

### Ingush Opposition Leaders Demand Aushev's Return

The campaign to gather signatures on a petition calling for the return of Ruslan Aushev as Ingushetia's president has been completed. According to the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website, leaders of the opposition to Ingushetia's current president, Murat Zyazikov, said during a press conference in Moscow on July 10 that a total of 105,000 signatures had been gathered, out of which 80,000 had been forwarded to the federal authorities in Moscow. According to the opposition leaders, an additional 25,000 signatures were seized by members of the anti-organized crime directorate (UBOP) of Ingushetia's Interior Ministry during a raid.



Among the Ingush opposition leaders who participated in the Moscow press conference were Magomed Khazbiev, head of the organizing committee of the Ingush national protest movement; Kaloï Akhîlgov, an Ingush youth leader; and Kheda Saratova, an independent journalist.

Next week, the 80,000 signatures will be forwarded to President Dmitry Medvedev along with an appeal in the name of the people of Ingushetia demanding that Zyazikov be removed from office, held accountable for the situation in the republic and replaced by Aushev. "In the event that the federal authorities do not name Aushev to the post of head of Ingushetia, we will protest and organize a large-scale demonstration," the Novyi Region website quoted Khazbiev as saying. He added that Aushev has agreed, in absentia, to head the republic. "I suggested to Ruslan Aushev to come to Ingushetia and organize a demonstration there," Khazbiev said. "He answered: 'I cannot do that; a revolution will begin [and] young guys will suffer.' However, at the same time, Aushev noted that he is always with his people and if the people decide he should be president, then so it will be."

Khazbiev also said that leaders of the Ingush diaspora in Moscow not long ago visited the Kremlin and demanded that one of them be named to replace Zyazikov as head of the republic, insisting that they could correct the situation in the republic. "But if they come to power, nothing will change," Khazbiev said. "Therefore we decided to organize an action in support of Ruslan Aushev. The people are certain that with his return changes will really take place in the republic. Only he can save the republic from war. He is a person of honor and his word." Khazbiev emphasized that he and his fellow opposition leaders are not asking the federal authorities for funds to improve the situation in the republic, but simply for Ruslan Aushev's appointment as head of Ingushetia.

According to the Ingush protest leaders, disorder is now taking place every day in Ingushetia, including disappearances, murders and kidnappings. "During the past month, murders of both members of the law-enforcement organs and civilians have begun to take place daily," said Khazbiev. "The current president of Ingushetia Murat Zyazikov and his entourage have brought the republic to this state." Khazbiev added that a turning point has been reached and that if the situation does not change, a full-scale war will break out. "From 2002 to 2007, 158 people disappeared without a trace and more than 700 people were murdered in the republic," he said. "If a war breaks out, it will also affect Kabardino-Balkaria and spread to the entire Caucasus. A new Caucasus war will begin."

**Find this article at:**

**<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374296>**

## North Caucasus Weekly

Volume 9, Issue 27 (July 11, 2008)

### Militants Kill Three in Ingush Village

On July 11, unknown gunmen attacked a car in which policemen were traveling in the village of Ordzhonikidzevskaya, Ingushetia, wounding three of them. A source in Ingushetia's Investigative Committee told RIA Novosti that the attackers fired grenade launchers and automatic weapons at the vehicle. On July 8, a group of armed rebels raided the village of Muzhichy in Ingushetia and killed three men linked to the security forces. Citing Russian media reports, the Moscow Times on July 10 quoted an eyewitness as saying that 15 armed men dragged the three men from a group standing outside a shop and shot them in a well-planned attack. The slain men were a policeman, a former Interior Ministry officer and a military teacher. "The whole attack lasted no more than 15 minutes," Isa Gandarov, a lawyer, was quoted as saying. "There were no more than 15 rebels, and they spoke in Chechen, Ingush and Russian."



According to the Moscow Times, most of the people living in Muzhichy hurried on when asked for comment about the attack on July 9, the day after it took place, as police and special forces in armored personnel carriers patrolled the village. The English-language newspaper quoted one woman as saying in an exasperated voice: "Why were these people killed? Because they were trying to support their families?"

In its own story on the rebel raid on Muzhichy, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, citing sources in Ingushetia's Interior Ministry, reported on July 10 that a group of up to 15 militants had entered the village from a wooded mountainous area and that some of the raiders had burst into one of the village's shops, stealing the shop's cash register and food, while other rebel gunmen stole two cars from local residents. According to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, besides killing three villagers connected to the security forces, the raiders shot and wounded another local resident and, after leaving Muzhichy, attacked a checkpoint belonging to an Interior Ministry Internal Troops operational regiment on the outskirts of the village of Nesterovskaya. After an exchange of fire, the militants retreated. "Representatives of the law-enforcement organs assert that the bandits spoke in Chechen [and] presumably entered Ingushetia from the Chechen settlement of Assinovskaya and escaped in the same direction," the newspaper wrote.

Itar-Tass reported on July 6 that four militants were killed in a special operation in Ingushetia during which two servicemen were also killed and two policemen were wounded. The news agency reported that gunmen in a VAZ-2110 automobile had attacked a group of policemen in the Ingush city of Malgobek on July 5, wounding one. Less than an hour later, gunmen near the settlement of Verkhnie Achaluki in Ingushetia's Malgobeksky district fired automatic weapons and a grenade launcher at a vehicle carrying five republican Interior Ministry officers, killing one and wounding two. After the second incident, the gunmen tried to escape, ditching their car near the settlement of Nizhnie Achaluki and running into a wooded area, but were surrounded by security forces.

Four rebels were killed in an ensuing special operation, during which two servicemen were killed and two policemen wounded. Ingushetia's Investigative Committee identified two of the slain militants as Ilyas Bokov and Khamagomed Bogatyrev, both of them residents of Ingushetia who were wanted for alleged participation in the rebel raid on police and government installations in Ingushetia in June 2004. The other two slain militants, whose bodies were also found in the wooded area, were not identified.

Also on July 6, the head of the anti-narcotics section of the anti-organized crime directorate (UBOP) of Ingushetia's Interior Ministry, Magomed Bapkhoev, was killed when unidentified gunmen fired on his car in the city of Nazran's Barsuki municipal district. Sources in Ingushetia's Interior Ministry told Interfax that Bapkhoev died on the way to the hospital and that his wife, who was in the car with him at the time of attack, was wounded.

On July 4, unidentified attackers burned down a new house belonging to Ingushetia's vice-premier in charge of security issues, Bashir Aushev, in Nazran's Tsentra-Kamaz district. A source in Ingushetia's Interior Ministry told RIA Novosti on July 5 that the attackers had pulled up to the house the previous evening and thrown several Molotov cocktails inside. Also on July 4, a large improvised explosive device was discovered along the side of the road on the Kavkaz highway near the settlement of Gazi-Yurt in Ingushetia's Nazran district. *Kavkazky Uzel* reported that the device was destroyed in a controlled explosion.

The Moscow Times reported on July 10 that at present, "military helicopters fly hourly over Ingushetia, and the army

sweeps the roadsides daily for bombs.”

Meanwhile, Newsru.com reported on July 7 that 34-year-old Khamid Iliev was abducted on July 5 from his home in Erzi, a settlement for Chechen refugees in Ingushetia, by people dressed in camouflage and armed with automatic weapons. Police subsequently detained a 25-year-old resident of the village of Guli, in Ingushetia’s Dzheiraksky district, in connection with the crime, and relatives of Iliev identified the suspect as having been involved in the abduction. A source in Ingushetia’s Investigative Committee said the abduction was probably part of a vendetta.

In a commentary on the situation in Ingushetia published in the Guardian on July 8, Human Rights Watch researcher Tanya Lokshina reiterated the thrust of the group’s recently-published report on Ingushetia (North Caucasus Weekly, June 26)—that in the wake of the June 2004 raid on two towns in Ingushetia by rebels led by Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev, heavy-handed security operations resembling those previously carried out in Chechnya have actually strengthened Ingushetia’s insurgency.

“Young men suspected of involvement with insurgency were hauled off by security services and tortured into incriminating themselves and others,” Lokshina wrote. “Those who they named when the beatings and the electric shocks became unbearable were also rounded up and tortured. After the hostage-taking atrocity at a school in the North Ossetian town of Beslan in September 2004, these ‘dirty war’ tactics became even more widespread in neighboring Ingushetia. The ‘lucky’ ones who were tortured but released—as opposed to disappeared or convicted in flawed trials—knew that normal life was over. They were already in the database of the ‘usual suspects’ and would either have to flee Ingushetia, be ready for further detention and torture, or join the rebels for the lack of a better choice. As the Ingush insurgents developed a militant Islamist agenda, the authorities also tagged as a potential insurgent any strictly observant young Muslim. Ingush villages suffered sweeps and targeted raids.”

According to Lokshina, such “dirty war” tactics, combined with the violent suppression of public protests against the administration of Ingushetia’s president, Murat Zyazikov, have served only to alienate and even radicalize the republic’s population. “After four years of counter-terrorism in Ingushetia, the insurgency has only intensified,” she wrote. “Those people who once supported the government’s counter-terrorism agenda now see the government as the enemy. It didn’t have to be this way. And Russia’s European partners can help the people of Ingushetia, and the wider region, by using their influence with Moscow to change this policy. Russia can still end impunity for killings, disappearances and torture in Ingushetia. It can work to regain the trust of Ingush communities and starve the insurgency of potential supporters. It can stop Ingushetia from becoming the full-blown human rights crisis that is synonymous with Chechnya.”

**Find this article at:**

**<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374297>**

## North Caucasus Weekly

Volume 9, Issue 27 (July 11, 2008)

### Chechen Interior Ministry Sources Doubt Umarov is Surrounded

Two members of the Interior Ministry Internal Troops' special Yug (South) battalion were wounded in a shootout with militants in a wooded area near the village of Eshelkhatoi in Chechnya's Vedeno district on July 7, Kavkazky Uzel reported. A Chechen police source told the website the shootout took place when members of the Yug battalion who were carrying out a joint operation with local police encountered a group of eight rebels, who opened fire on them with automatic weapons and grenade launchers.



The Associated Press on July 8 quoted security officers as saying they had killed a "suspected Islamic militant" who was holed up on the third floor of a dilapidated apartment building in Grozny. The sources told AP that two officers were wounded in a shootout with the militant after dozens of federal troops and police had surrounded the building in the Chechen capital. The same sources told the news agency that the slain 22-year-old man had been detained previously for suspected membership in an Islamic group. Yet Kavkazky Uzel reported on July 8 in an item apparently about the same incident that a man had been killed that day in Grozny's Leninsky district in a shootout between armed people in camouflage. The website stated that, according to one version of the incident, the gun battle erupted when security forces tried to capture a rebel fighter. Yet according to another version of events, the shootout was actually between two groups of "siloviki"—meaning security forces—Kavkazky Uzel reported.

Separately, the Caucasus Times on July 9 quoted a Chechen law-enforcement source as saying that officers from the Chechen criminal investigation department and the Chechen branch of the Federal Security Service (FSB) had detained two individuals in Grozny's Staropromyslovsky district suspected of involvement in "illegal armed formations." The same source said that a shootout had taken place between members of the federal Defense Ministry's Vostok battalion and three unidentified men in a wooded area of the Vedeno district, but that no one was hurt in the gun battle.

The Caucasus Times also quoted the first deputy commander of the federal Interior Ministry's Internal Troops, Colonel General Sergei Bunin, as saying that the aggravation of the situation in Chechnya's mountainous districts, where militants have carried out several attacks on federal troops, border troops and Chechen policemen, was connected to the fact that the "illegal armed formations" had received money from abroad. Bunin was quoted as saying that he also did not rule out the possibility that rebel leader Dokka Umarov was involved in organizing terrorist attacks. Bunin said that the command of the Combined Group of Forces in the North Caucasus had taken a number of measures aimed at thwarting the actions of "bandit groups" in Chechnya and plans to carry out "large-scale operations to eliminate terrorists in the republic's mountainous areas."

Bunin's claim that the rebels have received fresh infusions of money from abroad echoes the claim made by Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Alkhanov on June 30 that the recent increase in rebel activity was the result of fresh financial infusions from Arab "sponsors" (North Caucasus Weekly, July 3).

Meanwhile, Kavkazky Uzel on July 9 quoted Chechen Interior Ministry sources as saying they had no information confirming reports that had appeared in the Russian press several days earlier claiming that security forces had blockaded Dokka Umarov in Chechnya's mountainous Shatoi district. Those reports had cited "competent sources," who claimed that Umarov and his close associate Tarkhan Gaziev, who heads the Mukhabarat (security service) of the rebels' recently proclaimed Caucasian Emirate, were trapped by federal forces on the outskirts of the village of Kharsenoi. The sources claimed that Russian military intelligence (GRU) commandos were involved in the encirclement of the rebel leaders and that federal forces were bombarding the presumed location of Umarov and Gaziev using long-range artillery.

"Umarov is a native of the Shatoi district village of Kharsenoi and it is precisely on the outskirts of this village where he, as far as I know, usually likes to hide," an unnamed Chechen Interior Ministry source told Kavkazky Uzel. "But I think that if Umarov really was 'blocked up' in that area, there would already have been some concrete results. Will the military bombard the woods for weeks and wait for Umarov and his band to run directly into the ambush organized by the spetsnaz? That's simply absurd. Even if he was there, he would have left immediately after the artillery fire started. They [the militants] constantly move around not only in Chechnya's mountains, but also go out into contiguous

territories, because that is the only chance they have to survive.”

Kavkazky Uzel reported that Shatoi district inhabitants confirmed that there had been recent intense artillery shelling on the outskirts of Kharsenoi, which was practically leveled back at the start of the “counter-terrorist operation” in Chechnya in 1999. At the same time, the locals said such shelling is not uncommon and that the military periodically bomb surrounding woods and mountain gorges from the air as well as using artillery.

**Find this article at:**

**<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374298>**

## North Caucasus Weekly

Volume 9, Issue 27 (July 11, 2008)

### Three Policemen Killed in Kabardino-Balkaria

Three policemen were shot and killed in Baksan, a town in Kabardino-Balkaria, July 7. "Criminals attacked a highway patrol post situated in the so-called Baksan circle and shot dead three members of the police with an automatic weapon," Interfax quoted a local police source as saying. RIA Novosti reported that the bodies of two police officers were found on a road late on July 7, while the body of the third was found on the roadside. "Two government-issued Kalashnikov assault rifles and two Makarov pistols together with ammunition have been taken," the source told the news agency.

Itar-Tass reported on July 8 that the identity of those involved in the murder of the three policemen had been established and that one of the Makarov pistols taken from them had been found. "All the three suspects are local residents," the news agency quoted a law-enforcement source as saying. The source identified the alleged attackers as Aslan Karatsukov, 34, of the village of Dugulubei; Ramzan Bairami, 25, of the village of Psychokh; and Aualudin Bakayev, 31, of the village of Kyzburun. "Further measures to establish other members of the gang operating on the territory of the republic are being taken," the source said.

Itar-Tass identified the slain policemen as 39-year-old Admir Adzhiyev and 24-year-old Khasan Tkhakumchev, both of whom were traffic police inspectors with the Baksan region Interior Department, and Sergeant Khusen Kanloyev, an Interior Department patrol police officer. The news agency reported that they were found dead at the 26th kilometer of the Prokhladny-Elbrus highway near the city of Baksa late on July 7. According to Itar-Tass, their bullet-riddled bodies were found on the highway and roadside not far from a Zhiguli car with pierced tires, while a service VAZ-2107 car with a pierced fuel tank was found one kilometer from the scene of the crime.

Kavkazky Uzel reported on July 4 that an improvised explosive device containing explosives equivalent to 8.2 kilograms of TNT and packed with bolts went off in the city of Tyrnyauz in Kabardino-Balkaria's Baksan valley. The bomb exploded on a bridge across the Baksan River as a UAZ police vehicle was crossing it. No one, however, was hurt in the blast.

In Dagestan, meanwhile, a car exploded on a bridge in the republic's Khasavyurt district on July 9. RIA Novosti on July 10 quoted a local police source as saying that an investigation into the blast and a search for the driver were being conducted. Also on July 9, a civilian and two militants were killed in a shootout that took place after police surrounded a house in the town of Derbent in which armed militants were said to be hiding. A militant was killed and another wounded in the shootout, which also left a civilian woman dead and a 12-year-old boy severely wounded. RIA Novosti identified the slain militants as Mansur Velibekov and his brother Gadzhi, both of whom, according to the news agency, were members of a "local armed gang."

Also on July 9, a court in Makhachkala, Dagestan's capital, ruled that a search of the apartment building in which lawyer Adilgeri Omarov lives, which was carried out as part of a counter-terrorist operation conducted in Khasavyurt district on July 7–8, was illegal. Kavkazky Uzel quoted Omarov as saying that the city of Khasavyurt had been blockaded by armored vehicles on all sides, after which apartment buildings were selectively searched, including those in which high-level city officials live. According to an unconfirmed report, the home of Khasavyurt Mayor Saigidpasha Umakhanov was among those searched.

Omarov told Kavkazky Uzel that nothing good will come from such operations and that there are powerful forces in Moscow who "want to ignite ... [a] war in Dagestan in order to receive promotions in rank, "decorations, medals and other privileges." According to the website, security officials reported that 11 people were detained during the Khasavyurt district security operation on July 7 and that a bomb-making laboratory was also found and destroyed.

At the beginning of July, Dagestan's Interior Minister, Adilgeri Magomedtagirov, said that the operational situation in the republic had recently sharply deteriorated and that members of "illegal armed formations" had stepped up their activities. According to Kavkazky Uzel, a bomb blew up a Niva automobile traveling in the city of Khasavyurt on July 5, severely injuring three policemen. The bomb left a crater 1.5 meters (nearly five feet) wide and 0.4 meters (over a foot) deep.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta on July 7 quoted General Vladimir Pronichev, head of the Border Guard Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB), as saying that the situation in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan remains highly unstable. "Everything that is going on at the moment in these republics is derived from the actions of certain forces intending to destroy our state by means of destabilizing the socio-political situation in the region."

**Find this article at:**

**<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374299>**

## North Caucasus Weekly

Volume 9, Issue 27 (July 11, 2008)

### Briefs

#### Strasbourg Court Orders Moscow to Compensate Kidnapped Chechens' Relatives

In the latest ruling against the Russian government in a case involving Chechnya, the European Court of Human Rights on July 3 ordered Moscow to pay a total of 175,000 euros (\$275,000) in compensation to relatives of several Chechen men abducted by Russian troops in Chechnya in 2000 and 2002. As the Associated Press reported, that same day, President Dmitry Medvedev fired Russia's envoy to the Strasbourg-based court, Veronika Milinchuk. The AP noted that while no reason was given for Milinchuk's dismissal, the Kremlin has been "irked" by the dozens of verdicts against Russia issued by the court in cases involving human rights abuses in Chechnya. Also on July 3, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favor of a Russian government request that case files relating to the 2002 Moscow theater siege be held as classified material, RIA Novosti reported. A lawyer for the relatives of victims of the siege, Igor Trunov, said the files contain no secret information and thus there are no grounds to restrict access to them. He also said that if additional evidence was presented in secret, the Strasbourg court's ruling would also be classified, which could have "legal implications" for the plaintiffs.

#### Russian Court Finds Military Culpable for Serviceman Who Vanished in Chechnya

The city court in Maikop, the capital of Adygeya, ordered Russia's Defense Ministry to pay 200,000 rubles (more than \$8,500) in compensation to Rosa Khalishkhova, a resident of the city of Nartkala, Kabardino-Balkaria, whose son Albert went to Chechnya in 1995 to fight as a Russian serviceman and disappeared there. Kavkazky Uzel reported on July 8 that Khalishkhova was never told what happened to her son and spent five years searching for him in Chechnya herself. In 1999, she was wounded and captured by militants but following her release continued to search for her son. The Maikop District Court also ordered the Defense Ministry to provide Khalishkhova with information about her son's fate within one month.

#### Beslan "Healer" Sentenced to 11 Years

On July 7, Moscow's Tagansky Court sentenced Grigory Grabovoi, the self-styled healer who claimed he could resurrect children killed in the Beslan school siege, to 11 years in jail, the BBC reported. Grabovoi, who was accused by Beslan residents and others of accepting money for promising to bring back the dead or cure serious illnesses, was convicted on 11 counts of fraud. He denied all charges, saying he was a victim of religious persecution.

Find this article at:

<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374300>



## North Caucasus Weekly

Volume 9, Issue 27 (July 11, 2008)

### Salafists and Sufis Square Off Over Chechnya

By Andrei Smirnov

From July 5 to July 7, an international Islamic conference entitled “The Place and Role of Sufism in the Islamic World,” which gathered together more than 200 clergymen from Russia and other countries, was held in the Chechen town of Gudermes. According to official sources, the event was organized by the Libya-based World Islamic People’s Leadership organization (Interfax, July 1). The event, however, was most likely financed by the Russian government. The Kremlin seeks support from international Sufi leaders to counter the aggressive Salafi ideology that inspires the anti-Russian insurgency in the North Caucasus.

Sufism is a mysterious branch of Islam whose main idea is that a Muslim in his lifetime should concentrate on improving his moral principles while the social environment around him is not so important. At the opposite side of the spectrum, the disciples of the Salafi branch of Islam believe that all Muslims compose one Umma (society) that should be united as one political force and live according to Islamic Sharia law. The separatists in the North Caucasus very often justify their armed struggle by the fact that Caucasian Muslims live in a country ruled by non-Muslims (Russians). Salafists are usually very hostile to non-Muslim societies.

It is no surprise that the Russian authorities prefer to deal with and support Sufi disciples and not Salafi preachers. The conference in Gudermes was just another attempt to strengthen Sufism in Chechnya, where Salafism has become very popular recently, especially among the Chechen youth. In an address to the conference participants, Chechnya’s pro-Russian president, Ramzan Kadyrov, said that the “spiritual and moral ideals of Sufism are directly connected with the acknowledgment of monotheism, with the perception of the multitudinous attributes of the Most-High, with spiritual perfection, with the purification of a believer’s heart from evil, with condemnation of luxury and social injustice, with equality and human brotherhood” (Vesti-Severny Kavkaz, July 7). The conference adopted a resolution stating that “for many Muslim peoples spiritual knowledge of Sufism is part of their culture” and that the spiritual knowledge of Sufism is directed toward the “establishment of tolerant relations between people and helps to block radical and extremist developments” (Vesti-Severny Kavkaz, July 7).

Thus, the participants of the conference did not hide their main goal: to find ways to confront Salafism effectively. “The conference was an important event to unite all healthy elements of the traditional Islam that opposes radical Islamic distortions of the true faith,” said Ruslan Saidov, a political observer and unofficial ideologist for Kadyrov’s regime. Saidov sees Sufism as an ideological basis for national and state construction in Chechnya (forum.msk.ru, July 4).

The Kremlin regards Sufism as an ideal alternative to Salafism because Sufism agitates for non-violent methods, does not interfere with politics and helps to divide Russian Muslims, especially in the North Caucasus, according to ethnic characteristics. The North Caucasian insurgency has the opposite goal: to unite Muslims living in the Caucasus with those living in all Russia under a banner of the holy war against infidels and for establishing a pure Islamic state. The rebels in the North Caucasus recently gained an important ally—the famous Russian Muslim preacher Said Buryatsky.

Half ethnic Russian, half Buryat (the Buryats are a minority in Siberia very close to the Mongols), Sheik Said Buryatsky graduated from an Islamic Institute in Egypt several years ago. According to Jamestown’s sources among Moscow Muslims, Buryatsky’s main spiritual teacher in Egypt was Sheikh Mukhammad Khasan, an Egyptian scholar who issued his own fatwa (religious ruling) concerning defensive and offensive Jihad (holy war). According to his fatwa, a defensive Jihad requires every Muslim to defend any Muslim land against infidel aggression while an offensive Jihad is not obligatory.

Some people say that while studying in Egypt, Said Buryatsky was arrested once by the Egyptian police on charges of extremism. Despite this fact, Buryatsky became one of the leading young Muslim preachers after his return to Russia. Russia’s Muslim community lacks good preachers and Buryatsky has demonstrated good skills as a religious missionary. His emotional sermons are well-constructed, and his knowledge of the Koran and religious literature in general is exceptional. He also speaks fluent Arabic.

Said Buryatsky used to preach on Radio Islam (which is controlled by the Spiritual Directorate of Russian Muslims and is the main source of propaganda for Islam in Russia). It is astonishing that the Russian authorities allowed Said to preach on the radio for such a long time because some of his sermons sounded clearly Salafi-like. In his sermons, Buryatsky targeted Shias as well as Sufis, calling them people who distort the true Islam. The official Muslim clerics probably overlooked this simply because they needed a preacher as brilliant as Said Buryatsky.

However, Buryatsky suddenly appeared in Chechnya accompanied by two top rebel leaders of the Caucasian insurgency: Dokka Umarov and Supyan Abdulaev. In a video posted by the rebel Kavkaz-Center website on June 19, Buryatsky stated that after the declaration of a Caucasian Emirate (see Chechnya Weekly, November 1 and 8, 2007) it became clear that the Emirate is what Russian Muslims really need and that all Muslims should support it. Buryatsky called Dokka Umarov “our amir”—meaning “our leader.”

Buryatsky’s appearance in Chechnya and the recent conference of Sufis in Guderemes demonstrate the important role that religion has started to play in the Chechen conflict, which back in the early 1990s appeared to be simply a political dispute between the federal center and one of Russia’s regions.

**Find this article at:**

**<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374301>**

# Chechnya Remains the Epicenter of the North Caucasus Insurgency

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

Faced with a surge of Russian news media reports about daily armed skirmishes in Chechnya, official Moscow is trying to defuse the tension by deploying its usual crude propaganda tactics. To name just one, the Russian cabinet's presidium passed an extremely well-publicized resolution to invest approximately 120 billion rubles into Chechnya's economy over the next four years (<http://www.rian.ru/politics/20080623/111797654.html>; North Caucasus Weekly, June 26)—a move long awaited by Chechen economists. And just as expected, it was followed by a cold-shower statement from Regional Development Minister Dmitry Kozak effectively warning official Grozny that the gravy train could be cut off as soon as next year if results are not forthcoming. Still, the Kremlin has, in a very public manner, made it known that no corners will be cut when it comes to Chechnya's funding. According to Igor Bunin, president of the Center for Political Technologies, the money is a sort of reward for Ramzan Kadyrov's efforts to keep news of armed clashes to a minimum (<http://www.aif.ru/politic/article/19080>).

Following this bit of good news for the Chechen leadership, Ramzan Kadyrov hosted a visit by several top Kremlin officials charged with developing and implementing Chechnya-related policies. The guest list included Sergei Naryshkin, President Dmitry Medvedev's chief of staff, and Vladislav Surkov, a deputy Kremlin chief of staff who was the chief ideologist of the pro-Putin United political party during Putin's term and whose father was an ethnic Chechen (<http://www.echo.msk.ru/news/319751.html>). In all likelihood, Naryshkin decided to bring Surkov along to serve two purposes: first, to demonstrate that no changes toward Ramzan Kadyrov are envisaged, and second, to have Surkov, who was a key driver of Chechnya-related policies during Putin's term, deliver a direct and personal warning to Putin's proxy man against any possible efforts to reach out to Putin directly over the head of the current president's staff.

In any event, the presence of both Naryshkin and Surkov on the same trip was unusual, and the only explanation for their joint participation was the critical importance of their visit's goals. Notably, after becoming convinced that he has crushed the Yamadaev clan once and for all, the announcement that the army would not even contemplate dissolving the Vostok special forces battalion showed Ramzan Kadyrov that the army had no intention of letting Kadyrov run roughshod over its people (Newsru.com, June 10). This was a strong blow to Kadyrov's ego, because Vladimir Putin's man in Chechnya was not used to hearing "no" from his Moscow allies.

Ramzan Kadyrov's team in Chechnya spun the official visit as evidence of support by the new Russian president Dmitry Medvedev for Chechnya's "pacification" policy. The core of their message—"a routine visit into a routine region of Russia"—was belied by the fact that the high-level guests were shuttled through Grozny under a heavy protective escort of special forces units brought along from Moscow as well as dispatches from the army, police and Federal Security Service (FSB).

The pro-Moscow Chechen government is also struggling with the daily challenges of suppressing the reports of rebel activities that are on the rise compared with the last two years. Since March there have been almost daily reports of rebel attacks across the republic and shootouts involving police units, who live as if under siege. Notably, these stories include only what has been filtered through the news selection process, because in the absence of confirmation by the Russian information agencies, such news is usually dismissed by Western audiences as rebel propaganda. Until recently, such reports could have been verified with the help of NGOs present in the region; however, this mechanism is apparently being eliminated. Following the example of the United Nations, other humanitarian organizations are also winding down their activities under pressure exerted by the Russian government's policies targeting non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The last straw came on July 2, 2008, when Prime Minister Vladimir Putin terminated all tax exemption benefits granted to NGOs, including the International Red Cross (<http://www.izbrannoe.info/40906.html>).

In the meantime, official Moscow, chagrined by the reliably favorable hearing given to complaints lodged by Chechens with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg (the court, which has heard dozens of such complaints over the last three years, has yet to dismiss one or rule against the Chechen plaintiff), replaced its representative to the court Veronika Milenchuk after only a little over a year (<http://www.newsru.com/russia/03jul2008/mili.html>). Her predecessor, incidentally, had also been replaced for losing so many cases.

Yet another bitter pill for the Russian government was the “untimely” discoveries of secret mass graves (North Caucasus Weekly, July 3). It is believed that several dozen mass graves were left in Chechnya after the first war, and the number could have only grown by leaps and bounds after the second military campaign. The emerging reports of two burial sites with the remains of 800 and 300 dead, respectively, obviously do nothing to improve the reputation of the Russian government with the Chechen public. Instead, the news may only deepen the realization of who was behind the mass executions and killing of civilians. Thus a subject that the Russian government generally prefers to avoid at all costs has surfaced again, and has done so during Medvedev’s presidency, which makes one wonder whether it was orchestrated by his supporters to remind the public that it was his predecessor, Vladimir Putin, who was at the helm at the time of the atrocities.

News reports in Russia never happen spontaneously, and especially not news about Chechnya: there is always someone pulling the strings in order to damage someone else. Should more mass graves be found, it will almost certainly turn out to be a political card played against former President Putin (<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1224600.html>). There are still dozens, if not hundreds of mass graves remaining in Chechnya.

Yet another step in the anti-Putin chain of events came with the release of several ethnic Chechens detained in connection with the assassination of journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was killed during Putin’s term. This author has already made known his skepticism regarding the arrests of those who may have been simple pawns in Putin’s big game (Chechnya Weekly, November 1, 2007).

However, everything described above pales in comparison with the ground swell of rebel operations in Chechnya. Local TV and radio stations continue to exhort the youth not to leave for the mountains. The parents of those who did leave receive “counseling” to discredit the actions of their children. Chechnya’s chief mufti (Islamic scholar) ordered all mosque-based imams to denounce the rebels in their Friday sermons; he also called for holding religious leaders in every village (along with village and regional administrations) equally responsible for keeping their young men from joining the rebels in the mountain camps.

The rebels, meanwhile, have expanded the scope of their attacks against the Russian armed forces in Chechnya. Springtime skirmishes in Achkhoi-Martan and Urus Martan districts led by Amir Tarkhan have turned into summertime attacks in the eastern part of Chechnya from the Dagestan border to the Argun River (Nozhai-Yurt and Vedeno district)—the parts most commonly associated with Amir Muslim and Osman.

The Chechnya situation thus remains a key factor in the context of the entire North Caucasus region. Chechnya receives the most attention, time and funding because the events in Chechnya will determine whether the resistance movement remains a unified organization. The withdrawal of any of the ethnic jamaats from joint operations would certainly damage the resistance movement as a whole but probably not lead to its disintegration. The disintegration of the resistance movement as a whole would become possible only with the withdrawal of the Chechen units, which -over the course of two wars propelled the entire North Caucasus resistance movement. The Chechen front, therefore, remains the heart of the entire North Caucasus resistance movement.

**Find this article at:**

**<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374302>**