from different ministries and departments left much to be desired.

The operations were carried out in the main by Special Forces, and by different arms in 'composite subunits'. It was absolutely vital, however, that not only 'spetsnaz' (excellently trained, but not plentiful numerically), but also normally equipped troop units at regiment-brigade level should take part in wider-scale operations. At that moment such units were simply non-existent.

The level of individual and tactical training of the enemy *boyeviki* in formations exceeded the standards of the majority of Russian troop units.

Thanks to the punitive superiority in heavy weapons and aviation the success of the operation in Dagestan was anticipated. In the event of adverse weather conditions Federal Forces would lose such superiority, putting in question even the probability of limited success.

It is also useful to take a quick glance at public opinion in Russia during the first and second 'invasions' by the Chechen separatists and Islamic extremists into Dagestan in August-September 1999. *"How do you evaluate the actions of the*

<sup>14</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 185 (2001), 5 October 1999, p4, "*Pobedy nastoyashchiye i mnimyye*" by Igor' Strelkov.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Operations in Chechnya were to carry the same criticism. A later article in *Vremya MN*, 21 November 2000, p1, "Demobilisation for Generals" by Aleksandr Shaburkin adds to this theme: "Putin reproached the senior officers for professional inadequacy and sticking to positions within the Garden Ring. He says that we have too few officers in the upper echelons who have commanded armies or military districts. Most generals spend their whole careers in headquarters and organizations in Moscow. This is a serious accusation, implying that most senior officers are absolutely inexperienced in troop control and direct command. This tendency is particularly noticeable in Chechnya where officers of the Caucasus Military District fight while generals from the Defence Ministry or General Staff merely pay infrequent visits to the front line. And even then, they mostly stick to headquarters in Mozdok and Khankala".

*Federal Armed Forces in the military conflict in Dagestan?*” and “*How do you consider the ‘power ministries’ are controlling the situation in Dagestan?*” are two in a book<sup>17</sup> which gives the results of weekly public opinion polls in Russia, conducted by the Agency of Regional Political Research and covering all the regions<sup>18</sup> of the Russian Federation.

**Table 1 - “How do you evaluate the actions of Federal Armed Forces in the military conflict in Dagestan?” (20-21 August 1999)<sup>19</sup>**

Answer	N & NW Russia	Central Russia	Volga-Vyatskiy Povolzhe	N Caucasus Chernozem'ye	Ural	Siberia Far East	Overall Average
Approve	26	16	31	22	27	23	<b>24</b>
Inclined Approve	14	17	21	15	18	20	<b>18</b>
Neutral	15	16	13	10	19	12	<b>14</b>
Inclined Censure	5	11	7	12	4	8	<b>9</b>
Censure	15	13	9	15	13	15	<b>13</b>

It is interesting to note the general approval of Federal action. Perhaps the slow reaction of the ‘power wielding’ structures and lack of awareness of commanders of Interior Troops of the Interior Ministry (MVD) had not yet reached the rest of Russia, although reports had been somewhat scathing.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Obshchestvennoye Mneniye Rossii po Sotsial'no-politicheskim Probleмам - Otchet o Rezul'tatakh issledovaniy Agentsva Regional'nykh Politicheskikh Issledovaniy v 1999-2000 gg.* Ed General Director ARPI dsh A V Milekhin and Scientific Director ARPI dip N P Popova, ARPI February 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. The research is based on the following regions whose exact constituent parts are: **Moscow and St Petersburg, North and North-West Russia.** *Northern:* Karelian Republic, Arkhangel'sk oblast', Vologda oblast'. *North-Western:* Leningrad oblast', Kaliningrad oblast', Novgorod oblast', Pskov oblast'. **Central Russia:** Kaluga oblast', Moscow oblast', Bryansk oblast', Tver oblast', Tula oblast'. **Volgo-Vyatskiy region and Povolzh'ye.** *Volgo-Vyatskiy:* Republic of Mariy-El, Chuvash Republic, Kirov oblast', Nizhegorod oblast'. *Povolzhskiy:* Tatarstan Republic, Astrakhan oblast', Volgograd oblast', Samara oblast', Saratov oblast'. **North Caucasus and Chernozem'ye.** *Tsentral'no-Chernozemnyy:* Belgorod oblast', Voronezh oblast', Kursk oblast', Tambov oblast'. **North Caucasus:** Adygey Republic, Krasnodar kray, Stavropol' kray, Rostov oblast' [in the North Caucasus it will be noticed that the ethnic republics such as Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Osetia, Chechnya, Dagestan have not been included, presumably because the Russian population is considered insignificant. In the case of Adygeya of course the Russian population considerably exceeds that of the Adygeya people]. **Ural:** Bashkortostan Republic, Urdmurt Republic, Perm oblast', Sverdlovsk oblast', Chelyabinsk oblast'. **Siberia and Far East.** *Western Siberia:* Novosibirsk oblast', Omsk oblast', Tomsk oblast', Altay kray, Tyumen oblast', Yamalo-Nenetsk AO. *Eastern Siberia:* Khakassian Republic, Krasnoyarsk kray, Irkutsk oblast'. **Far East:** Primorskiy kray, Khabarovsk kray, Amur oblast'.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p534.

<sup>20</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 145 (1961), 10 August 1999, p1, 4.

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**Table 2 - "How do you consider 'the power ministries' are controlling the situation in Dagestan?" (3-5 September 1999)<sup>21</sup>**

Answer	N & NW Russia	Central Russia	Volga-Vyatskiy Povolzhe	N Caucasus Chernozem'ye	Ural	Siberia Far East	Overall Average
Yes	33	28	35	37	44	32	<b>34</b>
No	51	47	38	41	34	45	<b>43</b>
Too Difficult	15	25	28	23	22	23	<b>23</b>

The whole regional spectrum considered that the 'power ministries' were not controlling the situation, although this view only had a margin of 4% in the North Caucasus, with 23% finding the question too difficult to answer. It will be remembered that at this time Avaristan was in the mopping-up stage, Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar were undergoing an assault by Federal Forces and the second 'invasion' by the *boyeviki* around Novolakskiy rayon had already started. A month after the start of the first 'invasion' the general public had not only become aware of the shortcomings of the Federal Armed Forces but had also begun to suffer from terrorist acts in Buynaksk and Moscow.

According to Viktor Baranets and Sergey Gerasimenko the "*Small victorious war' apparently cost half of the annual military budget of the Russian Armed Forces*"<sup>22</sup> They provide a useful insight into how one newspaper regards the Russian military.

**Box 2 - Federal Military Expenditure in Dagestan from 2 August to 2 September 1999<sup>23</sup>**

**Weapons**

Based on a combined Defence and Interior Ministry force of 6,000 troops against 1,500 guerrillas. Of the 6,000 servicemen 4,000 participated directly in combat operations. 3,000 were armed with firearms, rifles, machineguns and grenade launchers. On occasion troops had to use 20 sets of small arms ammunition [SAA], each containing 30 rounds. This gives per day (for example at the Donkey's Ear feature [Botlikhskiy rayon]) at 600 rds per serviceman, 1,800,000 per day for the whole force, or 36,000,000 rds in 20 days. Each round costs 8 rubles, giving 288,000,000 rubles on SAA alone, not including artillery ammunition<sup>24</sup>, mines, bombs, missiles and fuel air explosives. One sortie of a Su-25 costs 600,000 rubles (there were over 200 sorties). One helicopter (helo) sortie costs 350,000 rubles (over 300 were reported). A total of over 100 tanks participated in combat operations, each costing 150,000 rubles per day. Federal Forces lost 4 helos at US\$ 6,000,000 each; 7 tanks at US\$ 4,000,000 each and 21 APCs and armoured vehicles at US\$ 1,000,000 each.

**Weapons - Running Costs**

SAA: 288,000,000 rubles  
Su-25 sorties 120,000,000 rubles  
Helo sorties 105,000,000 rubles

**Weapons - Losses of Equipment**

4 helos: 24,000,000 rubles  
7 tanks: 28,000,000 rubles  
APCs: 21,000,000 rubles

<sup>21</sup> Milekhin & Popova, *Obshchestvennoye Mneniye ...*, p536.

<sup>22</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 3 September 1999, p4, 5, "Russia has blown 2 milliard dollars in Dagestan - Stupidity is the most expensive 'budget component' of any military campaign" by Viktor Baranets and Sergey Gerasimenko.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Let alone all those extra artillery rounds used up because of reconnaissance inaccuracies - see Blandy "*Dagestan: The Storm - Part 2*", p51.

Tank usage	15,000,000 rubles		
Total:	528,000,000 rubles	Total	73,000,000 rubles

**Fuel and Rations**  
**Fuel:** During the first 20 days of the war the military used over 650,000 tons of POL. Il-62 aircraft transporting personnel to Dagestan cost 40,000,000 rubles and transport of dead and wounded out of Dagestan cost another 15,000,000 rubles. **Rations:** 4,000 canned products consumed daily @ 62 rubles each and 1,500 hot meals @ 50 rubles each. Rations total: 323,000 rubles.

**Social Guarantees**  
If a serviceman is wounded he receives a lump sum of 60 monthly allowances (salary for a 5-year period). There were over 250 wounded. If a serviceman is killed his family receives 120 allowances (10-year period) and his family receive all the privileges accorded to soldiers who died during the Second World War. Some 96 MOD servicemen and Internal Troops were reported killed in Dagestan up to 2 September 1999. The monthly combat pay allowance of US\$ 1,000 for soldiers and US\$ 1,200-1,300 remained a fairy tale. The approximate sum to be paid to servicemen in Dagestan as at 2 September was 30,000,000 rubles.

**Damage Compensation and Medical Assistance**  
**Damage Compensation:** 11,000 refugees were forced to leave their homes in Dagestan [This figure does not include all the people from Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar nor those from Novolakskiy rayon]. The state paid 50 rubles per day for food and hostel fees for refugees. During the course of fighting in Tsumada and Botlikh rayony 400 houses were completely destroyed; 700 were partially destroyed (the settlements of Tando and Karamakhi suffered most). For each destroyed building the Russian government has promised to pay Dagestan US\$ 10,000 for a completely destroyed building or US\$ 3,000-4,000 for a partially destroyed building. **Medical Assistance:** The cost of medical assistance is hard to quantify. Two military field hospitals were deployed to Botlikh rayon and the whole of Dagestan's medical resources provided assistance. Intensive care treatment in Makhachkala hospital costs 300 rubles per day. Medicines from Moscow 360,000 rubles.

The article concludes that in the fighting in Dagestan alone, Russia spent almost US\$ 2 billion, or “*half of the first tranche allocated by the International Monetary Fund, or half of the 1999 military budget (102.4 billion rubles or US\$ 4.096bn)*”.<sup>25</sup> One possible conclusion could be that utilising so much of the 1999 military budget must inevitably impinge on future research and re-equipment programmes, but there was a potential means of partially offsetting the additional costs.

This potential ‘gift’ to the Federal Centre was in the equipment stockpiled in Moldova for possible operations on the Southern Direction during the time of the Soviet Union. Up until late summer 1999 it appeared that the stockpiled equipment was inaccessible for Russian purposes because there were other interested parties, namely, Chisinau, Tiraspol and Kiev. Negotiations over Russia waiving debts for gas may well have secured a deal.

<sup>25</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 3 September 1999.

**Box 3 - Military Hardware stored in Tiraspol and Kolbasno<sup>26</sup>**

According to Lieutenant General Valery Yevnevich, Commander of the Russian Operational Group in the Transdnister region, there is enough ordnance for a medium sized European army there. In the early 1990s a great deal of military and engineering equipment, weapons and ordnance of Soviet troops withdrawn from Germany and Poland were stored in the Transdnister region. The 14<sup>th</sup> Army quartered there also had enough weapons of its own. The assets stored in the vicinity of Tiraspol and Kolbasno will be enough for a full-fledged front. There are 45,000 tons of ordnance, from bullets for guns to huge 240mm bombs for the Tyulpan systems.

"Tens of thousands of anti-tank guided missiles, a great deal of ordnance for Uragan systems, and all kinds of aviation bombs are there, to say nothing of 116 tanks, 43 armoured vehicles, 112 armoured personnel carriers, 220 anti-aircraft missile complexes, artillery guns, mortars and salvo-firing launchers. Other storage depots contain 30,000 greatcoats, 100,000 sets of underwear, field kitchens, bakeries and kitchenware: everything our units fighting in the Caucasus are short of. There are also 17 divisional sets" (a set means enough ordnance to last one fighting division one week).

**Political Considerations**

In the wider world of politics, the attempts of various rival political factions in Moscow to condemn their opponents' conjectured aims or interests ranging up to complicity with the bandits received a negative evaluation in Makhachkala. Many of the defects in the relationship between Moscow and Makhachkala could come to haunt Moscow at some later date, particularly given the lure of Islamic extremism as a result of widespread poverty and lack of opportunity, the development of events in Chechnya and throughout the North Caucasus. More specifically, the financial and economic problems of Dagestan have been exacerbated by the fact that the various regional development plans put forward for Dagestan by the Federal Centre have not been implemented. These plans did not and still do not take into account the unstable situation which prevailed even before the second Russo-Chechen conflict. Each newly appointed Prime Minister changed the plan adopted by his predecessor: five changes of Prime Minister between 1998 and 31 December 1999 did not help the situation in Dagestan or in the North Caucasus.

There were plans to make the republic into a transport and communications centre, upgrading Makhachkala's airport and port facilities with a ferry service to Iran, to utilise its fuel and energy complex and to guarantee various defence oriented contracts. However, the first Russo-Chechen war did not encourage foreign investment in the enterprises mentioned above, nor in others such as tourism, viticulture and local crafts.

Perhaps the most difficult and somewhat unfortunate matter for Makhachkala was the adoption throughout the Russian Federation of an anti-terrorist campaign, where Dagestanis became one of the most important objects in the eyes of the law enforcement organs. 'Targets' or perhaps 'victims' could be divided into four main groupings.

<sup>26</sup> *Izvestiya*, 21 September 1999, p2, "Stockpiles for the Caucasus War" by Yuri Golotyuk.

**Box 4 - Operation 'Whirlwind Anti-Terror' - Groupings of Interest to Law Enforcement Organs<sup>27</sup>**

**Group 1:** Former and current deputies of the Russian Parliament, their assistants, officials and colleagues of different central and metropolitan departments.

**Group 2:** Scientific, creative, technical intelligentsia, and specialists from different branches of industry.

Groups 1 and 2 are relatively small numerically; in the conduct of 'special operations' they naturally experience a definite nervousness or unease, more of a moral and psychological character by force of their position and due to the possibility of wide publicity from what has taken place; they have not experienced serious discomfort.

**Group 3:** Representatives of legal, semi-legal and criminal business and organised crime groups. Group 3 are more numerous, and nationality excites few of its representatives, besides those rare occasions when talk goes on about the struggle for sphere of influence or markets. Consisting of businessmen and leaders of groupings, they are all connected not only with local authorities but also with leaders and representatives of the power structures at different levels. For the people in this group, 'Anti-terrorist' actions bring a certain increase in financial outgoings and expenditure, including bribes. The main mass of this group are executives at different levels, couriers and other smart types, who are used to any attitude towards them including arbitrary actions by the militia.

**Group 4:** Visitors. This fourth group is the most numerous. It includes those on business, suppliers and buyers of agricultural products and other goods. The overwhelming majority of this group have never got used to arbitrariness towards them, they do not support nor reluctantly support this behaviour, for many, scandalous and unscrupulous fines, and the maintenance of searches on the basis of ethnicity. From militiamen it is frequently heard: *"All of you are 'black', you have bothered us for a long time, it is time for us to throw you out of Russia"*.

One of the results of the anti-terror operation and the attitude of the militia was ever-widening feeling that if Dagestan is part of Russia then the position of being stepsons in their own country could not be endured for much longer. Some people were already saying that *"in the form of a retaliatory response to the 'sanitising' by Russia, it was necessary to 'sanitise' the Caucasus and Dagestan from the Russian"*<sup>28</sup>.

Over the period 20-21 August 1999 the question *"Who in your view in the first place is to be blamed for what is now taking place in Dagestan?"* produced an overwhelming response against President Yel'tsin and the government.

<sup>27</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 187 (2003), 7 October 1999, p5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 3 - "Who in your view in the first place is to be blamed for what is now taking place in Dagestan?"** <sup>29</sup>

Answer	N & NW Russia	Central Russia	Volga-Vyatskiy Povolzhe	N Caucasus Chernozem'ye	Ural	Siberia Far East	Overall Average
Yel'tsin	28	34	42	44	24	27	<b>31</b>
Government	19	16	15	18	19	18	<b>16</b>
Chechens	3	8	5	3	14	9	<b>7</b>
Basayev							<b>[2]</b>
Boyeviki							<b>[2]</b>
Politicians							<b>[1]</b>

### Insights from Dagestan's Nogay Rayon

Whilst conditions in Chechnya were deplorable even before the second Federal intervention, when they were to become much worse, life in Dagestan, particularly along the border area between Dagestan and Stavropol' Kray, and also in the area of steppe lying to the west of the Astrakhan-Kizlyar railway line just north of the Chechen border and centred around Terekli-Mekhteb, was also extremely hard. An insight into the life of the average Dagestani living in this area is provided by Maria Bondarenko, who encountered a 30 year old man with *"an emaciated face burnt black by the sun and worn hands"*<sup>30</sup> on a dusty road close to the aul of Karagas while on a fact-finding mission to Dagestan around the first week in October 1999. The man invited her to his water melon plantation.

#### **Box 5 - The Ruined Water Melon Crop**<sup>31</sup>

On the way he complained that the crop had been ruined, and he did not know how to manage. Earlier they had come prepared to buy up everything, and now the proximity of Chechnya alarmed them. He cannot take the water melons to the market in Stavropol'. First, it is expensive to hire a vehicle ... Most of all he is frightened that after the sale of the melons he won't be able to settle the account for the vehicle. In order to get to Nevinnomysska in Stavropol' Kray, it is necessary to pass 8 blockposts and at each one *'to talk for a while'* with the person in charge, otherwise they could force him to unload his water melons. In order to closely inspect the vehicle, they begin to find fault, let's say, no certification of quality for that straw spread out under the water melons: at any blockpost - nervous trauma. How much does this round trip cost? Arslan said, "At each post it is necessary to give a minimum of 30 rubles, plus maybe 7 of the biggest water melons as well". "We invest so much work in the land which they give us in the kolkhoz instead of wages, and now you see it disappears, we remain with nothing. And in truth from early spring all the families work on the land, even old old relations. They thought, we will sell the crop, we will pay the debts, we will buy flour, something for clothes, but now already I don't know how we will live."

Arslan is very pleased when we proposed buying from him a few water melons at 20 kopecks a kilogram. His water melon allotment is situated directly by a blockpost at the Stavropol' Kray border. Seeing the abundance of water melons, the majority of which were over-ripe,

<sup>29</sup> Milekhin & Popova, *Obshchestvennoye Mneniye ...*, p535.

<sup>30</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 187 (2003), 7 October 1999, p2, "Na polyakh Dagestana gibnet urozhay" by Maria Bondarenko.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

involuntarily you think about those people who have laboured here, have joyfully waited for this crop, but now they grieve. But in truth it is not only the inhabitants of the aul of Karagas who are left without the hope of a scrap of bread, but also the thousands of families in the villages of Nogay rayon<sup>32</sup>.

The story of the Nogay people over the last 80 years or so cannot be dealt with here<sup>33</sup>, but in the heyday of Communist power, so we are led to believe, the land of Nogay rayon was comparable with that of Lipetsk oblast’.

#### **Box 6 - Life on the Nogay Steppe**<sup>34</sup>

The Nogay Steppe had some 900,000 hectares of land, one third of which today is given over to pasture land for the droving and grazing of livestock. Sheep are sent to graze here from the whole of Dagestan. In the words of Zinaida Koshtakova: “In Communist times it was the norm, today the very question of land for us is not a celebration, but economic. So what’s the result of having such lands, we have become beggars, artificially subsidised. This strange picture is arrived at as a result of the republic tax for our land: our rayon has only 20% from this, plus 20% goes to the republic budget, and the remainder for using the land (60%) goes to such rayony as Shamil’, Dakhadayev and others which are situated 100 km from here and only linked to the fact that they graze their sheep on our land. Why haven’t we protested about this barbaric law? It is simply not possible to do anything. Out of 120 deputies Nogay rayon has only one”.

Another recurring theme was that “*earlier our aul was the richest in the rayon*”.<sup>35</sup>

#### **Box 7 – Further Aspects of Life on the Nogay Steppe**<sup>36</sup>

There was no robbery, and consequently every inn had its own minifarm. Why do we not keep cattle? A person puts a heifer out to graze on the steppe, in order to sell it a year later. There used to be around 10-15 head of large horned cattle, and up to 100 sheep in each yard. **Now at this time generally the majority have absolutely nothing.**

They bartered everything in exchange for flour, sugar, rice, potatoes ... and the kolkhoz as such is no more. In it there are around 200 sheep, but there was a time when up to 20,000 were put out to pasture. The last time people received payment was four years ago. “Yes and how we are occupied in agriculture,” sighed Liza Kutenovna, “when at night they steal everything from your yard”. Starting from 1993 they drive sheep away in dumper trucks. That side nearest to Chechnya has shown all the robberies... Our border has never been covered. In the aul of Kumli today not only are there many abandoned livestock farms but

<sup>32</sup> On the Nogay steppe see also Blandy “*Dagestan: The Storm - Part 1 - The ‘Invasion’ of Dagestan*”, p14, Box 1.

<sup>33</sup> See C W Blandy “*A Compendium of Conflict in the Caucasus*” Brief No 2 - *Drivers of Instability in the Caucasus*”, N8 (2), SSRC, March 1993, p16 para 22.

<sup>34</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 187 (2003), 7 October 1999, p2. See also Blandy “*Dagestan: The Storm - Part 2 - The Federal Assault on the “Kadar Complex”*”, p15, Note 34.

<sup>35</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 188 (2004), 8 October 1999, p2, “*Aul v peskakh*” by Maria Bondarenko.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

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also houses. People are unable to sell their dwellings even for [rubles] 5,000-6,000. There are no rich people amongst refugees.

**Map 2 - Location of Kumli on the Nogay Steppe<sup>37</sup>**



The aul of Kumli, which in Nogay means '*aul in the sands*<sup>38</sup>, is situated some 7 km from the Chechen settlement of Sary-Su. Several days in succession through the hills of yellow sands amidst clouds of dust through the aul of Kumli columns of

<sup>37</sup> Atlas zheleznykh dorog, Moscow, 1988.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

heavy equipment<sup>39</sup> kept coming, crushing weakly growing bushes planted in the spring to protect the aul from sand hills which had been encroaching on several houses. Barefoot Nogay youngsters had already lost interest in tanks and BTRs. If on the first day, like partisans, *“out of sheer curiosity they counted how many vehicles passed through in a day - 400 ... 500 then today, armed with automatics, with excitement they play little war games”*<sup>40</sup>. The Nogay steppe is wide. Parallel to the road along which the military were moving towards Chechnya, there was a multitude of other paths, along which but going in the opposite direction was a column of refugees. There were *“officially only 1,442 people. But in fact - twice, three times more”*<sup>41</sup>. Not a few of them set off in search of a better lot to Neftekum rayon in Stavropol' Kray.

Some refugees had arrived as early as 12 September, fleeing from Federal bombing raids on Chechnya and the areas around the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border.

**Box 8 - Impact of Conflict on Peoples living on the Nogay Steppe<sup>42</sup>**

“Liza Kartakayeva, head of the village administration in Kumli, in which 52 families lived, confessed that in the first days of bombing it was extremely frightening: thunder hung over their aul, people could not sleep, children cried. On 12 September the aul was plunged into a state of shock, for around five in the evening a tractor and trailer arrived with the first refugees, and immediately behind them the first victims of the bombing, two women and two children. The men from Kumli over the next two days ferried some 25 refugee families to the aul where two or three families were allocated to a house...”

“From the aul of Kumli to the Nogay aul of Terekli-Mekteb is around 40 km... In Shelkovskiy rayon of Chechnya some 11,000 Nogay live. But you understand how hard it is when humanitarian aid is received in crumbs. People are without clothes and shoeless on the threshold of winter. The main mass of refugees were distributed to a pioneer summer camp on the outskirts of the aul of Terekli-Mekteb. Kindhearted local residents took in the remaining refugees. There were several families in each room in the pioneer camp. Two to three people slept on iron bedsteads with sagging springs. At a meeting with journalists people refused point blank to be photographed and named - fearful that they would be recognised in Ichkeria: in truth the bandits were not celebrating with them. And only the children called names and enjoyed being photographed. “They began to bomb our village of Voskresenskoye even on 10 September”, says one of the inhabitants. “Thank you that you have accepted us in Nogay rayon. My husband remains in the aul there, watching over our goods and chattels. In truth we were not rich”... “A 16 year old daughter is with me now”, sighed the other middle-aged woman. “My son is studying in Groznyy. I have news about him there. And I am ready to go there on foot, but the daughter does not like to be on her own... For she is a Nogay by nationality, our Homeland all the same is in Chechnya. Hearing the grown-ups' conversation the three year old kiddy starts to cry and calls for his mama. The fact of the matter is that his mother over six days ago together with her 12 year old son went off to the aul in Shelkovskiy rayon in order to collect some clothes, but she has not come back yet. What's up with him, the woman conjectures. Besides the little one there are three small children here.

<sup>39</sup> Possibly having detrained at Kochubey, see Blandy *“Dagestan: the Storm - Part 3”*, p15.

<sup>40</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 188 (2004), 8 October 1999, p2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

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Life for people eking out an existence on the Nogay step will not have changed much since October 1999. The abject poverty remains, as does the ever present threat of raids by fighters.

## Chechen Armed Resistance

Some of the prominent Chechen personalities who were either members of the government in Grozny or 'independent' field commanders before Federal forceful intervention are listed below.

**Table 4 - Prominent Chechen Personalities**

Location	Name	Function	Remarks <sup>43</sup>
Groznyy	Aslan Maskhadov	President/Govt	
Gudermes	Salman Raduyev	Field Commander	Sabotage school at Kadi-Yurt Mayor of Gudermes
	S Yamadayev B Bantayev	Field Commander	
Alkhan-Yurt	Arbi Barayev		
Achkhoy-Martan	Vakha Arsanov Ruslan Gelayev Movladi Udugov Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev Ruslan Khaykharoyev	Vice President/Govt Field Commander Kavkaz-Tsentr Media Former President Field Commander	An Ingush Commander of Bamut grouping
Shali	R Alikhadzhiyev Aslambek Ismailov	Field Commander Field Commander	Close associate of Basayev Close associate of Basayev
	Abu Movsayev	Field Commander	
Nozhay-Yurt	Khunka-Pasha Israpilov	Field Commander	
Vedeno	Shamil Basayev	Field Commander	Sabotage schools at Vedeno & Dargo
Serzhen-Yurt	Emir Khattab	Field Commander	Sabotage schools at Serzhen-Yurt & Aleroy

### ***Situation in 1994***

In the first Russo-Chechen conflict in recent times, the preparation of the Chechens for combat operations against the Federal Forces was started three to four months before the commitment of Russian troops. Before that there had been no real systematic preparation for war against Russia. The possibility had been admitted and considered, but more as an abstract concept rather than in any concrete form. For this reason, whilst regular Ichkerian armed forces were being developed from 1992 to the outbreak of conflict in December 1995, the process was still not completed.

<sup>43</sup> *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 7, 20-26 February 1998, p2, "Chechenskiye ekstremisty aktiviruyutsya" by Aleksandr Kuz'minov.

The concept for the Armed Forces for peacetime conditions was planned “*at a level of 1% of the population, within the limits of 13,000 to 15,000 soldiers but did not take into account the force structures of law-enforcement agencies*”<sup>44</sup>. According to Bakar Taysumov, by the autumn of 1994 not more than 1,000 men were under arms and distributed between the four main subunits: the mountain-infantry brigade commanded by Isa Arsanukhayev, the Shali tank regiment commanded by S Isayev, the Abkhaz Battalion commanded by Shamil’ Basayev and the *spetsnaz* regiment commanded by Ruslan Gelayev. The Chechen aviation regiment had all its aircraft destroyed by the Russian air force in November-December 1994. Almost the same fate was experienced by the air defence artillery missile regiment which was located in a training camp close to the village of Gekhi when it was subject to an attack by Bislán Gantimirov who had some time previously joined the anti-Dudayev, opposition forces in Chechnya.

***Period Immediately After the Chechen Elections of January 1997***

**Table 5 - Chechen Government Armed Forces<sup>45</sup>**

<b>Formation</b>	<b>Strength</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
<b>Special Guards &amp; Islamic Security Forces</b>		
National Guard also includes:	1,000	Subordinate to President Aslan Maskhadov. Selection on competitive basis. Base Groznyy, 300 men on border duty.
Presidential Guard	(300)	
Shariat Guard (includes personnel in Sharia court)	200	Implement decision of Sharia court in Chechnya's 18 rayony. Competitive selection including Mullah's certificate from place of abode, supported by no less than 50 local inhabitants' signatures.
Islamic Security Regiment consisting of 3 battalions	200	Commander: President Chechen Republic. Base: Groznyy, with battalions in Dolinskiy and Nozhay-Yurt.
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>1,700</b>	
<b>Ministry of Internal Affairs</b>	5,500	Over 50% tested in battle.
<b>National Security Service</b>	300	Main base: Groznyy; subunit in Argun (150 men), detachments in all rayon centres.
<b>Department of Customs-Border Service with Regiment</b>	400	Regiments on border with main base at Groznyy and 15 encampments. Training centres: Bratskoye and Nozhay-Yurt.
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>6,200</b>	

<sup>44</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 21, 6 February 1997, “*Nakanune stolknoveniya s metropoliyey*” by Bakar Taysumov, Director of the Vainakh Republican Party Analytical Centre.

<sup>45</sup> *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, No 7, 1998, p2.

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<b>Ecological Battalion</b>	80	Anti-illegal oil extraction/refining operations. Weapons unlike other bns, closest to separate missile artillery bn: 3 x BTR, 1 x ZSU-23-2, 11 x PZRK <sup>47</sup> deployed in Bamut, Vedenov, Serzhen'-Yurt, Shali, Bratskoye, Novoye Gordalo, Dzhugurty, Shelkovskaya, Nozhay-Yurt, Tolstoy-Yurt.
<b>Total Equipment<sup>46</sup></b>	Tanks of different marks-6; BTR/BMP vehicles - 20; Mortars - 8/11; ZSU-23-2 - 11; BM-21 'Grad' - 2. Anti-tank systems - 150	
<b>Deployment pattern of armed subunits in Chechen Republic</b>	100	Naurskiy rayon: detachment of 100 men.
	150	Achkhoy-Martanovskiy rayon detachment with Bamut group - 150 men.
	300	Urus-Martanovskiy rayon detachment of 300 men.

***Situation in 1999***

The potential sources for funding Chechen resistance to the Federal military machine have been detailed elsewhere.<sup>48</sup> Over the three years since the humiliating termination of the first Russo-Chechen conflict, local Chechen field commanders did not stop preparations for the next war on the grounds that sooner or later the Russian government would feel the need to adopt a policy of liquidating their form of bandit state<sup>49</sup>. "*Basayev, Maskhadov and Khattab and tens of other powerful and not so powerful field commanders have at their disposal much larger quantities of weapons than there were between 1995-1996*".<sup>50</sup> The main stress in rearmament was directed at those systems which would most successfully enable the conduct of a partisan war and diversionary operations, light man-portable weapons.<sup>51</sup> The

<sup>46</sup> See Blandy "*Chechen Status: Wide Differences Remain*", P27, CSRC, February 1998, p47, note 134, Concerning illegal forces in Chechnya: "Nearly 300 armed groups in Chechnya, with manpower totalling 2,500, are not controlled by the Chechen authorities. The groups possess four tanks, 12 infantry combat vehicles and four AD systems. The so-called General Dudayev's Army of about 1,000 men - the largest of the militias - has its main base 60 km south east of the Chechen capital Grozny. There are about 500 fighters stationed at the base. Groups of Chechen fighters are concentrated in areas bordering on Dagestan, North Osetia and Stavropol' Territory and are probably posed for attacks on Federal units".

<sup>47</sup> Air defence missile complex.

<sup>48</sup> C W Blandy "*Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions - An Interim Comparison and Assessment*", P29, CSRC, January 2000, p38.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> *Zavtra*, No 43 (308), 26 October 1999, p2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

Chechens made strenuous efforts to obtain up-to date anti-tank and air defence weaponry, such as “Stinger”, the results of which became manifest with the downing of four helicopters at Botlikh<sup>52</sup> during the first phase of the bandit foray into Dagestan at the beginning of August 1999 and possibly again the shooting down of a Su-25 near the Karamakhi-Chabanmakhi complex on 9 September 1999.<sup>53</sup> In establishing new supplies of equipment and restoring their combat potential the Chechen armed groupings had no need to purchase a large collection of armoured equipment and heavy artillery systems which were of little use given the complete air supremacy of Federal aviation; they had few specialist technicians to service and maintain sophisticated equipment. From the Federal point of view, if “our generals in 1995 had accounted for the tens of destroyed and captured armoured equipments (the major part of which were non-functional even in the time of the USSR), then now the Chechens could hardly start to use the remaining ‘matchboxes’<sup>54</sup> in battle”.<sup>55</sup> At this time it was estimated that the Chechens in one organisation or another had something in the region of 100-120 BTRs, BMPs and some 20-30 tanks. In the course of the ‘invasion’ into Dagestan, Shamil’ Basayev and his associates used weapons which were easily transportable in light vehicles or carried on foot, namely hand-held, man-portable weapons, mortars, anti-tank weapons, grenade launchers, heavy calibre machine guns, powerful sniper rifles and recoilless guns. The limitations of these comparatively light weapons was one more factor shaping Chechen strategy in discarding the option, if it ever was one, of defending Chechen territory north of the River Terek, the open and featureless steppe which was vulnerable to the overwhelming Federal superiority in aviation, heavy artillery, and the comprehensive presence of almost an unlimited number of tanks and other armoured vehicles.

### Chechen Concept of Operations

Little time would be spent by the Chechens in trying to defeat or block any Federal intervention from the north because of the openness of terrain and sparseness of protective cover. It was thought that the main Chechen resistance would start north of the line Novogroznenskiy, Shali, Chiri-Yurt, Orekhovo, Achkhoy-Martan, where the real mountains began.<sup>56</sup> The most difficult terrain, in the southwest of Chechnya (to the south of Bamut) is almost devoid of population and could be used by the largest and strongest formations as an area on which to base themselves for a considerable time. Even cleansing this area of small groups could drag on for a year at least, as it did after the Stalinist deportations.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the strongest resistance would be made, not so much around Bamut but in the Vedeno and Shatoy rayony, where although the mountains are not so high, they are covered in

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<sup>52</sup> See C W Blandy “*Chechnya: Second Federal Intervention - An Interim Comparison and Assessment*”, P29, CSRC, January 2000, p39.

<sup>53</sup> See Blandy “*Dagestan: The Storm - Part II-- The Federal Assault on the Kadar Complex*” P32, CSRC, June 2000, p47.

<sup>54</sup> Slang for BTR or BMP.

<sup>55</sup> *Zavtra*, No 43 (308), 26 October 1999, p3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* *Zavtra*, No 43 (308), 26 October 1999, p 1 to 5, “*Voyna ili manevry?*” by Igor’ Strelkov.

<sup>57</sup> *Zavtra*, No 43 (308), 26 October 1999, p2 of 5 “*Voyna ili manevry?*” by Igor’ Strelkov.

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thick forests and where there are large numbers of populated points, such as along the Chanti Argun and the Sharoy Argun rivers which flow down from beyond the Checheno-Georgian border. Here in the mountains support was and still is strongest for a continuation of the struggle for independence. However, Grozny would be a psychological and practical obstacle for Federal Forces to overcome. Limited resistance on the line of the Terek river and natural obstacles such as the Goragorskiy pass towards the western end of the Terek ridge would be exploited by the Chechens, perhaps with a view to enticing Federal Forces to cross over the Terek and be drawn into a battle for Grozny as they had been some five years earlier.

Keeping the *Federaly* tied down in blockading Grozny for as long as possible until the onset of spring was a further element of Chechen strategy: then forests of oak and beech were once again decked with their thick, leafy foliage, providing a protective canopy against threats from the air. Then the war would be taken into the mountains where the Chechen was master of his terrain, supported by supply lines south into Georgia and southeast into Azerbaijan via Dagestan.

**Box 9 - Major General Shamanov's Assessment of the Chechen Fighter<sup>58</sup>**

*"It's known that after some not so successful battles you reproach your officers, about saying shepherds and herdsman are fighting against you ..."*

**We have business with a strong enemy, let's say, at the level of taking a band separately.** They are professionals, who recognise who they are, what's necessary to them, and who train and prepare themselves in a scrupulous manner for battles. As a rule - men in the sunrise of their strength, physically well prepared. World class hired assassins. Well-trained murderers.

Next according to the hierarchy are the **field commanders**. We have the press from time to time calling them 'Colonels', although there are only 20 men in the 'regiment'. They fight their position with the high personal preparation of murderers and with the skill gained during their service in the Soviet Army. **Some individuals amongst them are at the level of training approaching that of our company commander. The main level is that of a platoon commander.**

Further on there are the **so-called 'Generals'**. They are so often called that in the press, that it makes me protest. What are these 'Generals', who promoted them? They give themselves the rank, and our press peddles the propaganda. These are former directors of collective farms, factories, enterprises, former komsomol' workers. The leadership experience they obtained during Soviet times. **A few of them have received military training, studying on different courses in countries in the West and Middle East. Their training is at the level of our battalion commander.**

At the highest level stand the **so-called 'Emirs'**. They developed during the time of the first campaign, calling themselves '*Vozhd*'.<sup>59</sup> In their midst according to the level of military

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.nns.ru/interv/int1059.html> Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Interv'yu nedeli *Versti*, 22 February 2000, "*Komandarm - The fifth year 58th Army, the largest in Russia, is fighting battles with Chechen terrorist* " interview of Major General Vladimir Shamanov by Vladimir Galayko. Not only did Vladimir Shamanov fight in the first Russo-Chechen conflict as Deputy Commander 58<sup>th</sup> Army, but he also occupied the appointments of Commander 58<sup>th</sup> Army and Commander of the Combined Group of Forces (West) in the second conflict.

<sup>59</sup> Leader, Captain or Chief.

training is Maskhadov and a series of officers (according to different evaluations) from 10 to 15 people, who in the Soviet Army occupied appointments at the level of Major. These people - amongst them Chechens and representatives of other nationalities - form the basis of a so-called Supreme Headquarters. But even by the largest account the Supreme Headquarters of Maskhadov is a fiction. He has not involved himself with any working out or research, nor conducted any analysis. In contrast to us, no one amongst the bandits has made any deductions or conclusions from the first campaign.

## **The Wait For 'Ch' Hour**

### ***Increasing Scope of Air Raids***

As if to underline the punitive superiority in heavy weapons and aviation which had been obvious throughout the campaign in Dagestan, on 30 September 1999 Federal aviation carried out extensive missile-bomb strikes on targets in the Itum-Kaly and Nozhay-Yurt rayony of Chechnya and on the outskirts of the villages of Serzhen-Yurt and Avtury, in the Vedeno Gorge, and in the Oktyabr, Staropromysl and Staroyurt districts of Groznyy. In all some 20 combat sorties were completed in the 24 hour period. It was reported from the Chechen side that Federal subunits had penetrated the territory of Naurskiy and Shelkovskiy rayony of Chechnya to a depth of 10 km.

Perhaps of greater significance were the results of the Federal air raid on the evening of 29 September 1999. This and the other air raids of a similar nature were particularly important on account of the fact that they put out of action a large element of the system which stored and supplied drinking water to people living in Groznyy, the neighbouring districts and suburbs. As a result of this particular strike the largest dam on the River Argun close to the village of Staryye Atagi just south of Groznyy was put out of action.<sup>60</sup> Direct hits by several bombs completely destroyed the bridge which ran along the top of the dam. Four vehicles were actually on the bridge at the time of the air strike: they were completely destroyed. The Deputy Chief of Staff of the Chechen President's operational headquarters, Colonel Islam Khasukhanov, reported that earlier "*a flight of aircraft had already subjected a bridge on the River Argun some 2 km downstream to a rocket-bomb attack. This bridge was completely destroyed. In the course of the past 24 hours nine bridges over the Argun, Terek, Dzhalka and other rivers had been completely destroyed*".<sup>61</sup> The dam and the reservoir supplied water to the Groznenskiy reservoir, in the southern part of the Groznyy suburb of Chernorech'ye. From 29 September the water supply which had flowed through seven canals into the Argun-Khankala reservoir network was terminated.

Those air raids directed at industrial plants and utilities unleashed noxious substances and toxic chemicals from containers which had burst or fallen into the waters of rivers such as the Argun and Sunzha, in turn carrying these poisons into the Terek<sup>62</sup>, and eventually leeching into the environmentally delicately balanced

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<sup>60</sup> Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: *Kavkazskiy krizis*, Events, 30 September 1999, p2 of 7.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: *Kavkazskiy krizis*, Events, 1 October 1999, p1.

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Caspian Sea. This must pose a longer term threat to the main feeding grounds for both the younger and fully grown sturgeon which are situated in the northern, shallow parts of the Caspian.<sup>63</sup> Sturgeon and other fish are already under threat not only from hydrocarbon exploration but also from poachers.

**Map 3 - Galayty and Gudermes<sup>64</sup>**



According to Kavkaz-Tsentr<sup>65</sup> the main mission of Federal aviation was to attack populated points and communications in Shali, Kurchaloy, Itum-Kaly, Shelkovsk, Gudermes and Nozhay-Yurt rayony. In the village of Galayty, which had been involved in the invasion into Novolakskiy rayon of Dagestan one month earlier, Russian groups under the cover of artillery fire had approached right up to Chechen houses on the village outskirts and had fired grenade launchers. Kavkaz-Tsentr reported that several houses had been ransacked on the night of 29/30 September 1999. During the second half of the day Russians bombed the road in Shalinskiy

<sup>63</sup> See Blandy "The Caspian: A Catastrophe in the Making - The Destruction of a Unique Ecosystem", S32, CSRC, September 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Obshchegeograficheskaya Karta Ingushskaya Respublika, Chechenskaya Respublika, Roskartografiya, Moskva, 1995, revised 1999.

<sup>65</sup> Kavkaz-Tsentr, *Kratkaya svodka novostey*, 30 September 1999, p2.

and Kurchaloy rayony, and between the villages of Avtury and Shali missiles were fired, killing three women who were standing by the roadside waiting for a bus.

### ***Widespread Speculation***

Speculation about the forthcoming Federal armed intervention into Chechnya was rife throughout the Russian Federation. It was not so much concerned with the fact that Federal Forces were about to be launched over the Chechen border from Dagestan in a continuation of the counter-terrorist operation, but over the question whether Federal Forces would go on to occupy strategic heights in the southern part of Chechen territory, having first occupied the whole of Chechnya north of the River Terek.

Everywhere that Premier Vladimir Putin visited on his extensive tour of the Russian Federation, he found that he was required to answer questions about Chechnya. When he was at St Petersburg's airport on 30 September 1999, in reply to a question concerning the possibility of Federal Forces occupying strategic heights, he said with more than a trace of irritation, "*Why occupy and occupy - what do you make of them?*"<sup>66</sup> Somewhat unwillingly, but nevertheless very expressively, the Russian Premier described the tactics selected by the Federal Centre in relation to Chechnya. Apparently, Russian troops would operate in front - without any pomp, "in working [battle] order" increasing their presence not only on the administrative borders with Ichkeria, but also on the territory of the rebellious republic. Tongue in cheek, Il'ya Maksakov continued his report:

*"It is possible to suppose that the realisation of the military plan concerning the concentration of troops along the Terek and the occupation of the whole of the northern part of Chechnya will be carried out 'imperceptibly', without the ceremonial procession of tank columns. And in one wonderful day everything will simply be resolved before the fact is realised, as quite recently no one had succeeded in expressing any sort of connection with the bombings of Chechnya until they had become daily and crushing"*<sup>67</sup>.

Putin went on, "*We will not consider a metre there or a metre here ... a border with Chechnya does not exist*". He emphasised that "*Moscow will never repeat what happened in Chechnya in 1994 - there will be no storm assaults which involved innocent victims*".<sup>68</sup>

A certain humdrum atmosphere, lacking incident, reminiscent of an everyday routine, uneventfulness, unconcern, almost placidity seemed to pervade all the statements of the Russian leadership, as for example in the banal remarks by the Chairman of the Federation Council Yegor Stroyev that "*The River Terek is a good barrier... It is possible to return to the question of the traditional boundaries of Chechnya, having understood that part of the territory of Stavropol' Kray had been transferred to Checheno-Ingushetia*"<sup>69</sup> in 1957 as compensation for the loss by the Ingush to North Osetia of Prigorodnyy rayon following the Stalinist deportations in

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<sup>66</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 183 (1999), 1 October 1999, p5, "*Rossiya ne schitayet metry*" by Il'ya Maksakov.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

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1944.<sup>70</sup> The head of the State Duma Defence Committee, Roman Popkovich, in his turn remarked that it was necessary to take under control a certain operational space in order to exclude the possibility of counterattacks from the *boyeviki*. One cannot but think to some extent that history was repeating itself, if one recalls the establishment of the Mozdok line along the left bank of the River Terek in 1763 as part of the relentless southward march of the Caucasus Fortified Lines during the Long Caucasian War which later became associated with the names of numerous Russian generals. The purpose of the Mozdok Line in 1763 was to keep the Chechens south of the Terek.

Map 4 - The Caucasus Fortified Lines<sup>71</sup>



It was significant that at this stage of the counter-terrorist operation, before Federal Forces actually launched the ground assault on Chechnya, Vladimir Putin had not ruled out a meeting with Aslan Maskhadov, and had stated his readiness to have such a meeting, but *"the Premier intended to 'lend an ear' to the recommendations of*

<sup>70</sup> See C W Blandy "Prigorodnyy Rayon - The Continuing Dispute - The Triangular Relationship of North Osetia, Ingushetia and Russia", P26, CSRC, September 1997, p11.

<sup>71</sup> Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Vol 19, 1953, p274.

*the State Duma*".<sup>72</sup> That Putin in the end did not meet Maskhadov was in part due to the assessments of a whole string of observers that Maskhadov had finally discredited himself by nominating Shamil' Basayev as the commander of the Eastern Direction. After this announcement Maskhadov also lost the last chance of a dialogue with Makhachkala. However, the position of the Chechen leader at this time was such that the report of Basayev nominating Maskhadov as the Supreme Commander was more than likely.<sup>73</sup>

Meanwhile in Chechnya itself, whilst the main news headline was the return of Salman Raduyev from abroad after a long course of treatment, there were other events of great importance taking place at presidential level. Kavkaz-Tsentr<sup>74</sup> carried a report that there had been a meeting on 30 September between President Maskhadov and ex-president Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, at which there were intensive discussions in connection with Russian aggression against Chechnya. It transpired that during the whole of the day before, Yandarbiyev had held meetings with different Chechen public political and military leaders. Yandarbiyev considered that it was essential to strengthen central government and bring all the Islamic patriotic forces into the country's defence structures. In view of the differences between President Maskhadov and Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, not least of which was the fact that Maskhadov had beaten him in the Presidential elections in January 1997, it is of interest to note that "*Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev up to this [point] had periodically met Aslan Maskhadov and expressed his views on internal and external problems*".<sup>75</sup> As the events immediately prior to the first Russo-Chechen conflict had also shown, the threat of aggression from outside had a unifying effect: "*local analysts pointed out the sharp rapprochement of the positions of the former command of Dzhokhar Dudayev and President Maskhadov*".<sup>76</sup>

Kazbek Makhachev, a deputy prime minister, busied himself with the announcement that the number of reservists in Chechnya was now 35,000.<sup>77</sup> Maskhadov divided the territory of Chechnya into three military directions: Western, Central and Eastern.

### ***Growing Exodus of Refugees from Chechnya***

Another matter of more than a little importance was the increasing number of refugees in the Northeast Caucasus, not only as a result of the operation in Dagestan, but the effects that bombardment by Federal artillery and bombing by Federal aviation were beginning to have on the civilian population in Chechnya. Chechen villages in the eastern border area had been subjected to raids by Federal aviation since August, but the scope and scale of these had been increased throughout September with intense attention being directed at Groznyy, Argun, Urus-Martan and other major populated centres. Whilst Dagestani refugees from Botlikh and Tsumadinskiy rayony could find temporary shelter and food in Makhachkala and other large towns, the Chechen old, infirm, sick and very young

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<sup>72</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 183 (1999), 1 October 1999, p5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Kavkaz-Tsentr, *Kratkaya svodka novostey*, 30 September 1999, p2.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

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had the option only of trying to make it as far as Ingushetia or North Osetia to escape aerial punishment. Whilst *"to be a pensioner in Russia is terrible"*<sup>78</sup>, being a refugee, old, coming from Chechnya and having to pass through Federal filtration controls was even worse.

On 27 September the first forced migrants from Chechnya had appeared in Mozdok: children, women and old men from rayony close to Groznyy. Maybe conditions in North Osetia were not so bad, for shortly after their arrival the Directorate of the North Osetian Migration Service began their registration.<sup>79</sup> Whilst only two families were able to obtain refuge in North Osetia as they had relations in Vladikavkaz, all the remaining forced migrants preferred to go to Astrakhan, Saratov, Orenburg or Altay Kray where special centres had been set up by the Federal Migration Service. It should also be borne in mind that North Osetia had already experienced the burden of refugees, and was still acting as host to *"around 40 tens of thousands refugees from South Osetia and other internal Georgian districts"*.<sup>80</sup>

There was scepticism in some newspapers about a humanitarian catastrophe, in particular with regard to President Aushev of Ingushetia's forecasts that within a week there would be 200,000 refugees.<sup>81</sup> Yury Biragov, Deputy Head of the Federal Migration Service confirmed on 29 September that according to his information at that time it was possible to talk about a maximum figure of 40,000<sup>82</sup>, although a figure of 78,000 people was quoted by Interfax.<sup>83</sup> It should be remembered that President Aushev had experienced an earlier problem concerning Ingush refugees from Prigorodnyy rayon, numbering some 19,000<sup>84</sup> who had to be placed in railway carriages at Nazran' or in 40 ft international freight containers to provide temporary accommodation. Moreover, there were still some 20,000 Chechen refugees from the first Russo-Chechen conflict.<sup>85</sup> For the reception of refugees the Ministry of Emergency Situations working on a figure of officially registered people, a little over 13,000, had erected four tented camps, namely "Sunzha" (3,000 places),

<sup>78</sup> Supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 15 (32), 1 October 1999, p9, *"Kak trudno byt' starikom"* by Nadezhda Azhgikhina: "To be an old man in Russia is terrible. It means not only to be a beggar and sick, it means exposure to innumerable humiliations, starting from many months of pension payments insufficient for bread and accommodation to the irritable grimaces of bureaucrats and neighbours in reply to any observation or question".

<sup>79</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 186 (2002), 6 October 1999, p2, *"V prigranichnykh s Chechney rayonakh rastet chislo bezhentsev"* by Vladimir Gutnov.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Kavkaz-Tsentr, 30 September 1999, p1, report *Interfax*: *"V Ingushetii kolichestvo Bezhentsev iz Chechni dostiglo 78 tys. Chelovek"*.

<sup>82</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 183 (1999), 1 October 1999, p1, *"Gumanitornoy katastrofy' v Ingushetii poka net"*.

<sup>83</sup> See Kavkaz-Tsentr, 30 September 1999, p1.

<sup>84</sup> Institute for War and Peace Reporting, CRS No 7, 19 November 1999, *"Harsh Welcome for Chechen Refugees"* by Hussain Pliev, p2. See Vanora Bennett in *"Crying Wolf - The Return of the War to Chechnya"*, Picador, Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1998, for vivid descriptions of the conditions suffered by Ingush refugees fleeing from Prigorodnyy rayon.

<sup>85</sup> Institute for War and Peace Reporting, CRS No 7, 19 November 1999 *"Harsh Welcome for Chechen Refugees"*.

“Chemul’ga”, “Redant” and “Sputnik” (306 places in each).<sup>86</sup> It was clear that it was almost impossible to provide an accurate figure of the number of refugees trying to enter Ingushetia in the ‘crush and rush’ in their attempts to find sanctuary from the dreadful conditions in Chechnya. It is also of interest to note that there were already some 16,000 Chechens living in Saratov oblast. Many of them had lived peacefully there for tens of years. Within the last year they had been joined by more than 5,000 Chechens.<sup>87</sup> So the ripples were already beginning to fan outwards throughout the Russian Federation.

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<sup>86</sup> Kavkaz-Tsentr, 30 September 1999, p1.

<sup>87</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 183 (1999), 1 October 1999, p2, “*Boyeviki priyeyzhayut za den’gami i dobrovoltsami*” by Sergey Sergiyevskiy.