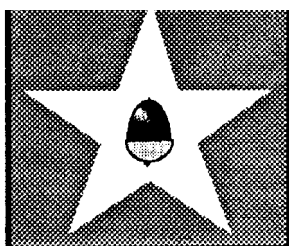


Conflict Studies Research Centre

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Dagestan: The Storm
Part I - The 'Invasion' of Avaristan

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P30

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SUMMARY

Lack of National Policy for North Caucasus

The most important point preceeding the ‘invasion’ of Dagestan is the fact that there was no state or national policy in the Russian Federation to resolve disputes or conflict in the North Caucasus.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that had there been greater effort on the part of the Federal authorities with regard to the status of Chechnya, President Maskhadov’s position would have been stronger and better able to curb the activities of Chechen opposition leaders, the actions of field commanders, of illegal bandit formations and their Islamic extremist ‘brothers’ involved in criminal acts, including hostage taking and ransom demands¹.

Agenda of Power-wielding Structure

It is again difficult to avoid coming to the conclusion that whilst initially the Centre was happy to conduct business with Maskhadov, it became apparent that he was a Chechen who could lead Chechnya to independence. Therefore Federal policy aimed to neutralise Maskhadov by lack of progress, leading to his vulnerability to an extremist Chechen approach.

The structures at the Centre had their own agenda stemming from the humiliating defeat and terms of the Khasavyurt Accords of 30/31 August 1996. The words of Colonel General Kazantsev, “*over the last three years we had made many steps forward*” and the holding of joint military exercises could perhaps be taken as being prudent military contingency planning. However, Sergey Stepashin’s statement concerning a plan for possible military intervention into the two northern rayony of Chechnya as a result of the abduction of Gennadiy Shpigun in spring 1999 tends to give weight to the existence of deep-laid plans for intervention and occupation.

Evidence of the construction of a ‘steel blockade’ around Chechnya together with the implementation of a more robust counter-terrorist action by MVD troops, militia and the targeting of Chechen field commanders’ bases and training camps by artillery and aircraft points not only to a greater readiness on the part of the Federal authorities to respond positively but also to intervene onto Chechen territory and prosecute anti-terrorist operations on Chechen soil.

Furthermore, the power-wielding structures had a perfectly legitimate view that continued rebellion of Chechnya, as they perceived it, would damage the cohesion and even the viability of the Russian Federation, giving encouragement to other subjects to attempt to leave the Federation.

¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 31 (2093), 19 February 2000, p1 and 4 “*Ya Blagodaren sud’be za etot urok*” by Il’ya Maksakov. Mayrbek Vachegayev, the official Chechen representative in Moscow, currently under arrest, is quoted as saying “You must understand how many times Maskhadov turned to the Russian leadership with the request to terminate payment for hostages”.

Outside Involvement

There can be no doubt that there was some form of involvement from outside Chechnya which precipitated the 'invasion' by Basayev and Khattab into Dagestan. Speculation continues to be centred on the activities of Boris Berezovskiy and elements of the Federal secret services.

There are many uncertainties surrounding the 'invasion' of Avaristan by Basayev and Khattab and the terrorist bombings in Moscow, Buynaksk and Volgograd. Speculation will continue to circulate about the probable causes, as well as on the involvement of bin Laden and provision of funds.

Reasons for Basayev's Repulse from Avaristan

The use of fuel-air explosives was probably decisive in moving the Chechen illegal bandit formations and Islamic extremist groupings out of Dagestan. They were not prepared for the devastating effect of these munitions.

Above all, they miscalculated on the reaction of the Federal and Dagestani governments, even though they attempted to exploit the grievances of the 'little peoples' over political representation and the differences between the Avar-Lak and the Darghin-Kumyk alignments. They over-estimated the support from Dagestani inhabitants, as illustrated by the seeming inactivity of Nadirshah Khachilayev, who had previously given Basayev to understand that he would not be involved in any action against Dagestani peoples.

They were too wrapped up in the experience of the first Chechen conflict in recent times and did not realise the advances that the Federal forces had made in coordination and cooperation. They underestimated the determination, resolve and sense of purpose pursued by the Federal government in quelling this 'invasion'.

Hindsight

Basayev and Khattab were unlucky, in their attempts to forestall Federal armed intervention into Chechnya, in as much that the weather seemed to remain remarkably fine permitting interdiction and strikes by Federal frontal aviation. Perhaps if they had waited they would have had a greater part of world opinion on their side when Federal forces struck against Chechnya. Furthermore, they probably lost a high proportion of fighters which they could ill-afford to lose.

Having expelled terrorist bandit formations from Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony and as a result of the continued concern of the Federal authorities and of the republic government in Makhachkala, the way was clear for military action to be initiated against the Wahhabi groups in the villages of Kadar, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi on 29 August 1999.

DAGESTAN: THE STORM

PART I - THE 'INVASION' OF AVARISTAN

C W Blandy

INTRODUCTION

An earlier paper "*Dagestan: The Gathering Storm*"² concluded that: "*There are two overriding themes which are repeated over and over again throughout the North Caucasus and Dagestan, namely: first, the lack of a proper policy and adequate attention for the North Caucasus from the Centre and second, the absence of a solution to the untidy question of Chechen status.*"

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that without the fulfilment of these two vital requirements by Moscow, the situation in the North Caucasus will continue to drift to a point, if it has not been reached already, where Moscow has lost the chance to regain lost ground. The trend will be the continued deterioration of the situation with the substance of any form of control eventually slipping and sliding untidily from Moscow's grasp.

This paper is the first of three papers under the overall title of "*Dagestan: The Storm*"³ seeking to identify questions to which as yet there are no firm answers, arising from the wide-scale combat operations which started in earnest at the beginning of August 1999 with the Chechen 'invasion' of south western Dagestan, the Federal assault on the Wahhabi villages of Kadar, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi in Buynaksk rayon, followed by the threats to Khasavyurt, Kizlyar, Babayurt and Makhachkala as a result of a further 'invasion' into Novolakskiy rayon by Chechen illegal *bandformirovaniya* (bandit formations) and Islamic extremists under Shamil' Basayev and Emir Khattab, culminating in their forcible expulsion from Dagestan. The appearance of these threats echoed the sentiment of over three years ago:

*"Rapidly [Chechnya] turns into an aggressive anti-Russian outpost which impetuously demolishes the whole unstable geopolitics of the North Caucasus turning it against Russia. Chechnya is a harpoon extending its strike to Bashkiria and Tatarstan cutting Russia off from the Black Sea, cleaving the lines of strategic pipelines, interpreting into separatism other regions of Russia".*⁴

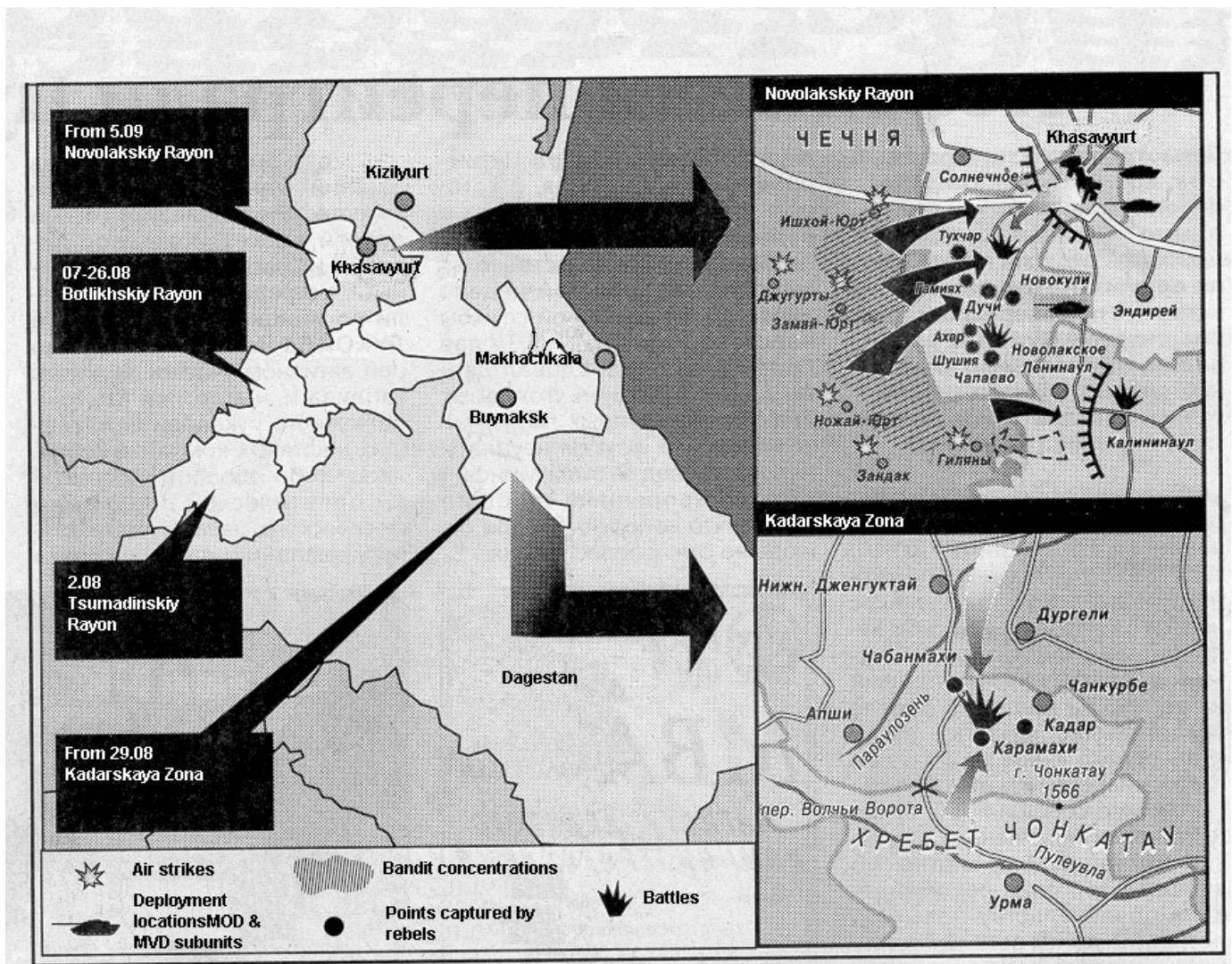
The subsequent military 'anti-terrorist' operations in Chechnya by Federal Forces are the subject of a fourth paper⁵.

² C W Blandy "*Dagestan: The Gathering Storm*" S38 CSRC June 1998, p47.

³ "*Dagestan: The Storm - Part II - The Assault on Kadar, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi*" and "*Dagestan: The Storm - Part III - The Expulsion of Chechen Bandit Formations from Novolakskiy Rayon*".

⁴ *Zavtra* No 34 (142), 21 August 1996, p1 and 4 "*Lebed' - Strategicheskaya Ugroza Rossi*" by Andrey Polikarpov. See Blandy "*Chechen Connections: From Khasavyurt to Moscow*" P24 CSRC September 1997, p27.

⁵ "*Chechnya - Occupy, Liberate and Obliterate*", forthcoming, C W Blandy.



Map 1: Battles in Dagestan⁶

⁶ Kommersant-Daily, 7 September 1999.

While the chronology of these events is clear and the inevitability of violence in this part of the North Caucasus long foreseen, what is far from clear is the extent to which religious extremism, the desire for a Greater Chechnya and the 'bandits' invasion of Dagestan were manipulated by those with an interest in quashing forever the question of Chechen independence.

Both the Federal and Dagestani authorities had been aware that it was only a matter of time before war erupted in Dagestan. For some time before this latest escalation of conflict, troops and militia had been beating off attacks by Chechen detachments along the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border⁷, dissident Dagestanis had even seized government buildings in Makhachkala in May 1998, and mountain villages had announced their land as being a "Sharia zone". In Moscow and Makhachkala it was hoped that everything would settle down and people would become reconciled. Immediately prior to the outbreak of conflict in Dagestan, Moscow was attempting to slow down yet one more "'hot spot' on the map of Russia"⁸, hoping that somehow the conflict in Karachayevo-Cherkessia would resolve itself, as it was hoped that relations with Chechnya and the situation concerning Prigorodnyy rayon would be resolved. However:

"In the Caucasus people are traded. Polygamy is allowed in Ingushetia⁹. Lynch law has come to pass in Dagestan. In Osetia the Ingush are not allowed in. In Adygeya they do not register Russian young men returning from Army service, but register Turks, Jordanians and Syrians. In Karachayevo-Cherkessia (KChR) the Cherkess do not want to live with the Karachay. In Kabardino-Balkaria (KBR) the alienation between Kabardins and Balkars is increasing. In the Kuban' and in Stavropol' mock Cossacks are on the spree in camouflage with swastikas on their sleeves... The Chechen war has turned into a new Caucasian war. In Dagestan they fight as at present, in the south of Stavropol' and between the Ingush and the Osetian a 'low intensity conflict', in NATO terminology, progresses, whilst in KBR, KChR and Adygeya a growing conflict between ethnic groups assumes a peaceful character, all this is one war".¹⁰

Observation and comment upon comment by those in authority in the North Caucasus has time and again centred on the fact that :

"In Russia there is no strategy to resolve Caucasian conflicts, there is no state or national policy. The present political-administrative map of the North Caucasus, the power structures remain in the heritage of Soviet times and in the new situation have become uncontrollable".¹¹

⁷ C W Blandy "Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions - An Interim Comparison and Assessment" P29 CSRC January 2000, p34, note 70 provides some further details.

⁸ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka "Novoye Vremya", 5 September 1999, "Vsye eto - odna voyna" by Yevgenniy Trofonov.

⁹ This is a reference to President Ruslan Aushev's recent attempt to have polygamy legally and officially recognised. Polygamy has been practised unofficially for many years amongst the Ingush.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

UNCERTAINTIES AND PARTIAL EXPLANATION

Setting The Scene

It is well known that autumn in the high mountains of the North Caucasus heralds the impending arrival of those close attendants of winter, namely, mist, fog and low cloud which obscure the form and loom of mountain, cliff and rocky crag, in turn producing distorted shadow and shape in dark chasm and narrow ravine below. Movement by vehicle is rendered difficult or even impossible by falls of snow in high mountain passes. Likewise, in the lowlands of Chechnya, Northern Dagestan, the southern extremities of Stavropol' Krai and over the Nogay Steppe, winter cloaks the terrain intersected by the Terek, Sundzha, Aksay, Sulak and other rivers, the towns and settlements of Kizlyar, Pervomayskoye, Babayurt and in particular the Khasavyurt-Gudermes 'avtostrada' with its Gerzel' bridge, scene of many a raid or skirmish between illegal bandit formation and Federal Internal Troops subunit or Dagestani militia detachment. Mist, fog and snow obscure the exact division between leaden sky and grey featureless steppe, reducing visibility, limiting effective observation but also affecting the imagination of the lonely, cold and dispirited sentry, with a subsequent lowering of his alertness, vigilance and combat capability.

Decreasing visibility also pertains to the latest resurgence of wide-scale conflict in the North Caucasus involving Chechen illegal bandit formations in concert with Islamic extremist groups. The actions of the Federal Centre are cloaked by a miasma of questions, uncertainties and suspicions, the origins and substance of which are obscured by rumour, half-truth and myth, in turn resulting in speculation and theories of conspiracy. The whisper of conspiracy has always been an integral element of the social fabric surrounding the every-day life of the average Russian. There are no clear-cut outlines or shapes to the shadowy figures, the 'puppeteers' manipulating the actions of their 'marionettes' behind the scenes or the circumstances surrounding the latest escalation of tension and conflict in the 250 year-old saga of enmity between Chechen and Russian.

The Hidden Hand of Moscow

The Berezovskiy Factor

It has been established that there are three main channels through which financial support flows to the Chechen field commanders and their illegal bandit formations.¹² A number of reports continue to circulate concerning the possible involvement of Boris Berezovskiy¹³ not only in providing money for hospitals and a cement works in Chechnya, but in initiating, setting up and financing the conflict in Dagestan by paying the Chechens and Islamic extremists to undertake an 'invasion of Dagestan'. Speculation is centred around meetings and alleged money transfers between Berezovskiy and Shamil Basayev¹⁴, and rumours of conspiracy between Berezovskiy

¹² See Blandy "Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions – An Interim Comparison and Assessment", P29 CSRC January 2000, p38, Box 8 and C W Blandy "Chechen Caravan Trails" P21 CSRC, April 1996.

¹³ Boris Berezovskiy is a millionaire business tycoon, formerly Deputy Secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council, said to be close to Boris Yel'tsin and his daughter Tatyana Dyachenko.

and Movladi Udugov which in turn aroused the concern and disapproval of President Aslan Maskhadov of Chechnya.¹⁵ There were also a number of other contacts between Berezovskiy and the Chechens.

However, the web of alleged conspiracy becomes even more tangled in view of the theories which speculate that it was in conjunction with the Russian secret services that Berezovskiy “*organised the war in Dagestan*”. In the words of Vitaliy Tretyakov, the Editor of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, a paper owned by Boris Berezovskiy himself, “...*here is my personal hypothesis, Berezovskiy in the worst case could have been used unwittingly by the Russian secret services, but most likely operated in conjunction with them*”¹⁶ to set up events so that the Chechen illegal bandit formations and Islamic extremists would invade Dagestan. Perhaps the allegations and thought processes are not so strange if one recalls the words of Sergey Stepashin on 4 July 1998 as Minister for Internal Affairs: “*Working on the Vlasov [kidnapping] case, I have had the chance to become convinced that there are probably also leads back to Moscow*”¹⁷. There was also suspicion of the involvement of elements outside Chechnya in the third assassination attempt on President Aslan Maskhadov.

What were the reasons for this apparent Byzantine behaviour on the part of Berezovskiy? Clues can be found in the Moscow media war which was raging in early autumn of 1999.¹⁸ *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* published transcripts of telephone conversations between Berezovskiy and Movladi Udugov allegedly concerned with the invasion of Dagestan by Chechen bandit formations and

¹⁴ *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* (Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka) of 23 September 1999 gives a digest of an interview with the French newspaper *Le Figaro* on Berezovskiy's discharge from hospital in Paris: “*Boris Berezovskiy: dal Basayevu 2 milliona dollarov. Na rekonstruktsiyu Chechni*”. “At the present time there is much speculation about the provision of money which I gave to the Chechens. Yes I gave it and there are many people who know about it. But I gave it for the reconstruction of a cement factory in agreement with Maskhadov. Chernomyrdin was informed, and the money went directly to Basayev. Then he was a Deputy Prime Minister of Chechnya. This money was tightly controlled and was necessary for the reconstruction of the republic because the government [Federal government?] was doing nothing.

¹⁵ *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* 27 September 1999, p3 “*Maskhadov: This War was provoked by Berezovskiy – An interview with the Chechen President*” by Arbi Arbiyev. “**Question:** Is it true that Boris Berezovskiy, who has some contacts with Udugov, has something to do with this war in Dagestan?” **Answer:** When I read the transcripts of Berezovskiy's telephone conversations in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, I wanted to call your editorial office and say that you were on the right track. All these conversations ... it is true ... I know Berezovskiy all too well. I have never liked his contacts with Basayev and other leaders. I particularly disliked the fact that Berezovskiy personally gave a million dollars to Basayev. I have always disliked his constant mediation in hostage and POW exchanges. Berezovskiy is a man who constitutes a danger to Russia and Chechnya”.

¹⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 190 (2006), 12 October 1999 “*Goniteli sem'i i Annibal'i*” by the Editor Vitaliy Tretyakov.

¹⁷ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) SU/3271 B/5 [20] of 6 July 1998. See also C W Blandy “*Chechnya: A Beleaguered President*” Occasional Brief 61 CSRC August 1998.

¹⁸ See, in particular *The Moscow Times*, Friday 22 October 1999 “*Berezovskiy's Own Paper Entertains War Intrigue*” by Brian Whitmore, Staff Writer.

payment to them. *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* is owned by Yuri Luzhkov, Mayor of Moscow. Luzhkov and Berezovskiy are political and business rivals. Publication relating to involvement of Berezovskiy in events in Dagestan would inflict damage on Berezovskiy, who owns and controls ORT television, which had been attacking Luzhkov over the previous weeks. Other rumours circulated to the effect that a certain group of insiders in the Kremlin, of which Boris Berezovskiy was one, were in the process of circulating a written timetable and programme of steps to “discredit Luzhkov by provoking a range of events that would destabilise the social and psychological situation in Moscow”. The plan was to carry out some high profile terrorist acts or attempted terrorist attacks. It foresaw the kidnapping of a series of famous people and ordinary citizens by ‘Chechen fighters’ with a separate chapter devoted to criminal acts and violence against commercial structures and business people supporting Luzhkov. The first terrorist bomb attack happened in the Manezh shopping mall, a pet project of Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov.

In the past Berezovskiy and the Kremlin were on one side and Luzhkov on the other, but Berezovskiy’s own media channels had been running stories about Tatyana Dyachenko, President Boris Yel’tsin’s daughter being allegedly involved in kidnapping. This information war was thus no longer just between Berezovskiy and Luzhkov, but also between different camps within the Kremlin. Perhaps it is simply that a man with Berezovskiy’s wealth, status and influence has a strategy that “*whoever wins, Berezovskiy wins and therefore his method is to establish profitable back-channels with all the protagonists*”¹⁹.

In many ways the mystery surrounding recent events is reminiscent of events between 1993 and 11 December 1994, before the military intervention into Chechnya, with various clandestine operations involving the Russian security and secret services in their attempts to destabilise Dudayev’s Chechnya, to replace Dudayev with a figure well-disposed to Moscow and to bring Chechnya back as a subject within the legal framework of the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

The Dismissal of Sergey Stepashin

Another source which concentrated its 39 pages on matters concerning the abrupt dismissal of Sergey Stepashin from the post of Prime Minister which took place on 8 August 1999 and the deliberations of the close circle surrounding President Boris Yel’tsin, stated that:

“In the power structures of the Russian Federation a sharp growth of dissatisfaction is being registered with the government reshuffle, especially in connection with the necessity of responding adequately to the ‘invasion of Chechen fighters into Dagestan’ which does not seem possible because of the close links of Berezovskiy with the groupings of Basayev and Khattab. According to available secret service information, a high ranking representative of the Presidential Administration had a confidential meeting the following week with Basayev, in the course of which the conditions of the ‘invasion of Dagestan’ were also discussed so that it would serve as a means for the retirement of Stepashin and pressure on Yel’tsin with the aim of ‘pushing through’ a Premier favourable to the Berezovskiy-Abramovich group”.²⁰

¹⁹ Point made by J G Sherr to the Author on 21 October 1999.

²⁰ “*Krizis Vlasti-99 Chast’ II*”, 29 September 1999 (Natsionnal’naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka) “*Rezkii rost nedovol’sstva “pravitel’svennoy chekhardoy” otmechayetsya v silovykh*

Right at the top of the list of speculation was the connection of the 'invasion' of Dagestan to the forthcoming Duma elections due to be held on 19 December 1999 which could possibly have necessitated the declaration of a state of emergency, in turn entailing postponement of the Duma elections and possibly delaying the Presidential elections which were due to be held before July 2000.

One of the main reasons for Stepashin's dismissal was the fact that he was not doing enough to conduct the election campaign for the party in power.²¹ Stepashin is on record as having said somewhat bitterly "*I was not afraid to take personal responsibility*"²² with regard to the need for the forceful ejection and liberation of Dagestani villages occupied by the *Wahhabi*. However, when the full extent of the Chechen 'invasion' into Avaristan, believed to number in excess of 2,000 men, became known over the period 6/7 August 1999, the thought could well have been in his mind, for he did express the opinion to the Praesidium after his dismissal, that "*maybe Russia could well lose Dagestan*"²³. These doubts could have been evident in his approach to the problem, particularly since he had opted for a less than robust solution in an agreement brokered in the summer of 1998 when he was Interior Minister, concerning the establishment of the Fundamentalist Islamic centre involving the villages of Kadar-Karamakhi-Chabanmakhi, known as the Kadar zone complex. This could hardly have commended him to a President such as Boris Yel'tsin²⁴, leading to a revival of the reasoning in the Presidential circle that "*Stepashin was weak*".²⁵

Terrorist Bomb Attacks

Public concern and conjecture in Moscow attained new levels with the sequence of bomb explosions starting at the end of August: first, the explosion in the shopping centre 'Okhotnyy Ryad' adjacent to Manezh Square in Moscow on the evening of 31 August 1999 killing one person and injuring 41; second, approximately at midnight on 8/9 September 1999 an explosion destroyed a nine storey apartment block on Gur'ryanova Street in southeast Moscow killing 94 and injuring over 200; third, on 13 September 1999 at 0530 the destruction of an eight storey apartment tower block, No 6, Block 3 along Kashirskiy Shosse leaving 60 killed including 10 children

strukturakh Rossiyskoy Federatsii" attributed to *Zavtra* No 32, August 1999, p1. On p1 this source states that according to *Kommersant* even before 5 August the speechwriters were commissioned to prepare a text for a Presidential television address.

²¹ Press-Dos'ye - "*Krizis Vlasti-99 Chast' II*" (Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka) "*Prichiny I Predposylki*".

²² "*Krizis Vlasti-99 Chast' II*" (Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka) "*Prichiny I Predposylki*", p6.

²³ "*Krizis Vlasti-99 Chast' II*".

²⁴ *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 December 1997 "*Yeltsin pleas avert 'Black Friday'*" by Alan Philips in Moscow. "Rumours of his wrath make grown men tremble. At a recent Kremlin meeting, when the President was in particularly fiery form, the Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin dropped his briefcase, while the Communist Speaker, Gennady Seleznyov, did not dare to demand a cabinet reshuffle".

²⁵ "*Krizis Vlasti-99 Chast' II*", p1.

and 13 injured. Amongst the general public in Moscow and the law enforcement agencies, Chechens and people from both the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus were regarded as prime suspects and the possible perpetrators of terrorist acts: some 11,000 were rounded up for questioning. However, for a people long subjected to a totalitarian police state, in some convoluted way, suspicion has also been directed to the activities of the security services, law enforcement agencies and organs, as possibly instigating and carrying out these acts themselves. The Security Service 'exercise' including explosives in an apartment on 22 September did not make identification of the perpetrators of any explosion easier. For a time fear stalked the streets, gripping the minds and imagination of Muscovites.

Whilst Moscow suffered a wave of explosions, there were also acts of terrorism in towns in the south. On 4 September 1999, a car bomb exploded outside military housing block No 7 in Buynaksk, base location of 136 Separate Motor Rifle Brigade of the Ministry of Defence, killing 64 people. The major explosion in Rostov Oblast' on 16 September 1999 at 0557 in the centre of Volgograd, in a nine-storey apartment block at the junction of Oktyabrskiy Shosse and Gagarin Street, killed 17 people with 47 needing hospitalisation and 276 requiring medical treatment. Volgograd is situated roughly between Rostov-on-Don, Headquarters North Caucasus Military District, and Volgograd, home to 20 Motor Rifle Division and 33 Motor Rifle Regiment.

Conspiracy Theories

However, the question remains as to who actually planned and perpetrated these criminal acts: rogue elements of the secret services, an element of a war between competing politicians and business interests in Moscow which stretched into Dagestan, political elites vying against each other for advantage in the Duma and perhaps more importantly in the Presidential elections, Chechens, Islamic extremists supposedly supported by the shadowy figure of Usama bin Laden, the international terrorist.²⁶ A plausible case could be made for any of the above elements and factors.

However "*It is very difficult to believe in the accidental coincidence of three events: the beginning of the election campaign, the nomination of Putin as Premier and the sortie of Basayev*"²⁷. Mention of Shamil Basayev in this context produces grounds for further speculation:

"It is maintained, for example, that Shamil' Basayev and his brother Shirvani are long-standing GRU agents, and that all their activities were agreed, not with the radical Islamists, but with the generals sitting in the military intelligence offices. All the details of the attack by Basayev's detachments were supposedly worked out in the summer of 1999 in a villa in the South of France with the participation of Basayev and the Head of the Presidential Administration, Aleksandr Voloshin. Furthermore the explosions in the apartment blocks in Moscow were organised by the GRU, and the demolition explosive they say was not supplied from secret bases in Chechnya, but

²⁶ He has reportedly provided funding to an initial figure of US\$ 25m followed by a similar sum.

²⁷ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 215 (2031), 17 November 1999, p3 "*Mne trudno ne verit Basayevu*" by Vadin Belotserkovskiy.

*from GRU stockpiles close to the capital. Under the statement of all these mad stories stands, however, not the name of Movladi Udugov, but it seems the name of a fully responsible journalist Boris Kagarlitskiy".*²⁸

The effective repulse of an 'invasion' into Dagestan would not only serve to restore the tattered prestige of the Russian Army, illustrating the fact that the Army needed rewarding through timeous payment of emoluments and improvement in conditions of service modern equipment, in turn benefiting the Military-Industrial Complex, but also providing an opportunity for decisive political leadership by a new Prime Minister, subsequently to be Boris Yel'tsin's "Dauphin" in the Presidential race. Therefore the thought cannot be totally excluded that this whole series of terrorist acts might have been part of a deep well-laid plan²⁹, in which the transfer of power in the Russian state from an old, inconsistent, though politically wily man, failing in health and energy to a younger one, possessing drive, consistency and the strong qualities of firmness and resolution of purpose was a matter of paramount importance for the Russian state.

Requirement to Halt Terrorist Incursions

Working at a practical level, unencumbered by speculation centred around Kremlin politics, there was a need to sort out the situation in Chechnya once and for all, on the basis that it was a continuing threat to the cohesion and existence of the Russian Federation. But first it was necessary to obtain the support of Russian society as a whole on the grounds of the need to protect society from terrorist acts in which Chechen involvement could be inferred, which in turn could give extra impetus for a final solution in which the Federal authorities would show decisiveness of purpose leading to an effective antidote to terrorism not only in Moscow but in Chechnya, Dagestan and to a marginally lesser degree in the rest of the mini-republics in the North Caucasus: Ingushetia, North Osetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachayev-Cherkessia, Adygeya, Krasnodar Kray and Stavropol' Kray.

However, the problem of terrorist incursions can also be taken at face value, disregarding suspicions about manipulation of events. A government has a duty to protect its citizens and to maintain an environment in which they can go about their daily business, employment and social activity without illegal disruption. An article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* paints a depressing picture for those occupied in farming on the Nogay Steppe in Stavropol' Kray and Dagestan.

²⁸ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka "Press Dos'ye - Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii", "Events 17 February 2000", quotes *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* "Basayev - agent GRU".

²⁹ An 'Internet' survey in "*Russia Today*", 27 September 1999, "Who orchestrated Russia's 'terrorist' bombings of the past month?" offered: Chechen extremists - 49.77%, the Kremlin - 36.48%, Political opponents of the Yel'tsin government - 5.17%, don't know - 8.58%. Of course there are no details of who contributed to it.

Box 1 – Vicissitudes of Farming on the Nogay Steppe³⁰

“The Nogay steppe has almost become depopulated and deserted. Constant raids of bandits have led to this. In the Nogay steppe one crime exists - the stealing or rustling of cattle and livestock which is driven into Chechnya. Not long ago four raiders, armed with automatics and grenades carried out a raid on a Nogay farm, situated on the junction of Stavropol' Kray, Chechnya and Dagestan. Since the beginning of the year from the border regions of Dagestan with Chechnya already about a thousand head of sheep have been driven into Chechnya, last year more than a thousand were taken. The Nogay steppe is extremely favourable for raiders. The constant raids of bandits have led to the fact that considerable tracts of Dagestan's border territories are no longer used as distant pastures for the wintering of livestock. Shepherds refuse to graze sheep here. If 10 years ago there were more than 20 farms, where cattle breeders lived with their families, then today only four decrepit, tumbledown structures remain, only remotely recalling the agriculture of yesteryear. Women and children are no longer here. All the farming during the time of the wintering of livestock, and it is several months, is carried out by the menfolk. A few farmsteads recall the settlement-illusions. From the steppe, where there is only one occupation - cattlebreeding, people are leaving.

The tragedy is of course that over the last six years the size of the population has shrunk fourfold because of continual expectancy of new raids. It is possible for people to move to towns, giving up their life as shepherds. In truth the people on the steppe do not suffer only because of their extreme poverty. Whilst, at the time of writing, Chechen civilians have become the helpless victims of a ruthless campaign by the Federal Forces to eradicate illegal bandit formations, it must also be remembered that Russian citizens in Chechnya were also victims, but victims unseen and unsung.

Plight of Ethnic Russians in Chechnya

A no less distressing picture concerns the plight of the ethnic Russian in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. According to the 1989 All-Union population census in the territory of Checheno-Ingush ASSR there were more than 293,700 Russians (23.1% of the population). When Chechnya and Ingushetia separated, there were about 30,000 Russians in the Republic of Ingushetia.

There is a view that a systematically planned resettlement of Chechens from southern mountain locations to the territories bordering Stavropol' Kray and Dagestan started to be carried out by the leadership of the republic (Doku Zavgayev) from the middle of the 1980s. This disrupted the 'ethnic balance', achieving greatest effect in Shelkovskiy, Naurskiy, Groznenskiy, Sunzhenskiy rayony and other areas belonging to the central plains, where up until that time, the Russian population had predominated numerically. In fact it could be said that the foundation was laid for future ethnic clashes or 'cleansing':

“A clearly expressed anti-Russian policy introducing systematic violations against human rights, moral and physical terror was directed against the Russian population becoming a nightmarish reality in the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria

³⁰ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 105 (1921), 11 June 1999, p4 “*Bol'she v stepi nikto ne zhivyet*” by Milrad Fatullayev.

*from August 1991, when with the connivance, and often also with the direct assistance of the central authorities the Chechen separatists seized power in Groznyy".*³¹

According to this article, between 1991 and 1999 more than 21,000 Russians were killed, excluding those killed during the period of combat operations, more than 100,000 apartments and homes were seized which belonged to the non-indigenous inhabitants of Chechnya (including Ingushetia), more than 46,000 people were put into slavery, being used only on important work "*from the gathering of wild onions to the construction of the road to Groznyy through Utum-Kalye and Tazbichi*"³² and thence to Shatili in Georgia. In the period between 1991 and December 1994, prior to intervention by the Federal armed forces into Chechnya, more than 200,000 Russians removed themselves from the Chechen Republic. According to the Ministry of the Interior (Russian Federation) approximately 29,000 Russian inhabitants still remained in the Chechen Republic at that time, the overwhelming majority of whom (more than 17,000) were people of pensionable age and helpless old people. The introduction of Sharia Law in 1997 enforced a legislatively Islamic way of life and actually had the effect of making ethnic Russians 'outside the law' and in the unfortunate position of being social outcasts. There were more than 800 cases a year of Russian citizens who had been kidnapped and held for ransom. Violence in relation to Russians in the republic became a widespread phenomenon: beatings, murders, robberies, rape, kidnapping of hostages, breaking in and even forcible eviction from apartments and homes. It seemed that the Russian population of the Chechen Republic were in fact hostages in the political dealings of the Federal Centre with the official Chechen leadership and the so-called field commanders.

Another factor which was endemic in 1996 official Chechen power structures probably made its own detrimental contribution to Chechen-Russian relations, when the Chechen government forsook military uniform and donned civilian clothing in February 1997:

*"Whilst the advertised criteria for selection to the new Chechen government were in some degree slanted toward the recruitment of the competent professional, in practice however, the old loyalties tempered and strengthened by the bonds of comradeship, found in a shared military experience, proved to be the criteria for selection. In a number of cases performance was to prove short of the requirement".*³³

In an interview in 1997, Vakha Arsanov, as the new Chechen Vice President, emphasised the criteria required for candidates for the new Chechen government:

"They will have to meet the following requirements. First, they must be religious and God-fearing. Secondly, professionalism and moral qualities will be taken into account. Thirdly, a candidate's war record in the two years from 1994-96 will also be taken

³¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 120 (1936), 6 July 1999, p5 "*O polozheniye Russkikh v Chechenskom Respublike*" by The Department of Ethnic Problems of the Russian People of the Ministry for Federal Affairs and Nationalities of the RF.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ C W Blandy "*Chechen Status: Wide Differences Remain*", P27 CSRC February 1998, p43 Note 118: "... Maskhadov stressed, in particular, that war participants occupied 80% of senior posts in the republic".

into account. These are the three requirements which all appointed government members should meet".³⁴

The Russian inhabitants of the Chechen Republic gradually turned to the organs of state power of Russia with a request to give them a chance to settle in other regions of the Russian Federation, since *"Russians in Chechnya are situated on the brink of complete annihilation"*³⁵.

Box 2 – Conditions of an Ethnic Russian Family in Groznyy³⁶

"This is no life, this is madness, this is something between life and death, when to go or stay, when your turn will come for extermination. Here is a complete lack of rights, vicious derision and mockery, humiliation, extermination, lawlessness in relation to Russians. How much is it possible to deride us Russians? Who can protect us?" ... "Why do you allot money to Chechnya for the restoration and payment of pensions? This money does not go to whom it is intended. They (the Chechen leadership and field commanders) build on this money, palaces, castles, fortresses with whole districts with fountains and swimming pools".

Before the latest explosion of conflict between Russian and Chechen, Russians remaining in Chechnya were even afraid to exchange letters, since complaints could become grounds for their murder as *"Russian spies and enemies of the Chechen People"*³⁷. From the viewpoint of a Russian in Chechnya, the number of independent subjects of the government in the Chechen Republic was increasing practically with every day with *"a president, two shura and a parliament. The elected official President of Chechnya in actual fact does not have complete rule over the whole territory of the republic. In the evolving situation, the positive effectiveness of the negotiating process, the fulfilment of achieved understandings was problematical"*³⁸.

The ethnic terror against Russians, the acts of murder and abduction as exemplified by the kidnapping of the Russian Federation's official representatives to the Chechen Republic (the deputy of the plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation in the Chechen Republic Sadykov, the plenipotentiary of the President of the Russian Federation Valentin Vlasov, the plenipotentiary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation Gennadiy Shpigun) underlined the inability of the authorities in Ichkeria to guarantee law and order in the republic and the fulfilment of the understandings achieved earlier with the Federal Centre.

For ethnic Russians in Ichkeria there was no possibility of obtaining the status of a 'forced migrant' because under Resolution No 510 of 30 April 1997 *"Concerning the order of paying compensation for a lost dwelling and/or property to citizens, victims as a result of the solution of the crisis in the Chechen Republic who abandoned it*

³⁴ SWB SU/2835/B/4, 5 February 1997.

³⁵ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 120 (1936), 6 July 1999, p5.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

without being able to return”, this category only applied to citizens who left in the period of the armed conflict.³⁹

Plight of Chechens

On the other side of the coin, nearly three and a half years after the Khasavyurt agreement which ended the first Russian-Chechen conflict, little was accomplished to rebuild the war-torn republic. It became increasingly apparent that the decision to leave Chechnya's status in limbo was a great hindrance to any Chechen effort towards reconstruction. Every Chechen citizen who lost his home during the war was entitled to compensation from the Russian government, according to the terms of the 12 May 1997 treaty signed by President Boris Yel'tsin and President Maskhadov. Yet no one received any compensation. Nearly all of the buildings of the republic's three universities were destroyed and have not been rebuilt, leaving young people without any opportunity to acquire further education. Unemployment was widespread, *“about 80% of the population of Chechnya at the moment have no work, and amongst the young almost 100% are unemployed”*⁴⁰ as almost all industrial plants had been flattened. Schoolteachers were unpaid, relying on donations from students' families. Only 10% of the population was engaged in some form of legitimate business⁴¹. Approximately 5,000 hectares, 15% of the republic's arable land, was strewn with land mines, which greatly affected agriculture, reducing output and depriving the population of another avenue of legitimate employment. Chechnya received virtually no international aid in rebuilding and developing its economy. The international presence in the republic was limited to humanitarian aid. The International Red Cross provided pensioners with free loaves of bread, and the OSCE also conducted a humanitarian aid mission, yet much humanitarian assistance designated for Chechnya was channelled through Russia, and thus did not reach the republic. Some Islamic states offered assistance to Chechnya, but most of these resources were directed to the radical extremist Wahhabis, who comprised a very small, yet powerful percentage of the republic's population and who were responsible for a large share of violence in the republic.

³⁹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 109 (1434), 27 June 1997 *“Migratsiya - problema prezhdе vsego ekonomicheskaya”* by Natal'ya Ayrapetova following an interview with Tat'yana Regent, the Head of the Russian Federation Migration Service. Regent, replying to the point that the category of “migrant” did not fit the Chechen refugee easily, said “And nevertheless officially they are migrants”. See also C W Blandy *“Chechen Connections: An End to Conflict in Chechnya”* P25 CSRC October 1997 Boxes 14 and 15 and *“Chechen Status - Wide Differences Remain”* P27 CSRC February 1998, p32.

⁴⁰ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 203 (1528), 28 October 1997, p1 *“Zapustit nefteprovod gorazdo legche, chem vyrabotat' gosudarstvennyu politiki”* by Yekaterina Tesemnikova. See also *Literaturnaya Gazeta* No 36 (6668), 3 September 1997, p9 *“Novyy plan Marshala kak sredstvo bor'by protiv Chechenskogo terrorizma”* by Valentin Zapevalov - “70% of the working population do not have the opportunity of honourable work to feed themselves and their families”.

⁴¹ Blandy *“Chechen Status: Wide Differences Remain”*, p25, Note 58, quotes an article by Boris Moskalev *“The Anatomy of the Chechen Conflict”* in *“Mediterranean Quarterly”* Volume 7, Number 1, Winter 1996, p107 “It was obvious that when legal means to earn a living no longer existed, illegal means would emerge”.

Despite the Maskhadov-Yel'tsin meeting of 18 August 1997, and President Yel'tsin's remarks to the effect that in the event of contradictions arising in the course of this work "*As with Shaymiyev, we will sit down together and cut this knot*"⁴², relations were poor and no further meeting took place, despite Maskhadov's repeated requests.

By September 1997 it appeared that some factions within the Kremlin were taking measures which could well be described as ones of prudent precaution or could at the same time signify something more sinister, such as the imposition of an 'unleakable' blockade around Chechnya for the purpose of starving Chechnya into a position in which it would have to conform to being a subject of the Russian Federation. However, the Chechen leaders warned about the dangerous consequences of such a policy, as exemplified by Aslan Maskhadov's statement whilst on a short break in Turkey in November 1997 "*If Russia with the help of intrigue attempts to prevent our independence, we are ready once again to join battle*"⁴³. Problems arising from a tight blockade would be compounded by a number of factors, shown in Box 3 below. In reality, as far back as September 1997 the Chechen perception was of impending isolation from the world community.

Box 3 - Grozny's Concerns over Indications of Russian Blockade in September 1997⁴⁴

1. All lines of communication and transport traversing Chechnya are being redirected.
2. Trains from Dagestan to Moscow now bypass the republic.
3. Road traffic bypasses the republic on the Rostov-Baku highway.
4. A high voltage electric power line bypassing Chechnya is nearing completion.
5. A gas pipeline bypassing Chechnya is also being laid.
6. Studies have started for an oil pipeline from Khasavyurt to Terskaya in Stavropol' Kray.
7. Intensive work is underway to strengthen the border with deep trenches and barbed wire.
8. Factors compounding a blockade: Chechen deficiencies in reserves of foodstuffs, absence of working machinery and a lack of land; Chechnya's inability to produce food, for the republic has no food processing factories, such as dairies, livestock farms or bakeries; it has no 'grain mountains' as tractors and agricultural machinery were destroyed in the war and arable land in most mountainous and upland areas is unusable due to extensive laying of landmines by Russians.⁴⁵

⁴² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 153 (1478), 16 August 1997, p1 "*Aslan Maskhadov dovolen rezul'tatami vstrechi s Boris Yel'tsin*" by Il'ya Maksakov.

⁴³ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 210, 6 November 1997, p3. See Blandy "*Chechen Connections: An End to Conflict in Chechnya?*" p21. "However, a refusal to use force by the Russians will not preclude the use of other methods. There will always be that danger; in the short to medium term there is always the lever of economic blockade, to obtain compliance, as shown in the past five years and recently".

⁴⁴ See Blandy "*Chechen Status: Wide Differences Remain*", p22 and SWB SU/3036 B/8 [18], 29 September 1997.

⁴⁵ Extensive mining by the Federal Forces was one point amongst a host of others brought up by Aslan Maskhadov, then Chief of Staff to Dzhokhar Dudayev, during the Author's visit to Chechnya in December 1995: *Unmapped minefields, indiscriminate mining by the Russians and the failure by the Russians to hand over minefield maps were also included in this list*. During this visit, it was important not to wander off track. Even when the Chechens, after the first Russo-Chechen conflict and some six months before the outbreak of the present one, made arrangements for Western help in training personnel for the task of removing landmines from their territory, this produced some criticism from the Russian side. See *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 25 February 1999, p3 "*Are Chechen Terrorists*

PRELUDE TO INVASION OF DAGESTAN

The increasing number of terrorist raids on the administrative border between Chechnya and Dagestan by the Chechen illegal *bandformirovaniya* give rise to a number of questions. Were these merely 'passout' examinations for students from Khattab's training establishment at Serzhen-Yurt; or, secondly, were they tied to a more defined programme of "reconnaissance by battle" which might have been directed towards disrupting the 'water-tight' economic blockade around Chechnya; or, thirdly, were they attempts to frustrate the coordination and concentration of Federal forces and thus cause delays to Federal plans for a second major, armed intervention into Chechnya and subsequent military occupation?

Questions also arise from the more combative approach in taking the conflict onto Chechen territory through the adoption of preventive aviation and artillery strikes on terrorist bases in Chechnya under the reinvigorated policy of Colonel-General Vladimir Rushaylo, Minister of Internal Affairs, implemented by Colonel General Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs and Commander of Internal Troops, known as the 'Hawk'⁴⁶. It will be recalled that some 30 months ago,

being Trained in Germany - The German Foreign Ministry has paid for the training of a Chechen group in mine sweeping" by Igor Yavlyanskiy, Victor Baranets, Elena Ovcharenko. "Germany is training Chechen field engineers, who are learning how to plant mines for free. The training is taking place not far from the settlement of Kenige Wusterhausen. The newspaper affirms that the German Foreign Ministry paid for the training of the four Chechens in the art of mine sweeping. Major General Adam Nizhalovskiy, Deputy Director of the Engineering Forces of the Russian Defence Ministry, commented on the article in *Berliner Zeitung*. "First of all, all minefields which were laid by the Federal Forces during the Chechen War have been cleared, and there are documents to prove it. Moreover, Russian field engineering units have neutralized over 500,000 explosive objects in the territory - mines, fougasses, grenades, etc. Wherever it was impossible to take away various "traps", trawls were activated. What is the need to train Chechen field engineers in Germany? It is dangerous, since experts who are trained to clear explosive objects have to know how they are installed, and consequently can carry out acts of terrorism very professionally in railway stations, markets, and other crowded places."

⁴⁶ *Izvestia*, 17 April 1999, page 2 "*The Interior Ministry shuffles Generals*" by Vladimir Demchenko. "The other day the Russian interior minister [Stepashin] launched a personnel shuffle. In their conversations with this reporter, Interior Ministry officials purport it to be a "planned reorganization", but observers cannot help noticing that all the changes have a common denominator: they are all aimed at assisting to a greater or lesser extent Deputy Minister Vladimir Rushaylo, who is fighting Chechen terrorists in the Caucasus. For starters, Leonty Shevtsov, Chief of the Operational Headquarters in the Caucasus, was relieved of his duties, assigned to "the minister's command", and replaced with Ivan Golubev, former director of the Directorate of Law and Public Order. When explaining the replacement, Minister Stepashin made it clear that the ministry's practice in the Caucasus is to "make a shift from the deployment of troops to operational police work against terrorists" and that that calls for "a specialist with Afghani experience." Shortly before that, Vyacheslav Selivanov, Director of the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime, was replaced with a certain Vladimir Kozlov (who once worked under Rushaylo). Kozlov, Deputy Director of the Main Directorate for Combating Organized Crime until now, recently advocated a war against the Chechen underworld in Russia to close down the financial channels pumping money to Chechnya. Selivanov is now director of a quiet directorate handling crimes in the sphere of high technology. The following day it became known that Stepashin had "purged" the Internal Affairs Department of Stavropol territory as well. Apparently some heads have rolled there (one of them belonging to a deputy director of the territorial department). If we recall that Internal Troops Commander Pavel Maslov was recently ousted and replaced with

there were some feelings of surprise when General Anatoliy Kulikov, then Minister of Internal Affairs, advocated such a policy of preventive and retaliatory action: *"It is perfectly justifiable under the circumstances to carry out pre-emptive strikes against the bandit bases, wherever they are, including those on Chechen territory. Life shows that the bandits do not understand any other language and should therefore be eliminated"*.⁴⁷

However, Boris Berezovskiy, then Deputy Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, described as 'inadmissible' the delivery of preventive strikes on gunmen's bases in Chechnya: *"It is becoming clear that the Russian authorities do not want to work out a strategy in the Caucasus. As a result, instead of money, Russia will pay with human lives for this"*.⁴⁸

In view of later military developments, including the deployment and concentration of some 93,000 troops, perhaps there might be some grounds for suspicion of 'constructive provocation' on the part of the power-wielding structures?

*"Preparation for a counter-terrorist operation in the North Caucasus was begun as far back as March last year [March 1999] after the abduction in Chechnya of General MVD RF Gennadiy Shpigun, ex-Premier Sergey Stepashin to Interfax. In his words Federal Forces' counter-terrorist operations were also planned on the territory of Chechnya. He also remarked that they would not be wide-scale operations. The creation of a security zone in Chechnya was planned with a way out to the River Terek. The unmasking and destruction of terrorist camps throughout the whole territory of Chechnya was also agreed in the plan"*⁴⁹.

Colonel-General Viktor Kazantsev, Commander-in-Chief of North Caucasus Military District and Commander of the Combined Grouping of Federal Forces, bore testimony to the amount of preparation that had taken place amongst the Federal power-wielding structures: *"Over the last three years we have made several important steps forward. Taking into account predicted terrorist activity, a series of joint exercises has been carried out with the Ministry of the Interior, Border Troops and government communications service. And we were prepared"*.⁵⁰

There is thus the possibility that the Chechens, and in particular Basayev, had become cognisant of Federal plans to invade Chechnya. Speculation on this point

hardliner Ovchinnikov, it becomes manifestly clear that the Interior Ministry is serious in its intention to handle Chechnya in a new manner. This hypothesis is also confirmed by Stepashin's plans to tour the Caucasus in person to get firsthand knowledge of the situation on the Russian-Chechen border."

⁴⁷ *Shchit i Mech*, No 101, 5 September 1997, pp1-2, keynote speech headlined "One gramme of peace weighs more than one tonne of war" at the Pyatigorsk Law Enforcement Conference on 1 to 3 September 1997. See Blandy "Chechen Status: Wide Differences Remain", p26.

⁴⁸ SWB SU/3119/B/4, 8 January 1998.

⁴⁹ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka, 27 January 2000, "Temy dnya", p4 "Plan po Chechenskoy voyne peryopolne".

⁵⁰ *Trud* Electronic Version, 10 November 1999 "General Kazantsev: V Chechne Poydu do Kontsa" by Sergey Ischenko.

might well be concentrated on the perception of the unofficial Chechen *shura* in opposition to President Maskhadov, that it had become a matter of absolute necessity to forestall a major Federal military operation which violated the "Fig Leaf Treaty"⁵¹. Chechen knowledge of the Russian military mind begotten of long years of experience of the treacherous practices of both St Petersburg and Moscow⁵², and those of their respective secret services, both Tsarist and Communist could only reinforce the view encapsulated in these words of Basayev:

*"Today the Russians have removed the mask. According to our information from March 1998 they were preparing for an invasion into Naurskiy rayon. In May at the sentry post in Kizliyar (Dagestan) they even killed one of our people trying to get through. We have known for a long time that Russia not only needs to take revenge but also to solve its own internal problems in this way. How is it possible to speak about a state when all its prime ministers - Stepashin, Primakov, Putin - originated from the FSB? This is a police state, and Chechnya is not its only mission ... Russia has never thrown off its imperialistic ambitions. What seems to be her military strategy has changed little".*⁵³

In this interview it also became apparent that Basayev did not see himself or the Chechen armed formations as terrorists. They were simply fighting to rid the North Caucasus of Russian domination, in fact liberating Dagestan. One can obtain another insight into the Chechen mind from an article written by the fanatical, Islamic, Chechen ideologist Movladi Udugov under the headline "*No military confrontation with the world of Islam, but a union with it can lead Russia out of the quicksands of history*"⁵⁴. Whilst the article concentrates on the fall of the USSR vis à vis the United States started by the failure of Russian military policy in Afghanistan, the end of the 'Cold War' and the process that followed, one cannot but help coming to the view that the underlying theme was the fact that it was Russia that had lost the war with Chechnya and that it should be Chechnya as the victor "dictating its will" and enjoying the spoils⁵⁵. Whilst the Chechen is undoubtedly a brave and

⁵¹ *Izvestiya* No 88 (24941), 14 May 1997 "*Dogovor s Chechnyey: kto pobedil, kto proigral*". [Treaty with Chechnya: who won, who lost]. See also C W Blandy "*Chechen Connections: An End to Conflict in Chechnya*" P25, CSRC, August 1997. The text of the treaty reads "Treaty on Peace and Principles of relationships between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. The highly contracting Parties, desiring to end the many-centuries long confrontation and striving for establishing firm, equal rights, mutually beneficial relations, agreed: 1. To refuse forever the use or the threat of the use of force in solving any issues of dispute. 2. To build their relations in accordance with the universally recognised principles and the norms of International Law, in this the Parties interact in the spheres defined by specific agreements. 3. The treaty is the basis for the conclusion of further treaties and agreements in the whole complex of relationships. Moscow 12 May 1997".

⁵² See *NG-Stsenarii* No 7, 8 July 1998, p12, "*Nasha bor'ba*" Magomed Tagayev. That "*the Russian consequently also outplayed their teachers in deception, cruelty, treachery and evil*" is particularly apposite in this context.

⁵³ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, exclusive interview by *Liberation* with Shamil' Basayev on 14 October 1999 "*Moskve nuzhna Chechnya bez Chechentsev*" by Ani Niva.

⁵⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 42 (1858), 10 March 1999, p8 "*Obrechennaya bor'ba*" by Movladi Udugov, President of the National Centre for Strategic Research and Political Technology.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* "The war was not finished by a simple handshake, mutual apologies and equal agreements. That does not happen in life. The victor dictates his will and plunders the

courageous fighter, one unavoidably comes to the conclusion that there is much naivety and lack of understanding about the world outside the Caucasus in the Chechen mind, and that every Chechen fighter believes himself to be a general, epitomised by a number of examples from the first Russo-Chechen conflict in recent times, together with a tendency to over-hasty reaction in the correction of perceived insult and indiscipline in the military sphere:

*“The problem of the Chechens, especially in the battles for Groznyy, was related to their weak discipline in all ranks, when every fighter considered himself to be a general. The Chechens were able, for example, at a price of large forces to recapture a number of federalist objectives, but the Chechens sometimes without any reason abandoned them without informing the command. Guerrilla warfare frequently switched to inter-partisan warfare. The Chechen command were often forced to apply considerable force in order to restrict this occurrence, but were not successful in ridding themselves of it completely”.*⁵⁶

The Chechen inability to counter the strengthening of Federal forces along the administrative border in the virtual establishment of a ‘ring of steel’ Chechnya would further damage the Chechen economy and viability as a state⁵⁷. An ‘invasion’ into Avaristan, Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony, if conducted with large numbers, could perhaps interrupt and delay Federal preparations for armed intervention onto Chechen territory from the north and east, forcing the Federal forces to redeploy troops to southwestern Dagestan, with the chance that even in late summer, mountain, mist and fog would hinder Federal air power. The lack of condemnation by President Maskhadov⁵⁸ or by the Chechen government concerning the armed incursion onto the territory of Dagestan is perhaps explained by this line of argument. Well aware of Federal preparations, precisely what action should the Chechens have taken, their President having been refused a meeting with President Yel’tsin on more than one occasion?

vanquished, and the losing side pays with gold, with a renunciation of its ideology, culture etc. And it is necessary to become dependent on the country (or countries) of the victor. The victor imposes his will on everything: in politics, economics, ideology, moral and other spheres of life. The cold war is not excluded. And when the mass media enthusiastically praises the end of the ‘cold war’ and the long-awaited ‘agreement’ between West and East, it is necessary to treat this critically. Knowing the laws of war, it is necessary to ask what part is prepared for the losing side? The principles on which sides build their policy have not changed since the time of Ancient Rome. The victor plunders natural resources, pumps out the ‘brains’, takes the young women away for their entertainment, as in the time of Ancient Rome. The essence has not changed, forms and formulation have changed”.

⁵⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 21, 6 February 1997, p5 “*Nakanune stolknoveniya s metropoliyey*” by Bakar Taysumov, Director of the Vaynakh Republican Party (VRP) Analytical Centre.

⁵⁷ SWB SU/2937/B/5, 5 June 1997, quotes Movladi Udugov in an interview on NTV's “Hero of the Day” programme: “*At present the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria remains under blockade, where even shoes, shoes for children, are being described as strategic goods and where even humanitarian goods are not being allowed into the territory of our republic*”.

⁵⁸ Maskhadov and Basayev differed in their views of the methods to be used to gain independence from Russia. Along with other field commanders Basayev wanted direct action. However, there were reports that President Maskhadov was virtually made a prisoner in his own residence as a result of action by the opposition Chechen Shura during the invasion of Avaristan.

However, to some extent there is also a weight of evidence from the unofficial Chechen and Islamist extremist side that a real invasion of Dagestan was planned by Shamil' Basayev, Khattab and others making use of the Wahhabi movement and other disruptive anti-government elements in Dagestan. There was more than just talk about establishing an Islamic Republic of Chechnya and Dagestan for, having consolidated their position in "*an alternative Dagestan*"⁵⁹, consideration would also be given to a "*simultaneous invasion of the Western Caucasus and even possibly into Stavropol'ye, Krasnodar Kray and Rostov Oblast*", culminating in an "*All-Caucasus*" state most probably under General V Semenov⁶⁰, President of Karachayev-Cherkessia".⁶¹ Some Russian sources contained suggestions concerning the possibility of action further afield with "*the process of liberating all remaining Muslim lands*"⁶². The scale of preparatory work involved in Avaristan underlined the fact that this work started some time ago, not just two or three days prior to the 'invasion'. Preparations not only included weapons and ammunition caches but also the excavation, digging and fitting out of trenches and strong points.

⁵⁹ Kavkaz Tsentri web site, 22 August 1999 "*Pobeda Vakhkhabitov*".

⁶⁰ It is of interest to note that General Semenov is a Balkar and his second wife is a "Chechenka".

⁶¹ Ibid. "The Cherkess, Balkar and even the Abkhaz question would also be solved..."

⁶² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 191, 13 October 1999, p5.

‘INVASION’ OF DAGESTAN

Aim of ‘Invasion’

The stated aim of the ‘invasion’ at the beginning of August 1999 by the illegal Chechen *bandformirovaniya* under Shamil’ Basayev and Islamic extremists under Emir al Khattab was to create an Islamic Republic comprising Dagestan and Chechnya. The first phase was to establish a bridgehead in Avaristan based on Wahhabi Islamic extremists who were active in Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony and therefore crucial to a successful first phase of the operation. The second phase of the operation was to launch another attack from Novolakskiy rayon, capture Khasavyurt and Buynaksk on the way to the capital of Dagestan, Makhachkala, and to destroy the authorities there.⁶³ One of the main elements of this plan was “*to simultaneously force the Command of the Federal Forces grouping to disperse his forces, to force the Command to commit and use all his reserves on the principle of a fire-brigade responding to false calls*”⁶⁴. There were possibly three main reasons amongst several others for the selection of Avaristan as a bridgehead for the further expansion of anti-government bandit formations into Dagestan.

First Consideration

On the assumption that the ‘invasion’ was a real operation planned in earnest by Basayev and Khattab, having carried out over the previous months an escalatory series of terrorist activity and raids in the direction of Kizlyar, Babayurt and Khasavyurt from Chechen territory, noting the main Gudermes-Khasavyurt road led directly and speedily to Makhachkala, this would be high on the list of priorities which the Federal and Dagestani authorities needed to deny to the bandit formations, to intercept and to block. As a result of the build-up of terrorist activity in this area, the Federal and Dagestani authorities had their minds and resultant operational assessments fixed on Khasavyurtovskiy, Kizlyarskiy⁶⁵ and Novolakskiy rayony as being the most likely to be threatened by Chechen illegal bandit formations. A demonstration of force, in the shape of an ‘invasion’, into Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony⁶⁶ would draw Federal forces into an area where major roads were noticeable by their absence; the few in existence did not readily lend themselves to wide scale vehicle movement, speedy military reaction and smooth logistical supply, thus inhibiting any rapid deployment of Federal or Dagestani forces.

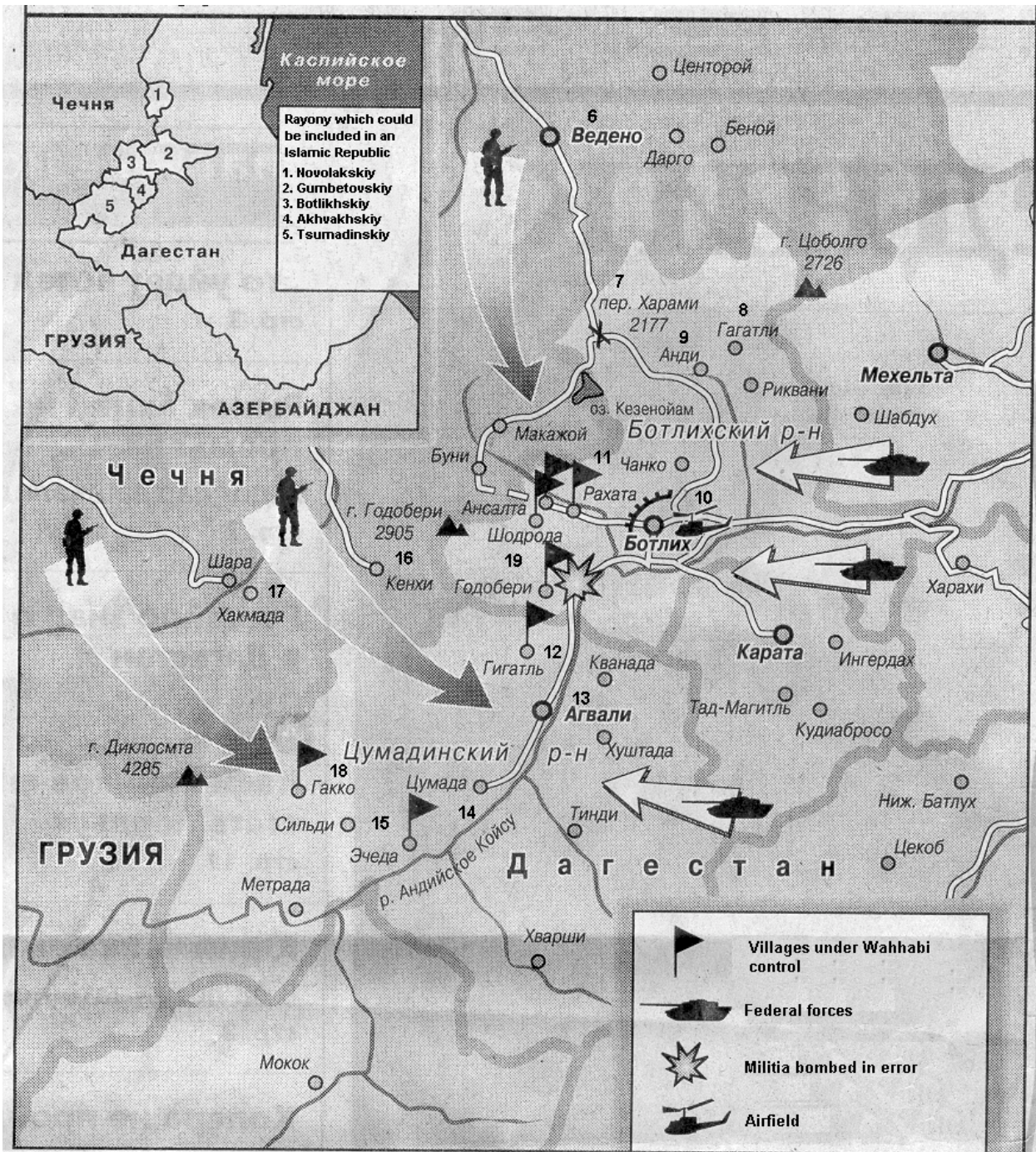
⁶³ Kavkaz Tsentri web site, 22 August 1999 “*Pobeda Vakhkhabitov*”.

⁶⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 8 September 1999 “*Staryye problemy na novom etape*” by Dmitriy Nikolayev.

⁶⁵ Ibid. “According to aerial and radio intelligence a large group was concentrated on the Kizlyar direction”. Salman Raduyev’s raid on Kizlyar in January 1996 and subsequent siege at Pervomayskoye was still very much in the minds of the Dagestani authorities.

⁶⁶ Ibid. “A concentration of bandit formations on the Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy directions was noted by Army reconnaissance. In particular a large detachment under the command of a certain field commander, Magomed Aslutdinov, was positioned in the area of the Chechen populated points of Kenkhi, Chadyri, Khindukh. Main blows were planned on the rayon centre of Agvali, and on the populated points of Gakvari, Gigat’, Khilidi, Gakko, Sil’di and Echeda”.

Map 3 - Schematic Diagram of Actions in Avaristan⁶⁷



Key

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 6. Vedeno | 10. Botlikh | 14. Tsumada | 18. Gakkho |
| 7. Kharami Pass | 11. Rakhata | 15. Echeda | 19. Godoberi |
| 8. Gagatli | 12. Gigatli | 16. Kenkhi | |
| 9. Andi | 13. Agvali | 17. Khakmada | |

⁶⁷ Kommersant, No 141, p2, 10 August 1999; adapted.

Map 2 shows to some extent where a military force moving from Buynaksk, the base location of 136 Separate Motor Rifle Brigade, whether in armoured or soft-skinned vehicles would be vulnerable to disruption through mining and ambush by guerrilla forces, in particular along the stretch between Tlokh and Muni which follows the upstream course of the Andi Kousu.⁶⁸ Map 2 also shows the Kharami Pass (shown here under the name of Pereval Khagali-Sodontsy) which lies on the road between Vedenno in Chechnya and the high mountain village of Andi in Avaristan. Both places played a significant role in the military campaigns of 1843-1844 between Imam Shamil' and the Imperial Russian forces⁶⁹.

The actual plan was a little more intricate in practice, for not only was there a major requirement to deflect attention away from the objectives in the second phase of the operation, namely Khasavyurt and Buynaksk on the way to seizing Makhachkala, but there was also a minor diversionary tactic:

“Armed groups of fighters penetrated into Tsumadinskiy rayon in the mountains along the border with Chechnya on 1 August⁷⁰. According to the evidence, conforming to all the canons of military science this was a diversionary manoeuvre, the aim of which was to draw the local law enforcement forces away from the main direction of the ‘invasion’ in neighbouring Botlikhskiy rayon. This ‘invasion’ took place on the night of Sunday 8 August⁷¹.”

Sergey Petukhov offers additional details on the furtherance of this plan, *“carefully worked out by the fighters’ headquarters⁷² with the ‘invasion’ in Botlikh rayon taking place from two directions. Again with a diversionary manoeuvre, a small group of fighters moved forward along a comparatively good road which led from Chechen Vedenno to the Dagestani border village of Andi. The main ‘invasion’ force completed a surprise forced march on mountain trails and tracks along the valley of the River Ansaltinka to the south and occupied the villages of Ansalta and Rakhota (Rakhata). The action to take and occupy these positions was deliberate, because from these positions it was possible to cover the one and only airfield with fire and with presence of mountain artillery and rocket launchers also to cover the rayon centre of Botlikh. In this another mystery arose: “Why didn’t the invasion forces immediately take the airfield under control?”⁷³ There could be two possible reasons for this. First, that the invaders did not receive the cordial reception they had counted on, or secondly, local law enforcement organs or the Federal Forces against all the odds appeared unexpectedly in the time frame and were used to full effect. It*

⁶⁸ One bulldozer on the Tlokh-Muni stretch en route to the rayon centre of Botlikh could take a considerable amount of time to clear a path, let alone its vulnerability to ambush.

⁶⁹ Moshe Gammer *“Muslim Resistance to The Tsar – Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Dagestan”*, Frank Cass & Co Ltd, London, 1994, pp139 and 149.

⁷⁰ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 8 September 1999 “The plan of Aslutdinov maintained the appearance in the following days of small groups of fighters in the passes of Yagodak and Zain”.

⁷¹ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka *“Dzhurnal ‘Ekspert’”*, 18 August 1999 *“Mozhet byt’, nakonets pobedim”* by Sergey Petukhov, p1.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

is interesting to note how history almost repeats itself, for it would appear that not much has changed in Andi since 1844-1845, when:

“Among those discontented with Shamil’s rule, the community of Andi occupied a prime place” “It was known for a fact that the residents desired our [Russian] arrival and even demanded it. We, for our part, indulged in the hope that the secession of the people of Andi would lead to the secession from Shamil of other peoples of Dagestan, who had been in the habit of following the people of Andi”⁷⁴,

hence lending strength to the expression *“Who rules Avaristan rules Dagestan and who rules Dagestan rules the Caucasus”⁷⁵.*

Second Consideration

Avaristan is close to Chechnya, with various hidden *tropinki* (footpaths or trails) from Chechnya passing through woods, providing covered access to the villages and settlements in western Dagestan of Tsumadinskiy, Akhvaskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony in particular. Even if the ‘invasion’ of Dagestan formed part of a much wider intrigue being engineered in Moscow, an ‘invasion’ of Botlikh and Tsumadinskiy would satisfy a need for the authorities to be seen to react in a *‘firm and non-sense manner’* without any risk to either the Federal or Dagestani authorities or to the Chechen bandit formations operating in a comparatively remote area which did not threaten the government in Makhachkala. The Chechens and Islamic extremists could melt back into the forests and safety in Chechnya as silently and quickly as they had arrived, where *“fighters run like hares - raid - bug-out - regroup - a new raid”⁷⁶.*

Third Consideration

If this was a serious operation and not just a demonstration, factored into the selection of Avaristan as a bridgehead was the matter of the ethnic composition, not only of Avaristan. Many peoples who were considered to be within the Dagestani family of nationalities and ethnic groups actually live outside the bounds of Dagestan in other administrative-territorial entities, such as Chechnya, and in the independent sovereign republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan. *“Dagestanis say that in their republic there are no undivided peoples. None of the 14 ‘titular’ nationalities live entirely in Dagestan”⁷⁷.* Perhaps the comments and denials of President Maskhadov and Mayrbek Vachegayev with regard to the participation of Chechens in the ‘invasion’ of Avaristan contained more than a grain of truth. As the name Avaristan implies, the majority of peoples who live in this area belong to the Avar tribal grouping of peoples. *“Avars are the most important nationality in Dagestan. In the*

⁷⁴ Moshe Gammer, op cit, Notes to Chapter 15.

⁷⁵ Ramazan Abdulatipov in interview with *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 16 August 1999 from *Obzor Tsentralnoy Pressy, Natsional’naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka*.

⁷⁶ Natsional’naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka *“Dzhurnal ‘Ekspert”*, 18 August 1999.

⁷⁷ *Sodruzhestvo NG*, March 1999, No 3 (15), p1 *“Po raznyye storony Kavkazkogo Khrebeta”* by Il’ya Maksakov.

*past they were the most warlike of the tribes and consequently they now enjoy the highest prestige amongst the Dagestanis*⁷⁸.

Box 4 - The Avar Tribal Grouping⁷⁹

Dagestan

The Avar lands together with those of the Darghin and the Laks continue to remain the least Russified and sovietised areas in the FSU. The Avars live mainly in the highest mountain areas in Dagestan, situated in the western part of the Republic: Khunzakh, Gunib, Kakhiv, Gergebil', Gumbetov, Charoda, Tiliyarata, Botlikh, Tsumada, Tsanta, Akhvakh and Kazbek. Other Avar groupings are found in the areas of Buynaksk and Levashi, which are inhabited in the main by Kumyks and Lezghins.

Outside Dagestan

There are a few Avar villages amounting to some 10,000 people located in Chechen territory on the border opposite the Dagestani rayony of Botlikh and Tsumadinskiy⁸⁰. Avars are found in the areas of Zakataly and Belokany in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Avar Nation

The Avar nation is not yet consolidated. Fourteen ethnic groups are divided into three main linguistic groupings, distributed amongst the highest valleys in Avaristan. However, each group maintains its specific identity and the use of its own language, which differs from Avar proper and other group languages. Other groupings within the Avar circle are the **Andi** and **Dido**.

The Andi

The Andi proper are found in the areas of Botlikh, in nine villages: Andi, Gunkha, Gagatl', Rikvani, Ashali, Chanko, Zilo, Munib and Kvankhidatl'. Other tribes include the Akhvakh (Akhvakh rayon), Bagulal (Tsumadin & Akhvakh rayony), Botlikh (Botlikh & Miarsu), Godoberi (Botlikh rayon), Chamal (Tsumadin rayon), Karatay (Akhvakh rayon), Tindi (live close to Bagulals and Chamal).

The Dido

The Dido proper are found in Tsuntin rayon. Bezhetins/Kapuchins (three settlements in Bezhit, Tzhadal and Kochar-Khota (Tsuntin rayon)), Khvarshins (Tsumadin rayon), Khunzals (Tsuntsin rayon), Archins (Charoda rayon).

In exploiting the divisions in ethnic composition, the policy of the extremist opposition to Maskhadov in Chechnya, namely Basayev, Khattab, Raduyev, Yandarbiyev and Udugov, had been orientated towards three elements of influence in the Republic of Dagestan, which were capable of playing a role in plans to create an Islamic Republic comprising in its initial stage the republics of Chechnya and Dagestan. The first element to be considered⁸¹ was the combination of the powerful religious factor and combat experience with the potential of the Wahhabi movement both in Chechnya and Dagestan. The second element to which the extremist

⁷⁸ C W Blandy "The Significance of Pervomayskoye" P19 CSRC April 1996, p71 Box 55.

⁷⁹ Ibid, and Blandy "Project Prognoz", Instability Analysis Area 4, July 1994, CSRC, RMA Sandhurst.

⁸⁰ *Sodruzhestvo*, March 1999, No 3 (15), p1.

⁸¹ This Russian perception is summarised in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 25 (1596), 14 February 1998, p5 "Novaya ugroza dlya Kavkaza" by Gur'ya Murklinskaya, correspondent of the newspaper "North Caucasus".

Chechen players gave serious consideration were the national movements in Dagestan and throughout the whole region. Here special hopes were lodged on the leaders of those national movements who supported direct contact with the Chechen military leadership during the period of combat operations December 1994-August 1996, and still continued to have their own armed formations and groupings. Finally, the Chechen extremists considered people of influence in the present Dagestan government as the third element possessing sufficient potential to change the situation in the republic into the required channel. Obviously, here they had in mind the ambitious strivings of individual politicians who were not concerned with the interests of security of the republic and Russia as a whole. The amendments to the Dagestan Constitution implemented in April 1998 in their turn accentuated the political ambitions of some Dagestani elites, eroded respect for high office and further destabilised the political system in Dagestan, as exemplified by the actions of the Khachilayev Brothers in May 1998⁸² and the establishment of an 'Independent Islamic State' in the area surrounding the villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar in the Buynaksk rayon of Dagestan.

Further tightening of border controls or armed conflict on the territory of Dagestan, especially with army interference, provided unofficial Chechnya with the possibility to act, not in the role of an aggressor, but as one coming to the aid of the Dagestanis in a holy war against Russia. All these groups and forces over a period of time in one way or another became enfolded into a "strategic partnership" with the extremist Chechen politico-military elite, and especially "*tightly with the irreconcilable and implacable opposition under Chechen field commanders such as Salman Raduyev and Khattab*"⁸³, not to mention Shamil' Basayev.

Dagestani Electoral Consideration

It is important to note that the Avaristan region populated by the many Andi-Dido ethnic groups had become involved in a dispute between the Federal Centre and the Dagestani government in Makhachkala some time earlier. The "*Andi-Dido peoples are included under the more general Avar umbrella, however their languages have independent status and linguists recognise them as being as close to the Nakh languages, Chechen and Ingush, as to the Avar*"⁸⁴.

In the beginning of the summer in the local Dagestani press a piece of information appeared which received no official comment: in the rayon centre of Botlikh a Dzhamaat conference took place where representatives of these ethnic groups expressed their dissatisfaction that the republic authorities were not devoting sufficient attention to this region and that their ethnic representation did not exist in the higher echelons of the Dagestani government. They demanded the granting of independent status for all the different Andi-Dido languages, so that seats could be allocated to them in the State Council and the National Assembly (Parliament) of the Republic of Dagestan. "*This factor cannot but be considered in trying to understand*

⁸² See below and Blandy, "*Dagestan, the Gathering Storm*", p15.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii, 17 August 1999 "*Voyna prishla v gornyye rayony Dagestana*" by Enver Kisriyev.

what has taken place in this region of Avaria".⁸⁵ Table 1 shows government members distributed between the Avars, Darghins, Kumyks and Laks. A Darghin-Kumyk alignment, particularly when the Chairman of the State Council is a Darghin and the Prime Minister is a Kumyk, has the effect of neutralising the Avars and Laks and goes a long way to explain the actions of Nadirshah Khachilayev in May 1998.

Table 1 - Percentage Share of Constitutionally Nominated Peoples⁸⁶

Titular Nationality	Percentage Share	Government members, head of committees & other organs
Avars	28	9
Darghins	16.3	9
Kumyks	12.9	9
Lezghins	12.2	3
Russians	6.5	
Chechens	5	
Laks	4.9	3
Tabasarans	4.6	
Azerbaijanis	4.6	
Nogay	4.6	
Tats, Aguls & Rutuls	0.8	Including Mountain Jews
Tsakurs	0.3	
Remainder	0.3	Belorussians, Armenians, Georgians, Ukrainians, Germans & others

The situation in Dagestan has facilitated the growth of tension in the republic, providing additional grounds to those in favour of a federalised Dagestan, of which there are not a few amongst other ethnic movements besides the Avar grouping, where public figures have already declared infringements against the interests of their peoples. Even before the 'invasion' of Dagestan, preparation for the elections to the Russian Federation Duma had already started, reflecting to a considerable degree both the political processes in Moscow and the objectives of the various political groupings and peoples within the republic, for instance the activities of the Wahhabi Islamic extremist movement.

As for representation in the State Duma of the Russian Federation, the republic is divided into four regions for electoral purposes which support two constituencies, namely, Buynaksk Electoral Constituency No 10 embracing the south and mountain regions, and Makhachkala Electoral Constituency No 11 enfolding the plain and northern region. A case can be made for an amendment to the Federal Law concerning electoral constituencies to increase the number of single mandate constituencies in Dagestan from the present two, if not up to four then certainly three⁸⁷. This is because of the relatively large population in the existing constituencies compared to elsewhere in the North Caucasus, as well as the ethnic mix.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 123 (1939), 9 July 1999, p5 "Elektoral'nyye nastroyeniya v Dagestane" by Magomed-Zarid Varisov. See also Blandy "Dagestan: The Gathering Storm".

⁸⁷ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* No 123 (1939), 9 July 1999, p5.

Buynaksk Electoral Constituency No 10 The Mountain Region of Dagestan, as its name implies, covers the foothill and mountainous parts of Dagestan, ranging towards the west from Makhachkala up to the border with Azerbaijan and Georgia to the south-west and also the west, and to Chechnya in the north-west. The rayony of Akhvakhskiy, Botlikhskiy⁸⁸, Gergebilskiy, Gunibskiy, Tlyaratinskii, Untsukulskiy, Khunzakhskiy, Tsumadinskiy, Tsuntinskiy, Charodinskiy, Shamil'skiy, Akushinskiy, Dakhadayevskiy, Serogokalinskiy, Levashinskiy are ethnically 'one people rayony', if one discounts the insignificant representation of other nationalities in the 12 rayony peopled by Avars and the three with Darghins. In Levashinskiy rayon approximately one third of the population are Avars and the remainder are Darghins. There are two ethnically Lak rayony, Kulinskiy and Lakskiy. In Buynakskiy rayon about half of the population are Kumyks, about a third are Avars and 15% are Darghins. In the town of Buynaksk itself approximately half the population are Avars, more than one third are Kumyks and about 15% are Darghins but there are relatively few Laks, Russians and other nationalities. The electoral behaviour of the region differs. In the Darghin and Lak rayony a directed or ethnically consolidated vote happens more often than in the Avar rayony, where the electoral behaviour is difficult to predict. A directed vote is possible in those rayony where the heads of the administration, the political elites, have an influence, but ethnic solidarity is expressed comparatively weakly here.

Makhachkala Electoral Constituency No 11 The North comprises the plains and foothill zones toward the north from Kizlyurtovskiy rayon up to the bounds of Chechnya, Stavropol' Krai and Kalmykia, and includes the towns of Khasavyurt, Kizlyar, Sukhokumsk, with the rayony of Babayurtovskiy, Kizlyarskiy, Novolakskiy (formerly Aukhovskiy rayon), Nogayskiy, Tarumovskiy, Khasavyurtovskiy and Kazbekovskiy. The last, Kazbetovskiy, is ethnically a 'one people rayon' and populated by Avars. In Khasavyurt and Khasavyurtovskiy rayon there is approximately an identical number of Chechens, Avars and Kumyks, a relatively small number of Darghins, Laks, Russians and Nogays. The basic population of Kizlyar and Kizlyarskiy rayon are Russians, Avars and a few Darghins. In Tarumovskiy rayon Russians and Avars predominate. In Sukhokumsk about 70% are Avars, with the remainder Darghins, Laks, Russians and others. In Babayurtovskiy rayon the Kumyks predominate, with little more than a third of the population being Nogays. Nogayskiy rayon is an ethnically 'one people rayon' where the Nogay make up more than 80% of the population. The north at the present time as a whole is most unpredictable in its electoral behaviour. Makhachkala has a strong influence on the Russian population. Cossack and Russian have their own positions, but are insignificant.

The Wahhabi Factor

The Wahhabi factor was one of the prime considerations, if not the most important one, for the 'invasion' of Dagestan and the unification of Chechnya and Dagestan into an Islamic Republic, the "Caucasus Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan (KNChD)".

⁸⁸ Kavkaz Tsentr web site, article on 22 August 1999 "*Pobeda Vakhkhabitov*". "Botlikhskiy rayon is one of the most multi-national oblasts of Mountainous Dagestan. In this rayon a large section of the 'little peoples' live. Many strategically important populated points are lived in by the so-called 'little peoples' such as the Andi, the Godoberi and the Botlikhskiy".

The “Shadowy” Dissident Leaders in Dagestan Amongst other dissident elements in Dagestan, the people regarded as the leaders against the government in Makhachkala were: “*the Dagestani Wahhabi leader, Bagautdin; the well-known ideologist of Wahhabism Magomed Tagayev and the State Duma Deputy Nadirshah Khachilayev*”.⁸⁹ All three have been on the security forces' ‘wanted list’ for some time. Bagautdin was wanted for the creation of illegal armed formations, Tagayev for anti-constitutional acts, and Nadirshah Khachilayev, a state deputy now stripped of immunity from prosecution, for organising mass disorder in Makhachkala on 21 May 1998. These three enemies of the Dagestan government long ago achieved fame beyond the bounds of the Dagestan Republic. Bagautdin, in the summer of 1998, removed two villages which were under his control, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi, from Russia and Dagestan, having proclaimed them an Islamic territory. The Russian authorities did not return the land to the control of Makhachkala, but negotiations took place between Bagautdin and Sergey Stepashin who was at that time the Minister for Internal Affairs. The latter promised not to interfere or trouble the Wahhabity further if they surrendered their weapons. In fact they were not troubled, as a result of which the armed supporters of Bagautdin became all the more powerful and stronger.

Later on when detachments of *Wahhabity* deployed from Chechnya, taking several villages under their control in the high mountains of Tsumadinskiy rayon of Dagestan, the majority of the inhabitants greeted the “*occupiers’ with enthusiasm and expressed their readiness to support them*”⁹⁰. This differs considerably from later reports concerning the reaction of the people from Andi to Chechen bandit formations. The fact of the matter is that Bagautdin was an Avar and came from around this area: “*in Tsumadinskiy oblast’ the most well-known (but not the main) centres of Wahhabism are found. One of these centres is the Echeda dzhamaat controlled by the Wahhabis. The birthplace of the spiritual leader of the Dagestani Wahhabis, Bagautdin Magomed Slantad is found here*”⁹¹. Consequently, many Dagestanis considered Bagautdin as the only man who stood for the interests of Dagestani Islamists. Before the invasion it was said that he had always maintained good relations with the leaders of the Chechen opposition, Shamil’ Basayev, Khunkar Israpilov, Salman Raduyev, Khattab and others.

It was not by accident that Bagautdin Magomed was called ‘Kizilyurtovskiy’, since he possessed real influence in the *dzhamaats* surrounding Kizil-Yurt. The Wahhabis thought that such a position created very real conditions for the victory of the Wahhabis in Dagestan. First, their position in the northern part of Dagestan had the potential to “*inflict an extremely painful military defeat on the Federal forces*”⁹², where transport arteries, oil pipelines, railways and highways could be severed. In Kizilyurtovskiy rayon, the plains-people’s *dzhamaats* were certainly favourable to the establishment of Wahhabi authorities, for there was a constant movement of people in the process of resettlement from the mountains, in the main unemployed young people. Unlike Mountainous Dagestan, all the peoples and nationalities of Dagestan are represented in Kizilyurt rayon. The people “*rub shoulders together*

⁸⁹ Kommersant No 138 (1782), 5 August 1999, p3 “*V Dagestane vyyavili zachinshchikov Islamskoy revolutsii*” by Crime Section.

⁹⁰ *Izvestiya* quoted in Kommersant, *ibid*.

⁹¹ *Kavkaz Tsent* web site 22 August 1999 “*Pobeda Vakhkhabitov*”.

⁹² *Ibid*.

*through [speaking] Russian*⁹³, for the everyday working language here is Russian. Remembering that all the resources of Dagestan are concentrated in the hands of approximately 200 families and the people who work for them, real conditions on the plains exist for the spread of Wahhabism.

These territories in the north of Dagestan were again favourable to the Wahhabi movement because of disputes between mountain peoples leaving the mountains and resettling on the traditional territory of Kumyks from the plains. Wahhabis assumed the role of arbitrators. Their method was very simple. The Wahhabis made the point of eschewing 'fanatical nationalism', "*You see there is only one nationality - Muslim*"⁹⁴. To this in their arbitration methodology, they added the promise of linguistic autonomy to the Kumyk and Nogays. The Wahhabi occupy an extremely favourable geo-political position, for from the Avar mountain oblasts they extend to the Caspian seaboard and the capital Makhachkala. From the north west they border Khasavyurtovskiy rayon, situated under the direct influence of the Chechens and a busy *caravanserai*; furthermore "*the ethnic mosaic of Khasavyurtovskiy rayon is the most explosively-volatile rayon in the whole of Dagestan. Its ethnic mosaic is not rivalled anywhere in the republic. Chechen-Akhin, Avartsy, Kumyki and Laktsy live here*"⁹⁵. To the north lie the Nogay and Kumyk steppes.

Magomed Tagayev One of Bagautdin's closest supporters is the 52 year old Magomed Tagayev. In the republic he is considered an important ideologist of Wahhabism. In his books Tagayev calls for an anti-Russian rebellion and sets out the concrete steps for its organisation. On account of one book, "*Our struggle and the Imam's Insurgent Army*"⁹⁶, Tagayev all but went to jail⁹⁷. But the writer

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *Izvestiya*, 20 January 1996, article by Igor Rotar'.

⁹⁶ *NG-Stsenarii* No 7 (27), July 1998, p12 "*Severnyy Kavkaz pered novymi ugrozam*," by Magomed Tagayev.

⁹⁷ During the 'invasion' into Dagestan, Magomed Tagayev occupied the post of Minister of Information and the Press of the Islamic Government of Dagestan. Further details on Magomed Tagayev can be found in *NG-Stsenarii July 1998*, p12/13. "On 17 May 1999, agents of Dagestani special services confiscated a number of books which called for the violent overthrow of the constitutional regime. According to the agents, this was a surprise for them. The search of the house belonging to a resident of one of the Dagestani districts bordering Chechnya was conducted on suspicion that he was involved in a terrorist act. Nothing is reported about his personality, besides the fact that he was known to be an adherent of Wahhabiyah. The title of the confiscated books (more than two hundred copies) was "*Jihad, or how one can become immortal*." Their author Magomed Tagayev was pursued by the law enforcement agencies for writing and distributing books of this type a few years ago. He is accused of calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional system and the kindling of inter-ethnic and inter-religious hostility. The author is well known to the law enforcement agencies. In 1970s Tagayev was convicted for anti-Soviet propaganda. He currently resides in Chechnya. He calls himself Commander of the Dagestani Guerrilla Army of the Imam in the public-political union of the Caucasus Confederation. The name of the underground publishing house, *Iskra* (Spark), is the name of the Russian revolutionary newspaper of the beginning of the century, which had the motto "From a spark the fire will start". See Blandy "*Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions - An Interim Comparison and*

opportunistically fled to Chechnya, where he gathered a hundred associates and called himself the supreme commander of the “Dissident Army of Allah”⁹⁸.

Table 2 - Tarikatisty and Wahhaby by Rayon in Dagestan⁹⁹

Rayon and Centre	Tarikatisty	Wahhaby	Main Nationalities
Buynaksk (Town)	1,000	820	Kumyk (central group); isolated Darghin villages Kadar, Karamakhi ; also Avar groups
Khasavyurt (Town)	1,170	460	Kumyk (northern group)
Kizilyurt (Town)	790	500	Kumyk (northern group)
Tsumadinskiy Rayon Agvali (Village)	575	475	Avar main/Andi: Bagulal (Tsumadin /Akhvakh); Chamal; Tindi area of Bagulal/Chamal. Dido sub-group: Khvarshin
Shamil'	480	37	
Gumbetovskiy (Mekhel'ta) (Village)	430	37	Avar
Untsukul'	320	135	
Kazbekovskiy (Dylm) (Village)	410	40	Avar
Gergebil'	410	30	Avar
Khunzakh	330	95	Avar
Tsuntinskiy Rayon (Bezhta) (Village)	280	126	Avar main/Dido sub group: Kapuchin (Bezhtin) in Bezhita, Tzhadal, Kochar-Khota & Khunzals .
Total	6,195	2,775	

Table 2 provides indications of the distribution Wahhabi support and numerical strengths in Dagestan. A further consideration was the relatively high proportion in Tsumadinskiy rayon and the villages of Kadar, Karamakhi and Yankurbi in

Assessment" p5, note 3, for an example of Magomed Tagayev's venom towards Russians and Russia.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Magomed Tagayev gives the Military Doctrine of the Insurgent Army of Allah which is laid out in three sections. Points of interest include: **Section 1**, 1.3 Necessary to teach and train for the start of military operations in the shortest possible time, 2750 junior NCOs and sergeants, 750 sergeants-major, 300 junior lieutenants, 50 senior lieutenants, 50 captains, 100 lieutenants around 80,000 rank and file. **Section 3**, 3.1 There would be six military districts; Northern, Central, Western, Coastal, South-West and South. 3.4 Strength of a front – 8,000 to 27,000 men commanded by a captain. Strength of a division 2,700 to 8,000 men. 3.5 Strength of a regiment 900 to 2,700 men. Strength of a battalion 300 to 900 men. Strength of a company 100 to 300 men and a platoon from 30 to 100 men. 3.7 Servicemen would be aged 15 to 45 years of age. **Comment:** Rank structure would appear to be a little weird and obviously written by someone with no military experience.

⁹⁹ *NG-Religii* No 3 (14), 18 March 1998, p12 “*Vliyaniye ekstremistov sil'no preuvelichino*” by Il'ya Maksakov.

Buynaksk rayon. Tsumadinskiy and to a lesser degree Tsuntinskiy were obvious places to launch an 'invasion' into Dagestan.

Within the Wahhabi movement there are interesting divisions relating to wealth and financial status. Right at the top of the list, according to Moshe Gammer¹⁰⁰, are the Wahhaby from the Kadar zone complex. They are the most wealthy, indeed there were photographs in some newspapers of American style caps, golf clubs and golf courses. Another group are the Wahhaby situated in large towns such as Makhachkala. The poorest groups of Wahhaby are those situated in the mountains of south west Dagestan, such as in Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony.

The aim of the Wahhaby was the establishment in the almost impassable mountains of Avaria of a 'liberated territory' similar to the one which had sprung up in May 1998 in the south of Buynaksk rayon, on the lands belonging to the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi, a "*Muslim Dzhamaat*" which had successfully attained self-rule from the authorities of Dagestan and Russia. An important factor was that the Karamakhi Wahhaby were Darghins, and those in the mountains along the riverbed of the River Andiy Kousu were representatives of the Avar 'ethnicity'. The republic political leadership under Magomedali Magomedov, a Darghin, Head of the executive authority, Chairman of the State Council qualified the activities of the Avar Wahhaby as an "*attempt of state revolution*"¹⁰¹ in Avaristan and demanded from the Russian authorities decisive action of a military nature. This resulted in a protest from the Avars, who asked why radical measures were not used in 1998 against Karamakhi, but against the Botlikh and Tsumadinski it was considered necessary to use armed force. "*This ethnic aspect of the present situation in Dagestan is directly linked to the internal political struggle for power and must not be neglected in trying to understand what has taken place*"¹⁰².

Bagautdin Kizilyurtovskiy had roughly 2031 followers in the republic, with wide geographical representation, but not represented in 11 rayony. Wahhaby call this wing the *Salafiyuni* (the forerunners who prepare the ground). They controlled the Caucasian Islamic Centre in Makhachkala and have links with Kattab. Before the conflict Ayub Astrakhanskiy's supporters were active in 10 rayony of Dagestan; including southern Dagestan, they numbered about 442 with their epicentre in Astrakhanskiy-Tsumadin. Amongst other Wahhabi leaders were Akhmadkadi Akhtiyev with 1377 followers mostly in the Khasavyurt and Gunib areas, who were more or less tolerant to Sufi Brotherhoods and representatives of the Makhtabs. They took no part in social or political activity, giving greater attention to education. Leadership was earlier conceded to Bagautdin Kizilyurtovskiy.

Perhaps one of the more interesting characters among the 'shady' dissident leaders must be Nadirshah Khachilayev.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ North Caucasus Seminar under the auspices of L'Observatoire Européen de Géopolitique, Paris, 6 December 1999.

¹⁰¹ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii, 17 August 1999 "*Voyna prishla v gornyye rayony Dagestana*" by Enver Kisriyev.

¹⁰² Ibid. The position of Karamakhi is explored further in "Dagestan: The Storm - Part II - The Assault on Kadar, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi".

Box 5 – Nadirshah [Mugamedovich] Khachilayev¹⁰⁴

Nadirshah Khachilayev is a Lak, one of the 14 peoples included in the titular nationalities of Dagestan. He was born in 1959 in the village of Kuma, Lakskiy rayon, Dagestan. He initially worked as a shepherd, in 1978-1980 served in the Army, from 1982-1984 worked as a sailor in the Leningrad fishing fleet. He is well-known in the republic in Karate unarmed combat (Champion of Dagestan at one stage).

He took his first steps in politics in 1990 when he participated in the formation of the National Lak Movement “Kazi-Kumuk” and the religious organisation “Dzhamaat val’ Khurriyat”. His brother Magomed Khachilayev is leader of “Kazi-Kumuk” and occupies the post of Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Fishing Resources. In 1995 Nadirshah Khachilayev participated in the Union of Muslims of Russia (UMR), becoming its head in 1996.

His earlier time in Moscow was not successful due to his weak knowledge of Islam and none too perfect Russian. In December 1996 he gained victory in the by-elections in the State Duma, having taken the place of Dagestan Deputy Gamid Gamidov killed in the course of a criminal ‘sorting out’.

Nadir Khachilayev quickly gained experience and in a short time was able to expand his horizons, perfecting his Russian language and taking on the mantle of a “*Russo-Muslim*”, and not only that of a regional politician. In this he maintained the image of an “*official of Caucasian nationality*”, but one with whom it was possible and necessary to have business in the consideration of complicated political problems.

Nadir Khachilayev strove to bring a “Muslim faction” into the political plane of the State Duma. Even if he was unsuccessful in this, he was able to strengthen the actual idea in the creation of the present deputies. The Head of the UMR is one of the most radical Muslim politicians; he often criticises government policy.

Khachilayev is in the process of perfecting his knowledge of religion. **His weak side is the appearance of an infantile desire to always have the last word himself in discussion.**

Lying in front of Nadir Khachilayev is the choice: to remain in Moscow as an emissary of Caucasus Muslims or to attempt to make a step higher – to reinforce his status of an all-Russian politician. For the attainment of this aim he is obliged to put into effect straightforward, reliable contacts with the Muslim society of Central Russia, including Moscow.

It is possible he could be helped by the active role he played in helping to “normalise” the [first] Chechen conflict. In 1996-1997 he was successful in carrying out an intermediary mission in the exchange of prisoners of war. Nadir Khachilayev speaks in support of Chechen independence from Russia, but endeavours not to discuss this in public.

As an outspoken critic of the government in Makhachkala, Nadirshah Khachilayev would appear to be an indispensable ally for the Chechen opposition personalities of Basayev, Yandarbiyev, Udugov in any campaign to exploit the underlying fractures in ethnic composition in Dagestan and to pose a threat to the Dagestani government. Nadirshah Khachilayev obtains additional value over and above that

¹⁰³ Further background details with regard to the Khachilayev brothers, and the tension arising from manipulation of the Constitution in April 1998 are contained in an earlier paper “*Dagestan: The Gathering Storm*”, S35 CSRC June 1998.

¹⁰⁴ Aleksey Malashenko “*Islamskoye Vozrozhdeniye v Sovremnnoy Rossii*”, Moskovskiy Tsentr Karnegi, 1998, p157-158.

accruing from his previous contacts with Chechen leaders, in as much that, as co-leader with his brother Magomed of the Lak titular nationality group in Dagestan, he has at his disposal a disciplined body of armed men, as well as having earned a reputation as a successful businessman and owning one of the five television stations in Dagestan¹⁰⁵. These would have been important considerations in any plan to overthrow the Dagestan government in Makhachkala.

Originally, the Lak para-military group was formed and developed to defend the interests of the local Lak population against attacks by other nationality groups, such as the Chechens and laterly the Kumyks as a result of moves to provide new areas for Lak resettlement to alleviate the original problem with the Chechens¹⁰⁶. It is particularly interesting to note that this para-military group *“has grown more capable militarily and bolder since its inception. [Nadirshakh Khachilayev] attributed this to the Laks' highly disciplined nature, who armed themselves to defend their villages against cross-border Chechen raids. They felt the need to field a para-military organisation in order to counter-balance the tacit alliance formed between the ethnic Darghins and Kumyks, two other titular minorities in Dagestan. With the creation of this military force the ethnic Laks now have a military force capable of protecting Lak civilians and are now much more eager to assert their voice in Dagestan's internal politics”*¹⁰⁷.

In the ‘invasion’ of Avaristan Nadirshah Khachilayev figures prominently, not so much fighting on the side of Shamil’ Basayev and Khattab, but from the opposite position in the initial stages of not contributing men and waging war against the Federal Forces slightly further north in the Novolakskiy rayon of Dagestan. Whilst the course of operations in and around Novolakskiy rayon are the subject of the third paper¹⁰⁸ in this series, it is appropriate to mention here some points concerning this seeming dispute between Khachilayev and Basayev.

It was on 23 August 1999 that reports from Russian sources emerged of a problem between Basayev and Khachilayev:¹⁰⁹

*“Shamil’ Basayev threatened his former associate with assembling the Sharia court which would condemn Nadirshah Khachilayev to death, if he did not immediately begin combat operations in Novolakskiy with his people. ... At a meeting which took place in Novolakskiy rayon of Dagestan the former State Duma Deputy of the Russian Federation, the Chechen field commander Nadir Khachilayev condemned the aggression of tribesmen against the Republic of Dagestan and stated that he had already made a similar announcement to that effect in Chechnya, and with that his relations with Shamil’ Basayev had already deteriorated, without a worsening as a result of ‘the inaction of the Khachilayev detachment”*¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁵ Conversation with Glen Howard, Analyst for Eurasian Affairs, Science Applications International Corporation.

¹⁰⁶ See Blandy *“Dagestan: The Gathering Storm”* S35 CSRC June 1998, p18, footnote 51.

¹⁰⁷ Glen Howard.

¹⁰⁸ See *“Dagestan: The Storm – Part III - The Expulsion of Chechen Bandit Formations from Novolakskiy Rayon”*.

¹⁰⁹ *“Voyna v Dagestane, Khronika sobytiy”*.

¹¹⁰ Natsional’naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii *“Vremya*

Nadir Khachilayev was subsequently arrested and taken into Lefortovo prison¹¹¹, having being lured to Moscow on the pretext of exploring the possibilities of freeing groups of hostages held in Chechnya by the Federal Security Service (FSB) in October 1999, as a result of losing his Deputy's immunity following the earlier upheaval in Makhachkala in May 1998. Even more amazingly, during the talks Nadir Khachilayev made the proposal to surrender himself.

MN of 15 October 1999 p1 "*Doverchivyy Nadir Khachilayev*" by Aleksandr Raskin.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

THE CHECHEN CAMPAIGN IN AVARISTAN 2-26 AUGUST 1999

Initial Success due to Surprise

Whilst it appeared initially when the Chechen and Islamist extremists penetrated into Tsumadinskiy rayon on 2 August 1999 that the 'invaders' had taken the Federal and republic's power structures by surprise, raising the spectre of the collapse of Dagestan and Russian inability to hold onto this volatile republic, this invasion was eventually to prove a fatal mistake for the Chechen bandit formations. Ultimately, as the course of operations later progressed onto Chechen soil, the Chechen bid for independence was totally neutralised, approaching the obliteration of anyone or anything Chechen.

There was indeed much criticism from people in authority on the Russian side in the initial days¹¹², as admitted by Colonel General Kazantsev, "*that whilst the security structures were aware of an impending incursion into Dagestan, they were getting ready, but there was an element of slovenliness, something failed somewhere*"¹¹³.

Initially on 2 August, in the diversion operation into Tsumadinskiy rayon, the Chechen formations and Wahhabi extremists entered Agvali, the rayon centre, but were repulsed by local inhabitants. They then occupied and prepared fortified positions in Echeda (Ichada), Gigatl' and Gakko (Gekko).

On 4 August "*Russian helicopters inflicted a strike on a school in the settlement of Kenkhi which in actual fact is situated in the Shatoy rayon of Chechnya*"¹¹⁴. As mentioned above, many of the villages inside Chechnya are homes not to Chechens but Avars and the 'smaller peoples' who share Avar nationality. This air strike on Kenkhi was instrumental in causing "*representatives of the Avar national movement to make a demand to the Chairman of the State Council to cease bombing Avar villages. They understood that no one was bombing the Darghin villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi, where Sharia Law was practised - it is well known that Magomedali Magomedov [the Chairman of the State Council] is a Darghin*"¹¹⁵. This again demonstrated the difficulties arising from the rivalry between the leading titular nationalities in Dagestan and the struggle for power.

Subsequently on 7 and 8 August it became clear that this was no ordinary raid, but an 'invasion', a large scale penetration of up to 2,000 men into Botlikhskiy rayon, first occupying the Dagestani village of Ansalta, quickly followed by the occupation of the aul of Rakhata (Rokhota) and by 8 August, Shadroda (Shodroda), Ziberkhali and Tando, the last being one of the highest villages in Avaristan. Federal helicopter strikes were not always effective; according to Kavkaz Tsentr on 8 August, rocket

¹¹² See Blandy "*Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions - An Interim Comparison and Assessment*" p30 to 35, in particular Box 5 which highlights the shortcomings but also mentions the advantages and lessons learnt by Federal Forces.

¹¹³ *Trud*, 10 November 1999 through Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, "*Interv'yu Nedel'*", "*General Kazantsev: "V Chechne poydu do kontsa"*".

¹¹⁴ Kavkaz Tsentr, 4 August 1999 "*Boi v Dagestane prodolzhayutsya*".

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

strikes against the villages in the area of Ansalta and Godoberi were ineffective due to fog. Kavkaz Tsentr also stated that Ansalta, Rakhata, Shodroda, Verkhnyy Godoberi and Nizhnyy Godoberi, all in Botlikh rayon, were in the hands of the Dagestani Islamist detachments.

Invaders' Territorial Gains and Losses

Noting the territorial gains and losses without discussing in detail the actions of the Federal Forces in their efforts to dislodge the 'invaders' provides a picture of how the campaign progressed from the Chechen and Islamist extremist point of view.

13 August 1999 By 13 August 1999 the 'invaders' were concentrated in seven out of 32 populated points in Avaristan: Ansalta, Rokhota, Shodroda, Tando, Zibirkhali, Beledi and Ashino, whilst Federal Forces claimed to have destroyed a bandit formation's headquarters in the area of Khvayni. According to Federal Forces, the flow of refugees from Botlikh and Tsumadinskiy rayony was increasing. Federal analysis of the situation in these rayony showed that the *boyeviki* (fighters) had now adopted typical partisan tactics by operating in small groups with changes of base. They had started to reinforce mountain tracks, paths and roads in an attempt to stop Federal troops interfering with their retreat and the movement of reserves from the depths of Chechnya. In this context it is of interest to note that one of the first acts of Colonel General Kazantsev on his return from leave was to state that "*Buynaksk was off limits to the bandits*" and that "*the road from Buynaksk to Botlikh and the specially important 5 km tunnel under the Gimri feature would be the subject of special control*"¹¹⁶. This tunnel is west-south-west of Buynaksk.

16 August 1999 Perhaps 16 August was the turning point in the course of operation in south western Dagestan, where it was becoming obvious that the Chechens and Islamist extremists were not making the necessary progress. It might even have been earlier, for according to Kavkaz Tsentr it was on 12 August that Shamil' Basayev announced the end of the first phase of the operation, codenamed "*Gazi Magomed*" to free Dagestan from Russian occupation.

On 16 August, according to the Federal press release, in the course of the next 60 hours the start of second phase of the operation "*Imam Gamzat-bek*" was announced by Shamil Basayev. From the Federal point of view "*this announcement once again confirms that the envisaged operations of the fighters had not brought the desired results for Basayev*"¹¹⁷. Furthermore it was rumoured, again from Russian sources, that relations between Basayev and Khattab had become complicated owing to the fact that "*Basayev had not seen support from the Dagestani side, which had been promised by Khattab before the commencement of the operation*"¹¹⁸.

On 16 August at 0600 Federal troops set out on the decisive stage of liquidating the Chechen and Islamist illegal bandit formations in Botlikh rayon. Airborne assault subunits suffered considerable casualties with one killed, 22 wounded and six

¹¹⁶ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka; "*Voyna v Dagestane. Khronika sobitiy*", "*Boyevyye deystviya 13 Avgusta*".

¹¹⁷ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka; "*Voyna v Dagestane. Khronika sobitiy*", "*Boyevyye deystviya 16 Avgusta*".

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

missing in battle in the seizure and occupation of dominating heights in Botlikh rayon, in particular during the battles for Ht 1622.5. Federal forces had already begun the second phase of their counter-terrorist operation to remove the illegal *bandformirovaniya* from the high mountain villages of Dagestan. Progress had been made by Federal forces but still the illegal formations continued to hold only four populated points, namely those of Ansalta, Rakhata, Shandroda and Tando.

17 August 1999 On 17 August the Chief of the Russian General Staff Anatoliy Kvashnin announced that in connection with the evolving situation in Dagestan command of the Russian military grouping would be put on the shoulders of Colonel General Viktor Kazantsev, Commander in Chief of the North Caucasus Military District. In the opinion of General Kvashnin *“Kazantsev is a professional soldier and knows how to professionally use forces and means”*¹¹⁹.

In the next two to three days the Botlikh rayon would be liberated completely from the *boyeviki* that had invaded them from Chechen territory. The First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Colonel-General Vladimir Kolesnikov, emphasised that in the course of combat operations Ministry of Defence, Internal Troops, and the Dagestani Militia would completely recover and liberate one of the most important strategic points, the Kharami Pass. This in itself would sever the link between the illegal bandit formations and Chechnya. Federal forces also obtained information that the bandit formation of Arbi Barayev was active in Botlikh rayon. Kazakhs and Arabs were in the camp of the Arab Abdul Malik at Avtury. The *boyeviki* in Botlikh rayon also suffered significant casualties and there were reports that their morale was suffering as a consequence. There was also evidence from the Federal side that one of the field commanders in Botlikh rayon, operating around the populated point of Tando, had requested Yelimkhan Yandarbiyev and Movladi Udugov to urgently supply more ammunition and personnel because only 100 *boyeviki* remained.

On 17 August another event of significance occurred. The elders of Shelkovskiy rayon in Chechnya sent a delegation to President Aslan Maskhadov of Chechnya with the demand that the Chechen leadership turn to the leadership of the Russian Federation to bring Russian troops into Chechnya for the preservation of the constitutional structure of Chechnya.

19 August 1999 Federal press releases reported that despite significant casualties the illegal formations continued to hold the following populated points in Botlikh rayon: Rakhata, Ansalta, Shandroda, Tando, Ashino, and the ruins of Ziberkhali. Groups of *boyeviki* had been pushed out of Dagestan into Chechen territory and had appeared in the areas of Khilidi (up to 400 men), Kenkhi (up to 500 men) and even in the area of the Dagestan mountain of Onshitligun (up to 150 men). Frontal aviation carried out aerial reconnaissance and inflicted strikes on collections of fighters and equipment in the areas of Lakes Goluboye and Ardzhi, and the populated points of Rakhata, Tando, Ansalta and Shandroda.

There were also reports from the Federal side that a series of field commanders had deserted their ‘commander-in-chief Shamil’ Basayev, *“leaving the zone of combat operations on Dagestani soil behind”*¹²⁰. This list included Abdul-Malik Mezhidov, Abdurakhman and Bagautdin.

¹¹⁹ “*Voyna v Dagestane. Khronika sobitiy*”, “*Boyevyye deystviya 17 Avgusta*”. This highlights the limitations of Internal Troops and Militia who were not practised in calling for artillery fire support or close air support and the requirement for Ministry of Defence troops.

20 August 1999 On Friday 20 August in the area of the village of Ansalta paratroopers of 7 Assault Division stormed the nameless height, but having taken part of the height in the early morning were forced to 'lie prone and hug' the ground on account of the fierce fire from the fighters, amongst whom were several snipers. Digging trenches or even earth scrapes was practically impossible due to rocky and stony ground. It was also reported on the Federal side that the *boyeviki* were still holding the populated points of Ansalta, Rakhata, Tando, Asheno and Shodroda and were also attempting to block routes in the direction of Muni and Tlokh to prevent the move forward of Federal forces.

At this time the Command of Federal Forces estimated that the campaign to destroy the *boyeviki* "did not exclude the fact that it could continue until December"¹²¹, and according to Colonel General Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov North Osetia could well become one of the main directions.

21 August 1999 The all-important strategic point on the Checheno-Dagestani administrative border of the Kharami pass leading from Dagestan to Vedeno in Chechnya was captured and in possession of Federal Forces on 21 August. There were also reports of *boyeviki* concentrations in Balansu (250 men), Simsur, Baytarki (2000 men) and in Komsomol'skiy (500 men).

23 August 1999 Magomed Tagayev, head of the *Modzhakhed* press centre announced from Grozny that all *Modzhakhed* had left Dagestan. In his words the commander of the Dagestani front, Shamil' Basayev, had given the order for Islamic forces to redeploy from Dagestan to previously ordered positions in accordance with the second phase of the operation and that the "situation in Dagestan was different from that of one month ago"¹²².

Devastating Effect of Fuel Air Explosives on Bandit Formations

The most decisive part of the operation to clear the *boyeviki* from Botlikh rayon was the use by the Federal Forces of fuel-air explosives. The effect on the *boyeviki* witnessing for the first time, even though some distance from the site of a fuel-air explosive target, must have been an awful experience and one which was not altogether dissimilar from that unfortunate Dagestanis suffered when General Yermolov "cowed part of Dagestan for a while mainly by the extensive use of artillery then seen for the first time in the mountains"¹²³.

There can be no doubt that this caused the 'departure' of many *boyeviki* from Avaristan, for it was not as if in this stage of the operation they were fighting to defend their own country and people. The decision to use this weapon could well have been taken by acting Premier Vladimir Putin on 22 August at a meeting with

¹²⁰ "Voyna v Dagestane. Khronika sobitiy", "Boyevyye deystviya 20 Avgusta".

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² "Voyna v Dagestanye. Khronika sobitiy", "Boyeviye deystviya 23 Avgusta".

¹²³ Moshe Gammer "Muslim Resistance to the Tsar", p35. Endnote 49 to Chapter 4: "Such a convincing proof of our rights" wrote Yermolov of his use of artillery "could not fail to give me the advantage. It is very interesting to see the first effect of this innocent means on the heart of man, and I learnt how useful it was to be in possession of the one when unable all at once to conquer the other".

Igor Sergeev, Defence Minister, Anatoliy Kvashnin, Chief of the General Staff, Vladimir Rushaylo, Interior Minister and Nikolay Patrushev, Director of the FSB, where “*special attention was directed to the situation in Dagestan, in particular the question of coordination of operations and forces which were carrying out the operation for destroying the fighters in Botlikh rayon and in Dagestan as a whole*”¹²⁴, and where Federal casualties must be kept to a minimum.

Fuel-air explosives of up to 250 kg in weight were used by Federal forces, in particular around the Botlikh area, where: “*The spectacle is frightening. Even if it is seen a long way off. Over the place where the bomb lands, a huge fireball appears. Although the characteristic and frightening thunder of the explosion is almost inaudible, terror envelops the man. Fear rises within as it were, from the knowledge that a ‘quiet’ fireball inflicts death on every living thing. The weapon is not like napalm. It is possible to hide from napalm, from a vacuum bomb – no. Neither cave, nor strong dug-out, nor hole, nor trench can save a person from it. The charge carries a special fuel aerosol, which in the first preparatory explosion penetrates throughout the whole of the slit trench spreading over the ground. An additional effect follows when you are sprinkled with a rush of air – the wrap-over spreads throughout the whole of the apartment. Then the second explosive is activated and ignites the aerosol. The fireball is not one single one but an intensely hot aerosol. It is better not to see the results of a vacuum bomb explosion: every living thing is consumed by fire. Smouldering firebrands remain*”.¹²⁵

In Botlikh rayon the bandits were settled in several villages and settlements, and for a long time could not be expelled. Federal assault troops perished in numerous attempts to storm these positions. Conventional shells, rockets, bombs were ineffective: the bandits during air raids and artillery bombardment succeeded in concealing themselves in well prepared cellars and holes in the ground, but when “*Russian soldiers were in the attack they raised themselves, climbed or crawled out of their shelters and met our ‘boys’ with intense fire*”¹²⁶. After a vacuum bomb was launched on the small aul of Tando, ‘Basayevites’ immediately removed themselves from the neighbouring villages of Ansalta and Rakhata: “*the nerves did not hold*”¹²⁷, despite serious military preparation and psychological training.

In addition to the planning faults of Basayev and Khattab in this initial phase of the operation¹²⁸, one further oversight must be included. There does not appear to

¹²⁴ “*Voyna v Dagestane. Khronika sobitiy*”, “*Boyevyeye deystviya 23 Avgusta*”.

¹²⁵ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka, “*Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii*”, *Trud*, 18 February 2000. “*Bomba dlya Khattaba*” by Viktor Khlystin.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ See Blandy “*Chechnya: Two Federal Interventions – An Interim Comparison and Assessment*”, p41, Box 9, “**1.** They were sure that Dagestani Muslims would support their invasion. But as it happened - they burst into a stranger's house with weapons, committing a bloody offence against those who in the last war fed and watered them, tended their wounds and ensured rest. This was against all Caucasian customs, and the Dagestanis cursed them. **2.** The Basayevites leaned too heavily on the experience of the first Chechen campaign. They were convinced that Russia could not in the short time gather together sufficient forces for a vigorous repulse. **3.** Basayev and Khattab considered that we would not succeed in quickly organising the coordination of all the power structures... Over the

have been any comprehension of the horrendous effect that fuel-air explosives could wreak on personnel even dug-in or sheltering in deep caves. Because the Russians did not use them in the first Russo-Chechen conflict, it did not mean that these weapons would not be used in this particular conflict, especially where the action would take place in rather bare, prominent high mountainous terrain around Botlikh and Andi. That Vladimir Putin presumably authorised the use of fuel-air explosives provides further evidence of his determination to exterminate the bandit and separatist threat to the Russian Federation.

End of Bandit Resistance in Avaristan

On 25 August 1999 it was announced by the Federal temporary press-centre that the villages of Ansalta, Tando, Rakhata, Ashino, Shodroda and Ziberkhali were now under the control of the local administration.

Casualties suffered by the troop grouping in the course of the operation in Botlikh rayon are set out in Table 3 below. Figures of those ‘missing in action’ have not been published, although mention was made of them in actions to gain various heights. Seriously wounded personnel may or may not recover.

Table 3 - Federal Forces Combined Grouping - Casualties in Botlikh Operation¹²⁹

Ministry	Dead	Wounded
MOD Troops	47	186 (24 serious)
Interior Ministry Troops	12	20

Aftermath of Bandit Incursion into Avaristan

The residue of personnel from Chechen and Islamic extremist bandit formations in small groups attempted to break through in the direction of the Chechen villages of Vedenov and Sovetskoye. It was believed that Shamil’ Basayev and Khattab were planning a new seizure of hostages in Kizlyar in order to distract the main forces of Federal and Dagestani law enforcement agencies away from Botlikh rayon. However, such a plan was probably hindered by the mass casualties suffered by the *boyeviki* in Botlikh. The Dagestani law enforcement agencies had already taken precautionary measures to prevent another ‘Kizlyar’¹³⁰.

On 25 August, inhabitants of Naurskiy and Shelkovskiy rayony of the Chechen Republic held a meeting to demand of the leadership of the republic that extremists must be driven out of Chechen territory. In Vedenskiy and Nozhay-Urtovskiy rayony Islamic extremists continued to concentrate their forces for resupplying manpower

last three years we have made several important steps forward. Taking account of predictable bandit ‘outings’, a series of joint exercises were carried out with the MVD, Border Service and FAPSI. And we were ready. 4. Finally, they thought that the Federal authorities would be at a loss. But both the President and the Prime Minister acted in a resolute manner and set the armed forces their combat tasks.”

¹²⁹ “*Voyna v Dagestane. Khronika sobitiy*”, “*Boyevyye deystviya 25 Avgusta*”.

¹³⁰ Reference to the raid on Kizlyar by Salman Raduyev in January 1996.

in place of the casualties suffered by formations blocked in Dagestan. A series of field commanders refused to nominate personnel for Basayev to carry out these tasks. Therefore in the extremist training centres in Serzhen-Yurt, Avtury and Kharachoy urgent training of new fighter-recruits had to be carried out.

However, on 29 August 1999 that Federal Forces turned their attention to Kadar, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi, which is the subject of the next paper "*Dagestan: The Storm – Part II - The Federal Assault on Kadar, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi*".

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the
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