

Dagestani Journalists, Police and Young People Victims of Violence

Gadzhi Abashilov, the head of GTRK Dagestan, the Dagestani affiliate of Russia's state television and radio company, was killed in a drive-by shooting as he traveled home from work in Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala, on March 21. His driver was seriously injured in the attack. Just hours earlier, Ilyas Shurpaev, a Dagestan-born journalist who covered the North Caucasus for state television's Channel One, was found stabbed and strangled in his Moscow apartment after a neighbor reported a fire in the apartment. Russian news reports quoted investigators as saying that the perpetrators had set fire to the apartment in an attempt to conceal the crime.



Various Russian media reported that Shurpaev had apparently asked his building's concierge to permit two young men of North Caucasus origin into his building shortly before he was killed and that no valuables were taken from his apartment. However, Komsomolskaya Pravda reported on March 27 that investigators had managed to identify Shurpaev's killers, who had tracked him down through his blog and the Odnoklassniki social networking website. The newspaper also reported that investigators believe he was murdered when he resisted the perpetrators' attempts to rob him and quoted relatives as saying that money was indeed missing from Shurpaev's apartment.

On March 18, three days before the murders of Gadzhi Abashilov and Ilyas Shurpaev, Kavkazky Uzel reported that both men were on a "black list" compiled by the founder of a weekly newspaper in Dagestan. The website reported that Rizvan Rizvanov, founder of the weekly *Nastoyashchee Vremya* (The Present Tense), had fired the paper's editor-in-chief, Andrei Melamedov, and was trying to get rid of other staffers. According to Kavkazky Uzel, staffers of the weekly accused Rizvanov of allowing the paper to be used as a platform for attacks on Dagestan's president, Mukhu Aliev. The staffers also declared in an open letter that Rizvanov had given Melamedov, the editor-in-chief, a list of people not to be mentioned in the newspaper, including Ilyas Shurpaev and Gadzhi Abashilov. The *Nastoyashchee Vremya* journalists said in their open letter that they wanted work for a "normal" newspaper, not a "press organ of this or that clan."

However, the Moscow Times on March 24 quoted Oleg Panfilov, head of the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, an independent media watchdog, as saying he was a friend of Shurpaev's and thought it unlikely that his death was related to his work.

"He was never involved in any kind of aggressive journalism," Panfilov said. "When he went to Chechnya and Beslan, for example, his reporting was very balanced and fair." Panfilov also told the English-language newspaper that the murders of Shurpaev and Abashilov were probably not connected to one another and that Abashilov's death might have been organized by rivals. "I think it's simply the criminal situation in Dagestan, where a person can be killed because of his position, so that someone can occupy his post," Panfilov said. He added that Abashilov was known primarily as a government official, not as a journalist, and that the newspaper that he previously edited, *Molodyozh Dagestana*, was "absolutely pro-government."

Whatever the case, the murders of Gadzhi Abashilov and Ilyas Shurpaev were just several among many acts of violence connected to Dagestan that took place over the past week. Itar-Tass reported on March 27 that two militants had been killed during a special operation carried out by Dagestani law-enforcement bodies in the town of Dagestanskiye Ogni. According to the news agency, three armed militants were holed up in a three-room apartment located in a 90-apartment building on the town's Pushkin Street. In response to the authorities' order to surrender, the gunmen threw several grenades at law-enforcers and fired automatic weapons. A special task police officer received a tangential wound in the exchange, a law-enforcement official said.

Police identified the three militants as local residents Dzhamamed and Chengiz Kurbanov, and Artur Araskuliev, a resident of the town of Derbent. According to police, Dzhamamed and Chengiz Kurbanov are suspected in the murder of a police officer last fall, and Chengiz Kurbanov is himself a former traffic police officer. There was no indication which of the three men had been killed.

Kavkazky Uzel reported on March 25 that one police officer was killed and two wounded when unidentified gunmen ambushed a traffic police unit on the outskirts of the city of Khasavyurt. The website earlier reported that a planned

attack on police in Dagestan's Karabudakhkentsky district was thwarted on March 20 when an improvised explosive device was discovered on the outskirts of the city of Gubden, about 1,500 meters from the Gubden-Levashi highway, and defused.

For its part, the chairwoman of the group "Mothers of Dagestan for Human Rights," Gulnara Rustamova, recently wrote an appeal to the Moscow Helsinki Group and the Memorial human rights group complaining about "arbitrariness and impunity" on the part of Dagestani law-enforcement personnel, Kavkazky Uzel reported on March 25. She said that while the number of kidnappings of young people in Dagestan has dropped significantly since her organization began its work, she and two other members of the group began receiving threats after they arranged a meeting between journalists and someone who had been abducted and subsequently freed. Rustamova said that police have repeatedly threatened her younger brother Vadim, several of whose friends and acquaintances have been abducted this month, apparently by law-enforcement personnel. According to Rustamova, some of those taken into custody have been accused of ties to militants and beaten and tortured while in custody. Kavkazky Uzel quoted Rustamova as claiming that an "organized crime group" headed by high-ranking police officials is operating in Dagestan. "The arbitrariness and impunity of the power structures is pushing young people to go into the woods and take up arms," she said.

Meanwhile, Kavkazky Uzel on March 27 quoted residents of the village of Gimry in Dagestan's Untsukul'sky district as saying that the special operation launched by Russian and Dagestani security forces there last December has not yet been completed and that local residents have been given no indication when it might end. "Today or tomorrow the military and police will leave the village, and then we will be left face-to-face with our misfortunes," the head of Gimry's administration, Aliaskhab Magomedov, told the website. "We are fruit growers, but the state took the most fertile land from us during the building of the tunnel, the Irganai Hydroelectric Station, and the villagers received nothing in exchange. Everywhere there are promises. Today there are more than 500 families in the village without land. Up to 80 percent of the young guys are sitting at home unemployed. Many of them have families, children. Persimmons are the only source of sustenance, but the harvest this year was only 50 percent completed."

Reuters reported on March 27 that an oil depot in Makhachkala was on fire. According to the report, a freelance journalist working for Reuters saw huge, thick plumes of black smoke covering almost half of Makhachkala and residents reported hearing a powerful explosion before the fire engulfed the oil depot near the Caspian Sea. Russian news agencies quoted officials of the local emergencies ministry as saying they believed an oil tank standing at the depot's railway junction had exploded and that a dozen fire engines were trying to put out the flames.

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Bombings, Shootings and Abductions Continue to Plague Ingushetia

A car bomb exploded outside a bank in Nazran, Ingushetia, on March 24, injuring at least five people. According to the Associated Press, the bomb went off beneath a Mercedes parked on a central street in Nazran when a police officer used a remote control to unlock his car. The regional Investigative Committee said the officer and another policeman with him were seriously injured and that three passers-by were also hurt. AP quoted the Emergency Situations Ministry's branch for the Southern Federal District as having stated that six people were injured in the blast.



Kavkazky Uzel reported on March 24 that the bombing took place in front of the Ringkombank building in Nazran, which is located 100 meters from the city police headquarters. According to the website, the targeted Mercedes belonged to a police officer named Akhmet Batkhiev, who approached the car along with another police officer, Aslanbek Kostoev, who was getting into the passenger side of the Mercedes when the bomb detonated and lost both his legs in the blast.

Interfax reported on March 24 that an improvised explosive device consisting of a 120mm mortar shell attached to an electronic detonator and a timing mechanism was discovered inside a suspicious parcel that had been placed in the market of the village of Ordzhonikidzovskaya. The device was defused. Another homemade explosive device, this one attached to a mobile phone, was discovered and defused in Nazran on March 23, Kavkazky Uzel reported. An explosion took place in the village of Troitskaya on March 21. No one was hurt in the bombing, and another explosive device was discovered in the vicinity of the blast. Meanwhile, a local resident was killed and another person was wounded in a shootout that took place in the center of Nazran, RIA Novosti reported on March 23.

Itar-Tass reported on March 25 that unidentified gunmen fired on a police post located on the administrative border between North Ossetia and Ingushetia. The news agency reported that the gunfire came from the direction of the North Ossetian village of Maisky and that two North Ossetian policemen were wounded in the incident.

Kavkazky Uzel reported on March 26 that a young person was abducted in Ingushetia's Barsukinsky municipal district. Citing "informed sources," the website said the unnamed victim was kidnapped by members of unidentified "power structures" near the district's local cemetery. Kavkazky Uzel also reported on March 26 that relatives of Madina Ausheva, who was killed in a special operation conducted in Nazran's suburbs on February 28, claim her body was returned to them without its internal organs. Quoting from a press release by the Chechen National Salvation Committee, the website reported that Ausheva was pregnant at the time she died, raising doubts about the official claim that she was a female suicide bomber who had blown herself up while resisting security forces (Chechnya Weekly, February 29). According to the Chechen National Salvation Committee, the bodies of two people killed together with Ausheva, 28-year-old Ibragim Yevloev and 22-year-old Akromat Genaev, were also returned to their relatives without their internal organs.

Following the incident in which the three were killed, a Federal Security Service (FSB) source told Itar-Tass that the three had fired automatic rifles and grenade launchers at security forces who approached a house in Nazran's Altievo municipal district and that two of the alleged militants were fatally wounded in the ensuing shootout, while a female "terrorist" killed herself by detonating a bomb (Chechnya Weekly, February 29). However, according to the Chechen National Salvation Committee, a neighbor of the three said they had not mounted any armed resistance and that security forces had simply leveled the house they were in with grenade launchers and other weapons. The committee reported that the body of Madina Ausheva's brother, Ruslan Aushev, who was killed by security forces in June 2007 (Chechnya Weekly, July 5, 2007), was also returned to relatives with its internal organs missing.

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Interior Troops Commander Reports a "Surge in Militant Activity"

RIA Novosti quoted the commander of Russia's Interior Troops, General Nikolai Rogozhkin, as saying on March 27 that his forces and those of the Federal Security Service (FSB) killed some 50 militants in the North Caucasus last year. "In 2007, the Federal Security Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs conducted nearly 2000 operations, during which about 50 militants were eliminated, and 180 small arms, 120 grenade launchers and 500 kg of explosives seized," Rogozhkin said, adding that sappers had destroyed more than 100 landmines during the operations. Rogozhkin had earlier announced that his troops killed 40 militants in the North Caucasus during the first quarter of this year.



Gen. Nikolai Rogozhkin

Rogozhkin said on March 26 that between 400 and 500 militants are currently active in the North Caucasus and that a "surge in militant activity has been registered in Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria," RIA Novosti reported. "The gunmen are waging war using mines against troops and civilians," he said. "We are taking a range of swift measures to avert terrorist attacks." According to the news agency, Rogozhkin said Russia has deployed about 30,000 interior troops in the North Caucasus, including 23,000 in Chechnya and 6,000-7,000 in other North Caucasus republics that have seen a "surge" in militant activity.

"The situation in the region is controllable and we do not expect any extreme circumstances," Rogozhkin said. "We have sufficient experience accumulated over the past few years to combat terrorist threats in the North Caucasus, for example in Chechnya, where we ensured security at the parliamentary and presidential elections. We will prevent any serious manifestations of terrorism."

It is worth noting that Rogozhkin's comments came just few days after a rebel raid on the village of Alkhazurovo in Chechnya's Urus-Martan district (Chechnya Weekly, March 20). Kommersant reported on March 21 that two groups of rebel fighters had entered the village along two roads—one leading from Urus-Martan, the other leading from Starye Atagi—at around 9 p.m., local time, the previous evening. The newspaper quoted the police as saying that fifteen rebels were involved in the raid while local residents said there were twice that many. "At the entrances to the village the militants set up checkpoints, stopped passing cars, checked the documents of drivers and passengers, and if any turned out to be employees of law-enforcement organs, they shot them on the spot," Kommersant reported.

The newspaper quoted Alkhazurovo residents as saying that the rebels' first victim was Sultan Sugaipov, who worked in a rural unit of the police. "Seeing a group of armed people dressed in civilian clothes sitting around a bonfire on the edge of the village, the policeman went up to them, showed his work ID and began to ask who they were," Kommersant reported. "In response, one of the militants shot him right in the forehead." The rebels also killed a local inhabitant who mistakenly thought the rebel fighters were government soldiers and showed them his ID as a driver for the Shatoi military prosecutor's office. The rebels killed four other policemen. One local civilian was killed during the seizure of the village and three others—a woman and two children—were wounded. According to Kommersant, the militants left the village after three hours.

Law-enforcement officials claimed that security forces killed at least eight of the militants who occupied Alkhazurovo. The head of the Chechen presidential administration's department for cooperation with law-enforcement and power structures, Akhmed Dakaev, announced that the bodies of three rebel raiders had been found and that the bodies of the other rebels killed by security forces were probably in the woods near the village.

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The Chechen Diaspora in Russia

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

The Chechen Diaspora in Russia is the most numerous of all Chechen communities spread around the world outside of Chechnya. According to the official results of Russia's 2002 census, 1.1 million out of 1,360,253 Chechens resided in Chechnya, while 260,000 were living in other regions of the Russian Federation, including 14,500 in Moscow—the actual number is assumed to be much higher than what the Moscow authorities admit officially, and the informal count may reach as high as 100,000 Chechens in Moscow and Moscow Oblast (<http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html?id=17>).

Notably, the settlement patterns of the Diaspora throughout Russia show extreme variation. For instance, the largest communities can be found in Moscow and its environs; other sizable clusters dating back to the Soviet period have emerged in oil-producing regions of Russia, including Tyumen Oblast, Bashkiria and Tatarstan, as well as Ryazan, Voronezh, Novgorod, Saratov, Astrakhan, Volgograd and even such remote parts of Russia as Khabarovsk and Vladivostok, not to mention regions close to Chechnya like Stavropol Krai, Rostov Oblast, Krasnodar Krai and Kalmykia.

The intellectual core of the Diaspora is mostly concentrated in the two Russian capitals of Moscow and St. Petersburg—which are the homes to the academicians Ruslan Khasbulatov, Salambek Khajjiev, Y. Akhmadov, other professors and hundreds of Ph.D.'s in various fields; various artists; writers S-Kh. Nunuyev and Z. Bersanova; and many others. It is distinguished by a high degree of autonomy that is not directly influenced by the events in the homeland. In truth, the Chechen community was always very diverse and tried to find its own way in developments concerning Chechnya.

As far back as during the first Chechen military campaign (1994–1996), Kremlin officials used the Chechen Diaspora as a mechanism to apply pressure and leveraged the reputation of the Diaspora members (e.g. S. Khajjiev and D. Zavgayev) as a counterweight to the separatist movement

All previous attempts by those who claimed to act as official spokesmen of the Chechen community (Malik Saidullayev, Beslan Gantamirov, etc.) were always strongly disliked by the majority of its members. Official Diaspora figures (R. Apayev) would have preferred to position the community as a homogenous group capable of acting in a unified manner, and thus impress official Moscow as a force capable of commanding a hundred-thousand-strong base. However, Chechens themselves always opposed this strategy because they did not want to be used by only a handful of people who had managed to find a common language with the governmental institutions.

Moscow-based leaders of the so-called organizations (various foundations) of the Chechen Diaspora do not enjoy a strong reputation in the community. These leaders are mostly individuals driven by selfish ambitions and without a following among the Chechens—and no one can identify an actual leader of the Diaspora with any certainty.

A contrasting picture emerges in smaller cities, where community leaders (such as Nur-Ali Khasiev in Yaroslavl, which is home to two thousand Chechens) have real authority and are capable of addressing virtually all the issues affecting their communities as well as interacting with the government to settle all disputes. These leaders have the backing of their community members, who prefer to support prominent individuals who can be useful in times of trouble.

As of today, all regional leaders of Chechen communities try to demonstrate their commitment to Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen Republic's pro-Moscow president, and not without reason. For the first time in several decades, Chechen communities finally have the opportunity not just to survive, but also to ask the authorities to take care of their issues locally, which would not have been possible in the past. During the Soviet period, the Chechen Diaspora was mainly concerned with survival, while under Russian "democracy," its underground existence ended with the support President Vladimir Putin personally extended to Ramzan Kadyrov. Today, every local community is trying to get even for past grievances by riding the coattails of Ramzan Kadyrov's name and reputation. Even in Moscow, policemen who had been hunting down Chechens over the previous twenty or thirty years must today treat them gently and, by their own admission, were instructed by their commanders to refer to Chechens as "brothers." This

makes life and job-hunting for Chechens in Russia tolerable. To make the loyalties of regional Diaspora leaders toward Kadyrov more permanent, they are most often given appointments as representatives of the Chechen President in various Russian jurisdictions, making them de facto officials of the Chechen administration.

The events of the last two wars in Chechnya drew a strong dividing line in the Chechen Diaspora between the supporters and the opponents of separatism. Today no one is able to determine even approximately which faction is the largest because some of those who oppose secession have a different vision of Chechnya's future that is not always linked to Russia (i.e., this group opposes the separatist leaders but not the concept of Chechnya's independence from Russia).

In addition, a majority of prominent Chechen businessmen, although they are seen by Moscow as a reliable and supportive group, would be happy to see Chechnya separate from Russia to secure a safe retreat for themselves in the event that relations between Russia and Chechnya are severed. Many of the Chechens living outside the republic send money back to their families in Chechnya and continue to work in Russia in order to build an economic foundation for their future return to Chechnya. Therefore, they see Russia as a place of temporary residence in order to buy some time and gain enough energy for subsequent repatriation and re-engagement with the affairs of their small but permanently troubled homeland.

Moscow-based Chechens try to avoid contact with those who do not share their opinions, even during the Jumu'ah Friday prayer. In addition, young Chechens are becoming more attracted to the idea of independence and very critical of the mood for reconciliation among their elders. The young are much more radical and their version of Islam has more Salafi leanings due to their dedication to the late Sheikh Fathi, a Chechen Salafi leader who died in 1997. His sermons and life story have been published online and are quite popular; he attracts interest and admiration. He is viewed as a true mujahid, and young Chechens support his goal of creating a Chechen state and propagating Salafi ideas among all Chechens. The youth is more organized than the older-generation Chechens: they are involved in the same clubs and are always communicating online to share their thoughts on various developments in Chechnya. They are uniformly negative toward the current pro-Moscow Chechen leadership and critical of anyone opposing the resistance movement. At the same time, they may not be enthusiastic about the actions of certain opinion leaders of the resistance, but they consider these details to be immaterial and not worth their attention.

Yet another faction of the Chechen Diaspora is in full agreement with the ideas of the resistance movement and operates as a kind of a secret organization; although they continue to see themselves as jamaats, they are better described as a certain support base for the resistance movement. This is the group that tends to lend its support to those who for various reasons were forced to leave Chechnya. Jamaats of that kind have experienced repression at the hands of the Russian government in Tatarstan and other parts of Russia. However, they have undoubtedly survived in Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Stavropol Krai, Mordovia, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, North Ossetia, Moscow, Astrakhan, Volgograd, Ulianovsk, Ekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Tyumen and Petrozavodsk

The resistance movement consists not only of its active participants. It also includes a powerful base of popular support that is critical for its continued existence. In order to fully understand the roots and nature of the resistance movement today, one should understand that the idea of seceding from Russia has reached its peak in terms of its understanding and public support. The entire future of the resistance movement today depends on the outcome of the dilemma of whether this understanding will continue to grow or whether the public will become disappointed in the ideas put forth by the resistance movement. Shifting the emphasis away from independence and toward the proposal to build a common Islamic State in the Caucasus may scare away many supporters of independence. There is also the factor of the recent declaration of independence by Kosovo, which became an argument in support of those who continue to believe that secession from Russia may become a reality and canceled out all the missteps of the resistance leaders over the last six months. Time will tell how long that effect will last and how resistance leaders will act, although nothing so far indicates any upcoming changes in tactics or strategy.

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