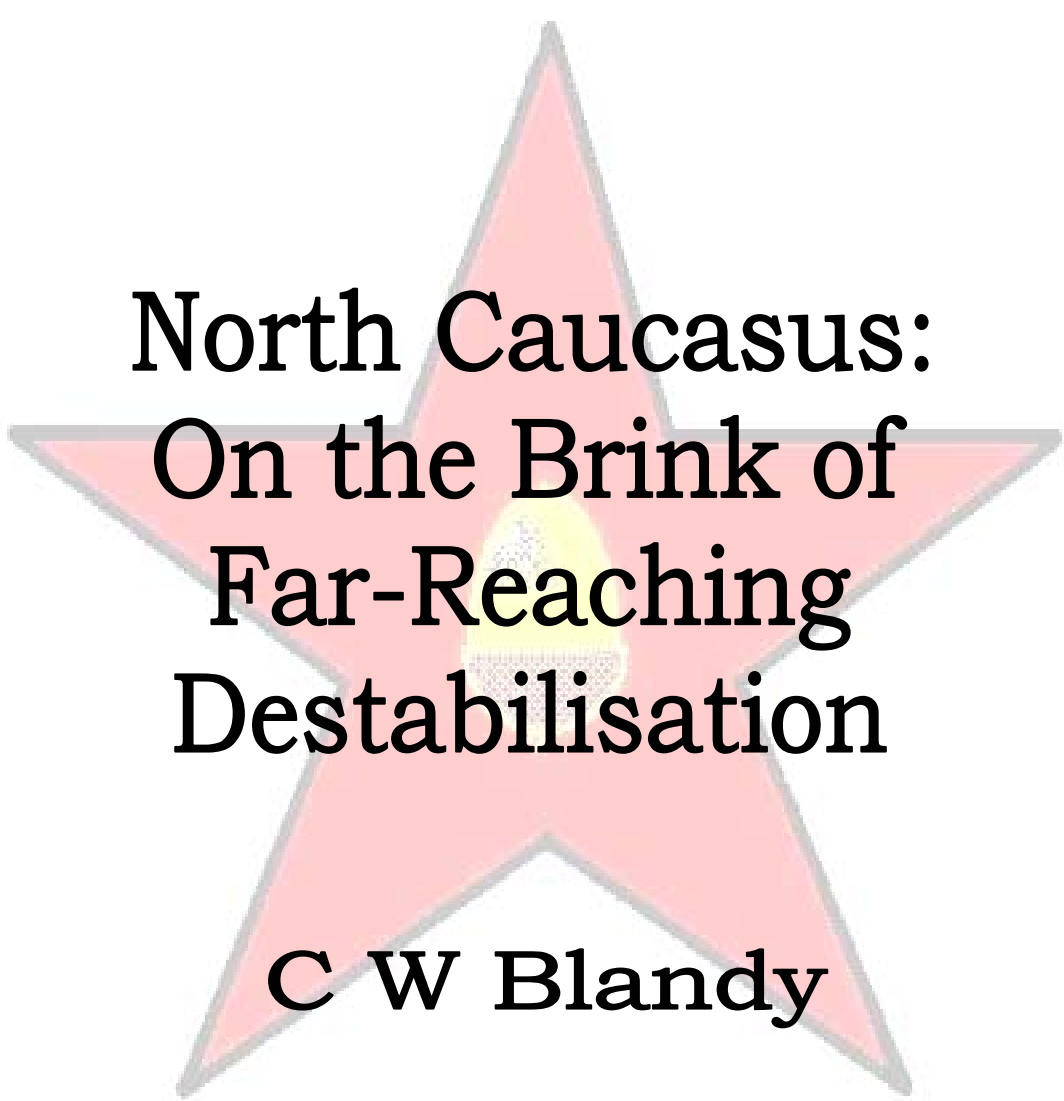


Conflict Studies Research Centre



**North Caucasus:
On the Brink of
Far-Reaching
Destabilisation**

C W Blandy

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Key Points

- * The scale of instability in the North Caucasus is extremely serious.
- * The forceful counter-measures currently underway must be accompanied by urgent measures to counter corruption, assist the economy and improve living conditions.
- * Failure to implement social-economic reforms will result in Russia losing the North Caucasus.

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The Southern Federal District



North Caucasus: On the Brink of Far-Reaching Destabilisation

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Introduction

“There is a sharp growth of radicalism and extremism, the widening of the gap between constitutional democratic principles and the processes taking place in reality. In the end it could lead to the appearance of a macro-region of social, political and economic instability which will include all the Caucasus republics and part of Stavropol’ kray.”¹

The short passage above is perhaps the most significant part of a devastating report delivered to President Putin in May 2005 by Dmitriy Kozak, President Putin’s Personal Representative to the Southern Federal Okrug (YuFO). A bleak future for Russian presence and power in the North Caucasus is forecast by Kozak unless drastic remedial action is taken now. He reiterates with greater thrust and detail some remarks made by Ramazan Abdulatipov, an Avar, the then Chairman of the Peoples Assembly of Russia and member of the Federation Council in December 2003.

“I have been repeating for a decade: we are not in control of the situation in Chechnya which is explainable, but we claim to be in control of the situation surrounding Chechnya! In fact, the situation around Chechnya is no better than inside the republic. In some directions, including the Dagestani problem, the authorities are unaware of the actual situation.”²

The political-social situation has become extremely brittle, hostile and tense in Ingushetia, North Osetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachayevo-Cherkessia.

In Karachayevo-Cherkessia a political crisis is continuing to simmer with demands for the resignation of unpopular President Mustafa Batdiyev. Much of the discontent has its origins in events which took place in 2004, when a deputy of the National Assembly and six members of the population were murdered. Batdiyev’s son-law was also implicated. In November 2004 the main administrative building of Karachayevo-Cherkessia was taken over by people demanding Batdiyev’s resignation. After negotiations with Dmitriy Kozak, there was a period of limited calm. On 10 June 2005 on the initiative of the political party *Yedinaya Rossiya* a crowd of people from the opposition voiced their lack of confidence in President Batdiyev, calling for his resignation. The crux of the matter is not so much inter-ethnic conflict but an economic conflict between the clans of one ethnic group, namely, the Karachay.³ Karachayevo-Cherkessia was the first of the republics of the North Caucasus to introduce a special border zone regime “*in the interests of the creation of the necessary conditions for the protection of the state border of the RF*”⁴ for the primary purpose of countering the spread of religious radicalism, particularly from Abkhazia and Georgia.

In Kabardino-Balkaria a longstanding history of friction exists between the two titular nationalities: Kabardins and Balkars. The present unrest is centred on El'brus *rayon*, populated and hitherto administered by Balkars. Balkars are protesting about limitations to their economic interests as a result of changes stemming from Federal Law No 131 on local government and new boundaries. The republic government, controlled by the Kabardins, wishes to take over the administration of the *rayon* as it is a popular tourist centre and thus a valuable economic resource for the region as a whole. Throughout June 2005 in El'brus many thousands of protest actions have taken place against the local government law which makes the tourist zone into a centre of republican importance.⁵ Despite objections, the republican government has introduced a special presidential post, whose functions duplicate those of the Balkar *rayon* head of administration, Khazir Makitov. The El'brus population has demanded that Makitov remains in post, the law on local government amended and the legitimacy of the president's special representative not recognised.

In North Osetia the head of the republic, Aleksandr Dzasokhov, damaged politically from the Beslan tragedy of September 2004, was forced to stand down after his failure to sign an agreement for the return of some 10,500 Ingush to Prigorodnyy *rayon*. In Ingushetia, President Murat Zyazikov, although loathed by the population, was recently confirmed in office by the Russian President. Despite Moscow's bland statements that the war is over in Chechnya, conflict, ethnic cleansing and abduction continue to reign unabated there. The unauthorised action by elements of the Chechen 'Vostok' battalion of Russia's 42 Motor Rifle Division at the former Cossack *stanitsa* of Borozdinovskaya, Shelkovskiy rayon, at the beginning of June 2005, with its undertone of ethnic cleansing against the wholly Avar population⁶ and the major terrorist act at Znamenskoye on 19 July 2005 which killed 14 people, including three children, and injured over 40⁷ are but two recent incidents. Znamenskoye had been enjoying a period of peace and quiet since 2003. Moreover, the Federal Centre is in a quandary over how to clip the wings of Ramzan Kadyrov in his ever-increasing accretion of power to the detriment of the 'elected' President, Alu Alkhanov.

The situation in Daghestan is sliding remorselessly and rapidly out of control. Lawlessness in the republic now rivals that of Chechnya, with a continuous campaign of assassination targeted against local heads of the law-enforcement organisations, ministers and other leaders in civil society. Inter-ethnic rivalry to secure the post of President of Daghestan, in a republic riddled with corruption amongst political elites, is but one factor edging towards a state of anarchy. Perhaps of equal concern to the federal authorities is the concerted operation against economic targets such as railways, gas pipelines and other strategic infrastructure, posing the question whether there is an external element in the planning, financing and execution of these terrorist acts. The attack at the end of May 2005 on the important Gimrinskiy vehicle tunnel, which lies on the border between Buynaksk and Untsukul'sk *rayony* and connects the high mountainous areas of Daghestan with the lowland plains is but one example of many such incidents. There is an old saying that "*Whoever rules Daghestan rules the North Caucasus*", but conversely failure to hold Daghestan carries the implication of losing the Caucasus!

Destabilisation in the North Caucasus is not due just to the present pressures such as the Chechen conflict, but has been caused by flawed nationalities policies and neglect by the centre over a very long period of time. There seems to be an unwillingness to correct the consequences of past injustices, such as the mass

deportations of 1944, in particular the loss of Prigorodnyy *rayon* by the Ingush in their staggered return after 1957.⁸ 70,000 to 100,000 Chechen Akin in the former Chechen Aukhovskiy *rayon*, now the Novolakskiy *rayon* of Dagestan, are vulnerable to pressures from Avar and Lak alike.⁹

Moscow's Attempts at Control

Society in the region as a whole is based on centuries of tradition which in essence defines the shape, form and behaviour of republic governments. This in turn forms a basis on which clan rivalry operates and naturally attracts a high degree of corruption in the struggle for influence, power and survival. The feudal structure of the economy in the republics is only capable of providing a low level of subsistence for the majority of their inhabitants. All the republics in the North Caucasus are heavily subsidised by the federal centre: "*on average around 70% of the budgets are formed round federal subsidies*".¹⁰ Furthermore, the clan and ethnic character of governments in North Caucasus republics, further obfuscated by the usage of local languages, makes it difficult for the federal centre to control the allotment of funds and their expenditure.

Until 2001-2002 the Kremlin used the strategy of coordinating policy with the activities of the most dominant clans in a republic, but then for example in Chechnya after 2001, the Kremlin adopted a policy of attempting to influence and control the system by placing 'its man' within the apparatus of the republican government. In theory the person appointed would have an unshakeable loyalty to the federal centre and not to the dominant clan. After Akhmat-Khadzhi Kadyrov (Kadyrov senior) was nominated head of the Chechen Republic, it will be remembered that Stanislav Il'yasov, "*an accomplished former politician in the government of Stavropol' Kray*"¹¹ was appointed Prime Minister. Moscow wanted to retain control over the allocation of federal government funds and finance in general, for whilst Kadyrov senior was 'loyal' to Moscow, his first loyalty was to himself in the accumulation of the levers of personal power and his clan interests.

Nevertheless, as it turned out, Il'yasov and his two successors, Mikhail Babich and Anatoliy Popov were forced out of the Chechen government. It became quite clear that a person with loyalty to the Kremlin was a person outside the 'circle' and in practice was incapable of fulfilling his role of safeguarding the Kremlin's position. On the other side of the coin, a person that adapts to the situation in a senior post in Chechnya becomes not so much an instrument capable of facilitating the Kremlin's wishes but in essence an advocate of the ruling clan. A case in point is that of the present Prime Minister of Chechnya. Sergey Abramov is regarded first and foremost as being a member of the Kadyrov clan, dominated by his forceful First Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov. Moreover Abramov's usefulness is curtailed by his inability to speak the Chechen language.

Another method that Moscow tried was the 'importation' of a candidate of the same ethnicity as the population of a republic. In 2002 the Kremlin produced a candidate from outside the republic, a *chuzhak* or interloper,¹² to become President of Ingushetia, namely Murat Zyazikov, an FSB (Federal Security Service) general and an ethnic Ingush. Significant support from Moscow enabled Zyazikov to overcome strong resistance from the influential Gutsereyev clan, which had previously lent its support to the first President of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev. Whilst Aushev never actively supported the separatist campaign in Chechnya by making Ingushetia a

place of rest and recuperation for Chechen *boyeviki*, he voiced strong criticism of the federal centre in its policy towards Chechnya.

Whilst Zyazikov more or less succeeded in his task of reducing Chechen influence in the Ingush government, it brought an escalation of terror to Ingushetia with a substantial number of terrorist acts, the most notable being that of 21/22 June 2004 which dealt a severe blow to Zyazikov's position. Significant steps had been taken in conjunction with President Dzasokhov of North Osetia during 2002 for the return of displaced Ingush from Prigorodnyy *rayon*. After the Beslan tragedy in North Osetia in September 2004 hopes for a solution to the Prigorodnyy problem vanished. Amongst the Ingush in the period April-May 2005 the catalyst for further anger and demonstrations was the impending implementation of Federal Law 131 "*On the general principles of local self-government organisation*" which had repercussions on elections, charters, budgets of urban and rural districts, the distribution of power between the different levels and the method and order of solving problems. Naturally, with regard to Prigorodnyy *rayon* the Ingush wanted local government and boundaries to reflect the situation prior to their mass deportation in 1944 before the Osetian 'takeover': Federal Law 131 only reflected the present situation. Zyazikov was unable to secure a permanent agreement or understanding with the Ingush opposition and "Akhki-Yurt" movement not to organise further demonstrations.

Within Ingushetia there is mounting criticism and dissatisfaction with President Zyazikov, not only over the continuing presence of Ingush refugees from Prigorodnyy living in squalid conditions, but also his encouragement to Cossacks to return and settle in Ingushetia. Discontent is further fuelled by his seeming inability to successfully isolate Ingushetia from the negative and disruptive effects emanating from neighbouring Chechnya. Even before the June 2004 raids, there were a number of incursions by Chechen law enforcement organs involved in carrying out search operations in tented refugee camps in conjunction with the FSB.¹³ Adverse comparisons are made between Zyazikov's performance as president and that of former President Ruslan Aushev who, apart from providing a haven for Chechen internally displaced persons, was able to limit the effects of the Russo-Chechen conflicts on Ingushetia.

Unfortunately, Moscow having facilitated the departure of Dzasokhov on account of his refusal to sign the proposal for the return of Ingush forced migrants to Prigorodnyy *rayon* which had been prepared by Kozak's office, in April 2005 the new head of North Osetia Taymraz Mamsurov found himself in exactly the same position as his predecessor. Following the Beslan tragedy where a number of Ingush were reported to have taken part in the seizure of Middle School No 1, no leader of North Osetia could possibly accept these proposals in the face of the deep-rooted emotional opposition to any proposal benefiting the Ingush. In this instance, Moscow could not pursue the route of importing a person from 'outside' to take over from Dzasokhov as it had been agreed in the process of 'retiring' Dzasokhov that Mamsurov, the Speaker of the North Osetian Parliament, would take over: this decision was endorsed by an almost universal majority in Parliament.

The Kremlin's Rejoinder to the Spread of Terrorism

One of the results of the Beslan tragedy was that President Putin on 13 September 2004 announced a series of measures to strengthen government power at the regional level. He introduced two decrees, "*On urgent measures to increase the*

*effectiveness of the struggle against terrorism” and “On the creation of a commission for coordinating the activities of federal executive power in organs in the YuFO”. Dmitriy Kozak was appointed chairman of the commission.¹⁴ The commission's task embraced not only counter-terrorism but also the social-economic reasons for deprivation and poverty in the region, and it included representatives of the power structures: the first deputy director of the FSB, the first deputy minister of defence, deputy interior minister (MVD), the deputy minister for emergency situations and ministers responsible for implementing an effective economic and social policy: Aleksey Kudrin, German Gref, Mikhail Zurabov and Andrey Fursenko.¹⁵ Putin, in defining the aim of the commission, said: “*The social-economic picture of the region is deplorable. It lags at a level of life remotely behind other Russian territories. Suffice it to say that the level of unemployment here is higher than the average in Russia.*”¹⁶*

Kozak Commission Report

The Commission's report to the Russian President in May 2005 was leaked to the press on about 16 June 2005 and was published in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*.¹⁷ Its unambiguous message to President Putin was that the whole system of governance in the North Caucasus is in a state of total disorder: high levels of corruption, poverty, no economic growth and lack of investment due to clan activities. (The main points of the report are summarised at Appendix 1.)

There is a systemic crisis of government. Corporate clan associations have been formed in government structures which monopolise political and economic resources. The top positions in government and the main economic entities are surrounded by a network of family connections. Systems of checks and balances have become non-existent. The dominant clan-corporate associations are closed entities which are not interested in dialogue with ordinary people. A high degree of social apathy exists amongst most of the population. The leaders of six out of the 12 regions making up the YuFO are regarded negatively by their populations.¹⁸

The report foresees a sharp growth in radicalism and extremism, with an increasing gap between constitutional democratic principles and the processes which are taking place in reality. In Kozak's opinion this will lead to the appearance of a macro-region of social, political and economic instability, which will include all the North Caucasus republics and part of Stavropol' *kray*.

Over the last four years assistance from the federal budget to the region had grown 3.4 times, in contrast to a national figure of 2.6 times. However, the gross regional product has remained unchanged. The shadow economy, the criminal sector, is estimated at 26% of the whole regional economy (in Daghestan it is 44%, compared to the average in Russia of 17%). There is a chaotic system of distributing financial support from central government. The YuFO has the highest number of civil servants in Europe (1,180 per 100,000 population). Functions of different departments are duplicated.¹⁹ No one has direct responsibility.

Courts maintain a negative stance and without exception are organs of unscrupulous economic competition. Between 54 and 90% of enterprises (depending on the region) are convinced that they do not have the slightest chance in court in disputes with regional authorities. 44% to 88% have suffered from the scandalous practices of the militia. Sociological polls testify that the main regional obstacles to business are extortions and requisitions by the authorities, which businessmen fear more than actions by criminals.

A second part of the leaked report was published on 8 July.²⁰ This leak was:

“No less tough than the first, only not touching on the problems of all the North Caucasus, but on one concrete subject of the Federation – Daghestan. This is not an accidental choice, but this republic lately has become one of the most problematical which even outstrips Chechnya. Not a week passes in which information agencies have not reported about another terrorist act, a contract killing or abduction.”²¹

Excerpts from the report stated that around 7% of Daghestanis are ready to take up arms, a further 8% to seize buildings and block transport routes, and almost one third of the population was ready to participate in illegal acts of protest.²² Over the last 4 years 20,000 Russians have left the republic. The politicisation of Islam has increased, with religious communities actively participating in the electoral processes and exerting a growing influence on the heads of local government in the mountain regions. Local authorities have become involved in financial malpractices or spend state monies on enterprises and objects which benefit relatives of people in power.

Lack of action means that the mounting socio-economic and political problems are fast approaching a critical level, the leaked report stated. It pointed out that continued lack of attention to these problems will lead to protest actions and civil disobedience, an uncontrollable development of events, the logical ending of which will be overt social groupings leading to inter-ethnic and religious conflicts. Simultaneously it believed that the growth of religious influence in the medium term (10-15 years) could lead to the establishment of Sharia enclaves in mountainous regions of the republic. Perhaps the report is being a little optimistic here. Not only has the seed of radical religious influence been planted but it is in the process of multiplying into several *dzhamaats* (Sharia enclaves) already. The federal actions to destroy the Wahhabi bases in Daghestan in the autumn of 1999 seem a long time ago.

Direct Rule?

At a meeting on 18 July 2005 in the White House, the commission once again established that the fight against terrorism was ineffective. In the North Caucasus republics the high levels of corruption and poverty were such that they created conditions for recruitment to the ranks of the *boyeviki*. Estimates concerning Daghestan now put 50 to 70% of the population who had some form of work into the shadow economy sector. Newspapers speculated that Kozak had recommended direct rule from the federal centre:

“The more a region [republic] is subsidised, the less sovereignty local governments will have ... Those subjects of the federation which live on someone else’s money could be transferred to direct control from the centre. According to the concept of Kozak and other like-minded people this is to avoid the ineffective use of resources and to lower the level of corruption. The principle is simple: the more a region is subsidised, the less power local [republic] governments will have.”²³

The need was for tough rules from central government, for *“all the country’s hotspots are sitting firmly on subsidies from the federal budget, but subsidisation spawns corruption, criminal quarrels and fighting with weapons”*.²⁴

According to the media, the more Kozak became immersed in the realities of the North Caucasus the more he became convinced of the appropriateness and advisability of this idea. A whole series of governors were said to believe that it

would provide an additional stimulus for economic-social progress and success. It would also provide yet one more instrument which strengthens the vertical power of the centre over the regions. It was felt that the innovation would have an effect on the budgetary payments from the federal treasury, which currently amount to 80-90% of the region's funding. Furthermore, Kozak was said to believe that if the use of these resources by the regional elites could be postponed or delayed, then the tension in the battle for power in the republics would automatically be reduced. Often regional leaders had used the excuse of the fight against terrorism and extremism to fight the real battle for control of allocation and distribution of funds.²⁵

Kozak confirmed that the subsidised regions which could lose political independence were: Chechnya, Daghestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, and possibly Tyva and Koryakia. He gave an undertaking that his administration in the autumn session of the State Duma would prepare corresponding amendments in the budgetary code and federal draft law "*On the general principles of the organisation of state government of subjects of the RF*". The Ministry of Economic Development would not participate in the preparation of the law; it was envisaged that Federal Laws No 95 and No 131 on local government and demarcation of authority between regions and the centre would suffice.²⁶

One matter which could well stem from this is the eradication of small administrative territorial entities where from the centre's point of view they would be wasteful of manpower and cause duplication, such as the minute republic of Ingushetia. This has already happened in the recent merger of Krasnoyarsk Krai and the autonomous areas of Taymyr and Evenki following the policy of the commission on the demarcation between the federal centre and the regions aiming at larger administrative-territorial units to improve economic performance. In April 2005 there were also reports concerning the possible amalgamation of Kamchatka *oblast'* and Koryakia; the presidential plenipotentiary for the Far East Federal District proposed the inclusion of Chukotka as well, to form a single Northern republic.²⁷ However, *Izvestiya* noted on 20 April 2005: "*Local society organisations are ready for protest actions, maintaining that amalgamation will enable the creation of ground for extremist moods and tension in society, the appearance of radicalism and terrorism in the North Caucasus region*".²⁸ One can imagine the feelings of outrage amongst the Adygey peoples in the event of proposals from Krasnodar and ethnic Russians for amalgamating the Republic of Adygeya with Krasnodar Krai.

At the Kozak commission's meeting on 18 July there was one additional proposal, that the FSB which currently was occupied in investigations of economic crimes, the interception of drug-trafficking and other violations of the law should hand over these functions to the MVD, and make its priority the fight against crime within the law-enforcement system itself, in particular within the MVD. At the same time the commission suggested the creation of a separate authority for controlling the work of the Procurator.²⁹

There has been a certain amount of speculation with regard to the leaking of the Kozak report. Some have made allusions to the explosions in apartment blocks in Moscow in September 1999 as a supposed means of increasing public support for the counter-terrorist operation against Chechnya. Leaking the Kozak report would similarly prepare the general populace and help them to understand the real threat which lay at their door in Southern Russia, when in reality the federal centre would be enhancing its grip solely for the purpose of gaining complete control. That may well be so, but it is an undeniable fact that the North Caucasus is on the brink of

massive destabilisation which required the personal attention of the Russian President.

President Putin's Visit

In the week beginning 11 July 2005 President Putin visited Astrakhan (12 July), the Caspian Flotilla (12 July) and Daghestan (15 July). Undoubtedly he felt the need to gauge the situation in Daghestan for himself.

Astrakhan

During the President's visit to Astrakhan he was accompanied by Dmitriy Kozak and Astrakhan region's governor Aleksandr Zhilkin. One of the subjects discussed was the serious problem of wide-scale poaching, which depleted fish stocks and increased the price of fish. They in turn affected many people in the area around Astrakhan living at a subsistence level, as well as those living further inland. Poachers intent on purveying caviar for their own profit are devastating the numbers of sturgeon. Zhilkin believed that the problem should be raised at government level, including rationalising and regulating the activities of fishery protection structures: *"There are too many of them – in their work they duplicate one another. We have proposals on this account, and we are ready in the immediate future to bring them to the attention of the Russian government."*³⁰

The President met the Director of the FSB Border Service Vladimir Pronichev and the recently promoted Head of the Border Service within the YuFO boundaries Nikolay Lisinskiy. Emphasising the importance of reinforcing the borders of the YuFO, the President made the point that over the last 10 years border protection had become seriously weakened. Earlier, Putin visited the "Red Barricades" industrial site where construction was in progress of the floating crane "Ispolin", designed for working at oil deposit sites in the Caspian. The removal of poverty and its effects, increased border protection, the improvement and rationalisation of law enforcement organisations, and additional investment for similar projects to "Ispolin" were said to be at the top of Putin's agenda.

Caspian Naval Flotilla

To some extent his visit to the Caspian Flotilla and its flagship "Tatarstan" embodied a more international flavour with its theme and tone devoted to the creation of an *"operational-tactical group of ships from the Caspian riparian states as exemplified by Blackseafar to counter terrorism, narcotic-trafficking and bio-terrorism"*.³¹ Fundamentally, however it was the spread of terrorism in Putin's own country and possibly the growth of China's need for other sources of oil which were the main points, for: *"If Russian influence in the North Caucasus region and in the area of the Caspian as a whole becomes weakened, eastern appetites could grow"*.³² To prevent the weakening of Russian power and influence much depended on the modernisation of the Astrakhan combined maritime-river transport node and the ports of Makhachkala and Ol', and the development of a system of ferries in the Caspian within the framework of the international "North-South" transport highway.³³ Bringing this into operation would significantly raise Russia's position in the transportation of cargo in the region. Russia has a great advantage over the other riparian states of the Caspian with shipbuilding yards on the Volga and access from other seas for smaller craft via the Volga-Don shipping canal.

The flotilla and its upgrading have been of interest to Putin for the last few years. Putin's first official visit to the region was as the newly appointed prime minister in

the autumn of 1999 following the Chechen 'invasion' into Botlikh and Tsumada regions. He has made at least two more visits to the flotilla, including observing the naval exercises in 2003. He has always shown a marked interest in the Russian navy, hailing from St Petersburg himself, and his interest in the Caspian flotilla and concerns over the Caspian Sea should come as no surprise, given the need to "*maintain an effective military force to protect Russia's oil reserves and transportation routes from external intervention*"³⁴ amongst other concerns. Two structural developments show its significance for the future system of regional defence planning. First was the formation of a brigade of naval infantry in place of the current battalion. Second, permanent readiness missile armed motor launches would be put into commission. A desant-engineer company would also be formed. Equipment would be installed from the Pacific and Northern Fleets, and also from the naval engineer service. The presence of a reinforced naval grouping in the Caspian would raise its status to that of a large operational formation.³⁵

Within the flotilla a missile capability has appeared for the first time. The new missile ship "Tatarstan", commissioned in 2003, has a radius of operation of 5,000 nautical miles at a speed of 10 kts. The armament includes guns (1 x 76 mm range 15 km, 2 x 30 mm, torpedoes (4 x 533 mm, two twin tubes) and missiles (8 x Zvezda SS-N-25). In the immediate future it will be fitted out and armed with the new "Uran" (KH35) missile complex.³⁶ No other Caspian state has anything like the "Tatarstan". Only Iran has a frigate-type ship. Other Caspian states have only launches. The Caspian naval flotilla also provides a useful adjunct to the ground forces operating in Daghestan.

Daghestan

The unexpected arrival of the president and the supreme commander in chief by helicopter to the southernmost Russian republic clearly demonstrated Putin's resolve to put words into action.³⁷ During his visit, President Putin made it quite clear to politicians, civil servants, military and naval commanders, other service commanders and both federal and regional special services, law enforcement organs and militias exactly what was required of them to combat the serious situation which was burgeoning in Daghestan. There was no doubt about the thrust of his statements, his sharp questions and acid remarks.

Whilst in Makhachkala at the FSB spetsnaz centre the president spoke about plans for the deployment of mountain brigades in the North Caucasus region, in Botlikh (Daghestan) and in Karachayev-Cherkessia. Putin gave directives to Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov; FSB Director Nikolay Patrushev; Head of the Ministry for Economic Development German Gref; Chief of General Staff Yury Baluyevskiy and the Head of the FSB Border Service Vladimir Pronichev. President Putin made it clear that the federal centre knew about the situation in Daghestan and in the YuFO as a whole and was determined to resolve it. By far the most important task was the strengthening of the southern borders of Russia, which at the present time were simply not capable of being closed.

*"It is vital to act in the immediate future, taking into account the international obligations of the country, including also in cooperation with European partners the question of the creation of 'four common spaces' including the space of internal security. From Astrakhan up to the border with Azerbaijan – the whole of this border sector must be reliably closed, defended. And in this region where the resorts of Krasnodar Krai are situated, millions of our citizens have holidays and this zone must be protected."*³⁸

His instructions to the MVD were to ensure that the spirit of organised crime was erased, as the region was too tense to sleep peacefully at night. With regard to military protection of the borders, the formation of the two mountain brigades must be completed forthwith. Putin remarked that the Chief of the General Staff had spoken about the fact that mountain subunits were in existence, but he added “*I don’t know where they are,*”³⁹ which was followed by: “*When you come up against the problem of fighting against terrorism, you send combined arms units there, and they do not have special training, neither special education nor proper fitting out*”.⁴⁰

Whilst the president expressed his displeasure with the winter footwear issued to subunits, particularly for work in the mountains,⁴¹ it would appear that there were problems of a far deeper nature. The President had ordered the formation of two mountain brigades over 18 months ago as a matter of priority, and yet it transpired that the infrastructure is still in the process of being created for these formations.⁴² It was envisaged that the formations would be operational by the beginning of 2005, but now the date has been put back to the beginning of 2006.⁴³

The main task of the two brigades is envisaged to be “*special mountain subunits required for service in the Caucasus, covering the borders and assisting border troops to defend the state border*”.⁴⁴ The concept of mountain brigades had taken root in the President’s mind following the special six month operation which started in the summer-autumn of 2003 along the Russo-Georgian border, and the death of nine border troops in a clash with Ruslan Gelayev and his group in December 2003, an operation culminating in the deaths of Gelayev and his band in February 2004.⁴⁵

However, there appear to be several problems in meeting the president’s priorities. First, infrastructure and serious costs; second, troops and experienced instructors; third, the purchase, training and acclimatisation of donkeys and mules to combat conditions, to name but a few of the requirements. The apparent lack of urgency with which the Supreme-Commander-in-Chief’s priority task is being addressed by the Defence Minister and senior officers is shocking, but perhaps more damning is the fact that “*today according to experts, in Russia there are no specialists who could completely fulfil the training of military mountaineers, and the experience gathered over the not too distant past has been completely lost*”.⁴⁶

In Soviet times the 68 Detached Motor Rifle Brigade (Mountain) had a wartime strength of 3,800 and a peacetime complement of 1,800. The requirement for outstanding physical fitness, robustness of troops and experience of working in high mountain terrain creates a serious problem, particularly when an instructor in mountain (and arctic) warfare “*needs to train for no less than four years*”.⁴⁷ One mountain-trained officer is convinced that future spetsnaz rock-climbers should be trained along the lines of the tourist-mountaineer. This is due to the fact that when operating in the mountains the main interest of the spetsnaz are the mountain passes. According to Anton Kostyanov, a captain in the Border Service FSB, “*the alpinist differs from the tourist-mountaineer like a formula 1 driver does from a Paris-Dakar rally driver*”.⁴⁸ The weight of equipment of a mountain-tourist is approximately the same as the weapons and ammunition carried by a soldier operating in mountainous terrain, and is three to four times heavier than the alpinist carries making his ascent. Kostyanov also emphasised that there was a difference in tactics in surmounting different mountain obstacles.

Perhaps the only way to meet the President’s demands of creating mountain brigades as a priority task, of “*being needed yesterday*”,⁴⁹ was a suggestion Kostyanov made that brigades could be manned and formed more quickly if officer-

mountaineers were called up from the reserve. However, he also emphasised that age also played a role because people over 35 would experience considerable difficulties along tracks, and scaling heights and cliffs would become progressively harder. Officers with mountain training and experience could be posted in from other units.

Forceful Countermeasures

In the next few months the grouping of Internal Troops in the North Caucasus will be increased significantly. *“The scope and essence of the reorganisation is such that the preparation for military action on such a scale has never happened before.”*⁵⁰

The Commander Internal Troops Nikolay Rogozhkin confirmed that before 2006 command of the counter-terrorist organisation in Chechnya would be passed to internal troops. By the start of the coming year the structural organisation of internal troops from the present brigade-battalion structure would revert to the earlier division-regimental structure. Where at present a battalion is deployed with a strength of 600 men, in future the deployment would be one of a regiment of 2,000 men. For example, at a military base in Sochi or Na’chik where only a single battalion is deployed at present, in future there would be one regiment at each of the military bases.⁵¹

Furthermore as well as the operational-territorial formations of Internal Troops with their six existing districts and their subordinate regional/republic directorates, a new regional command group (*komandovaniye*) would make its appearance. The first command group will be created on the basis of existing directorates of internal troops throughout the regions of the North Caucasus. Additional forces are being transferred to Krasnodar *kray*, Daghestan, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Kalmykia. In these regions, regional operational control groups (ROUG) will be created. Not only will Internal Troops’ units including spetsnaz be subordinated to ROUGs, but also MOD and Emergency Situations Ministry subunits. It must also be remembered that the North Caucasus acts as a 'test bed' for deployment and employment of special forces. Moreover, all the military *komandatury* operating in mountainous *rayony* such as Veden, Nozhay-Yurt, Itum-Kaly and Shatoy will be transferred to the Main HQ of MVD Internal Troops.⁵²

The number of MOD troops will not be reduced in Chechnya, but in other important regions of the North Caucasus they will be significantly increased. In Bamut, Veden and Shatoy, army spetsnaz subunits and company tactical groups from 42 Motor Rifle Division will carry out operations. By 2006 in Botlikh⁵³ on the border with Chechnya and Georgia a mountain brigade will be deployed with a similar one in Karachayevo-Cherkessia at Zelenchukskaya, remembering that the Cossacks of Zelenchukskaya and Urup have long awaited their autonomy. The troop grouping in Chechnya and the Regional Operational HQ for the control of the counter-terrorist operation (ROSh) deployed at Khankala is already in the process of reorganisation. The information war will suffer, however: the ROSh combined press-centre reported that it was terminating the reporting of events in Chechnya by internet.⁵⁴

According to General Aleksandr Baranov, Commander of the North Caucasus Military District during the present year six military units of the military district will be brought up to strength, including spetsnaz, two brigades (in Krasnodar and Bataysk), 205 Separate Motor Rifle Cossack Brigade (Budennovsk), and 503 Motor Rifle Regiment in Ingushetia. A flamethrower and tank battalion in Maikop would be brought up to strength by contract servicemen. For the remainder of 2005 it is

planned to have 10,047 contract servicemen. This figure represents another division. By the end of 2007 the number of contract servicemen in NCMD will amount to 45,701 which equates to four divisions at full strength. Amongst those under contract service in 2006-2007 will be a brigade of naval infantry in Daghestan (Kaspiysk), certain regiments of 19 Motor Rifle Division (Vladikavkaz), and 135 Motor Rifle Regiment (Prokhladnyy, Kabardino-Balkaria),⁵⁵ the last named being ready to intervene in Nel'chik and any event associated with the main railway line from Vladikavkaz to the west.

Conclusions

The situation in the North Caucasus is extremely serious, particularly in Daghestan. However, the measures to counter the ever-widening spread of terrorism in the North Caucasus are "too little, too much, too late". Increases in the strength of the military and Internal Troops may improve law and order, but their heavy-handed policing of Chechnya has if anything exacerbated the situation there. Moreover, troop increases in the North Caucasus and throughout the YuFO may well increase the problems associated with implementing the much-needed reforms underway in the Interior Troops and other power structures. It is of prime importance that forceful countermeasures to contain the spread of terrorism, religious extremism and radicalism must be accompanied by urgent and realistic measures dedicated to:

1. Counter corruption amongst the regional elites.
2. Promote and encourage investment in the economy.
3. Reduce levels of unemployment.
4. Improve living conditions.
5. Provide hope for a better future.

So serious is the situation that failure to implement the much-needed social-economic reforms and depending solely on forceful measures will result in Russia's position in the North Caucasus becoming increasingly precarious, to the extent that she could even lose the region altogether.

Inability to rectify the situation and a continued drift toward anarchy would be a devastating blow to Russia's confidence, influence and power in the Caucasus-Caspian region. This in turn would have serious consequences and impair the campaign against global terrorism.

Violence could threaten oil production in the Caspian Sea and pipelines through Azerbaijan and Georgia. Military action could also spill over onto Georgian and Azerbaijani territory.

An escalation of violence in the Caucasus-Caspian region will complicate the political situation in Moscow and make Western relationships with the Russian president more difficult. But regardless of the original causes, the more recent reasons for the situation in the North Caucasus and the horrors of the Russo-Chechen conflicts, Western states, NATO and the EU should be prepared to offer closer cooperation with Moscow in the fight against global terrorism, renew efforts to

bridge the gap between the centre and Chechen separatists and assist in reducing the flow of arms, finance and narcotics through Russian borders into Russia.

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- ² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 26 December 2003, p4, "Ramazan Abdulatipov: Na Kavkaz kazhdyy avtoritetnyy politik imeyet svoyu boyevuyu gruppirovku?" by Andrey Riskin. Abdulatipov is now Russian ambassador to Tajikistan.
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- ¹¹ See C W Blandy, "Chechnya: Normalisation", P40, Conflict Studies Research Centre, June 2003, p55, <http://www.mod.da.uk/csarc>.
- ¹² Stanovaya, *ibid*.
- ¹³ <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/russia0903/2.htm>, HRW: Spreading Despair: Russian Abuses in Ingushetia: II. "The frequency and intensity of the operations in Ingushetia reached an alarming level in the summer of 2003. While previously the sweep-type operations were a very rare occurrence, in June 2003 alone, seven operations of this kind were carried out in 'displaced persons' settlements and Ingush villages. Throughout all of 2002, only twenty-two people were arrested in Ingushetia in the course of anti-terrorist operations. By contrast, during the first three weeks of June 2003 alone, eleven people were detained. Moreover, for the first time Ingush civilians fell victim to abuses perpetrated by federal forces in Ingushetia."
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Appendix

The Kozak Commission Report⁵⁶

Political-Social

There is a systemic crisis of government. Corporate clan associations have been formed in government structures which monopolise political and economic resources.

The top positions in governments and main economic entities are surrounded by a network of family connections.

Systems of checks and balances have become non-existent.

The dominant clan-corporate associations are closed entities which are not interested in dialogue with ordinary people.

A high degree of social apathy exists amongst most of the population. The leaders of six out of 12 regions making up the YuFO are regarded negatively by their populations.

There will be a sharp growth in radicalism and extremism, with an increasing gap between constitutional democratic principles and the processes which are taking place in reality.

This will lead to the appearance of a macro-region of social, political and economic instability including all the North Caucasus republics and part of Stavropol' kray.

Economic

Over the last four years assistance from the federal budget has grown 3.4 times, in contrast to a national figure of 2.6 times. The gross regional product has not changed at all.

The shadow economy, the criminal sector, comprises 26% of the whole economy of the YuFO (in Daghestan 44%, compared to the average in Russia of 17%).

Distribution of financial support from central government is chaotic.

YuFO has the highest number of civil servants in Europe (1,180 per 100,000 population).

Functions of different departments are duplicated. No one has direct responsibility.

Police & Judicial System

Courts maintain a negative stance and without exception are organs of unscrupulous economic competition.

From 54% to 90% of enterprises (depending on the region) are convinced that they do not have the slightest chance in court in disputes with regional authorities. 44% to 88% are in clashes with scandalous practices of the militia.

North Caucasus: "On the Brink of Far-Reaching Destabilisation"

Sociological polls testify that the main regional obstacles to business are extortions and requisitions by the authorities, which businessmen fear more than actions by criminals.

Daghestan

7% of Daghestanis are ready to take up arms, a further 8% to seize buildings and block transport routes, almost one third to participate in illegal acts of protest.

Over the last 4 years 20,000 Russians have left the republic.

Over the last few years the politicisation of Islam has increased, with religious communities actively participating in electoral processes.

Religious authorities are exerting a growing influence on the heads of local government in mountain regions.

Local authorities are involved in financial malpractice or spend state monies on enterprises and objects which benefit relations of people in power.

Lack of action means that the mounting social-economic and political problems are approaching a critical level.

Further lack of attention to these problems will lead to protest actions and civil disobedience, and an uncontrollable development of events, the logical ending of which will be open social groupings leading to inter-ethnic and religious conflicts.

Simultaneously the growth of religious influence in the medium term (10-15 years) could lead to establishment of Sharia enclaves in mountainous regions of the republic.

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