

# **The Russian Military Campaign in the North Caucasus:**

## **Is a Victory in Sight?**

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## **Introduction**

At the start of the Year 2005, propositions about a possible Russian military victory in Chechnya and a military-political victory in the struggle against terrorism in the North Caucasus would have been truly hypothetical, unless sponsored by Moscow's propaganda machine. In mid-2006, they might still appear far-fetched – but nevertheless deserving a serious assessment, providing that the sponsorship of the abovementioned kind is not a factor. The trajectory of the conflict-generating political transformations in this region has never been straight in the last 15 years, since Chechnya proclaimed its independence in September 1991. In the last two years, perhaps starting with the Beslan tragedy, the sum total of the outcomes of continuing violent clashes and incremental political steps has amounted to a quite significant shift of momentum that has acquired a pronounced de-escalatory character. It remains uneven and uncertain, and during the first post-Beslan year it was barely distinguishable as political attention was focused on the spectacular political crises known as 'colored revolutions'. The attack on Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria on 13 October 2005 marked an intersection of the Islamic guerilla and popular uprising, which could have opened new avenues for both across the region but in fact has narrowed the paths of resistance. The situation, nevertheless, remained quite volatile and many experts, including this author, warned about the hidden tensions that could have resulted in new explosions.

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The real explosion, however, happened on July 10 and among a dozen or so of the victims was Shamil Basaev, the legendary elusive terrorist who had become not just a source of inspiration but also the main driver for, and the crucial connection between multiple North Caucasian Islamic/terrorist/criminal networks.<sup>2</sup> His death, most probably accidental, reinforced the trend of declining terrorist activity and de-escalation of overlapping conflicts, which now requires a new evaluation.

## **The Decade of Patience and Resilience**

The reference point in analyzing the security developments in the North Caucasus is inevitably the violent turmoil of the early 1990s when the region was engulfed by instability: Chechnya effectively seceded in September 1991; North Ossetia was deeply involved in the armed clashes in South Ossetia from the start of 1990 to June 1992 and in ethnic cleansing in its own Prigorodny district in October-November 1992; Abkhazia was rescued from an attack by Georgian para-militaries by volunteers organized by the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus in September 1992 and achieved a decisive victory in October 1993.<sup>3</sup> Russian military interventions in South Ossetia, Prigorodny district, and Abkhazia were more impromptu responses rather than elements of a pro-active strategy, while Chechnya, remarkably, was left alone.

The situation started to change since late 1993, after President Yeltsin had established his grasp on power with the help of several tanks; at that time, most Caucasian conflicts were 'frozen' by ceasefires and Russian peacekeepers, while the unruly Confederation was dissolved.<sup>4</sup> Chechnya emerged as the major source of regional instability spread by smuggling and banditry, kidnappings and plane hijackings. Russian military invasion in December 1994 was certainly a

huge political mistake, but it did help in stabilizing the region and, in retrospect, it appears quite remarkable how little direct spill-over was produced by the high-intensity military operations of 1995-1996. Even the penetrating rebel raids in June 1995 and January 1996 were aimed at civilian 'soft targets' and not at disrupting the vulnerable rear echelons of the 50,000-strong grouping of federal forces in Chechnya.

The end of the First Chechen War in the last day of August 1996 provided a short respite in the hostilities but in the matter of a few months the drivers of instability re-emerged resembling quite closely the pattern of 1994. It was perfectly possible for Moscow to cut Chechnya out as an unpleasant reminder about a humiliating failure but the North Caucasus was left exposed to the enterprises of the victorious warlords. The incursion of Basaev's '*mujahideens*' into Dagestan in summer 1999 generated, clearly against his newly-born Islamic vision, a remarkably strong defensive response in the Dagestani society. That response went beyond expelling Basaev's units and determined the interruption of most channels that could have transmitted the resonance from the Second Chechen War.<sup>5</sup> That made it easier for Moscow to implement its strategy for isolating the war zone and cutting Chechnya out of all regional interactions, so that it could be dealt with inside a carefully maintained 'black hole'.

At that time, Moscow had only limited resources to invest in enhancing political stability in the republics of the North Caucasus, so the main emphasis was placed on securing dependency of their presidents who were seen as 'guarantors' of loyalty of local elites. Combined with gradually increasing subsidies and transfers from the federal budget, that strategy initially appeared successful and provided for minimizing the impact of occasional terrorist attacks and other 'disturbances' emanating out of Chechnya. Following that approach, President Ruslan Aushev, who managed to keep his Ingushetia out of the harm's way during a turbulent decade, was forced out of office in late 2001 and a more controllable Murat Zyazikov was installed through a shamelessly rigged presidential election in May 2002.<sup>6</sup> In Dagestan, Moscow became reluctant to accept the traditional way of balancing interests in the State Council where political clans representing various ethnic groups engaged in delicate bargaining, and put the stake on this Council's chairman Magometali Magomedov, treating him as de-facto president. Both choices appeared entirely logical and rational, and both had disastrous consequences.

### **The Insecurity Complex Takes Shape**

The significant increase of terrorist attacks across the North Caucasus since 2002 (the attached Table provides some data on that) did not alarm Putin's team since the priority issue was the threat to Moscow exemplified by the *Nord-Ost* hostage drama in October 2002. Putin demanded from the High Command to concentrate on countering terrorism, a task for which the Russian Armed Forces were quite unsuitable.<sup>7</sup> The 'top brass' suggested instead to the inexperienced Commander-in-Chief to focus on the operations against terrorist bases outside Russia's territory, for instance, in the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia.<sup>8</sup> They promised to minimize high risks of such operations by deploying long-range high-precision missiles, an idea that clearly captured Putin's imagination.<sup>9</sup>

As for the North Caucasus, the key point was to reduce the spill-over from Chechnya and the newly-adopted policy of ‘Chechenization’ was supposed to provide for that. The spill-over actually increased, not as a result of any escalation of combat operations but primarily because of the gradual but accumulating growth of the explosive potential in the region itself. That trend involved two main elements – the degradation of the ruling regimes and the spread of discontent in the societies. The first one was directly related to the Kremlin’s stake on loyal rulers who were materially rewarded with resources to be distributed among their clans. The rapidly maturing neo-patrimonial regimes not only featured staggering levels of corruption but also expanded their control over illegal activities so that local law enforcement structures became undistinguishable from criminal groupings.

The second element was less visible and hidden by official ‘life-is-good’ reporting, but it manifested itself in the growth of various self-help networks that often acquired Islamic character and resulted in the spread of ‘alternative’ and, in many cases, radicalized Islam. Ingushetia, where President Murat Zyazikov failed to build any support base, and Dagestan, where Magometali Magomedov presided over a spectacularly corrupt system of clan patronage, had the worst combination of destabilizing factors and formed one ‘insecurity complex’ together with Chechnya.

The scale of accumulated troubles was revealed by three consecutive crises in mid-2004. First, an explosion in Grozny on 9 May claimed the life of President Akhmad Kadyrov and thus undermined a key pillar of the strategy of ‘Chechenization’. Then, on 22 June, a rebel unit conducted a night raid on Nazran, Ingushetia and managed to kill more than a hundred of policemen and soldiers without any organized resistance.<sup>10</sup> Finally, on 1 September, a unit of some 35-50 rebels seized more than a thousand hostages in a school in Beslan, North Ossetia and the poorly prepared assault on 3 September resulted in more than 350 casualties.<sup>11</sup> The resonance of that horrible massacre was so heavy that Putin could no longer hide behind denials of the spiraling crisis in the North Caucasus.<sup>12</sup> In North Ossetia, the leadership of President Aleksandr Dzasokhov was deeply compromised; the weakness of federal control over Ingushetia became apparent; and the suppressed Ingush-Ossetian conflict over the Prigorodny district threatened to explode with a new force. In the emotional speech resembling Stalin’s famous ‘Brothers and sisters’, Putin re-defined his ‘counter-terrorist operation’ as ‘war’ and hinted that the West was behind the terrorist enemy; however, the proposed measures for achieving a victory, including the direct appointment of governors and republican presidents, appeared strikingly inadequate.<sup>13</sup> One meaningful thing he did, nevertheless, was the appointment of Dmitry Kozak as his envoy to the Southern District with expanded authority.

### **Kozak and GrOU from Cherkessk to Nalchik**

Just a month in the job, Kozak had to face a sharp and unexpected crisis when an angry crowd stormed the government building in Cherkessk, the capital of Karachaevo-Cherkessia and demanded the dismissal of President Mustafa Batdyev. That relatively peaceful rebellion was triggered by a ‘business conflict’ involving Batdyev’s son-in-law, who had performed ‘hostile takeover’ of a cement plant by inviting its owner to a meeting and murdering him together with six other people. Kozak managed to defuse the explosion of public anger by promising full investigation – but got a good measure of the depth of the problems with corruption, nepotism,

and office abuse. He focused his efforts on reformatting the most grossly distorted structures of power seeking to prevent another eruption, which appeared quite urgent on the background of the 'orange revolution' gathering speed in Ukraine.<sup>14</sup>

Kozak's authority did not extend over the units and command structures of several different 'armies' deployed in the North Caucasus and engaged in various counter-terrorist activities. In order to improve, or even enforce, coordination between them, special Groups of Operational Control (Gruppa Operativnogo Upravleniya – GrOU) were created in each region of the Southern District (except Chechnya) in late 2004. They included representatives from every military, para-military and special services structure and were formally under the Interior Ministry but in fact the FSB was in charge.<sup>15</sup> In early 2005, these GrOU launched a series of manhunts involving hundreds of soldiers and policemen and staging assaults on suspected terrorist cells, quite often in urban quarters, with heavy arms including tanks.<sup>16</sup> Such indiscriminate 'special operations' sparked some protests, so in March 2005, the Federation Council approved revisions to the Law on Defense that removed any restrictions on the use of armed forces in counter-terrorist operations. Neither 'collateral damage' nor legal issues could have prevented the enthusiastic 'warriors' from making triumphant reports to the Commander-in-Chief; receiving one of those from Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliev, Putin reprimanded him for using confusing terms like '*jamaat*' and ordered to call terrorists by their real name.<sup>17</sup> That desire to simplify complex social reality translated directly into the strategy of achieving a military victory over the terrorists by exterminating their networks.

Kozak was extremely worried about that militarization of Moscow's counter-terrorist policy in the North Caucasus since the easily available evidence pointed to a further spread of *jammats* after every 'successful' operation.<sup>18</sup> He conducted an in-depth analysis of the crisis in Dagestan and concluded that urgent and sustained political measures were necessary in order to break the grasp on power of entrenched political clans, while the on-going escalation of military operations would inevitably lead to 'the appearance of a macro-region of social, political and economic instability'.<sup>19</sup> The most immediate task was to remove Magomedov from the position of power, but Putin, paying an extra-short secretive visit to Dagestan on 15 July 2005, found no signs of problems reaching a 'critical level' or any risk of a 'break-up of the republic'. Ignoring Kozak's warning about the risks of 'pushing the problems deeper inside' by applying forceful methods, Putin promised more troops and insisted that the southern borders of Dagestan should be sealed off in order to prevent the penetration of rebels towards the resorts of the Krasnodar kray, where 'millions of Russians are making their holidays'.<sup>20</sup>

That self-deceiving net assessment of the terrorist threat brought a new round of escalation of clan warfare and violent unrest in Dagestan.<sup>21</sup> The next major terrorist attack happened, however, against Kozak's premonition, in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria, on 13 October 2005. Unlike other raids, this one involved only local residents and from the military point of view, was completely hopeless: isolated groups of 10-15 rebels attacked in broad daylight such heavily guarded targets as police precincts, OMON headquarters and FSB centers. The local GrOU was able to mobilize during the first couple of hours some 3,500 troops that hunted down most of the poorly trained 'terrorists'.<sup>22</sup> While the FSB and other agencies involved in the struggle against terrorism basked in the glory of their 'victory', Kozak pointed out that the attack was launched by the *jammata* 'Yarmuk' that had been reported as destroyed in early 2005. He also gathered

convincing evidence about the repressions against Muslim communities that had been portrayed as 'extremist' and in fact driven to a hopeless rebellion.<sup>23</sup> Working together with Arsen Kanokov, the new president of Kabardino-Balkaria, Kozak was able to convince Putin that the crisis had deep roots in the resentful society and had to be addressed with political rather than military measures.

### **Signs of an Uncertain Stabilization**

Putin's new reading of the situation informed his short address to the Chechen parliament during the blitz-visit to Grozny on 12 December 2005, when he emphasized Russia's role as the 'most reliable, trustworthy, and consistent protector of the interests of the Islamic world' and argued that 'those on the other side' were driven by a 'distorted interpretation of the Koran'.<sup>24</sup> He even mentioned 'compromises', which marked a sharp difference from his straightforward 'go-get-them' orders earlier that year. The Year 2006 started, however, with yet another massive manhunt in the mountains of Dagestan with the use of artillery and aviation.<sup>25</sup> The situation showed few signs of improvement and the priorities of Russian policy were hanging in balance; quite possibly, it was the lack of success in the winter operation that strengthened Kozak's hand.

His first breakthrough achievement was the long-overdue removal of Magomedov and the approval of Mukhu Aliev as the President of Dagestan on 20 February 2006.<sup>26</sup> The next significant success was sacking Kabardino-Balkaria's Interior Minister Khachim Shogenov in March, which helped in discontinuing the brutal repressions against the Muslims who followed the unofficial or 'alternative' Islam and were treated collectively as terrorist suspects. Kozak followed up on that in June proposing Andrei Yarin, who had worked in his staff, as the prime minister of Kabardino-Balkaria, and in July replacing notoriously corrupt prosecutor-general in Dagestan Imam Yarialiev. Cadre reshuffling would not have achieved much of a stabilizing effect in itself but it was accompanied by a significant increase of funding from the federal budget, which the new leaders were able to distribute in a more efficient way. Through the first half of the year, the situation in the region still remained highly unstable since many trouble-spots continued to reproduce tensions.<sup>27</sup> For that matter, Kozak worked closely with Taimuraz Mamsurov, the new leader of North Ossetia seeking to prevent any escalation of the Ingush-Ossetian discord focused on the Prigorodny district and much aggravated by the Beslan tragedy.<sup>28</sup>

What made the most significant impact on the advancement of Kozak's plans and more broadly on the security situation in the North Caucasus was the gradual but steady decrease of hostilities in Chechnya. The January report of the Interior Ministry on the big reduction of terrorist attacks in Chechnya in 2005 (95 as compared with 214 in 2004) did not appear credible, particularly since the statistics on casualties showed no reduction at all.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, in the course of the year the difference with the familiar pattern of ambushes, shootouts and explosions has become increasingly apparent.<sup>30</sup> Many factors contributed to this de-escalation, including the 'war fatigue', but the main driving force has certainly been the consolidation of power in the hands of Ramzan Kadyrov, who has succeeded in recruiting hundreds of former rebels into his 'guard'. The Russian military have been eager to delegate the responsibility for patrolling and policing to

these para-military units that are now performing key functions in enforcing order. That has made it possible to reduce the grouping of federal forces in Chechnya and even disband the Regional Operational Headquarters setting instead a smaller HQs in Chechnya.<sup>31</sup>

The sustained decline of the terrorist threat and particularly the absence of any terrorist attacks in Moscow since mid-2004 convinced the FSB that the risk of taking prime responsibility for combating terrorism had become politically acceptable. In February 2006, a new super-structure – the National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAC) – was created by the presidential decree under the chairmanship of Nikolai Patrushev, the head of the FSB. This seemingly illogical ‘reorganization’ secured for the FSB more efficient levers of control over other agencies and granted it privileged access to significant new funding. Presiding over the mostly virtual ‘war’ against the residual ‘terror’, Patrushev with few doubts claimed credit for the elimination of Shamil Basaev asserting that the explosion was not an accident but a carefully planned ‘special operation’ that prevented an attack aimed at derailing the G8 Strelna summit.<sup>32</sup>

Basaev’s death, coming less than a month after the death of Abdul-Khalim Saidulaev, the formal leader of the Chechen rebels, signified a possibly crucial watershed in the campaign of violent unrest and terrorism across the North Caucasus. He personified the cause of defiant resistance but what was more significant, used his authority for connecting various terrorist cells, Islamic networks and criminal groupings. The FSB is quite aware that in the absence of such a key organizing center the capacity of isolated groups for staging a high-impact attack has diminished and so claims a larger role in directing the activities of anti-terrorist commissions and GrOU (now subordinated to them) in every republic.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the overall responsibility for coordinating the activities of federal forces in Chechnya remains squarely on the Interior Ministry, which faces a hard challenge to keep the maverick Kadyrov in check.<sup>34</sup>

### **Prospects, Conditions, and Spoilers**

Examining the trajectory of stabilization in the North Caucasus, the region that has for a decade and a half lived up to the reputation of ‘tinderbox’, is certainly a counter-intuitive analytical exercise, perhaps to the extreme.<sup>35</sup> It appears possible, nevertheless, to outline the broad conditions that appear necessary for sustaining this very recent trend and to identify possible spoilers. The first among them is the continuation of the political efforts organized by Dmitry Kozak towards the removal from power of the most corrupt political clans and building some new confidence in the republican leadership. His most immediate task in that is finding a suitable replacement for the completely compromised President Batdyev in Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, while further down the list is the problem of easing out of office President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov who has been ruling impoverished Kalmykia as his personal fiefdom for the last 13 years. Engaging in vicious intrigues around every replacement, Kozak needs to retain President Putin’s personal trust and a direct access to the Kremlin, which inevitably becomes complicated as the problem of selecting and installing a successor looms large.

The foundation of Kozak’s ‘cadre management’ policy is the huge volume of financial resources provided by Moscow – and in the immediate future this foundation appears solid, as the 2007 federal budget delivered to the State Duma in late August promises nice increases in transfers and subsidies. There is, however, a serious problem hidden in this generosity as the inflow of

federal 'petro-roubles' makes bureaucratic distribution by far the most profitable 'business' and in fact stifles entrepreneurial activity and normal economic development. Putin apparently intends to solve this problem by ordering Russia's largest companies to invest in the region but that quasi-GOSPLAN type of dirigisme will hardly improve the investment climate.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, Moscow has effectively withdrawn its invitation to the EU to establish a political dialogue on the problems of the North Caucasus supported by a program of European economic investments.<sup>37</sup>

One possible spoiler for these efforts could be the plan for merging tiny Adygeya with surrounding Krasnodar kray, which is strongly pushed by governor Aleksandr Tkachev; it is also supported by Kozak who seeks to get rid of the ineffectual President Khazret Sovmen and assumes that the Russian majority could provide a more reliable political base than the 'Cherkess Congress'.<sup>38</sup> Sovmen's term expires in January 2007 and his replacement with an 'outsider' who would be less hostile to the merger plan could spark a crisis that might resonate from Abkhazia to Chechnya.<sup>39</sup> Another and a more 'direct impact' spoiler is the situation in Ingushetia, where – even according to official statistics – the number of terrorist attacks in 2006 has doubled comparing to 2005. President Zyazikov is completely isolated in the republican political elite and relies exclusively on police and para-militaries that are hated more than feared and targeted in incessant ambushes and shootouts. Kozak's ability to control the distribution of federal funds is quite limited and he cannot touch Zyazikov who was chosen personally by Putin, while the FSB pursues the 'deterrence-by-punishment' strategy through the republican GrOU. Ingushetia appears far closer to an armed rebellion in the near future than Dagestan.<sup>40</sup>

A major condition for continuing stabilization in the North Caucasus is further progress in suppressing hostilities and advancing reconstruction of Chechnya. The stake on granting expanding powers in enforcing order and unlimited control over distribution of resources to Kadyrov Jr. has proven efficient in the short term but it directly undermines Moscow's plans for sustained 'normalization' of the situation in the republic. Ramzan's power rests on the armed units of *kadyrovtsy* recruited mostly from former rebels who have accepted his personal guarantees and have no trust in the federal amnesty. These gangs are far from reliable allies for the Russian troops, but Kadyrov Jr. pushes hard for the withdrawal of 'redundant' Interior forces and military units and even advocates for 'hot-pursuit' and 'search-and-destroy' operations in neighboring republics who are extremely wary of *kadyrovtsy*.<sup>41</sup> After the clash in Borozdinovskaya in mid-2005 and the explosion in the battalion 'Vostok' barracks in February 2006, Kadyrov Jr. has managed to normalize relations with the Chechen units that are subordinated to the Russian 42<sup>nd</sup> Division and 46<sup>th</sup> Brigade, but remains very suspicious about the operations that are conducted outside his authority.<sup>42</sup> It might become significant in this respect that only Alu Alkhanov, the President of Chechnya, is a member of the republican operational HQs led by Deputy Interior Minister Arkady Edelev.

As Prime Minister, Kadyrov Jr. insists on exclusive control over the disbursement of federal funding for reconstruction, which was increased five times in 2006 comparing to 2004, so that the official goal of rebuilding everything damaged by the wars by the year 2010 has become his personal PR campaign.<sup>43</sup> In many ways, this over-concentration of power and nascent 'personality cult' are incompatible with the Chechen traditions and the system of power balance between various clans; Kadyrov Jr. is not trusted either by groups loyal to Russia, or by diaspora



entrepreneurs looking for tapping into federal funds, or by former rebels. Even in Moscow he is increasingly seen as a self-assertive and uncontrollable upstart who may potentially turn to the separatist course; it still remains possible to pretend that Ramzan is a key part of the solution and not of a problem but there are hardly any serious doubts about the name of the potential spoiler.

The problem of terrorism has during the last couple of years become an issue separate of the ‘no-war’ in Chechnya and keeping it under control is certainly one of the main conditions for building stability in the North Caucasus. The intensity and character of terrorist attacks in this region vary and evolve, and the official data remains quite unreliable – but even a general overview of the most significant acts of terror could provide some indications about possible turns of events in the near future.<sup>44</sup> The attached table lists 17 attacks in the North Caucasus (outside Chechnya) that generated the most resonance, imperfect as this criteria certainly is.<sup>45</sup> The first impression is that surprisingly few of these attacks were directed against military assets and even those few were aimed at ‘soft targets’ like hospitals or barracks. Another feature that does not fit the pattern observed in the global war against terror is that the rich infrastructure of tourism – from Sochi sea beaches to ski resorts near Elbrus – was not attacked once. Putin mentioned this threat making a brief appearance in Dagestan in mid-2005 (perhaps reflecting on his own retreat in Krasnaya Polyana) but even small-scale violence against tourists has been in fact extremely rare. Yet another and even more counter-intuitive feature has been the lack of any significant attacks on the highly vulnerable energy infrastructure.<sup>46</sup> There were several explosions on the ‘non-strategic’ gas pipelines in Dagestan but overall the January 2006 blasts that left Georgia without gas and electricity for a week (No. 17) stand out as the exception that proves the general rule.

It appears possible to suggest that as long as terrorism in the North Caucasus remains limited to targeting primarily local law enforcement, commercial interests and mid-level officials – it would not interrupt or adversely affect the general trend of stabilization. It would even answer the FSB interests in keeping the system of operational HQs and GrOW actively functioning as means to control the local authorities and maintain own profile. If however, the ‘strategic’ Tengiz-Novorossiisk pipeline or the oil terminal in Novorossiisk or Tuapse is targeted, or if a series of explosions hits some tourist hotels, the delicate balance of stabilization may be instantly upset.

One particular aspect of the terrorism/counter-terrorism interplay appears significant – but often overlooked. The issue of external funding for terrorist networks has been so grossly abused by Russian official propaganda that the rational point in it has all but disappeared. However, the death of Shamil Basaev would not close the issue altogether; much depends upon the unpredictable developments in various overlapping crises from Afghanistan to Gaza that both attract and generate resources available for trans-national Islamic extremism. For that matter, the demand for seasoned fighters with experience in Chechnya have quite possibly been boosted by the war in Lebanon, escalation of inter-communal strife in Iraq and Taliban’s revival in Afghanistan, while the supply of funds for the Chechen cause has probably shrunk. For that matter, Russia remains fundamentally interested in the success of coalition efforts at state-building in Afghanistan and in US ability to contain the self-destructive hostilities in Iraq, while Moscow’s actual stance in the global struggle with Islamic terrorism has become increasingly ‘neutral’.<sup>47</sup>

One last condition for stability in the North Caucasus that could be briefly touched upon in this paper involves Georgia and, more specifically, its break-away provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. To all intents and purposes, these quasi-states have for the last 12-15 years been a part of the North Caucasian ‘insecurity complex’ – and the interplay between their conflicts with Tbilisi, Russian-Georgian relations and the normalization in the North Caucasus remains strong. The forthcoming referendum on independence in South Ossetia accompanied by daily clashes around Tskhinvali might create a situation where smart policies of conflict manipulation could give way to inadequate responses and unforeseen consequences.

**TABLE 1. MAJOR OCCASIONS OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS/INSURGENCY/TERRORISM IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS (OUTSIDE CHECHNYA)**

No.	Type of event	Location	Date	Target of attack	Rebel force	Casualties	Media attention
1.	Hostage taking	Budennovsk, Stavropol krai	June 1995	Hospital	75	150	Max
2.	Hostage taking	Kizlyar-Pervomaiskoe, Dagestan	January 1996	Hospital, village	200-250	200-250	High
3.	Explosion	Kaspiisk; Dagestan	November 1996	Barracks	NA	70	Medium
4.	Explosion	Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia	March 1999	Market	NA	50-70	Medium
5.	Rebel attack	Botlikh, Dagestan	August 1999	Villages	300-500	400-500	High
6.	Explosion	Buinaksk, Dagestan	September 1999	Apartment house	NA	30-60	Medium
7.	Explosion	Volgodonsk, Rostov oblast	September 1999	Apartment house	NA	20	High
8.	Multiple explosions	Essentuki, Mineralnye vody	March 2001	Market, police station	NA	30	Medium
9.	Explosion	Kaspiisk, Dagestan	May 2002	Parade	NA	45	Medium
10.	Explosion	Mozdok, North Ossetia	June 2003	Bus	Suicide	20	Medium
11.	Explosion	Mozdok, North Ossetia	August 2003	Hospital	Suicide	50	Medium
12.	Explosion	Pyatigorsk, Krasnodar krai	September 2003	Train	NA	10	Medium
13.	Explosion	Essentuki, Krasnodar krai	December 2003	Train	Suicide	45	Medium
14.	Rebel attack	Nazran, Ingushetia	June 2004	Police stations	100	100	High
15.	Hostage taking	Beslan, North Ossetia	September 2004	School	35-50	400	Max
16.	Rebel attack	Nalchick, Kabardino-Balkaria	October 2005	Police, OMON stations	150	150-200	High
17.	Multiple explosions	North Ossetia	January 2006	Pipelines, power line	NA	None	High

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, John B. Dunlop & Rajan Menon, 'Chaos in the North Caucasus and Russia's future', *Survival*, vol. 48, no. 2, Summer 2006, pp. 97-114. My recent analysis is in Pavel K. Baev, 'Contre-terrorisme et islamisation du Caucase du Nord', *Politique Etrangere*, vol. 70, no. 1, pp. 79-89.

<sup>2</sup> For a sharp portrait, see Thomas de Waal, 'Basaev: From Rebel to Vicious Extremist', *IWPR Caucasian Reporting Service*, 11 July ([http://www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=322196&apc\\_state=henicrsf0b0dd69d4b41e3718df38e196f8e8ce](http://www.iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=322196&apc_state=henicrsf0b0dd69d4b41e3718df38e196f8e8ce)).

<sup>3</sup> Excellent sociological analysis of these turbulent developments with a particular focus on the role of the Confederation can be found in Georgi M. Derluguian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> My first assessment of these applications of military power was in Pavel K. Baev, 'Russia's Experiments and Experience in Conflict Management and Peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, Autumn 1994, pp. 245-260.

<sup>5</sup> For a thoughtful comparison, see Enver Kisriev, 'Why is there stability in Dagestan but not in Chechnya?', in Christoph Zürcher & Jan Koehler (eds), *Potentials of Disorder*. Manchester: MUP, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> On Aushev's outstanding performance see Georgi Derluguian 'A Soviet general and nation-building', *Chicago Tribune*, 28 October 2001; Matthew Evangelista described the intrigue around his removal in Chapter 6 of his excellent book *The Chechen Wars: Will Russia Go the Way of the Soviet Union?* Washington: Brookings Institution, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> I examined that problem in Pavel K. Baev, 'The Challenge of "Small Wars" for the Russian Military', in Anne Aldis & Roger McDermott (eds), *Russian Military Reform 1992-2002*. London: Frank Cass, 2003; for a more recent analysis, see Roy Allison, 'Russia, regional conflict, and the use of military power', pp. 121-156 in Steven E. Miller & Dmitri Trenin (eds), *The Russian Military: Power and Policy*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> The trajectory of the Pankisi crisis is investigated in Jaba Devdariani, 'Georgia and Russia: The troubled road to accommodation', pp. 153-203 in Bruno Coppieters & Robert Legvold (eds), *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution*. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Putin took a ride on a strategic bomber in August 2005 and observed the launch of cruise missiles which only increased his propensity to brag about high-precision strikes; see Aleksandr Golts, 'According to old plans', *Ezhednevny zhurnal*, (in Russian) 22 August 2005 (<http://www.ej.ru/dayTheme/entry/1648/>).

<sup>10</sup> As Felgengauer pointed out, even most carefully prepared operations of this kind had high risk of failure, but the support from local population helped several groups of rebels to find their targets and then to disperse without any trace. See Pavel Felgengauer, 'Nazran: Rebels win by skill not quantity', *Novaya gazeta*, 28 June 2004 (in Russian).

<sup>11</sup> The independent report of Yuri Savelyev, a member of the parliamentary commission investigating the Beslan operation, has produced significant new evidence and was suppressed by the authorities; see Elena Milashina, 'People who know everything', *Novata gazeta*, 28 August 2006; Valery Panyushkin, 'The unforeseen factor', *Kommersant*, 4 September (in Russian).

<sup>12</sup> A thorough examination of that shocking tragedy can be found in John Dunlop, *Beslan: Russia's 9/11?* Washington DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> In the popular Internet journal 'Vladimir Vladimirovich', the reconstruction of that speech ended with a striking point: 'Don't you get it that we have declared this war to ourselves?'; see Maksim Kononenko, *Vladimir*

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Vladimirovich, Moscow: Colibri, 2005, p. 488. The anti-Western connotations are analyzed in Sergei Medvedev, "'Juicy Morsels": Putin's Beslan Address and the Construction of the New Russian Identity', *PONARS Memo* 334, Washington DC: CSIS, December 2004.

<sup>14</sup> For a convincing risk assessment, see Georgi Derluguian, 'The coming revolutions in the North Caucasus', *PONARS Memo* 378, Washington: CSIS, December 2005.

<sup>15</sup> For a penetrating examination, see Andrei Soldatov & Irina Borogan, 'Rapid reform forces', *Novaya gazeta*, 5 December 2005 (in Russian).

<sup>16</sup> One clear account is in Aleksandr Golts, 'Tank wipes cleans all footprints', *Ezhenedelny zhurnal* (in Russian), 17 January (<http://supernew.ej.ru/150/tema/goltz17/index.html>).

<sup>17</sup> On the transformation of traditional *jamaat* and its new 'self-help' functions, see Mayrbek Vachagaev, 'Evolution of the Chechen *jamaat*', *Chechnya Weekly*, 6 April 2005; see also Alexei Malashenko, 'Russia and Radical Islam', Carnegie Moscow Center, 6 April 2006 ([www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/media/74135.htm](http://www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/media/74135.htm)).

<sup>18</sup> For an alarmist diagnosis of the situation in the North Caucasus at that time, see Yulia Latynina, 'This is a breakdown: On the systemic crisis of President Putin's regime', *Novaya gazeta*, 14 February 2005 (in Russian); my assessment was in Pavel K. Baev, 'The North Caucasus slips out of control', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 4 April 2005 ([http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2369543](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2369543)).

<sup>19</sup> Desperate to attract Putin's attention, Kozak broke the strict Kremlin rules and leaked the report to the tabloid *Moskovsky komsomolets*; for an elaborate analysis, see Blandy, C.W., 'North Caucasus: On the brink of far-reaching destabilisation', *Caucasus Series* 05/36, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the UK, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> This rather odd, if not bizarre evaluation of the situation was reported by the press but omitted from the presentation of the trip on the presidential website. As Latynina argued, 'The rebels do not infiltrate into Dagestan, they live here... To speak in the war-time Dagestan about protecting the holiday-makers in Krasnodar kray essentially means to write Dagestan off.' See Yulia Latynina, 'Boots in Dagestan', *Ezhednevny zhurnal*, (in Russian) 18 July 2005 (<http://www.ej.ru/dayTheme/entry/1443/>).

<sup>21</sup> As Markedonov argued, 'In the largest republic of the North Caucasus we face with terrorism of a higher level and quality than in the neighboring Chechnya.' See Sergei Markedonov, 'Terrorism in Dagestan will become problem no. 1', *Prognosis.ru*, (in Russian) 5 July 2005 (<http://www.prognosis.ru/news/region/2005/7/5/markedonov.html>).

<sup>22</sup> A thorough investigation of the attack can be found in Irina Borogan & Andrei Soldatov, 'Basaev left the rebels in distress', *Novaya gazeta*, 22 June 2006 (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> An extensive analysis of the driving forces of the crisis in Kabardino-Balkaria, possibly informed by Kozak's staff, is in Konstantin Kazenin, 'New president and old problems: Can the attack on Nalchik happen again in 2006?', *Regnum*, 10 January 2006 (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/570125.html>).

<sup>24</sup> My take on that rather unpolished speech is in Pavel K. Baev, 'Putin protects Islam and praises democracy in Grozny', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 14 December 2005 ([http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2370597](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2370597)).

<sup>25</sup> See Ekaterina Rogozhnikova, 'Inefficient war', *Lenta.ru*, (in Russian) 5 January 2006 (<http://lenta.ru/articles/2006/01/05/fight/>). On Kozak's efforts, see Milrad Fatullaev, 'Kozak's loneliness', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 December 2005 (in Russian).

<sup>26</sup> A very favorable evaluation of Aliev's performance is in Yulia Latynina, 'One day of the president', *Novaya gazeta*, 10 August 2006 (in Russian).

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- <sup>27</sup> One good risk assessment is Yulia Latynina, 'The seat of tensions moves from the East Caucasus to the West', *Ezhednevny zhurnal*, 28 April 2006 (<http://ej.ru/comments/entry/3673/>). My assessment is in Pavel K. Baev, 'Shifting battlefields of the Chechen War', *Chechnya Weekly*, 20 April 2006 ([www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=416&issue\\_id=3697&article\\_id=2371008](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=416&issue_id=3697&article_id=2371008)).
- <sup>28</sup> Kozak's plan for resolving that conflict developed together with the North Ossetian leadership was blocked by Ingushetia in march 2006; see Milrad Fatullaev, 'Kozak failed as peacemaker', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 8 August 2006 (in Russian).
- <sup>29</sup> See Vladimir Mukhin, 'Mistakes in counting the rebels', *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 27 January 2006 (in Russian).
- <sup>30</sup> That pattern is thoroughly examined in Mark Kramer, 'The Perils of Counter-Insurgency: Russia's War in Chechnya', *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 3, Winter 2004/2005, pp. 5-63.
- <sup>31</sup> Putin issued a directive on withdrawal from Chechnya of all federal forces deployed there on a temporary basis by the end of 2008, which would still leave there the 42<sup>nd</sup> Motor Rifle Division and the 46<sup>th</sup> Interior Troops Brigade; see Ivan Sukhov, 'False withdrawal', *Vremya novostei*, 10 August 2006 (in Russian).
- <sup>32</sup> This version was elaborated in Andrei Gromov & Shamsudin Mamaev, 'The end of Basaev', *Expert*, 17 July 2006 (in Russian).
- <sup>33</sup> Patrushev presided over the NAC meeting in Rostov-on-Don in late August and focused the attention on the high level of corruption in the law enforcement; see Sergei Kisin, 'Terrorists dispersed across the Caucasus', *Kommersant*, 26 August (in Russian).
- <sup>34</sup> Nurgaliev personally supervises the work of the operational HQ in Chechnya that maintains control over all armed forces, including several Chechen battalions not subordinated to Kadyrov; see Musa Muradov, 'Rashid Nurgaliev took Chechnya under control', *Kommersant*, 22 August 2006 (in Russian).
- <sup>35</sup> See Fiona Hill, 'Russia's Tinderbox: Conflict in the North Caucasus and Its Implication for the Future of the Russian Federation', *Occasional paper* from the Strengthening of the Democratic Institutions project, Harvard University, 1995.
- <sup>36</sup> On Putin's August meeting with the 'captains of business' in Sochi about 'voluntary' investments in the North Caucasus, see Anna Nikolaeva & Tatyana Egorova, 'Business will go to the mountains', *Vedomosti*, 17 August 2006 (in Russian).
- <sup>37</sup> One minor piece of evidence here is my experience in cooperating with SIPRI in organizing a seminar 'Transforming Conflicts in the North Caucasus' (Stockholm, 15-16 June 2006) that was supposed to bring together officials from the EU, who duly arrived, and from Russia, of which none showed up. For more systematic evidence, see Svante Cornell & S. Frederick Starr, 'The Caucasus: A Challenge for Europe', *Silk Road Paper*, Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, June 2006.
- <sup>38</sup> An elaborate assessment can be found in Konstantin Kazenin, 'Union against Congress: The situation in Adygeya', *Regnum* (in Russian), 25 August 2006 (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/694395.html>).
- <sup>39</sup> See on that Yulia Latynina, 'Krasnaya polyana and the Republic of Adygeya', *Ezhednevny zhurnal*, 10 April 2006 (<http://www.ej.ru/dayTheme/entry/3504/>); I have looked into that in Pavel K. Baev, 'Russian quasi-federalism and Georgian non-existent territorial integrity', *CACI Analyst*, 3 May 2006 ([http://www.cacianalyst.org/view\\_article.php?articleid=4201](http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=4201)).
- <sup>40</sup> See Vladimir Mukhin, 'Ingushetia becomes another Chechnya', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 26 June 2006 (in Russian); on the explosive potential of the Ingush-Ossetian conflict, see Oleg Kusov, 'Ossetia – Ingushetia: The main issue', *Prognosis*, 25 August 2006 (<http://www.prognosis.ru/news/region/2006/8/25/kusov.html>).

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<sup>41</sup> See Vladimir Mukhin, 'Ramzan put pressure on federals', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 18 April 2006 (in Russian).

<sup>42</sup> See the interview with Sulim Yamadaev, the commander of the 'Vostok' battalion in *Kavkazsky uzel*, 21 June 2006 (<http://kavkaz.memo.ru/analyticstext/analytics/id/1022301.html>).

<sup>43</sup> The commission on rebuilding Chechnya is chaired by the First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who seeks to maintain control over key projects, for instance the reconstruction of Grozny airport; see Ivan Sukhov, 'Chechnya becomes a regular subject', *Vremya novostei*, 2 August 2006 (in Russian).

<sup>44</sup> According to NAC, during the last three years, 864 rebels were killed and some 3,000 arrested, while 708 terrorist attacks were prevented, including only 26 in the first half of 2006 – which presumably indicates the overall decline of terrorist activity in the North Caucasus; see Aleksei Nikolsky, 'Terror is in decline', *Vedomosti*, 30 August 2006 (in Russian).

<sup>45</sup> A very useful chronicle of terrorist attacks in Russia (with a separate list for Dagestan) is maintained at *Kavkazsky uzel* (<http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/chronics/id/770040.html>).

<sup>46</sup> I looked into that aspect in Pavel K. Baev, 'Reevaluation the risk of terrorist attacks against energy infrastructure in Eurasia', *China and Eurasia Forum*, May 2006, pp. 33-38.

<sup>47</sup> This point is elaborated in Pavel K. Baev, 'Russia wrapping up its war against terror', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 14 August 2006 ([http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2371377](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371377)).

The insurgency in the North Caucasus is a low-level armed conflict between Russia and militants associated with the Caucasus Emirate and, since June 2015, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) groups. It followed the official end of the decade-long Second Chechen War on 16 April 2009. It attracted people from the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and Central Asia, who then participated in the conflict, but volunteers from the North Caucasus are also fighting in Syria. Also used is the name Armed