

Medvedev and Kadyrov: The Start of a Beautiful Friendship?

Kavkazky Uzel, citing the press service of the Chechen president and government, reported on April 2 that President-elect Dmitry Medvedev and Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov met and discussed issues related to the socio-economic development of the Chechen Republic.

Forum.msk.ru reported that the meeting took place in the Kremlin and that during a portion of the meeting that was open to the press, they discussed changes that have taken place in Chechnya over the past year. "Let's talk about the whole complex of issues: how work to develop the

republic's socio-economic potential is going; what achievements [and] what problems there are," the website quoted Medvedev as saying in opening the meeting.



"There are many positive aspects," Kadyrov was quoted as saying during his meeting with Medvedev. "We are reconstructing the republic and not only the cities, but also remote mountain villages." Interfax quoted Kadyrov as saying that reconstruction funds had already been found and that a number of the republic's districts have already been completely reconstructed. "If last year we reconstructed dwellings, then this year we want to raise the economy [and] solve social problems," he said. "This year we have taken a priority direction—industry and agriculture. Kadyrov said that thanks to national projects—which Medvedev has been in charge of during his tenure a first deputy prime minister—most issues in the area of health care and education have been resolved. "Technical aspects remain that we must resolve ourselves," he said. Kadyrov said that the Chechen people have found support from the federal authorities and visa versa.

For his part, Medvedev promised Kadyrov to render active assistance in transferring certain federal installations over to the Chechen authorities' ownership; in allocating spare bank credits for investment in Chechnya's economy and social sphere; in speeding up the process of conferring the status of an international airport on the Grozny Airport; in regularizing the activities of Grozneftegaz, the Chechen state energy company that is 51 percent owned by the Russian state oil company Rosneft; in paying off debts accrued in fulfilling extra-programmatic activities in 2006-2007; and in allocating to the republic funds for paying compensation for homes lost during Chechnya's wars.

Medvedev also noted the rapid tempo of housing construction in Chechnya. "It is good that a large quantity of dwellings is being built," Itar-Tass quoted him as telling Kadyrov. "That was the case last year, when I visited you in the republic and, as I understand it, the same pace is being continued this year. This is very important for the reconstruction of the republic." Kadyrov said in response: "We did a whole lot in a year with your help; I hope to do even more this year."

Commenting on the meeting, Forum.msk.ru political observer Ruslan Saidov said: "Dmitry Medvedev undoubtedly realizes that Ramzan Kadyrov and his military sub-units are the basic guarantees of relative stability in both Chechnya itself and the neighboring regions of the North Caucasus. For his part, Kadyrov at this juncture is vitally interested in positive relations with the Kremlin, whoever is sitting there. That is to say, there is a mutual interest and urge to support one another. Among other things, a political union between Dmitry Medvedev and Ramzan Kadyrov, in my view, is called upon to dampen the ardor of the Kremlin siloviki, who view both presidents with hostility and are in principle capable of reckless actions."

Indeed, it is interesting to note the meeting between Dmitry Medvedev and Ramzan Kadyrov against the backdrop of Rosneft's decision to build a new oil refinery in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria (KBR), which was confirmed by KBR President Arsen Kanokov on March 4. On March 12, the speaker of Chechnya's parliament, Dukvakha Abdurakhmanov, condemned Rosneft's decision to build an oil refinery in KBR, calling it "an insult to the entire Chechen people," Regnum.ru reported; two days later, Chechnya's human rights ombudsman, Nurdi Nukhadzhiev, called Rosneft's plans "amoral" and "incomprehensible" in light of the fact that Chechnya has an Oil Institute to train qualified specialists and given Chechnya's high rate of unemployment.

The chairman of Rosneft's board, Kremlin deputy chief of staff Igor Sechin, is widely seen as the de facto leader of the Kremlin "siloviki" faction that wanted Vladimir Putin to serve a third term as Russia's president and opposed Putin's choice of Dmitry Medvedev as his successor. These same "siloviki" reportedly opposed allowing Ramzan Kadyrov, a former separatist, to become Chechnya's president, preferring instead to deal with Kadyrov's

predecessor, Alu Alkhanov, a career Interior Ministry officer who was always loyal to Moscow.

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FSB: Nazran-based Rights Group Funded by "Foreign Extremists"

Kavkazky Uzel reported on April 2 that the Federal Security Service (FSB) directorate in Ingushetia claimed that "foreign extremists" are funding the Chechen National Salvation Committee (ChKNS), the Nazran-based human rights group. For that reason, the FSB last August ordered a probe of the committee by the Federal Registration Service (Rosregistratsiya) for Ingushetia.



ChKNS Chairman Ruslan Badalov told Kavkazky Uzel that the FSB's suspicions were stated in a letter that the head of the FSB directorate in Ingushetia, Colonel Igor Bondarev, sent to Rosregistratsiya's branch in Ingushetia, which was made available during a Nazran District Court hearing on April 1 devoted to a complaint brought by the ChKNS against Rosregistratsiya. According to Badalov, the republican FSB chief asserted in the letter that the ChKNS, "under the cover of human rights activities," collects "negative material about the socio-economic and political situation in Ingushetia" that is subsequently published "in a deliberately distorted form" on the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website. Bondarev further claimed that information analyzed by the FSB found that the ChKNS is the main source of information for Ingushetiya.ru, which he described as having "a strikingly pronounced anti-Russian character" and being "aimed at discrediting the initiatives of the federal center for stabilizing the socio-political situation in the republic and the region in general."

Bondarev also said in the letter that given that the ChKNS receives grants from "international structures," he could not rule out that it had received funds from "foreign extremist organizations" and had asked the Rosregistratsiya branch in Ingushetia to investigate. The ChKNS receives funding from the National Endowment for Democracy.

The Kasparov.ru website on April 3 quoted ChKNS staffers as expressing "bewilderment" over the FSB's charge that the committee is financed by "foreign extremist organizations." One staffer noted that the committee lives off donations and suggested that the FSB is unhappy over the fact that the committee posts information about murders and abductions in Ingushetia on its website, Savechechny.narod.ru. The lawyer for Ingushetiya.ru, Kaloi Akhilgov, was quoted as saying: "The statements by the [Ingush] prosecutor about closing the 'Ingushetiya.ru' website, the criminal case brought against the website last year and these statements by the FSB—all of this has a common hidden motive; it is all political." According to Kasparov.ru, Akhilgov said the Ingush authorities probably did not like the fact that the ChKNS is not afraid to speak the truth about the situation in Ingushetia.

On March 18, the Russian Supreme Court rejected a suit brought by the Ingush prosecutor's office to close the Ingushetiya.ru website for allegedly stirring up national hatred and enmity in the republic. Ingushetia's Supreme Court had earlier rejected a similar suit, stating that it did not have jurisdiction over Ingushetiya.ru because the website is registered in the United States (Chechnya Weekly, March 20). Yet Ingushetia's prosecutor, Yury Turygin, has filed suit against Ingushetiya.ru yet again, this time asking the Moscow City Court to close the website for its alleged incitement of inter-ethnic hatred. Turygin claims the Moscow City Court has jurisdiction in the case because Ingushetiya.ru's owner, Magomed Yevloev, lives in the Russian capital. The court will consider the suit on April 11. The website's lawyer, Kaloi Akhilgov, said he is certain that this suit will also be overturned.

Gazeta.ru reported on April 3 that the office of Ingushetia's prosecutor fined the editor of Ingushetiya.ru, Rosa Malsagova, 4,000 rubles (nearly \$170) for false advertising. According to the office, prosecutors found an item posted on Ingushetiya.ru about Putin and Medvedev visiting a Cossack military school in Rostov-on-Don. In it, the website reported that when the current president and president-elect visited a computer class in the school, they found one of the cadets reading the Ingushetiya.ru website. Yet the prosecutors found an item on the Kremlin website that covered Putin's visit to the Cossack military school and was accompanied by a photograph of him and a cadet looking at the Yandex.ru website, not Ingushetiya.ru. On this basis, the prosecutors fined Ingushetiya.ru's editor for false advertising.

Meanwhile, Gazeta.ru reported on April 2 that the Nazran District Court rejected criminal charges brought against Ingushetiya.ru owner Magomed Yevloev by the Investigative Committee's main investigative directorate for the Southern Federal District for Yevloev's alleged involvement in organizing disturbances connected to an abortive opposition protest in Nazran on January 26. Several buildings were set ablaze during those disorders. Yevloev said that those responsible for the arson were "provocateurs acting in the interests of the authorities" (Chechnya Weekly,

January 31).

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Umarov Faces Charges of Incitement Via the Internet

Kommersant reported on April 2 that the Investigative Committee's investigative directorate for Chechnya has launched a criminal case against Chechen rebel leader Dokka Umarov for inciting inter-ethnic hatred and calling for the overthrow of the Russian government on the Internet. If he is captured, prosecuted and found guilty of these charges, Umarov could face a fine of up to 500,000 rubles (more than \$20,200) and a ban on holding management positions. According to the newspaper, Umarov was earlier on Russia's wanted list but the charges against him were suspended.



Kommersant quoted Chechnya's prosecutor, Valery Kuznetsov, as saying that the initiative to file criminal charges against Dokka Umarov this time was taken by ORB-2, the controversial operational-investigative unit of the Southern Federal District's main Interior Ministry department that operates in Chechnya. According to Kuznetsov, the texts of Umarov's appeals were first studied by specialists at the Pyatigorsk Linguistic University. The statements that were determined to violate the law were connected to Umarov's declaration in December 2007 of a Caucasus Emirate, which were posted on several rebel websites. In them, Umarov said that the situation in the North Caucasus "can be corrected only with weapons in hand" and called for all federal laws to be rejected and "the infidels" to be destroyed. He also called for a Caucasus Emirate encompassing and replacing Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and part of Stavropol Krai, and said that the leaders of these republics should be destroyed.

The head of ORB-2, Isa Surgueva, said he was surprised to find that there were not any criminal cases against Umarov, and that Chechen officials, including the republic's president, Ramzan Kadyrov, were also surprised. Meanwhile, the Chechen prosecutor's office has asked the Investigative Committee to review all of its criminal cases connected to Chechnya to see whether Umarov was involved in other crimes, including terrorism-related crimes. "We think that this bandit should answer for much more serious crimes than extremist statements," a source in the Chechen prosecutor's office told the newspaper. According to Kommersant, the Investigative Committee found that back in 2005 charges were brought against Umarov for "organizing illegal armed formations" and that the old charges could be merged with new ones and Umarov could be put on the wanted list again. Sources in the Chechen prosecutor's office said they plan to find out why the 2005 charges were suspended.

Kommersant noted that the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) is investigating Umarov for attempting to "liquidate the independent Chechen state" by declaring the creation of a Caucasus Emirate. According to the newspaper, under ChRI laws, treason is punishable by death.

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Briefs

- North Caucasus Bombers Target Police, Soldiers, an Official's Home...

Unknown attackers hurled a grenade into the courtyard of the home of Ingushetia's deputy culture minister, Alla Malsagova, on March 31, Interfax reported. A car was damaged but no one was hurt in the incident. It was the second-such incident: on February 5, a grenade was thrown into the same courtyard. No one was hurt in that blast. According to the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website, both attacks may have been aimed against Malsagova's son, Makhmud, who lives in the same house and is the coordinator of Ingushetiya.ru's "People's Computer" program. Ingushetiya.ru reported on April 2 that the grenade that exploded in the Malsagova home's courtyard on March 31 was thrown by Uruzbi Zyazikov, the brother of Ruslanbek Zyazikov, who heads the security detail for Ingushetia's president, Murat Zyazikov, and is a relative of the Ingush president. In Dagestan, a passerby was killed in an explosion that took place near the monument to the Defender of the Fatherland in Makhachkala, the republic's capital, on April 2 as a police car was passing by. None of the policemen was injured in the blast. A police car was the target of a bombing in the Dagestani city of Khasavyurt on April 1, Kavkazky Uzel reported. There were no passengers in the car at the time of the blast, and the car's driver was uninjured due to the fact that the vehicle was armored. In Chechnya, a law-enforcement source denied a report that an armored personnel carrier had been bombed in the Staropromyslovsky district of Grozny on April 1 and three Defense Ministry servicemen were wounded, RIA Novosti reported.

- ...and a Wedding

Nineteen people were injured on March 29 when a grenade was thrown during a brawl at a wedding in the Chechen village of Sary-Su, Agence France-Presse reported. An official in the district mayor's office told Interfax that the incident occurred during a large wedding celebration attended by most local residents as well as a group of visitors when a brawl broke out between the locals and the visitors. "Taking advantage of their superior numbers some youths from Sary-Su beat up the guests," the source said. "These in turn called some comrades up for help and the conflict reached a new level. In the ensuing brawl one participant threw a grenade." The official said that 19 people suffered shrapnel wounds and one injured woman was in critical condition. RIA Novosti quoted a local police source as saying most of the 19 injured were aged between 17 and 25. In Ingushetia, one person was killed and another wounded when an unidentified attacker opened fire on people attending a wedding at a home in Nazran on March 23, Newsru.com reported.

- Politkovskaya's Alleged Killer Named

Komsomolskaya Pravda reported on March 29 that a 30-year-old Chechen, Rustam Makhmudov, was the triggerman in the October 2006 contract-style killing of Novaya Gazeta correspondent Anna Politkovskaya. Echo Mosky Radio reported that Makhmudov was the brother of a man already arrested in connection with the murder. The reports surfaced a day after an announcement by prosecutor Vyacheslav Smirnov that the Russian authorities knew the name of Politkovskaya's killer. As Germany's DPA news agency noted, a similar claim had been made last October, prompting protests about foot-dragging from Politkovskaya's former colleagues at Novaya Gazeta. Lyudmila Alekseyeva, head of the Moscow Helsinki Group and a leading Russian human rights activist, said Smirnov's statement was "concocted" to preserve the reputations of prosecutors and timed to coincide with vital diplomatic meetings. "News that a suspect has been established could have been announced in connection with a forthcoming NATO summit and Russian-US meetings there," Alekseyeva told Interfax.

- Two Reportedly Admit to Killing Dagestani Journalist

Officials in Tajikistan said on March 31 that two men from Tajikistan admitted robbing and killing Ilyas Shurpaev, a Dagestani reporter for Russia's state-run TV network Channel One who was found dead in his rented Moscow apartment on March 21, the Associated Press reported (Chechnya Weekly, March 27). Tajik Interior Ministry spokesman Makhmadali Shafatov said one of the two suspects, Masrudzhon Yatimov, claimed Shurpaev had invited him to his house on March 12 and offered him money to have sexual relations, and that during the visit, Yatimov learned the reporter had just received a large money transfer. According to Shafatov, Yatimov and another man

returned to Shurpaev's apartment on March 21 and killed the reporter after he resisted.

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The Alkhazurovo Operation: Are Chechnya's Rebels on the Rebound?

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

Recent developments in the North Caucasus have captured the attention of skeptics who had prematurely decided that the region had finally achieved long-term stability and that there was no longer anything that could unsettle the situation. Armed clashes of the magnitude of those that took place near the village of Alkhazurovo in Urus-Martan district of Chechnya on the evening of March 21 have not been witnessed in Chechnya's military operations for a long time.



Numerous commentaries made by the separatists, along with the meaningful silence and attempts to minimize the reaction to the attack, suggest that the Alkhazurovo fight was not just a random skirmish between the resistance fighters and the Russian troops and policemen. Indeed, the operation was a well-organized military sortie mounted by one of the numerous Chechen units of the armed opposition forces. The fact that the operation was staged by a single unit is clear from the number of rebel fighters involved. In addition, according to witness reports (Kommersant, March 21; Chechnya Weekly, March 27), the group of rebel fighters entered the village simultaneously by two main roads running from Urus Martan and from Starye Atagi. The fighter headcount (even if assumed to be half as high as the separatists claimed) reached up to 70 men (Kavkazcenter.com, March 20), which indicates that this was not a run-of-the-mill raid, since it has been some time since rebel leader Dokka Umarov has dared to bring so many fighters together in one place.

The Amir of the Urus-Martan sector, Dishni Abdulmalik, entered the village of Alkhazurovo around 9 p.m., local time, and had total run of the place for three hours. One should note that this village, located in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains, is only 28 kilometers away from Grozny. Additionally, the village of Starye Atagi, located only 6 kilometers away, is home to a large military base of Russian Interior Ministry and Defense Ministry troops, who were nevertheless in no hurry to come to the rescue of their Chechen colleagues—that is, members of Kadyrov's pro-Moscow police force. What's more, one of the largest Russian army bases outside of Khankala, located east of the town of Urus Martan, is only 7 kilometers northwest of Alkhazurovo. Therefore, the Alkhazurovo operation was staged within easy reach of two military bases that did nothing to respond to the clash until the morning hours. The rebels were engaged by local policemen whose mission does not equip them to mount military operations: in effect, the police were mostly defending themselves, since they were the real target of the rebel raid. The end result was five dead and three wounded policemen as well as civilian casualties among the locals. The latter included a man who was killed and three wounded passengers in a car that was caught in the crossfire, including a woman (www.chechenews.com/news/117/ARTICLE/4068/2008-0).

The Alkhazurovo operation serves as further proof of the longstanding lack of unity between Russian troops and police forces, on one hand, and the Chechen police and their Russian counterpart units serving tours of duty in Chechnya, on the other hand. This trend of a lack of coordination and the army's intense (and fully reciprocated) contempt toward the police has been frequently observed during both military campaigns in Chechnya.

Should the Alkhazurovo raid be interpreted as a restart of military activities by the armed opposition forces or an isolated act of a single Chechen jamaat commander? It would probably be premature to conclude that the separatist forces, who are sinking into political infighting over building the Islamic state of the Caucasus Emirate, have decided to launch a campaign. In truth, Dokka Umarov has never been the military mastermind he was undeservedly believed to be. His military mastery came from audacity and the sheer numbers of his troops, but to this day he has no independent military actions attached to his name. Umarov also has nothing to contribute to the idea of building the Islamic State due to a complete lack of education in this area. Therefore, he will always remain dependent on those who orchestrated the transformation that replaced Ichkeria with the Caucasus Emirate and on those who managed to split the resistance movement into the democratic camp of Akhmed Zakaev and the Islamists led by Dokka Umarov. And that would have been fine, except that the change has led certain politicians to jump to the conclusion that the Chechen conflict is now fueled by religious rather than separatist sentiments, which certainly harms the public opinion that is generally sympathetic to Chechens and their resistance to Russia.

The Alkhazurovo operation, when combined with the multiple isolated attacks against policemen, the repeated mining

of roads used for military traffic and the attacks on police units from other Russian regions serving in Grozny (<http://ru.wordpress.com/tag/wilayah-of-nokhchicho>), provides incomplete but consistent proof that those who believe in the demise of the Chechen resistance movement are rushing to judgment.

In truth, the death of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and his successor Abdul Khalim Sadulaev, followed by the assassination of the military leader of the entire regional resistance movement Shamil Basaev, has resulted in a de facto paralysis of the core of the resistance movement. Only the foundations built by Shamil Basaev that survived his death allowed the Chechens to regroup and attempt to reorganize their resources. Instead, however, they decided to change the initial strategic goals and reduce them to religious slogans, which served to delay the restructuring even further. It also took at least a year for them to explain the need and reason for this change in strategy.

Therefore, the next month should be a good indication of whether any further actions by the Chechen resistance fighters should be expected. Although the present state of affairs, in which no active military operations are underway, is quite satisfactory to everyone involved in the conflict. The Chechen rebels can use this time to focus on the political battles within the resistance movement. For their part, the Russians are quite happy with the appearance of a temporary lull or ostensible calm, and Ramzan Kadyrov is certainly satisfied with the way this fits in with his policies and the dividends he receives for the putative victory over the separatists, whose numbers (according to his statistics) keep going down every year. In reality, their numbers remain constant due to the incoming young recruits who see the rebel fighters as heroes. In this regard, Magomed Vakhaev, a State Duma deputy representing Chechnya, launched an official inquiry to compel the Interior Ministry and Defense Ministry to explain why their estimates still refer to "hundreds" of rebel fighters (<http://www.km.ru/news/view.asp?id=BE8B82337D9B4665B2A4145A7A20F689>), a move that will likely force the Russians to make their numbers consistent across different government agencies.

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The Geography of OMON Deployments in the North Caucasus

By Andrei Smirnov

On March 17, Russian official news agencies reported that a rebel group in the North Caucasian Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria (KBR) had a day earlier tried to destroy an armored car with five police officers inside using a roadside bomb. The vehicle was damaged but luckily none of the officers were hurt (Chechnya Weekly, March 20).



The policemen were driving to the settlement of Khasanya on the southern outskirts of Nalchik, the KBR capital, to man a checkpoint near the settlement. The most striking aspect of the incident is that the five officers in the car were not locals. According to the RIA Novosti and Interfax agencies, they were officers of the Police Special-Task Unit (OMON) from Nizhny Novgorod, a Russian city located more than 500 miles from the North Caucasus. The bombing of the car on the outskirts of Nalchik on the evening of March 16 reveals that Russian authorities have started to send additional police troops to the western part of the North Caucasus, where the situation used to be considered relatively calm and local police structures seemed capable of combating insurgents without the assistance of their colleagues from other parts of Russia.

Last year, a group of Russian human rights activists conducted a study to find out how missions to the North Caucasus affected the physical and mental state of the Russian policemen themselves. The study's findings were very gloomy. "Russian policemen lose their qualifications and professional skills during their duty tours in Chechnya," it stated (Chechnya Weekly, July 5, 2007). While the human rights activists' report was discussed at the Research Institute of the Russian Interior Ministry, the ministry apparently drew conclusions diametrically opposed to those of the report: the length of the tours of duty in the North Caucasus was extended (policemen now have to spend six months in the North Caucasus instead of three); moreover, police officers are now not only being sent to Chechnya, but to all the region's republics, including Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

The geography of police units deployed for tours of duty in the region continues to be quite impressive, giving the appearance that the whole of Russia is involved in the Caucasus war. While Russia's national press declares that everything is being normalized in Chechnya, Russian regional media report that police troops from the Far East to the Baltic Sea are being deployed to the North Caucasus by train and plane. On January 29, the Sever DV agency reported that a unit of the police special forces (OMSN) from Magadan—located near Alaska, 10,000 miles away from the Caucasus—had been sent by plane to Chechnya. Just two months earlier, on November 14, Vesti reported that a plane had landed in Kaliningrad, a Russian city that is adjacent to Poland and Germany, bringing home members of the Kaliningrad special-task police unit (OMON) from another tour of duty in Chechnya.

Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to say that all 89 of Russia's regions are involved in the Chechen/Caucasian campaign. The question is why the Kremlin needs so many policemen in the Caucasus, and especially in Chechnya, when thousands of local officers and Russian troops are already there. In 2001, Sergei Ivanov, who was then Russia's Defense Minister, complained that the government had to send troops to Chechnya from all of Russia's regions and it was a burden for the budget. It seems that this is still true, at least when it comes to police forces. Policemen from Magadan continue to be deployed in the Caucasus despite the high cost of bringing them from Russia's Asian Far North to its volatile European South.

In Chechnya, police units from other Russian regions are stationed in all parts of the republic. Colonel Sergei Kondobaev, commander of the police special forces from Irkutsk (Eastern Siberia), told a Siberian newspaper that there are at least 10 combined groups consisting of policemen and FSB (Federal Security Service) officers operating in the republic (Vostochno-Sybyrskaya Pravda, November 21, 2007). For example, a unit of OMON from the Russian town of Lipetsk is located Borozdinovskaya, a village that is in the calm northern part of Chechnya. Policemen from Tatarstan are stationed in the city of Gudermes (there is also a group of Tatar police officers in Ingushetia), while units from the Urals and Siberia are concentrated mostly in the town of Argun and Kurchaloi District.

In addition to the Russian police, the federal Interior Minister sends special units to Chechnya and the North Caucasus on a regular basis, including criminal investigators and experts on organized crime and corruption. These personnel

are mainly concentrated in the Chechen capital Grozny and the Russian military base at Khankala. Hidden behind fortified walls, they deal with detainees who are brought to them for interrogation by their colleagues from police special units.

Russian policemen are present in most strategically important checkpoints in Chechnya, such as the post near the village of Chiri-Yurt (Volgograd OMON) that is at the foot of the mountains, the Kavkaz-1 post (Kursk OMON) located at the administrative border between Chechnya and Ingushetia, and the post located near the village of Benoi in Vedeno District (Perm OMON). It seems that the Russian military still does not trust Chechen policemen to guard Chechen territory.

The role of police officers from other regions has also increased in the neighboring Dagestan. Today all police operations in the republic are coordinated by Sergei Chenchik, deputy head of the Russian Anti-Organized Crime Department. An additional 400 policemen were deployed to Dagestan from other Russian regions on the eve of the presidential elections that took place early March (Regnum, March 2). Police squads from Stavropol, Tolyaiti and Moscow are stationed in Khasavyurt District, an area of Dagestan adjacent to Chechnya. OMON units consisting of ethnic Russians also take part in sweep operations in Dagestan's heartland—the Buinaksk and Utsukul districts.

Russian police units play the main role even in North Ossetia, the most loyal of the republics of the North Caucasus. Units of OMON from Arkhangelsk and Lipetsk serve at checkpoints in North Ossetia's cities and on its roads.

Despite the fact that the Kremlin sends police units to the Caucasus from all Russian regions, geography is still a factor. The smallest units of 20-40 fighters come to the Caucasus from the Far East, Siberia and Kaliningrad. Yet the closer a region is to the North Caucasus, the larger are the units taken from it. According to local Russian media sources, there are up to 200 officers from Lipetsk in the Caucasus, more than 200 from Voronezh and about 150 from Bryansk (the Bryansk OMON is stationed in Chechnya's mountainous Shatoi District). As for officers from the regions adjacent to the North Caucasus, like Krasnodar Krai, Stavropol or Rostov, they spend more time in the Caucasus than at home.

It is a closely guarded secret how many police officers regularly do tours of duty in Chechnya and other republics of the North Caucasus, but it would be safe to assume that at least several thousand of Russia's best policemen leave their homes every six months to go to the North Caucasus to maintain Russian domination over the region.

It is these OMON fighters and policemen, together with FSB officers and Russian army servicemen, not Ramzan Kadyrov or any of the Kremlin's local clients, which are in fact the backbone of Russian rule in the Caucasus. That is why any proposals to bring them home are non-negotiable for the Kremlin.

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