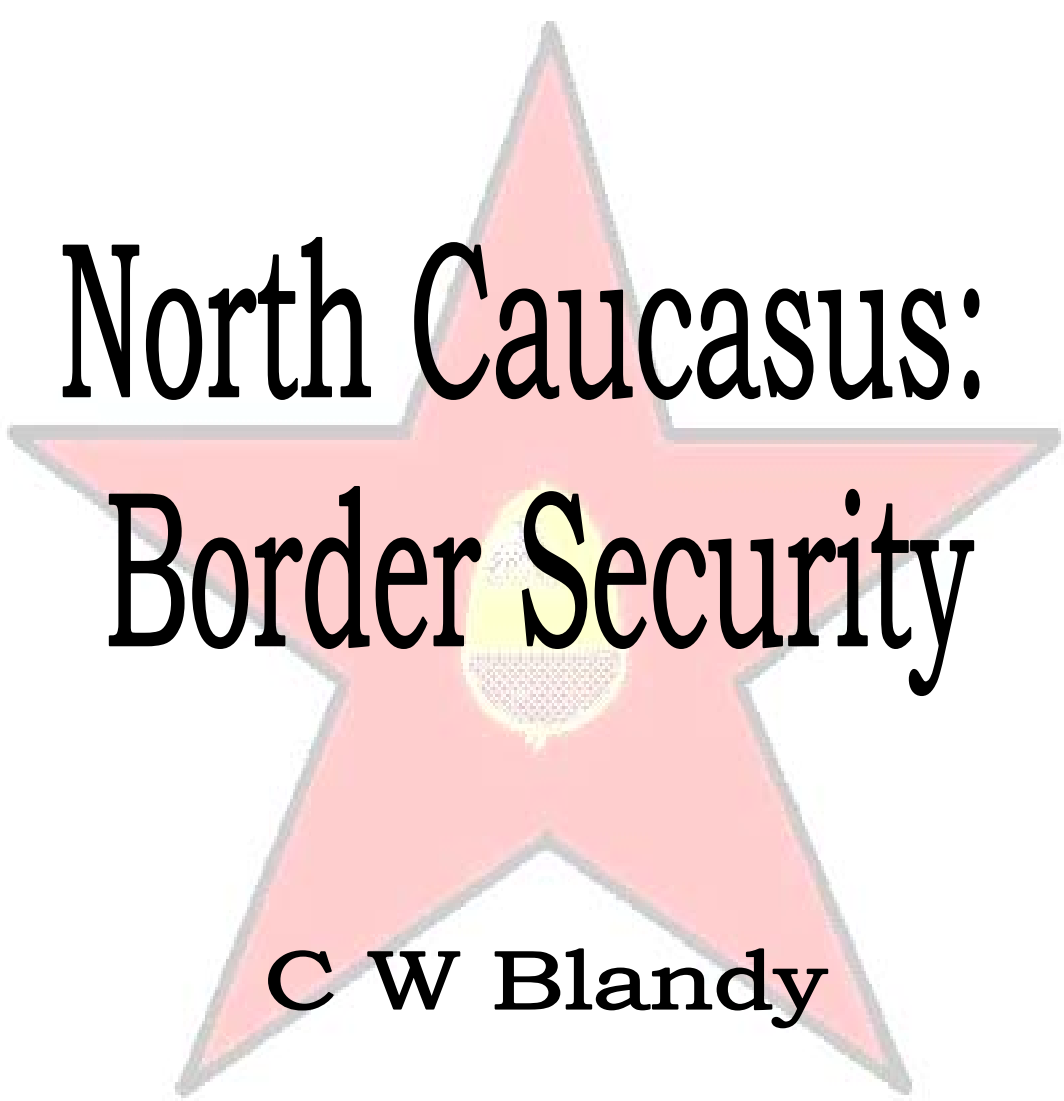


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**North Caucasus:  
Border Security**

**C W Blandy**

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# North Caucasus: Border Security

C W Blandy

## Key Points

\* The Federal Special Programmes to improve the infrastructure on the State Border of the Russian Federation is underway in Chechnya and Dagestan.

\* Over the last two years the Chechen border has not been breached by bandit formations.

\* Despite efforts by the border guards to build relationships, the local population are still suffering economic hardship and serious inconvenience.

\* The campaign against Caspian poachers is still ineffective, however.

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# North Caucasus: Border Security

C W Blandy

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine in greater depth the recently reorganized structure, deployment and tasks of the Federal Security Service's Federal Border Service (FPS) directorates and detachments in Chechnya and Dagestan in the Southern Federal District. President Putin's continued determination to perfect border security was evident when he attended a recent Federal Security Service (FSB) conference. Whilst positively evaluating the contributions made by the special services and the FSB's successful coordination role, the Russian President once again emphasized the need to strengthen the Russian border particularly in the North Caucasus, where "*the Border Service of the FSB must continue the construction of a modern infrastructure along the whole perimeter of the state border*".<sup>1</sup>

In Soviet times, the border between Caucasus republics had been changed on several occasions.<sup>2</sup> When, however, Georgia and Azerbaijan became sovereign states independent of Moscow, there was of course a need for the formality of an international interstate border. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, a significant part of the new state frontiers of Russia lacked the necessary installations and were unable to carry out the tasks of border protection effectively. The situation in the North Caucasus, "*a hotbed of terrorist activity*",<sup>3</sup> was further complicated by the first and second Chechen campaigns. A Federal Special Programme, the "*State Border of the Russian Federation*" (2003-2010) was initiated for the construction and fitting out of the Russian state border. Naturally, the border with Georgia and Azerbaijan was a vital part of the programme, with special attention being devoted to the Chechen sector.

Despite almost 14 years of conflict and migration of ethnic Russians away from the Muslim republics, there can be no doubting Moscow's intention of staying put in the North Caucasus. For instance, the North Caucasus Military District boasts a strong military presence marked by 20 formations and military units in which at least 43,000 servicemen are serving on contract.<sup>4</sup> The military presence is further underpinned not only by two newly formed specialist mountain motor rifle brigades in Botlikh (Dagestan) and Zelenchukskaya (Karachayevo-Cherkessia), but also through the implementation of Federal Special Programme "*Transition to bringing formations and troop units up to strength with contract servicemen*" (2004-2007).<sup>5</sup> The programme also laid emphasis on the improvement of training: "*New training areas will be fitted out and brought into use (Sernovodsk, Troitskiy – 19 Motor Rifle Division, Budennovsk – 205 Detached Motor Rifle Brigade, Buynaksk – 136 Detached Motor Rifle Brigade, Kalinovskaya, Shali – 42 Motor Rifle Division)*".<sup>6</sup>

## Porous Borders

During the first Russo-Chechen conflict it was clear that the Chechens benefited from external assistance: receiving men, arms, ammunition, finance and other supplies as well as arranging for rest, recuperation and medical treatment for fighters in countries unofficially sympathetic to the separatist cause where there were significant Chechen diasporas, particularly in Asia Minor and the Middle East. Countries which were involved in assisting Chechnya included Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi-Arabia, Azerbaijan, the secessionist Abkhaz republic and Tajikistan, as well as Russian regions of Ingushetia, Kalmykia and Astrakhan oblast', and particularly the routes to/from Azerbaijan through Dagestan.<sup>7</sup> At this time little mention was made of the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, which assumed greater prominence and publicity during the second conflict.

In the uneasy lull between the first and second Russo-Chechen conflicts, between 1997 and 1999, President Aslan Maskhadov realised the strategic importance of improving the track between Itum-Kale and the border in the direction of the Georgian settlement of Shatili which would enable the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria to enjoy a vital link to the outside world which was not under the direct control of Russia. Despite the belief circulating in 1997 that more than 46,000 Russians had been put into slavery in Chechnya and used for work "*from the gathering of wild onions to the construction of the road to Groznyy through Itum-Kale and Tazbich*",<sup>8</sup> a Chechen mountain-dweller from Itum-Kale emphatically rejected the notion of Russians being put to work on the road: "*Before the war (2<sup>nd</sup> Chechen campaign) I happened to earn good money working on my bulldozer. I bored my way through to Georgia on it. To look how I did this, even Vakha Arsanov came [Vice President of Ichkeria in the time of Aslan Maskhadov]. It's not true that the road from Itum-Kale to the Georgian border was built by prisoners of war or hostages, as Russian TV reported. I built this road. Right up to the Georgian border*".<sup>9</sup>

In the second conflict whilst the Georgians did not complete the 6-7 kilometres of road between Shatili and the border for fear of reprisals from Russia, nevertheless the unfinished road provided an easier link than hitherto, providing a conduit to the Chechen-Kistin haven in the Pankisi Gorge.<sup>10</sup> Along this route the supply of ammunition, foodstuffs and medical supplies flowed with little or no interruption before the seemingly inevitable second round of conflict. Map 1 shows the approximate locations of Shatili and the Pankisi Gorge.

Another factor which increased the importance of the routes along the Chanti-Argun and Sharoy-Argun, and thus the Itum-Kale to Shatili connection, was that the raids into Dagestan by Shamil' Basayev and Emir Khattab caused a forceful counter-action from federal forces<sup>11</sup> in the area around Botlikh and Tsumadinskiy rayony, a major nodal point for routes on a north-south axis as well as an east-west one. The areas in Dagestan contiguous to Chechnya were inundated with federal troops, Dagestani militia and the local home guard. The last named, reflecting the feelings of outrage of the local Avar population towards the Chechen 'invaders' would not have been in sympathy with any attempts to support an uprising in Dagestan.

**Map I – The Caucasus**

(K - Kodori Gorge. P - Pankisi Gorge. S – Shatili)

Towards the end of 1999 the federal government gave the North Caucasus Regional Directorate of the FPS in conjunction with the Commander of the Southern Group of Federal Forces Lieutenant General Ashurov the task to sever the guerrillas' vitally important transport artery which lay along the southern part of the Argun gorge. The aim of this operation was the capture of Itum-Kale to enable federal forces to cut the Itum-Kale – Shatili road. This particular phase of the counter-terrorist operation to seal the international border with Georgia concluded with the fall of Itum-Kale on 10 February 2000 and was a major logistical setback for Chechen separatists.<sup>12</sup>

According to Colonel Sergeyev, right from the moment of the airborne assault landing on 20 December 1999 during the “Argun” special operation (in which “our unit”, “the legendary border service formation – the Argun Detachment was created”,<sup>13</sup> now the FPS' Chechen Republic Directorate),<sup>14</sup> contact with the local Chechen population was a priority, remembering that the eyes and ears of the local population are a vital asset for law enforcement and border protection agencies. Right from the beginning border troops were occupied in explaining to local people that they had not come for a fleeting period but were to be based there permanently. Every opportunity was taken to meet local inhabitants to emphasize that border troops were guarding the whole state border and protecting those people who lived in the border areas. Colonel Sergeyev was convinced that the continued series of meetings with the local population was instrumental in emphasizing the joint nature of the operation. Included in the explanations was the fact that whilst in the past Georgia had been part of the Soviet Union, this was no longer the case, for it was now an independent sovereign state with its own political

structure and establishment. Moreover, Colonel Sergeyev thought that the mutual understanding between border troops and local inhabitants had achieved a degree of cooperation which was bringing positive results and he was optimistic that even further development of cooperation could be achieved in the future.<sup>15</sup>

To some degree one cannot help but wonder about the extent and reliability of cooperation which Colonel Sergeyev said existed between locals and border troops during the initial period of mountain operations. First, one must have a degree of scepticism since the route along the Chanti-Argun that winter was reportedly crowded with women, children and the very old fleeing to Shatili from Groznyy on their way to Pankisi, including locals from the Argun gorge and the Chechen lowlands when the route was bombed by federal aviation. In 2007 locals in Itum-Kale described the chaotic scenes along the road:

*“When the second war began, life on the border came to a standstill. But the road to the Pankisi gorge, built by Maskhadov, from Itum-Kale was chock-a-block: hundreds of local inhabitants, having taken their belongings, fled across the border on this road from advancing federal forces. Then they say, across this border boyeviki went in both directions. Now along the border with Georgia, due to Russian border troops few risk using this road – neither from this nor from the other side. Things for mountain people are somewhat bad”.*<sup>16</sup>

Shatoy suffered extensive damage from federal forces’ bombardment; and the wholesale destruction of Komsomol’skoye with large losses of Chechen men at the beginning of March 2000 were scarcely acts which would endear the *federaly* to the Chechens. However, the question of Pankisi gorge harbouring fighters became a serious bone of contention between Moscow and Tbilisi, with the prospect of punitive action by Moscow in the period 2001 – 2003 in particular. Pankisi still remains an area which the federal forces, if given the opportunity, would be happy to cleanse.

### **Modernisation of State Border**

It should come as no surprise that the federal programme “*State Border of the Russian Federation*” 2003-2010 mirrors the thrust of the manpower programme for 2004-2007, envisaging not only the construction of new buildings and the creation of modern living accommodation for FPS servicemen and their families, but also the construction and fitting out new complexes with modern systems for improving security along the length of the state border.<sup>17</sup>

An article in “*Krasnaya Zvezda*” on 14 February 2008<sup>18</sup> covered a briefing by Lieutenant General Anatoliy Zabrodin, first deputy head of the Department of Border Protection of the Russian FPS, and head of its Operational-Organisational Directorate. The General confirmed that under the integrated plan most of the requirements for improving border security in the North Caucasus region had been completed prior to 2007. General Zabrodin remarked that the FPS organs had not lowered their general indicators of operational effectiveness. Over the last year their main efforts had concentrated on ensuring the state’s territorial integrity, its economic security, the campaign against terrorism and the prevention of cross-border movement by criminal groups.<sup>19</sup> In General Zabrodin’s opinion the most important indicator of effective border security was that over the last two years in succession there had been no breakthrough of the state border by illegal bandit formations. This was particularly relevant with regard to the North Caucasus, he

said, because after the unforgettable sortie of Ruslan Gelayev's band in December 2003, no bandit group had attempted to find a breach in the border.

However, the General felt it would be foolish to exclude the possibility of attempts to break through the state border. In further evidence of the effectiveness of border security, General Zabrodin cited an incident on the Karachayevo-Cherkess Republic's (KChR) sector of the Russo-Georgian border on 5 September 2007 when a FPS detachment came across two armed men, moving from the Georgian side toward the Russian side of the border. In their attempt to resist capture they were killed. There was an interesting side to this occurrence. One of them, it appeared, was a leader of an extremist-religious group in KChR who had participated in organising terrorist acts there, namely Rustam Ionov (*nom de guerre* Abu Bakar).<sup>20</sup> The men were found to be in possession of weapons, ammunition, anti-personnel mines, 15 kg of explosive material, detonators for explosive devices and training manuals on the use of explosives.<sup>21</sup>

A question concerning the extent of cooperation with border detachments of contiguous states in the North Caucasus elicited the reply from General Zabrodin that "*along the line of international collaboration of the FPS FSB Russia, and between border representatives of other sides working relationships had been formed, exchanges of information about threats to border security also took place*".<sup>22</sup> General Zabrodin provided an example of the degree of collaboration which exists between border service detachments and the problems that can arise through inexperience (see Box 1 below). The European observers he mentions could have been based at Omalo on the northeast border of Georgia under the aegis of the OSCE mission.

#### **Box 1 – Cross-Border Collaboration**<sup>23</sup>

In the North Caucasus there is a place situated at the junction of state borders of Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan and the administrative borders of Dagestan and Chechnya. Two high mountain villages are situated there. Around the border there is a small track. Local people periodically travel along it in the direction of the larger village, where there is a mosque, and shopping and trading take place. After some time the locals return home with the shopping loaded on their donkeys.

And here on one occasion the European observers who were monitoring the Russo-Georgian border sounded the alarm. According to their signal to General Zabrodin, who was commanding the North Caucasus regional directorate, a Georgian had reported the hardly likely fact that there were fifty or so *bojeviki* moving towards Russian territory. Zabrodin telephoned the border detachment and informed them that they were local inhabitants who always went to the mosque on Fridays in the larger village, but who could not return home because of the rain. It was all explained to the "vigilant" Europeans, after which the number of border violations observed by them sharply decreased ...

Sometimes, seemingly threatening events have very simple and innocent explanations.

Within the plan, according to General Zabrodin, out of 102 items, 81 had already been completed; for the remaining 21 painting and decorating was in the process of being finished.<sup>24</sup> New living accommodation for two to four people per room had been built. For every two rooms there was a shower and toilet, in each room a television. Officers and warrant officers receive a well built apartment. Repeating

a phrase which is now becoming quite commonplace in articles about improved accommodation for army and border service officers, General Zabrodin confessed “*When I look at what conditions officers in the border service will live in - I even wished to return to my youth as a lieutenant*”.<sup>25</sup>

Within the framework of the integrated plan and the first stage of reforming the border service in the Southern Federal District a complex of measures directed at the active construction of the infrastructure to improve and strengthen border protection had also been introduced. In the North Caucasus the construction of 72 border posts has been completed. They are all fitted out with modern technical border protection means and up to date weaponry, including military and special equipment. Several FPS detachments are situated on the border adjacent to Sochi in preparation for the approaching Winter Olympics (2014) to strengthen the border area there. Already reconnaissance has been conducted as a result of which plans have been defined, to the extent that “*the border in this sector will be reliably closed to all uninvited guests*”.<sup>26</sup>

In the North Caucasus as a whole plans are well advanced for the creation of special designation border troops – FPS spetsnaz. In each FPS directorate based on earlier motor-manoevre groups, mobile action detachments have been formed. Moreover, a regional FPS spetsnaz has been formed, whose zone of responsibility comprises the Russian land border with Azerbaijan and Georgia. It is planned to include coastal detachments from the Black Sea-Azov FPS Directorate and FPS Directorates from Kalmykia and Astrakhan oblast’.

In an interview in December 2007 regarding the changes that have taken place in the technical re-equipping of border troops organs following their incorporation into the Russian Federal Security Service, Major General Panchenko,<sup>27</sup> Head of the Directorate of Technical Development of the FPS stated that if one is talking about the technical means of protecting the border, then as a whole nothing has changed very much. The FPS now has the benefit of the departmental procurement procedures, and the technical-scientific potential of other FSB subunits. This arrangement, he said, had resolved difficult questions relating to the technical kitting out of security organs: much has been done to exclude duplication of resources, such as weapons, military and specialised equipment which in turn allows a more qualitative approach in the resolution of competing organisational problems and the conclusion of state contracts.<sup>28</sup>

Major General Panchenko emphasised that the search for up-to-date equipment for use in border protection was a constant and continuing process, though recently it had become more active. For instance in 2007 regarding technical work more than 10 different types of equipment had been taken into service, namely digital radar stations (RLS), control systems for land-border sectors, automatic and mobile radio posts, vehicles, heat seeking and signals equipment. Automated systems of control on independent maritime sectors of the border and in the North Caucasus were also being introduced. Work was continuing on the development of such systems on other land and maritime sectors of the border. At the end of 2007, he said, the engineer refurbishment of the state border project in the Caspian direction would be near completion. There, new technical observation posts (PTN) were to be brought into operation with complete life support systems. The PTN's information resources were to include new generation digital RLS and modern means of identification and recognition of targets: optical electronic, optical and heat-seeking means of observation; an automatic identification system, as well as modern secure communications.<sup>29</sup>



## **Federal Border Service - Chechnya**

The “*State Border of the Russian Federation*” (2003-2010) is designed to bring into effect a reliable “*belt of security*”<sup>30</sup> on the territory of Chechnya. The FPS' Chechen Republic Directorate has already created 10 new border detachment complexes. The “Meshekhi” and “Tongakhoy” complexes have been built and border guards are quartered there under conditions doubtless similar to the to the well-appointed barrack accommodation enjoyed by the two mountain brigades.<sup>31</sup> The FPS in the Chechen Republic was included in the federal programme for the transition to contract manning: with effect from 2006 only contract servicemen were being recruited into the directorate. Furthermore around 70% had signed a second contract. The pay of FPS soldiers and sergeants there was in the region of 30,000 roubles.<sup>32</sup>

From 2006 the FPS started to conduct briefings for the local population concerning the definition and parameters of the border zone itself, together with an introduction to border regime regulations. Colonel Sergeyev explained that in the mountains the border is determined not in width by kilometres but by firm, visible points, well marked on the ground, through which the border line is drawn. Warning signs have been established about movement in the border zone with reminders about the necessity of people being in possession of the relevant documents. Those who live in this zone are free to leave and enter according to the procedures laid down; there are crossing points on the state border. Colonel Sergeyev reiterated that people who did not have a stain on their reputation, have not been placed on the federal criminal wanted list and have not participated in terrorist acts against federal forces, namely peaceful citizens and representatives of local administrations can freely cross into Georgia and Azerbaijan to maintain family relations.<sup>33</sup>

However, along the Chechen sector of the state border there are no border crossing points in place. The only official crossing points are located in North Osetia-Alania (Verkhnyy Lars/Kazbegi) and in Dagestan despite the road which follows the course upstream of the Chanti-Argun river, via Itum-Kale to the Checheno-Georgian border some 6-7 miles kilometres from Shatili. It is important to remember that the isolated villages or settlements in the Russia/Georgia/Azerbaijan border areas are populated by a variety of ethnic groups. State border closures have a distinctly adverse effect on local populations.<sup>34</sup> The example cited in the IWPR's Caucasus Reporting Service concerning the situation at Verkhnyy Lars (see Box 2 below) in effect not only contradicted the information provided by Colonel Sergeyev, but also illustrates the fact that the situation for local people living along the border in some ways is worse than that portrayed in 2002.

**Box 2 – Effect of North Ossetian Border Closure**<sup>35</sup>

The Russian authorities closed the Verkhny Lars crossing point in June 2006. The closure hit inhabitants of border areas on either side of the crossing the hardest; previously they had the right to travel across without a visa by having a special slip in their passport. Larisa Pavliashvili has lived in a small house in the village of Balta in North Ossetia for five years, after moving back here with her two younger daughters from the Kazbegi region in Georgia, on the other side of the nearby mountains. Larisa, 46, has a tough life, supporting her grandmother and two older daughters who stayed behind in Kazbegi. Visiting them, at least, used to be easy enough – a mere 90 minute bus ride – and Larisa used to bring food to them. Now these relatives belong almost to a different world on the other side of a sealed border.

The situation is certainly somewhat different now compared to the time when Mikhail Lermontov wrote *“In Kobi we parted from Maksim Maksimych. I vividly galloped through the Terek and Dar’yal gorges, breakfasted in Kazbek, drank tea in Lars, and was in time for supper in Vladikavkaz.”*<sup>36</sup> This short passage from *“A Hero of Our Time”* stimulates and fires the imagination, but above all it concentrates the mind on how short the distances are between the populated points mentioned above and therefore the effect on families separated not so much by the Great Caucasus Range but by political regulation.

It should be remembered that whilst Itum-Kalinskiy rayon in Chechnya is perhaps the largest in area of all the rayony in Chechnya, it has the sparsest population. In the *“20 mountain villages there is only a population of about 3,000 people”*.<sup>37</sup> Perched almost on the border with Georgia, Itum-Kale is the highest rayon centre in Chechnya, but for the local school director Alima Akhmadova the town is a dreadful place. In 2007 she complained about the bad working conditions: *“yes, and in general about life in the rayon centre itself. There’s nothing for the young here. Neither studies, nor leisure pursuits, we don’t even have a sports-hall. In general nothing that was here before the war.”*<sup>38</sup> This echoes a 2001 article: *“here children do not go to school because in the course of the last 10 years after the coming to power of Dudayev, schools did not work”*.<sup>39</sup>

Akhmadova lamented the fact that they were always getting mixed up in wars. She went on to add that life in Itum-Kale and the surrounding villages slumped with the fall of the Soviet government at the beginning of the 1990s. Collective farms were closed, where the menfolk were shepherds and the women grew tobacco. The cultivation of tobacco was a very lucrative livelihood, although not harmless. The Soviet government finished, the Dudayev regime came to power, and mountain people were left without work and without a working wage.<sup>40</sup>

The youth are unemployed; they do nothing, according to Said-Abdul Akhmadov, head of Itum-Kale village council of elders. *“In the council of elders we watch over them so that the young observe our customs and traditions, this is our main task.”* Asked if this was successful, Akhmadov replied: *“We try our utmost, the young listen to us. You understand that this is a mountain territory. Here there are very great problems with employment, with studying. There is the danger that unemployed young people can go away into the mountains. We identify those who go off into the forest.”*<sup>41</sup>

The question of how the local population managed to live alongside the Russian military brought replies that the people who lived in the mountains had their own

views and understandings as mountain people, but it was difficult for others from outside to understand them. Several older residents in and around Itum-Kale had never even learnt Russian.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, certain local people had found some form of dialogue with the military. From the early days of the second campaign the federal forces had carried out substantial construction work in Itum-Kalinskiy rayon, building barracks, bases and training townships. All the construction work was for the FPS detachment at Itum-Kale, which by all accounts was going to remain there for a long time. The military themselves did not bring in builders. There was a surplus of local labour, and the majority of mountain people were by profession stonemasons and carpenters, who became employed in the building work, earning up 15,000 roubles per month, which for a Chechen was a huge amount.<sup>43</sup> However, there were not enough vacancies for everyone, which meant that the younger Chechens were drawn to Groznyy.

### **Federal Border Service - Dagestan and Caspian Seaboard**

The diversity of tasks included within the Dagestan FPS Directorate's area of responsibility is reflected in the fact that in terms of personnel numbers and services it is the largest in the Southern Federal District. Whilst the federal border authorities responsible for Chechnya only have land borders to consider, the Dagestani authorities have the task of not only guarding mountainous border areas, but also monitoring the Caspian seaboard which includes shipping and passengers arriving from the other four Caspian riparian states. Moreover, the FPS Dagestan also have a responsibility for protecting maritime biological resources in the Caspian, hunting down poachers of sturgeon laden with black caviar. Some of these operations entail cooperation and coordination with the FPS Directorates from Kalmykia and Astrakhan oblast'.

As in Chechnya, the Dagestan FPS Directorate has been engaged in the completion of the 2003-2010 programme in constructing border installations. By the end of 2007 there were 18 detachments and by the end of 2008 a further 10 will be brought into operation, including new border service installations along the Caspian coast. In the Caspian Sea, the FPS has two guard ships "Mangust" and "Mustang", together with a passenger-cargo vessel and several tens of motor launches. Furthermore several 'ekranoplan' air/sea craft have also been allotted: with seating for a dozen men.<sup>44</sup> Two crewmen with a section of border guards might stand a greater chance of apprehending the *baydy*,<sup>45</sup> the very fast craft belonging to the Caspian poacher fraternity.

As a result of the structural reorganization effected on 1 September 2007 four new FPS detachments have been created, namely in Khunzakh, Akhty, Derbent and Kaspiysk. Box 3 below provides an outline of their tasks.

**Box 3 – Tasks of Four New FPS Detachments**<sup>46</sup>

The FPS detachments at Khunzakh and Akhty<sup>47</sup> carry out tasks in the difficult mountainous areas where the international borders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Georgia meet: these areas contain the high mountain passes which border violators, mainly members of illegal bandit formations, have in the past and continue to attempt to use. [These two detachments will also have the support of the recently deployed 33<sup>rd</sup> Detached Motor Rifle Brigade (Mountain) if required.]

The FPS detachment at Derbent protects the low-lying coastal sector of the border with Azerbaijan and is close to the border crossing points at Tagirkent-Kazmalyar, Novofil' and Yaraz-Kalmalyar on the north-south road and rail trunk routes to and from Baku.

The Kaspiysk FPS covers a 600 kilometre sector along the littoral of the Caspian Sea. Moreover, the Kaspiysk FPS also has a responsibility for protecting the Caspian's bio-resources. In earlier times the border service had a squadron (*brigada*) of guard ships, which are now in service in the town of Kaspiysk. Amongst the tasks of the FPS based at Kaspiysk are the interdiction and apprehension of illegal entry from the sea of contraband, undesirable elements and illegal immigrants.

**Gamekeepers versus Poachers**

Apart from the difficulty of curtailing the activities of poachers there are two obstacles which need to be sorted out: one at the international government level, namely the lack of agreement amongst the five Caspian riparian states about extent of national territorial limits and secondly the question of widespread corruption and the huge amounts of money gained from the illegal slaughter of sturgeon and sale of caviar. As the first deputy head of the FPS Directorate FSB Russia (Republic of Dagestan) Colonel Igor' Tsvetkov admitted during an interview in November 2007, to some extent the fact that no agreement has been achieved between the five Caspian states on the status and division of resources in the Caspian Sea has tended to make the struggle for the preservation and protection of fish stocks that much harder, despite the second summit of Caspian states in Teheran on 22 October 2007.<sup>48</sup>

The first Caspian summit in Ashkhabad in April 2002 had been equally unsuccessful on the subject of division of the Caspian Sea. In 2007 Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan proposed to divide the sea floor into national sectors through the median line, but allow common usage of the waters and surface. Iran and Turkmenistan were not in agreement with this, insisting on the division of the Caspian Sea's surface. Then there is disagreement between Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan on the extent of national coastal territorial zones. Russia wants a 15 mile zone which would include economic interests. Azerbaijan on the other hand proposes to increase its zone to 40-45 miles. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan during the summit proposed a 25 mile economic zone.

A problem also remains on the distribution of fish quotas. According to existing rules, Iran gets 45% of sturgeon, Russia 27%. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have called for a revision of their quotas. As President Nazarbayev stated: "*The Kazakhstan quota does not meet existing realities! Treaties between Iran and the former USSR have gone into history. Now there are five sovereign states!*"<sup>49</sup> Perhaps for Russia the most important outcome of the summit was its suggestion to create a

new economic organization with the participation of the other Caspian riparian states which could reinforce Russia's influence in the Caspian, with the aim of giving Russia the right to veto Western attempts to lay pipelines on the floor of the Caspian.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps it might also strengthen protection for biological resources, through the creation of a joint naval force.

In Russia, attempts were made to introduce a state monopoly for the sale of black caviar in 1995. Although discussions were held at the highest level, the sturgeon have practically disappeared, "*but Russians understand it is meant to be impossible to eat black caviar. But if a person really wants to eat black caviar – then it is possible.*"<sup>51</sup> A black market for caviar operates in the Southern Federal District: expensive cartons decorated with the "national brand" are sold under the counter in supermarkets and bazaars. To buy caviar wholesale is also possible through the internet. The state's attempts to reduce the flow of caviar are ineffectual.<sup>52</sup>

Caspian fish poachers not only have satellite telephones, but also satellite navigation capability. Nets are laid using satellite navigation; they submerge them so that it is almost impossible to spot them. Poachers mark their chart with the net's location, or more likely they record the latitude and longitude coordinates of the nets separately. FPS vessels are equipped to trawl over the areas where poachers' nets are likely to be laid. Caspian poachers in the main use small craft such as a 12-25 metres long *bayda* built to an Iranian design. A typical *bayda* is powered by two to four imported engines of some 200-250 horsepower that allow it to develop speeds of up to 100 km/h. The draught of these boats is no more than 20 cm. Poachers take with them one to two tonnes of fuel and stay at sea for several days. Backup groups and reserve manpower remain ashore. On 5 November 2007 the FPS apprehended eight such *bayda* and 15 outboard motors/engines. In comparison with 2006 when the FPS caught some 200 *baydas*, in 2007 around 500 were held. Around 100 km of nets were taken and thousands of hooks were seized.<sup>53</sup>

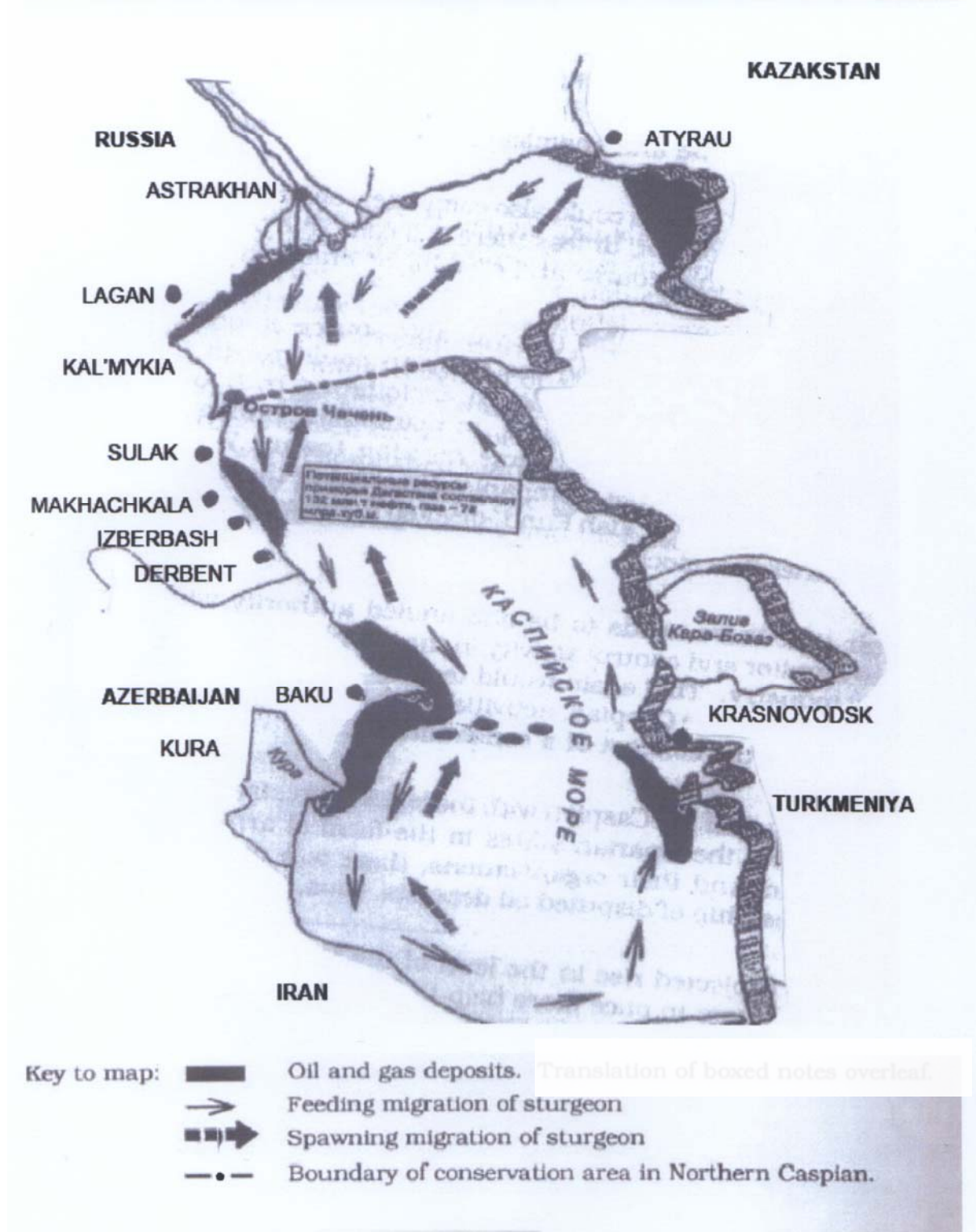
Moreover, if a poacher is apprehended and one head of a sturgeon is found in his possession, that is a criminal offence. In the zone beginning from the land border with Azerbaijan from Derbent and Sulak boat motor engines with a capacity of 200-250 horsepower are not forbidden. A nature reserve is situated from Sulak north to Kalmykia, where since the 1970s engines above 25 horsepower have been forbidden. Naturally poachers use much more powerful engines and build their bases in the conservation zone, amongst dense reeds: the width of the reed zone is between three and five kilometres. Besides, according to the state border law boats must enter the sea from open anchorages or moorings, and there are no such anchorages in the nature reserve zone. In the end poachers are fined in the order of 500 roubles: for having illegally powerful engines and violating the laws of going out to sea.<sup>54</sup> Map 2 shows the boundary of the conservation area together with the feeding and spawning migratory movements of sturgeon.<sup>55</sup>

Map 2 shows that both the migratory feeding and spawning movements keep close to the Dagestan – Kal'mylian coastline. Some 15 years ago sturgeon used to spawn in the River Volga above the Volgograd dam (from Volgograd to Chernyy Yar were natural spawning grounds), the young fish would slip down into the Caspian where they would mature (see feeding route in map) and get ready for spawning in the conservation area in the northern sector of the Caspian. Then they would swim up along the Volga through Tsaganaman (Kal'mykia) to Saratov and even as far as Kalinin. The poacher catches the sturgeon with nets and slaughters the female fish, thus decreasing the overall population and the amount of caviar on the market

but also increases the price of black caviar astronomically. Fish farms produce a certain amount but not enough to satisfy demand.<sup>56</sup>

**Map 2**

**Migratory Movement of Sturgeon (Osetr) and Caspian Water Movement**



The illegal sale of black caviar happens only in Dagestan or in Astrakhan. Luk'yanchikova's research revealed that on the territory of Kalmykia there was not

one shop, nor a market where you could find black caviar or sturgeon. In fishing villages it was possible, under the counter. From time immemorial it had been camouflaged. However in Astrakhan, both were sold quite openly – fresh or smoked. In seaside Dagestan there is naturally more.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

President Putin's visit on 4 February 2008 to Botlikh brought a degree of symmetry to his period as the Russian head of state. It will be remembered that Vladimir Putin became prime minister on 9 August 1999 and flew to Dagestan on 27 August, where he spent three hours at Botlikh assessing the situation following the 'invasion' of Shamil' Basayev and Emir Khattab. Premier Putin evaluated the damage to the infrastructure and local living conditions, authorized funds for repair and restoration and made appraisals of other important requirements for the rehabilitation of the 12,000 people made homeless as a result of the 'invasion', subsequent fighting and bombardment by artillery and aviation.

On 4 February 2008, as President Putin looked around Botlikh, now blessed with new barracks for 33 Separate Motor Rifle Brigade (Mountain), together with border improvements along the Great Caucasus Range, he could conceivably have felt that the border situation had improved somewhat over the last eight years.

## Endnotes

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<sup>10</sup> See C W Blandy "Pankisskoye Gorge: Residents, Refugees & Fighters" P37 CSRC March 2002.

<sup>11</sup> See C W Blandy "Dagestan: The Storm – Part 1" P30 CSRC March 2000; "Dagestan: The Storm – Part 2" P32 CSRC June 2000; "Dagestan: The Storm – Part 3" P33 CSRC October 2000.

<sup>12</sup> See Blandy "Pankisskoye Gorge: Residents, Refugees & Fighters" P37 CSRC, March 2002, pages 10 to 12.

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