

# The Second Chechen War the Information Component

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IN DECEMBER 1994 Russian authorities made their first attempt to crush Chechen separatism militarily. However, after two years of bloody combat the Russian army was forced to withdraw from the Chechen Republic. The obstinacy of the Russian authorities who had decided on a policy of victory in Chechnya resulted in the deaths of at least 30,000 Chechens and 5,000 Russian soldiers.<sup>1</sup> This war, which caused an estimated \$5.5 billion in economic damage, was largely the cause of Russia's national economic crisis in 1998, when the Russian government proved unable to service its huge debts.<sup>2</sup>

It seemed that after the 1994-1996 war Russian society and the federal government realized the ineffectiveness of using colonial approaches to resolve ethnopolitical issues.<sup>3</sup> They also understood, it seemed, the impossibility of forcibly imposing their will upon even a small ethnoterritorial community if a significant portion of that community is prepared to take up arms to defend its interests.

Aslan Maskhadov was recently elected president of the Chechen Republic and has been so recognized by Russian officials. In 1997, when Maskhadov visited Moscow to sign a treaty, both he and President Boris Yeltsin signed an agreement obligating both sides to resolve peacefully all contentious issues arising between the Federation and the Chechen Republic.

Just a few months before the second war, Russian Prime Minister Sergey Stepashin stated that federal troops would not be sent into Chechnya, which most experts believed. However, in August 1999 President Yeltsin removed Stepashin from his post and named Vladimir Putin as his replacement. In October combat actions began anew in Chechnya. Russian authorities called these actions "operations to suppress terrorism," while journalists christened them the "second Chechen war."

**The militarization of the mass consciousness.** It is striking just how quickly Russian society's at-

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titude toward the war in Chechnya changed, beginning with the change in the opinion of politicians. In June 1999 the Communists and most political parties in the Russian Parliament (the Duma) angrily demanded that President Yeltsin be removed from office, saying that he had "unleashed the war in Chechnya." But by that November most Duma members (with the exception of the *Yabloko* faction) supported "unleashing" a new war.<sup>4</sup>

In 1994 the press deplored the introduction of troops into Chechnya. The initial bombings brought such strong protest that the president was forced to declare publicly that he had ordered the bombings stopped. The bombings did not stop, but it was as though they were being carried out against the will of the commander-in-chief. Now the situation in the press has changed: gone is the former emotional anguish, gone are the passions about the loss of innocent civilian lives. Instead, official summaries and dry reports of the army's victories dominate. By using professional military jargon in their reports, journalists lend the war an everyday flavor. Thus, in Chechnya the army is "working." Aircraft are not bombing and the artillery is not firing on towns, but rather, as the journalists put it, they are "working on towns." Rather than speaking of an "assault" on

Grozny—a term which has painful associations for Russians—the military terms “special operation” and “mop-up” are used.

The press has changed its attitude toward the obvious untruths of Russian politicians and the military in their comments on the second Chechen war.

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The press quickly refuted statements by Russian generals that the Russian army had not bombed border areas of Georgia and had not fired on a Grozny market place, or that Russian soldiers had not killed a saleswoman in a little store in Ingushetia and had not participated in pillaging in the village of Alkhan-Yurt. However, in contrast to the previous war, the press did not investigate or condemn these actions.

Censorship of reports on military actions has increased sharply. The circle of journalists allowed to report from Russian troop positions about events in the second campaign has been strictly limited. It is now illegal for Russian or foreign journalists to visit camps of the Chechen armed resistance. In contrast, during the first war many Russian journalists spent months in the headquarters of former separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev. Even in the days of the Soviet Union, at least starting with the Gorbachev period, there was never such suppression of dissent on state television as is the case today. On the two channels with the largest viewing audience, ORT and RTV, no statements are allowed that are even slightly critical of the Russian government’s actions in Chechnya.

In December 1999 a Russian government decree created the Russian Information Center (RIC).<sup>5</sup> The RIC filters information from the combat theater before it reaches the mass media. It also selects for dissemination information from the foreign press that does not contradict the Russian government’s view of events in Chechnya. Furthermore, foreign journalists believe that the RIC is not above falsifying information.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to government censorship there is also private censorship. Boris Berezovsky is Russia’s largest media mogul. His support of military actions determined the position taken by the publications and television companies that he owns and controls. Most common of all is self-censorship by journalists, many of who simply do not want to hear any objections to the military actions in Chechnya, since they share the military mood of most Russians.

As figure 1 shows, there has been a reversal in the ratio of those who support maintaining Russia’s territorial integrity through military means to those who oppose doing so. In 1995 a two-thirds majority opposed a military solution to the problem. Today an equal percentage of people supports it. These changes may seem especially surprising when compared with the trends in Russian public opinion prior to the second war. Research conducted by the same service (RAMPIR) indicates a year-by-year increase in the number of people who were either happy about or willing to accept Chechnya’s separating from Russia. In 1998, 82 percent of those surveyed held this opinion.

Just a few months before the military actions began, the author participated in a televised debate with Minister Ramazan Abdulatipov and defended the idea of Chechnya’s gradual separation from Russia, while Abdulatipov opposed it. The program’s viewers were asked to assess who was right. Their response was predictable for that period: more than 75 percent favored Chechnya’s splitting away from Russia. Today’s complete reversal in the public consciousness occurred in just a few months. Moreover, among those surveyed there was also a 20-fold increase in the number who favored military actions that would destroy the Chechen militants.

**Reasons for increased public support.** What has caused this about-face in Russian public opin-

Shifts in Russian Public Opinion about the Chechen Problem

Question	October 1995	November 1999
<i>Military actions in Chechnya are necessary to prevent the collapse of Russia.</i>		
<b>Agree</b>	20%	53%
<b>Disagree</b>	65%	21%
<i>Best solution to the Chechen problem:</i>		
<b>Conduct military actions until the Chechen fighters are completely destroyed.</b>	3%	63%
<b>Withdraw forces from Chechnya and fortify its borders with Russia.</b>	52%	14%

Figure 1.

ion? In the time between the two wars the empathy that a large segment of Russian society had felt for the 1991 Chechen revolution dissipated, particularly that of the liberal intellectuals. A number of factors repelled even those Russian intellectuals who had unconditionally supported “the Chechen struggle for independence”: the rise in crime; Chechnya’s de facto independence; the relentless raids on neighboring territories; the kidnapping and hostage taking, which included journalists and international humanitarian workers; and the increase in slavery and slave trading.

This reassessment did not evolve without twists and extremes. In the early 1990s many Russian intellectuals ignored the criminal tinge in the Chechens’ national liberation movement. Recently, however, they have been willing to identify nearly the entire current population of Chechnya with criminals.

These attitudes became widespread after an incident in August 1999. Detachments of Chechen and Dagestani fighters commanded by Shamil Basayev and Amir Khatab crossed the Chechen-Dagestan border and attempted to seize several areas of the Dagestan Republic. All Russian political forces supported the government’s actions to rebuff the terrorists. If there was any criticism in the Russian press, the author is not aware of it.

The idea that only military actions could stop the Chechen terrorists became even more deeply ingrained in the public consciousness after a series of apartment building explosions that swept across Russian cities in October, claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians. Chechen involvement in planning these attacks has not been proven, and there is not a single ethnic Chechen among the suspects. However, based on information coming from the Russian special services, the public is more convinced than ever about the guilt of Chechnya, its armed forces and even its official structures.

NATO’s military actions in Kosovo and Serbia during the Kosovo crisis had a significant impact on Russians’ attitude toward the second Chechen war. In Russian eyes, the bombings of civilian targets that took the lives of innocent civilians and even foreign diplomats justify similar actions by the Russian military. In the wake of Kosovo, statements by politicians and public officials from NATO countries that Russia has exceeded the acceptable limits in the use of force are perceived in Russia as hypocritical, a political double standard.

Raids into Dagestan by Basayev’s bands, the apartment bombings in Russian cities and the mis-



Anything in Grozny that remained after the first war was leveled in the second.

Yuri Kozyrev, Itogi

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understood “Kosovo lesson” have released the pent-up feelings of national humiliation and outrage: “Nobody takes us seriously—not the Chechens, not the West”; “nobody is protecting us”; “the government and the military are good for nothing.” As the poet said, “We long retreated in silence.” The military’s first victories in Dagestan completely reversed public opinion. People began saying that the Chechen problem could be solved by force, that an “iron hand” could restore order in the entire country. Previously it was General Alexander Lebed who had personified the image of the strong leader, but now that image belongs to Vladimir Putin. The Chechen war added to the new Prime Minister’s respect. As time went by, Putin began to use this newfound political capital and respect to win support for the federal government’s militaristic policy in the North Caucasus.

The rise in Putin’s authority and influence brought additional supporters for the second Chechen war—political pragmatists. More accurately, these pragmatists were cynics who wanted to boost their own political capital and thus began to defend the war,

“grabbing onto the tail” of Putin’s military authority. Initially these were regional leaders, then political outsiders from the parties of the right. Once Putin became the acting president, former political oppo-

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nents began a large-scale and irreversible move into Putin’s camp. This process was made easier by the climate of boundless political cynicism that has recently arisen in Russia. Public betrayals of former allies and the demonstrative rejection of long-held principles—such as antimilitary principles—are becoming the norm and are welcomed by the current Russian elite as a sign of “political flexibility.”

Many people, weary from decades of failed political reforms, see Putin as the fabled hero who will ultimately bring Russia prosperity and greatness. To them, the Russian army’s victory in Chechnya symbolizes Russia’s coming revival.

**Changing military goals.** A consistent and nearly imperceptible shift in the military’s campaign goals has played a major role in winning public support for the second Chechen war. In the beginning (August-September 1999) the goal was to repel Chechen aggression, a goal that Russian society entirely accepted. In October Russian authorities sought a “sanitary boundary” as the primary military objective. This boundary would protect Russian regions from incursions by Chechen terrorists, and the people fully supported this goal. By November the authorities had quietly discarded the boundary idea and replaced it with the goal of “total destruction of the terrorists.” Certain politicians, such as the leader of the Yabloko Party, Grigoriy Yavlinsky, began to object, pointing to the inappropriate means being used to achieve this goal. Nonetheless, the public has so far accepted the new goal nearly without objection. Finally, speaking to soldiers on 1 January 2000 in Chechnya, Putin announced that

the primary goal was now to “preserve the integrity of Russia”—exactly the goal in the previous war. The Russian public has not noticed this substitution in the goals.

Russia’s military actions were justified as long as the goal was to defend against terrorism by creating a sanitary boundary. In moving deep into the interior of Chechnya the Russian army is moving Russia further away from solving the Chechen problem. Taken to its logical conclusion, the sanitary-boundary strategy will require more than just stopping troops. It will mean replacing offensive forces with large units trained to defend borders, and it will also mean constructing a special border infrastructure, with costly permanent facilities, a plowed strip and mine fields.

A sanitary boundary can better protect Russian regions from terrorist forays than would a total seizure of Chechnya, which would sparsely distribute the army over a large area. In the latter circumstance, individual garrisons inevitably control the area only at certain focal points, allowing not only small mice but also large armed detachments to slip through between those points. It was no accident that Basayev and Chechen military commander Salman Raduyev carried out their raids precisely when the Russian army seemingly controlled all of Chechnya.

The sanitary boundary reduces the losses of Russian forces as compared to distributing the forces throughout the entire republic. In the previous war the more territory Russian troops controlled, the greater their losses became. The relatively small garrisons, checkpoints and even military convoys moving between populated points became tasty prey for the partisans. Of course, as the army moves deeper into Chechnya’s interior, the number of refugees rises, and so inevitably does the number of civilian casualties.

Before the first Chechen war began, the federal authorities had an opportunity to move Dagestan’s border with Chechnya downward to the Terek River line. This boundary would have created frontiers along the Terek River suitable for mounting a defense against terrorists and for applying pressure to Grozny.

A similar proposal was presented in September 1994 at a session of special advisors to the Russian president, and elements of this proposal made their way into the press. The proposal was entitled “One Chechnya, Two Systems.” Its basic idea was to create a “welfare zone” within three northern areas of Chechnya. This zone would have allowed residents

to choose to live in the lawless Dudayev zone or in a fairly well-established pro-Russian zone. That idea would have been easier to implement then than it would be today. At the time, Russia could have expected support from the people of the northern areas, particularly the entire Upper Terek area. It had never recognized Dudayev's authority, and it had defended its loyalty to Russia. However, Russia missed this opportunity both in 1994 and 1999. Similar reasons hindered implementation of the sanitary-boundary strategy.

The primary reason is the inertia of a military machine: an expeditionary force that is large and growing stronger cannot sit idle without lowering the combat morale of the troops. An army demands that there be no stopping and no negotiating. It was difficult to stop the army in the first war when virtually the entire Russian public actively opposed the war. It is even more difficult to stop it when, judging by the polls, the vast majority of Russian citizens demand that the army "pound the low-lives into the ground."

It may be that big-business oil interests played a quiet role in the army's moving deep inside Chechnya. Their goal would have been to protect pipelines. However, a protracted war only makes protecting the pipelines more difficult.

Other hidden economic factors also played a role in turning up the military heat. However, the chief factor that prevented the possibility of stopping the Russian military at the Terek was the Russian pre-election requirement for a "victorious war." In 1999 this requirement was even more powerful than it was in 1994. The popularity ratings of presidential candidate Putin and those of the parties he supported during the Duma campaign were closely linked with a military solution

to the Chechen problem. If Putin had abandoned an offensive strategy in favor of simply digging in, his popularity could have fallen as rapidly as it had risen.

### Gaining Public Support

After the first Chechen war, the Russian military concluded that it had lost the information war to the Chechen resistance, which had morally disarmed



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Russian public opinion. Hence, Russian strategists saw reprogramming public consciousness as the primary goal in their battle with the Chechen separatists. They wanted to eliminate public apathy toward the military's task of retaining Chechnya as part of

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Russia. They also wanted to win public support for Moscow's use of force against the Chechen separatists.

A former deputy prime minister, General Anatoliy Kulikov, who ran all the power ministries in Victor Chernomyrdin's government, recently spoke openly about this subject.<sup>7</sup> Russian officials recalled that the American people had supported their government's actions against former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega. In contrast, the Russian public had not supported the first military campaign in Chechnya. Russian officials determined that Russian authorities had failed to present the Chechen armed resistance as criminals and terrorists.<sup>8</sup> In the subsequent years, 1996 through 1999, this mistake was successfully overcome, in large part through the actions of the Chechen criminal groups and political extremists themselves. However, the Russian special services have also supplied the mass media with materials that darkened the terrible image Russians already had of the Chechen terrorists. These efforts have not been wasted; something akin to mass hatred for Chechen terrorism has emerged in Russian society. Monthly polling by the newspaper *Literaturnaya Gazeta* showed that in every month of the second half of 1999, Basayev occupied first place among the 10 people most hated by Russian citizens.

With this psychological background it was not difficult for Russian authorities to impart a number of informational and propagandistic clichés and assure reliable public support for federal military actions in Chechnya.

**The image of terrorists and aggressors.** The real shift in Russian public opinion took place after Basayev led a detachment into Dagestan and after

a series of explosions (attributed to Chechen terrorists) at apartment complexes in Moscow and other Russian cities. These actions and the anti-Chechen sentiments that arose in Russian society in their wake were put to use to provide informational support for the Chechen war. At the same time, discussions of the possibility that Russian special services had been involved in organizing these crimes were carefully driven out of the information space. However, such ideas invariably arise when attempting to explain terrorist actions that seem completely illogical.

It remains a mystery how the Basayev detachment of 2,000 men thought it could take Dagestan or even any of its regions when it would have to face the entire Russian military. Perhaps Basayev was lured into Dagestan.<sup>9</sup> If considered in terms of Chechen separatists' goals, the apartment-house bombings make no sense. On the other hand, the bombings came at a perfect time for those who needed additional arguments to win President Yeltsin's approval for the military operation in Chechnya.

Prior to mid-September 1999 no one would have dared present Yeltsin a plan for sending troops into Chechnya. Everybody knew how difficult and painful the failure of the first military campaign had been for him. Moreover, in early September President Yeltsin was not fully convinced that his generals would succeed in Dagestan against Basayev. He publicly expressed his dissatisfaction with the military, who he said had "missed the capture of an entire region." Then in September the apartment buildings explosions in Buynaksk and Moscow pushed the president and Russian public opinion into approving the military move on Chechnya.

By no means is the author saying that Russian special services were involved in Basayev's attack on Dagestan or in the blasts at the apartment buildings in the Russian cities. Mere suspicions are insufficient for such an assertion. However, the Russian public's fixed opinion that "they attacked us," is also disputable. In any case, there is no proof whatsoever that official authorities in the Chechen Republic were involved in the aforementioned acts.

Immediately after the bombings, Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov expressed his condolences to all Russian citizens. He also distanced himself from Basayev's terrorist actions in Dagestan. Maskhadov could be faulted for not openly criticizing Basayev and for not making an effort to hand over to Russian courts the suspected terrorist. However, the leader of the Chechen republic, according

to his special envoy to Moscow, was following Russia's lead. Russia had never taken responsibility for the actions of its citizens who provided armed support to separatist forces—in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, for example. Nor did Russian authorities attempt to deliver General Lebed to Moldovan courts. In July 1992, acting on his own initiative, Lebed provided 10th Russian Army support to Transdnestrian separatist forces. He managed the 10th Army's actions against the regular armed forces of a sovereign state and member of the Commonwealth of Independent States.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Lebed was eventually appointed to one of Russia's highest government posts.

**The Image of the "New War."** Those responsible for providing information about the second Chechen war can take credit for instilling in the mass consciousness the idea that the second campaign is different from the first—that the army is better prepared, is taking fewer losses and has greater hopes for victory. However, this image is largely an illusion based on several factors.

First, information about combat losses is unreliable because the special services lower the number of Russian losses, inflate the losses on the Chechen side and do not publish the number of civilian casualties. In the previous war 10 civilians died for every one Chechen fighter. Today's rate is unknown, but indications are that the situation has changed little or not at all. At an international conference in Moscow, Oleg Orlov, the head of a Russian human-rights society called "Memorial," described an attack on Basayev's home. In the process of destroying Basayev's home with a "precision" missile, five other buildings were also destroyed, including multistory buildings that housed innocent civilians. Basayev himself escaped unharmed.<sup>11</sup>

A second factor in the illusion is that people with high hopes are inclined to accept the desirable as fact. The military actions in Dagestan, which the general public regards as completely successful, in reality provide no basis to suggest that the federal armed forces have become more effective than in the previous war. It must be remembered that the militants were capturing entire areas and that Basayev's and Khatav's circles twice managed to depart unscathed, even though they were surrounded by regular armed forces who outnumbered them many times over and had vastly superior weapons.

Not much time has passed since the end of the first Chechen war, but many have already forgotten that then, as now, in the war's early months re-



Russian troops move warily down a Chechen road. The greening of spring made avoiding ambushes much more difficult.

Yuri Kozyrev, Itogi

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ports from the front were largely positive. In the first war the troops moved out on 10 December 1994; a week later they approached Grozny; in another week they had completely blockaded it; by May 1995 federal forces controlled more than 90 percent of the republic. But representatives of the federal authorities felt relatively safe in only two very small locations—the Northern Airport and the Seat of Government building, which was guarded like a citadel. One could move between these two "islands of Russian lawfulness" only by armored personnel carrier, preferably in a convoy. Even in convoys the federal troops were not able to protect themselves completely, as the attempted assassination of General Anatoliy Romanov demonstrated.

The primary Chechen bases, such as those in Bamut, Samashki and Gudermes changed hands several times, and federal forces never completely controlled most other populated areas. Their inhabitants signed peace treaties with the army command, occasionally agreeing to chase the bandits out of their territory. Often, however, they displayed loyalty to the Russian authorities by day and became guerillas by night.



Russian military vehicles in Grozny.

Yuri Kozlyev, Itogi

*After 10 years of Chechnya's de facto independence, an entire generation has now grown up for whom the idea of subordination to Russia is unthinkable. Chechens perceive the arrival of the Russian military to fight terrorists as Muscovites would see the arrival of a Chechen army to fight the mafia —“better our own bandits than alien liberators.”*

The Russian defense minister says that the guerrilla movement can be quelled by cutting its supply lines. He is right in theory. However, it is unlikely that anyone will succeed in removing all the local population from Chechnya who would support the Chechen movement. Second, the first war showed that the Russian soldiers and not Islamic fundamentalists were the primary source of weapons for Chechen guerillas. It is unlikely that this source has completely dried up because court proceedings for embezzlement of public funds continue as the second Chechen war goes on. We cannot restore constitutional order in Chechnya until we restore it in Russia.

It is possible that Russian military leaders have indeed learned something from the previous war. However, they have surely not learned one most important lesson—in a guerilla war controlling a territory does not mean victory. It is not the territory that must be won, but the confidence of the people. On what forces in Chechnya can federal troops rely for support?

The image of the “liberated Chechens.” Russian propaganda attempts to convince Russian citi-

zens that the Chechens, weary of the low quality of life in their virtually independent republic, are waiting for the Russian army to liberate them. The real situation is different.

It is true that life in “independent Chechnya” is not improving, that inhabitants of the republic suffer at the hands of their own bandits even more than people in the neighboring Russian regions and that Maskhadov’s popularity is declining. Nonetheless, on the eve of the first war the social climate in Chechnya was much worse than it is today. Just prior to the first war there were mass demonstrations in the streets of Grozny, especially after the dissolution of the local parliament and constitutional court, the appearance of dozens of so-called “mortal enemies” of Dudayev and several attempts on his life. However, when Russian troops arrived in Chechnya most of the former enemies either forgot or temporarily dropped their vendettas and united against a common enemy.

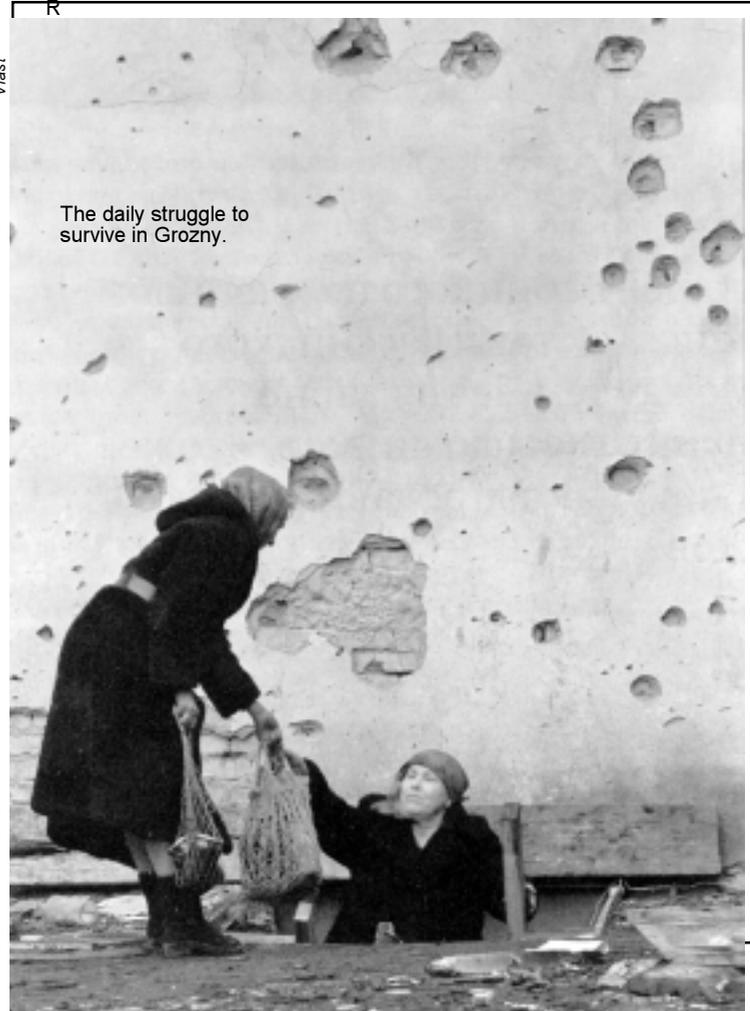
Chechnya has retained traces of a tribal democracy and respects the process of fair elections. Thus, nobody who arrives in Grozny in a Russian tank and rides to power on Russian bayonets will be able to stay in power for long. The unenviable fate of the three leaders during the military period offers proof. The stature of the imported political figures is shrinking. Initially these imported leaders were famous people, such as the scholar and former national assemblyman of the Soviet Union, Salambek Khadzhiyev, or the last Soviet leader of Chechnya, Doku Zagayev.

Today the worthiest candidate that Russian authorities could find was the young lottery owner, Malik Saydullayev, who has no political background. If Beslan Gantamirov, a deputy prime minister in the Chechen government, replaces this young businessman as the head of the “government in exile,” the situation will not improve. Gantamirov was specially released from a Russian prison to take this post. The short list of alternative political figures indicates that the personnel resources on which the Kremlin might rely are almost exhausted.

Proposals to create alternatives to the Maskhadov organs—by holding elections among Chechens living outside Chechnya—do not stand up to analysis. First, there is no legal basis for such elections: the *Constitution of Russian Federation* does not call for elections based on ethnic origins or on the basis of residence permits that have been constitutionally discontinued. Second, it is unlikely that Russian Chechens would support such an idea. Most of them oppose the Russian military actions in Chechnya and recognize Maskhadov's legitimacy, even if they condemn his policies. Third and most important, any bodies of power created in Russia will have absolutely no influence in Chechnya.

After 10 years of Chechnya's de facto independence, an entire generation has now grown up for whom the idea of subordination to Russia is unthinkable. Chechens perceive the arrival of the Russian military to fight terrorists as Muscovites would see the arrival of a Chechen army to fight the mafia—"better our own bandits than alien liberators." The idea of Chechen independence never had anything to do with a desire for a more prosperous life after separating from Moscow. For Chechens, independence means protection from bombers.<sup>12</sup> If not every Chechen family, then at least every clan, remembers its own who died in the first war. New losses and new insults will be remembered too, as will be the case with the 200,000 people forcibly resettled at the Ingushetia border, for example. Chechens are also aware of the unprecedented increase in ethnic prejudices in contemporary Russian society. Anti-Russian sentiments among Chechens are also more widespread than was the case in the first war. Mutual alienation is on the rise. With all these factors, can one expect the republic's populace to feel loyalty toward Russian military commanders and civilian bosses?

Prior to the start of the new campaign, about 500,000 people lived in Chechnya, at least 100,000 of military age. The forced exodus of the refugees will have had little impact on the size of this latter group, since the refugees were primarily women, children and the elderly. Therefore, the Russian army in Chechnya could easily find itself facing an armed force 50,000 to 60,000 strong. In the last war at least 30,000 civilians died. However, estimates are that only 3,500 Chechen fighters died and that the Russian military lost 4,500 soldiers. Let us say that today's Russian army is better prepared and better organized than was the army that fought in 1994 and 1995. Let us further say that perhaps 10



The daily struggle to survive in Grozny.

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militants will die for every one Russian soldier. Even so, if the goal is the total suppression of armed resistance, then about the same number of Russian soldiers will have to give their lives as was the case in the last war.

### **Possible Changes in Russian Attitudes**

Since 1 January 2000 the Russian press has carried an increasing number of reports about a rise in guerilla activity in Chechnya. These reports are beginning to suggest that the military operation in Chechnya cannot achieve any of its goals.

The goal of preserving the integrity of the Russian Federation is largely an invention. The dominant thinking at every recent Russian conference on federalism has been that Russia is in no danger of

disintegration. In the worst case Russia might lose a small piece in the Chechen area.<sup>13</sup> Numerous studies show that prior to the war, nobody was thrilled with Chechnya. Its relations with all its neighbors, including Ingushetia, were steadily worsening. National separatism and nationalist movements in Russia in general were declining.<sup>14</sup>

Worsening ethnonational relations in individual areas of the North Caucasus, such as Karachayevo-Cherkessiya, do not controvert the general trend of declining nationalism and had no bearing on Chechnya. Karachayevo-Cherkessiya's warring national

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group leaders do not favor Chechen separatism. A certain rise in religious extremism (Wahhabism) in Dagestan did not offset the decline in nationalist movements and was driven more by internal factors such as poverty and crime than by any external influence. Many researchers view Dagestani Wahhabism primarily as a form of protest that is most widespread in areas hit hard by unemployment.<sup>15</sup>

The Chechen war will trigger an increase in such Wahhabism because it will worsen the republic's economic situation. The war has already exacerbated all the following situations: Avar-Dargin differences (an Avar militia took part in an assault on the villages of Karamakh and Chabanmakh); the division in the Lezgin ethnic group because of the harsh border regimen with Azerbaijan; and the Chechen-Akin problem because Russian forces are concentrated in a new settlement area for the Akins. None of these accounts even mentions the increasing Islamic solidarity with the 11 million Chechens in Russia. A war is more destructive to the Federation than is the existence of a rebellious republic.

The other stated goal of the war is to combat terrorism. However, the experience of countries that have tried for decades to cope with terrorism shows that military operations are not an effective cure for this illness. It requires more sophisticated methods.

Usually an unlimited search period is declared for

the heads of the terrorist organizations. They are then either destroyed over time, as with the killers of the Israeli Olympic team, or they are eventually handed over to the courts, as with Kurd leader Abdullah Ojalan. Air strikes are used to combat terrorism, chiefly to destroy an enemy's infrastructure, but since infrastructure is not built every month, such strikes are sporadic. Such air strikes do not inflict great losses on the so-called "live forces." Official reports about thousands of losses inflicted by such air strikes invite skepticism. Past results of the full-scale bombing of Chechen militant bases and new information about the results of the strike on Basayev's residence reinforce such doubt.

Political rather than military operations is the chief axis in the war against terrorism. The Israelis ultimately managed to divide the moderate and radical wings of the Palestinian resistance. Turkish authorities found common ground with the Barzani family, which had headed the Kurdish nationalist movement for decades. By doing so, they largely paralyzed the movement's military activity. Russia had two years of peace, from 1996 to 1999 and many opportunities to seek support from among the influential Chechen political elite but did not take advantage of these opportunities, due largely to the renewed quest for military solutions to the Chechen problem.

Russia may face the rather painful process of overcoming a currently widespread belief that military means offer miraculous possibilities for holding Chechnya in the Russian Federation. Sooner or later there will be at least significant changes in the Russian mass consciousness.

**The quick-insight scenario.** Perhaps by summer 2000 more than half the population could come to see the inadvisability of a military solution to the Chechen problem. Survey results provide the basis for this assumption.

**Russian Fears of a Deteriorating Situation  
(November 1999 survey)**

<i>What people believe would happen if a government loyal to Moscow were established in Chechnya—</i>	<i>Percentage of people who believe each possibility</i>
Chechen fighters would initiate guerilla actions	63%
Chechen fighters would increase terrorist acts in Russian cities	14%

Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that the percentage of Russians who fear a new partisan movement in Chechnya and increased Chechen terrorism in Russia is about the same as the percentage who support Russia's military actions. Hence, the number of people who doubt the wisdom of continuing the military campaign will increase in proportion to the extent that these fears become reality. The lengthening campaign is already disappointing to those who had hoped for an end to Chechen terrorism. The longer the campaign continues and the more fierce the resistance, the greater will be the losses among Russian troops. Without question, casualties will have the greatest impact in changing society's mood, particularly given that almost none of those who support the military actions wish to participate directly or send their children to participate. Military actions and expenditures to restore Chechnya will probably have a negative impact on Russia's economy, which would make people less willing to support the military actions. There is another reason for declining support: the Russian public's support for the second Chechen war is not deep-seated and is largely a consequence of pervasive myths and illusions that were created to manipulate public opinion.

**The slow-and-painful scenario.** Under this scenario, authorities manage to shift the responsibility for failures on the Chechen front to enemies (internal and external). They also manage to spend quite

a long time consolidating public opinion against these enemies, which include the Chechen fighters. If this scenario comes about, censorship will increase, as well as repression of dissidents. In other

*The percentage of Russians who fear increased Chechen terrorism in Russia is about the same as the percentage who support Russia's military actions. Hence, the number of people who doubt the wisdom of continuing the military campaign will increase in proportion to the extent that these fears become reality. . . .*

*The Russian public's support for the second Chechen war is not deep-seated and is largely a consequence of pervasive myths and illusions that were created to manipulate public opinion.*

words, this scenario becomes possible only with a return to the dark days of totalitarianism. However, this second scenario is less likely than the first.

Such a scenario did not unfold during Putin's acting presidency, nor after his election. Furthermore, implementation of this scenario would prove extremely difficult. Significant forces in the Russian parliament and in general society support the Chechen war but deeply oppose totalitarianism. *MIR*

#### NOTES

1. V. Mukomel and M. Olkot, et al., *Armed International and Regional Conflicts: Human Losses and Economic Damage. Social Consequences. Identity and Conflicts in Post-Soviet States* (Russian) (Moscow: Carnegie Center, 1997), 301, 305-306.

2. *Ibid.*, as to the 5.5 billion-dollar estimate.

3. Translator's note: because the point is not apparent in the English translation, a word about the author's use of the term "Russian" is in order. Pain avoids the term "russkiy," which would refer to ethnic Russians and/or native speakers of Russian only. Instead, he consistently uses the terms "rossiyskiy" and "rossiyanin," which refer to all citizens of the Russian Federation. By consciously using these terms, the author emphasizes the cultural and linguistic diversity of the RF citizenry; a diversity that is also reflected in the RF's military. This distinction is not trivial if the RF is to achieve unity in the midst of such linguistic and ethnic diversity.

4. Translator's note: *Yabloko* ("apple") is a political party headed by Grigoriy Yavlinsky. It has supported human rights, private property, democratization and a market economy. For more information see <<http://www.yabloko.ru/Persons/YAVL/index-eng.html>>.

5. This was Russian Federation Government Decree No. 1538.

6. The Chechen journalist Petra Prokhazskova, who writes for the newspaper *Lidove noviny*, filed a complaint against the RIC with the Russian Fund for the Protection of Openness. She maintains that the RIC distorted her information from Chechnya of 29 October 1999 and used it on their website. Source: Oleg Panfilov,

"The New Caucasus War," *Imedzhi* (December 1999).

7. General Kulikov made this statement in a live radio broadcast of "Echo of Moscow" on 5 January 2000.

8. See D. Azrael, E. Pain and A. Popov, eds., *How Policy is Made in the U.S.A. and Russia: Making Decisions to Use Force in Regional Conflicts in the Late 20th Century* (Russian) (Moscow: Kompleks-Progress, 1996): 287-290.

9. Translator's note: the point of luring Basayev and his detachment into Dagestan would have been to provide legal grounds for Federal forces to attack Chechen forces. The author is not saying, however, that this was done.

10. *Ibid.*, 97-98.

11. See proceedings of the 18 December 1999 Moscow conference, as printed in the newspaper series: "Chechnya—Lessons Not Learned," (Russian) *Moskovskiyevosti* (Moscow) No. 49, 21-27.

12. Translator's note: The Chechen thinking, according to the author, is that if Chechnya were to achieve the status of an independent state fully recognized as such by the world community, then the Russian Federation would no longer be free to attack it with impunity.

13. See D. Azrael, E. Pain, N. Zubarevich, eds., *The Evolution of Relations between Moscow and Russia's Regions: from Conflicts to a Search for Accord* (Russian) (Moscow: Kompleks-Progress, 1997).

14. *Ibid.*, 30-52.

15. Aleksey Malashenko, "The Islamic Factor in the Dagestan War," (Russian) *Nezavisimyy golos Rossii* 5 (September 1999), 10-12.

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