

The Second Caucasian war: Chechen wars

IREn5019 No War, No Peace: Frozen Conflicts in the Caucasus

Mgr. Zinaida Bechná, Ph.D.

3 November 2021

Structure

- RF in transition
- Manifestation of issues at stake
- Conflict escalation
- Full scale war
- Uncertain peace
- II Chechen war
- Terrorism, guerilla warfare
- Discussion: power vertical.

The RF in transition

- Mikhail Gorbachov – General secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union 1985.
- Perestroika (re-structuring) – initially economic reform.
- Liberalization project: first step – glasnost in order to mobilize public for the wider programme of perestroika.
- Glasnost: release of political prisoners, new freedoms to the mass media, “the first step on our road towards democracy”.
- Gorbachov believed in the socialist ideal through controlled democratization.
- Glasnost “triggered the expression of grievances and opinions, which the authorities were unable to control and which fatally weakened the legitimacy of Soviet rule”.

The RF in transition

- August 1991- the coup attempt.
- Idealistic aspirations were soon destroyed by corruption, mistrust and subterfuge.
- Chechen independence movement against this backdrop of the Russian transition.
- Colonel Charles Blandy argues that interethnic tension in the Northern Caucasus arose in a consequence of perestroika and glasnost.
- Moshe Lewin argues that “it was not... the exit of nationalities... {that} caused the downfall”, but rather “it was the decline and de facto downfall of the regime that gave them the chance to leave.”

The RF in transition

- Nationalism has been soon used as a tool to achieve self-determination.
- Norther Caucasian states were predominantly governed by minority nation – Russians.
- Chechen elite extremely underdeveloped – no Chechen held senior positions in government. (only Chechens who married Russian women had a chance to reach a leading position)
- Complex social and economic problems:
- Income rates were well below the national average: in 1985 : 158 out of 199 roubles and in 1991 : 392 opposed to 548 roubles. Unemployment rate was high : rural, dependent on agriculture.
- Oil industry: Chechen oil very few impurities, ideal for aviation.
Groznyy – major oil-refining centre, still lack of employment.
Gastarbeiter, grey economy, criminal structure plus high demographic growth

Manifestation of issues at stake

- “Vinogradov theory” 1987 – consolidation of opposition against communist control.
- 1988 environmental protests against construction of a biochemical plant in Gudermes : thousands of citizens in the mass meetings which also spread to Groznyy.
- Environmental issues soon gained a political character : demands over greater autonomy, national movement against Soviet rule.
- The National Front led by Khozh-Akhmed Bisultanov : first and leading opposition force = “bottom-up” political activism.

Manifestation of issues at stake

- Establishment of Congress of People Deputies , 1989: ethnic Chechens finally permitted to take an active role in Soviet politics (professor Salambek Khadzhiev, Lecha Magomadov gained seats in the Congress).
- Salambek Khadzhiev first Chechen in the Soviet government: USSR Minister of the Chemical Industry.
- Ruslan Khasbulatov became Chairman of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet.
- Doku Zavgayev July 1990 : First Secretary of the republican Communist party → regional ambitions, independent newspapers and journals, religious freedom, creation of the North Caucasian Islamic Party “Rebirth”, restoration of the Sharia law.
- Zavgayev with support of the NF instigated wave of revolutions in order to consolidate his personal power:
- In 1990 a week demonstrations in five rayony “regional revolutions” : dismissal of the First Secretaries and Communist leadership, a cement factory, lack of roads and infrastructure, pollution of water and “social injustices”.

Manifestation of issues at stake

- March 1990 parliamentary elections: victory for local “democrats”, Bisultanov “Democratic Initiative” parliamentary faction.
- Summer 1990 “Bart” (“Unity”) the Chechen association, renamed to “Vainakh Democratic Party” : “the first political party in Chechnya... which openly proclaimed its objective to be the creation of an independent, national state... the beginning of the end of Soviet power in Chechnya, the North Caucasus and the entire Soviet empire”.
- The first National Congress of Chechen People in November 1990 in Groznyy. The aim was to put pressure on the local authorities in order to achieve political change.

Manifestation of issues at stake

- Three conflicting political tendencies:
 1. The republic's leadership (Zavgayev)
 2. The moderate democrats (Khadzhiev)
 3. The “radicals” (Yandarbiyev, Bislan Gantemirov and Yaragai Mamodayev).
- The Supreme Soviet passed the sovereignty resolution November 27th , 1990 : the republic was a sovereign state, which was not a component of either RSFSR or the USSR.
- May Dudaev as a fresh Chairman of the OKChN Executive Committee declared that Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet lost its legitimacy, no confidence in the soviet leadership – total independence and creation of Islamic state.
- The centre-periphery struggles both within Chechnya-Ingushetia as well as between Moscow and Groznyy.
- Yeltsin: “take as much sovereignty as you can swallow”.

Manifestation of issues at stake

- Dudayev calling on the Chechen people to support Yeltsin's anti-coup position and “show endurance, determination and courage in defending democracy and human dignity”.
- On August 22nd Dudayev and his supporters seized the television station in Grozny in order to broadcast a speech by the OKChN leader outlining the opposition's demands: dissolution of the local Supreme Soviet, and the resignation of Zavgayev.

Table 3.1 Chechen initiatives in the immediate post-coup period (August–November 1991)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Actor</i>	<i>Nature of initiative</i>	<i>Type</i>
19–20 August	Opposition movements such as OKChN and VDP	Mass demonstrations in support of Yeltsin, denouncing the local Communist Party elite	Similar to protests across Soviet Union
1–2 September	OKChN: Third Congress	Declared Supreme Soviet to lack legitimacy and called elections for 27th October 1991	
6 September	OKChN Dudayev's National Guard	Seizure of Supreme Soviet building Zavgayev's 'abdication'	Provocation
1 October	Provisional Council	Radical faction adopted unlawful resolution dividing Checheno-Ingushetia; not recognised by Soviet authorities. KGB building seized	
9 October	Dudayev	OKChN leader declared mobilisation in response to Russian ultimatum	
9 November	Dudayev	Dudayev inaugurated as President following illegitimate elections on 27th October	

Table 3.2 Russian initiatives in the immediate post-coup period (August–November 1991)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Actor</i>	<i>Nature of initiative</i>	<i>Type</i>
<i>Late August</i>	Chechen members of Soviet administration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Khadzhiev, Soviet Minister of Chemical Industry • Aslakhanov, Member of Russian parliamentary Presidium • Grebesheva, Deputy Chairman of Russian Council of Ministers 	Negotiations between Chechen Supreme Soviet and radical opposition group OKChN. Zavgayev warned not to use force	Mediation
<i>11 September</i>	Russian Government delegation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burbulis, RSFSR State Secretary 	Attempt to persuade Chechen parliament (Supreme Soviet) to disband and prepare for elections. Possibly also covert attempt to replace republican leaders	Mediation
<i>14–15 September</i>	Speaker of the RSFSR parliament, Khasbulatov	Successful attempt to persuade Supreme Soviet to dissolve itself. Creation of Provisional Council, temporary legislature	Conciliation

<i>6 October</i>	<p>Russian Ministers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rutskoi, Vice President of RSFSR • Dunaev, RSFSR Interior Minister • Ivanenko, KGB Chairman 	Yeltsin's demands conveyed to Dudayev, including restoration of Supreme Soviet	Political Intervention
<i>19 October</i>	RSFSR President Yeltsin	Message to Executive Council condemning its actions and demanding immediate cessation	Direct intervention
<i>22 October</i>	RSFSR Prosecutor-General	Ban on organisations and activities inciting people to 'anti-constitutional' actions	Pressure
<i>24 October</i>	RSFSR President Yeltsin	Appointment of Arsanov as Yeltsin's envoy to Chechnya	Manipulation
<i>9 November</i>	RSFSR President Yeltsin	Declaration of state of emergency on Chechen territory	Military force

Conflict escalation

- Dudayev and his armed forces were already well equipped to defend the republic.
- The Russian troops finally withdrew in June 1992--> signified the destruction of the final pillar of Moscow's authority in the republic.
- Moscow failed to take any decisive action in Chechnya at this time because similar incidents were occurring across the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Weaponry left in Chechnya, June 1992

<i>Description</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Armoured equipment	
T-62 & T-72 tanks	42
Infantry fighting vehicles	BMP-1 & BMP-2 36
Armoured personnel carriers	BTR-70 & BRDM-2 30
Antitank weaponry (total)	590
9P148 ('Competition')	2
9P185M ('Bassoon')	24
9P151 ('Mongrel')	51
Rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPG-7)	113
Artillery (total)	153
BM-21 ('Grad' multi-barrelled rocket launcher)	18
122mm Howitzer D-30	30
Small Arms (total)	41,538
AK-47 assault rifles	18,832
Dragunov sniper rifles (SVD)	533
Automatic grenade launchers ('Flame')	138
AKM sub-machine guns (7.62 mm)	9307
PM & TT pistols	10,581
Heavy machine-guns	678
Large calibre machine-guns	319

Weaponry left in Chechnya, June 1992

Ammunition	
82 mm shells	1,000
122 mm shells for D-30	+ 24,000
Hand-held grenades	
RG-42	80,000
F-1	72,000
RGD-45	+ 2,500
Cartridges	
5.45 mm	+ 11,000,000
7.62 mm	+ 2,000,000
12.7 mm	+ 500,000
14.5 mm	140,000
Aviation	
L-39	111
L-29	149
MiG-17	3
MiG-15	2
AN-2	6
Mi-8 helicopters	2

Source: Nezavisimoye voennoye obozreniye, 26.9.96, p. 2.

Conflict escalation

- In March 1992 a new Constitution.
- Article One: 'The Chechen Republic is a sovereign, democratic state functioning in accordance with constitutional law, created as a result of the self-determination of the Chechen people. It has a supreme right over its territorial and national wealth [and] independently defines its own foreign and domestic policy...The state sovereignty of the Chechen Republic is indivisible.'
- However huge economic and social problems: impoverishment of the people, criminalisation of the state and increased violence
- March 1992 armed supporters of the opposition seized the television and radio stations in Grozny, demanding the resignation of Dudayev and parliament calling for fresh elections.
- Accusation of Moscow in planning this event, Russian policy of opposing the Dudayev regime by means of providing support for competing factions within the republic constituted a 'proxy war'.
- 1993 Civil war in Chechnya

Main anti-Dudayev opposition groups

<i>Group</i>	<i>Leader</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>Further Details</i>
Interim Council (IC)	Umar Avturkhanov	Znamenskoye	Received military and economic assistance from Moscow
	Beslan Gantemirov	Urus-Martan	Gantemirov's group allied with the IC at the end of August 1994 and Gantemirov became commander-in-chief of their united forces.
'Nisyo' ('Justice')	Ruslan Labazanov	Argun	Lacked support amongst Chechen people because of Labazanov's criminal past.
Peacemaking Group	Ruslan Khasbulatov	Tolstoy-Yurt	Khasbulatov, in need of armed support, subsequently formed an alliance with Labazanov's group, which discredited him in the eyes of many Chechens who considered the latter to be a 'bandit'. Khasbulatov later formed a brief alliance with the IC and Gantemirov.
Government	Yaragai	Moscow	Political rather than armed

Russian policy in the Chechen crisis

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Effectiveness</i>
1991–	Political approach in attempt to reach negotiated settlement	Failure to resolve issue of Chechnya's status
1993–mid-1994	Overt, verbal support for anti-Dudayev opposition	Exacerbated tensions within republic, but failed to accomplish overthrow of Dudayev regime
1993–	Economic assistance to opposition groups	
mid-1994	Covert, predominantly military support	
End 1994	Full-scale military invasion	Failed to re-assert federal hegemony

Full scale war

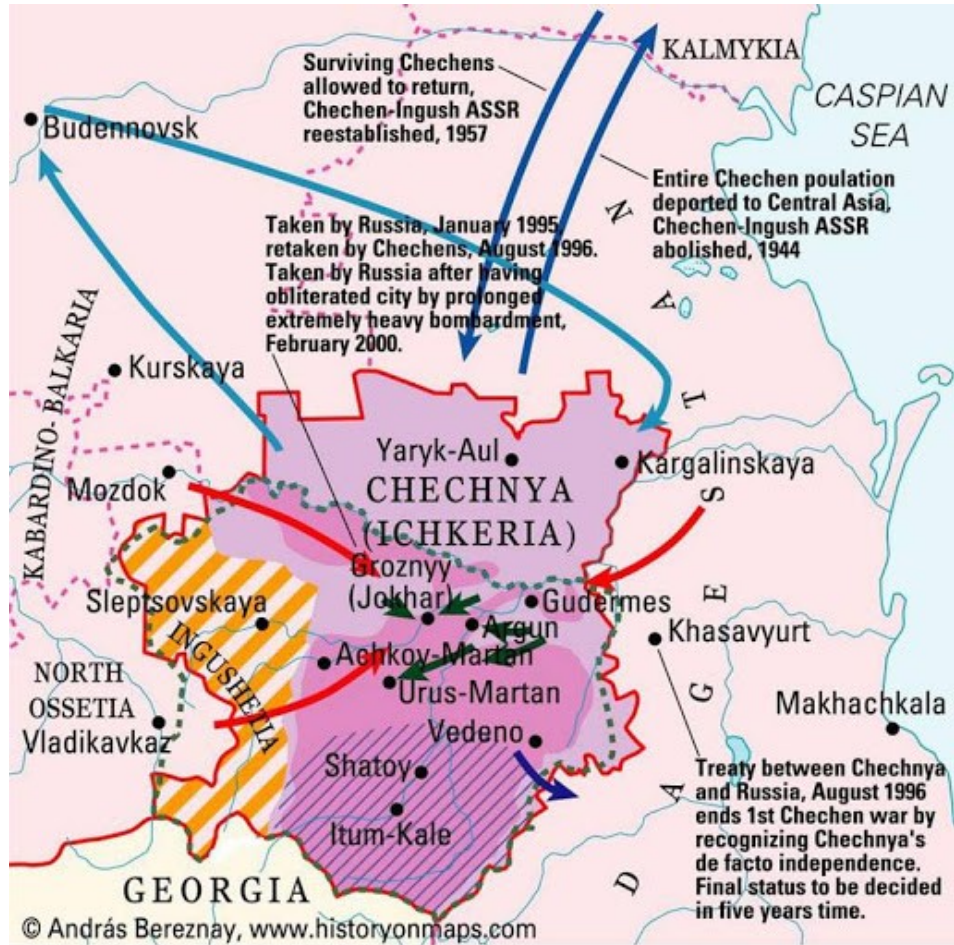
- Russia was afraid 'Chechen virus of separatism', domino effect, religious extremism – military action.
- The party of War: the role of Russian in the world. The first stage of the plan involved air attacks on strategic communications points across Chechnya, including raids against Dudayev's forces located around Groznyy. Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev warned that an operation in Chechnya would take "10 minutes to plan, 10 hours to execute, and 10 years to finish"
- The culmination of this Russian-sponsored operation was the storming of Groznyy on November 26th. Combined opposition forces, approximately 1,500, attacked the city at dawn from three directions, supported by Russian tanks, armoured vehicles and aircraft.
- The Chechen government forces were well-armed, including more than 150 snipers. The opposition's tanks quickly reached the centre of Groznyy, but, lacking infantry support, came under heavy fire from the rocket-propelled grenades of Dudayev's forces, a mistake that was to be repeated frequently by federal troops during the 1994–96 war.
- The Chechen government forces had taken up positions on the upper floors of Groznyy's buildings, which enabled them to fire unseen at the beleaguered tanks. Many of the Russian tank crews were killed and the survivors were captured.

Battle of Grozny

- 1994-1995 Battle of Grozny ended by Russian forces taking the city, approximately over 30, 000 civilian killed and more than 2,000 Russian soldiers.
- After Grozny Dudaev and his forces moved to the mountains. Chechen forces retake Grozny in 1996.
- Yeltsin signed the peace treaty.
- Russian military death between 3,500 to 7, 500 and from 3, 000 to 17, 000 Chechens killed or missing. Civilian deaths between 30, 000 to 100, 000 and over 200, 000 injured while more than 500, 000 were displaced.

Images of War





Uncertain peace

- 1996 April - Dzokhar Dudayev killed in a Russian missile attack; Zemlikhan Yandarbiyev succeeds him.
1996 August - Chechen rebels launch a successful attack on Grozny; Russian military leaders and Chechen rebels sign the Khasavyurt ceasefire accords, followed by an agreement on a Russian troop withdrawal in November.
- 1997 January - Russia recognises Aslan Maskhadov's government following his victory in Chechen presidential elections.
- 1997 May - Yeltsin and Maskhadov sign a formal peace treaty, but the issue of independence was not resolved.

Chechen War II

- 1999 March - Moscow's top envoy to Chechnya, General Gennadiy Shpigun, is kidnapped from the airport in Grozny. His corpse is found in Chechnya in March 2000.
- 1999 July/August - Chechen fighters clash with Russian troops on the Chechnya-Dagestan border; Chechen rebels carry out armed incursions into Dagestan in an attempt to create an Islamic state.
- 1999 September - The authorities blame a series of apartment block bombings on Chechen rebels and launch the second Chechen war.

Chechen war II

- In 1999 Chechen forces invaded Dagestan. Consequently Russian troops were sent to Chechnya.
- Moscow's second campaign in the North Caucasus, begun in 1999, aimed to defeat Chechen separatism and the safe haven it provided for terrorism. But after the Russian government declared "victory over terrorists" in the spring of 2000, acts of terror intensified.
- I phase:
 - Air strikes wipe out Chechen Air Force, land lines, mobile phone transponders, television stations, radio stations, bridges, rebel bases.
- II phase:
 - Russian Army easily takes northern Chechnya, including a symbolic rebel stronghold and the second-largest city in Chechnya.
- III phase
 - The aim was to destroy the insurgents who undermined the Russians in the First Chechen War
 - In 2000: Grozny retaken by Russian troops
 - Land war taken to the mountainous south of Grozny
 - Stiff resistance met in the mountains
 - Non-Chechen volunteers rejoin the fight
 - Victory of Russia?

Terrorism, guerilla warfare

- Terrorist attacks increased on civilian targets in Russia including: blowing up an apartment building in Dagestan 1996, 69 people died.
- A bomb explosion in the Russian railway station in Armavir, 3 people died and Pyatigorsk 2 victims 1997.
- In 1998 a Russian army convoy in Ingushetia was ambushed, 2 colonels and 3 soldiers killed.
- Explosion in the Central market in Vladikavkaz, 64 victims.
- 2002 armed Chechen men and women seizure in the crowded Moscow theatre, 900 hostages , 33 militants and 128 hostages dies.
- 2004 Beslan school hostage, 334 people dead.

Do Ordinary Russians Support the Kremlin Policy on Chechnya?

Russians responding to a May–June 2003 poll

Yes	No
31%	52%

Source: <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/d032208/printable>. Poll conducted in 100 localities in 44 out of 89 Russian regions.

Why Do Chechens Kill Russians?

Chechens responding to an August 2003 poll

Reason	Why Chechens Become Suicide Bombers	Why Chechens Continue Armed Resistance toward the Russian Forces
Revenge on the federal forces for their brutality toward Chechens	69%	56%
Struggle for Chechen independence	8%	24%
Jihad	8%	6%

Source: ValiData, http://www.validata.ru/e_e/chechnya/.

Do Chechens Want to Secede?

Chechens responding to an August 2003 poll

Chechnya should be part of Russia ^a	78%
Chechnya should be independent	19%

Source: ValiData, http://www.validata.ru/e_e/chechnya/.

^a Among the percentage of Chechens who think Chechnya should be part of Russia, 61% believe Chechnya should have more autonomy than any other part of the Russian Federation.

Discussion

- Does Chechnya have the right to secede?
- Are the Chechen militants terrorists attacking innocent civilians? Or freedom fighters attacking a brutal regime?
- Are the Russian's justified in indiscriminately bombarding cities when separatists hide among them?
- What is Chechen status within Russian federation?

“Power Vertical”

- Ramaz Kadyrov’s private state and Vladimir Putin’s federal “power vertical”: recentralization of political structures. Especially after a hostage crisis in the Beslan in September 2004 (300 people killed when Russian security forces stormed a school occupied by terrorists). “Power vertical” limited the federal subjects’ independent policy-making, the National Guard (Ross-gvardiya) as one of the most striking institution.
- In 2010 the Northern Caucasus (previously the part of the Southern Federal District) promoted to its own federal district, run by a special representative of the Russian president.
- “Municipal filter”: a candidate have to submit signatures of mayors and delegates of a local and district councils.
- In March 2018 replacement of older “territorial prices” with younger ones, easier to control technocrats. 19 governors were forced to resign.
- Kadyrov “Putin’s foot soldier”: Chechen is a part of Russia, links Chechen nationalism with Russian patriotism
- Putin is in Grozny – a state icon.
- “Chechen Khanate” or “Kadyrov’s caliphate” – advocate for Russian multiethnic unity.
- Fight against terrorism and Islamist extremism = greatest challenge for its national security policy.

Kadyrov's Private state "Pax Ramzana"



- Kadyrov dynasty - except for president Putin nobody could limit his authority, neither parliament nor the media or judicial mechanisms.
- Kadyrov receives almost 100% of votes. He uses collective punishment against adversaries and vendetta.
- "Kadyrovsty" 30 000 men.
- After second Chechen war – local civil war.
- Russia attained three goals:
 - 1. war casualties among the population has declined.
 - 2. transfer of counter-insurgency fight to the Kadyrovsty distances Moscow from the battlefield of Chechnya an accusations of human-rights violations.
 - 3. Kadyrov managed to drive back the insurgency and remained loyal to Putin.
- Chechen society is still traumatised by the two wars, casualties almost in every family.
- "There are those for whom everything is allowed. And there's the mass of people who have no rights at all..."

Literature

- Galeotti, Mark (2014): “Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994-2009,” Osprey Publishing.
- German, Tracey, C. (2003): “Russia’s Chechen war,” Routledge, London, New York.
- Halbach, Uwe (2018): “Chechnya’s Status within the Russian Federation”, German Institute for International and security Affairs, SWP Research paper.