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Police and Servicemen Attacked, Lawyer's Relatives Abducted in Chechnya

Unidentified attackers wounded a policeman in a drive-by shooting in the Chechen town of Vedeno on July 16, Kavkazky Uzel reported. The gunmen shot the policeman, who was guarding a building housing a branch of the Russian Pension Fund, from a Zhiguli automobile and managed to get away, a Chechen police source told the website. Also on July 16, militants ambushed local police in the Shatoi district settlement of Musolt-Yurt, killing one policeman and wounding three, Itar-Tass reported, quoting a Chechen law-enforcement source. A group of Defense Ministry servicemen conducting a reconnaissance-engineering mission near the town of Shali hit a landmine on the roadside of the Agishty-Shali highway on July 15. One of the servicemen was injured. On July 14, unidentified gunmen driving in a Lada car fired automatic weapons at a car carrying two federal Interior Ministry officers in the Tersk Mountains in Chechnya's Groznensky district. The two officers—a colonel and a warrant officer—were severely wounded in the attack. On July 11, militants detonated a powerful explosive device in the path of a column of military vehicles in Chechnya's Shali district. The blast killed an officer from a unit of Interior Ministry Internal troops and wounded two contract servicemen.

Chechnya's Interior Ministry reported on July 17 that three people suspected of membership in "illegal armed formations" had been detained in Grozny, the Chechen capital, and in the republic's Shali and Shatoi districts. A Chechen law-enforcement source told Itar-Tass on July 16 that two militants were killed the previous day when officers of the main police department in the Southern Federal District, police commandos and local policemen manning a checkpoint near the village of Engel-Yurt in Chechnya's Gudermes district stopped a car. "The car was carrying two men, who put up armed resistance to the policemen," the source said, adding that the attackers were "neutralized" by return fire. None of the policemen was hurt in the shootout.

Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Alkhanov told a meeting of top law-enforcement officials in Grozny on July 16 that 30 members of the "armed underground" were "liquidated," three entire rebel units destroyed and 199 detained during the first six months of this year.

Nine soldiers were killed and four injured on July 15 when munitions detonated near the Chechen town of Shali. Agence France-Presse quoted the federal Defense Ministry as saying that "an uncontrolled explosion occurred as ammunition was being transferred from a tank into a vehicle." According to Interfax, two of the six injured in the explosion died in the hospital, raising the initial death toll from seven to nine. Russian media reported that the incident took place on the grounds of a unit of the Defense Ministry's 42nd Motorized Rifle Division. According to AFP, prosecutors opened an inquiry into the explosion and Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov dispatched a special investigative commission to look into the incident. Russian media reported that investigators believe the explosion was triggered by a faulty round of ammunition and have ruled out the possibility that it was a terrorist act.

Meanwhile, Kavkazky Uzel reported on July 17 that members of "power agencies" in Chechnya's Shatoi district had seized two local residents of the village of Aslambek-Sheripovo and taken them to an unknown destination. According to the website, the two abducted residents were the brother and nephew of Ilyas Timishev, a well-known Chechen lawyer who has represented the interests of Chechen human rights abuse victims in both local courts and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. A relative of Timishev identified the abductees as 54-year-old Yunus Timishev, Ilyas Timishev's brother, and 20-year-old Aslambek Timishev, his nephew.

"A group of armed persons burst into Yunus' home on the evening on July 16 and under the threat of force took him and 20-year-old Aslambek away," the relative told Kavkazky Uzel. "The 'siloviki' neither introduced themselves nor explained the reasons for their actions. Our authorities constantly repeat that the lawlessness of the military and members of other power agencies long ago became a thing of the past, that everything is now according to the law, but where is this law? Why were no concrete charges whatsoever brought against Yunus or Aslambek? Why didn't they [the siloviki] say where they were being taken away to and why? In general, why do our 'heroic organs' behave worse than bandits in such cases? Where is the law here?"

Interfax quoted Chechnya's human rights ombudsman, Nurdi Nukhazhiev, as denying that Yunus and Aslambek Timishev had been abducted. "The report was carefully checked on my orders," Nukhazhiev told the news agency. "It

was determined that Timishev's nephew was detained in connection with operational information about his possible links with NVFs [illegal armed formations]. At present the detainee is located in the Shatoi ROVD [district department of internal affairs]. Investigative measures are being carried out with him."

Kavkazky Uzel quoted a local human rights activist as saying that the detention of Ilyas Timishev's brother and nephew was an attempt to pressure the lawyer. "As far as I know, Ilyas won several cases in local courts concerning non-payment by so-called 'militants' to Chechen police officials. A complaint based on one of the cases is currently with the Strasbourg court. Probably, representatives of the 'organs' want to force Ilyas to withdraw that complaint."

In 2005, Ilyas Timishev won a case he filed with the European Court of Human Rights after his children were not allowed to attend school and the traffic police (GIBDD) refused to allow him to drive into Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria. As a result of the Strasbourg court's ruling, the Russian government paid Timishev around 76,000 rubles (worth more than $2,600 at that time).

Kavkazky Uzel, citing the Chechen National Salvation Committee, reported on July 16 that Chechen "power structures" operating jointly with federal forces had abducted and then released Zaur Betilgireyev. Betilgireyev's mother, Luiza Betilgireyeva, was a volunteer with the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society who was shot and killed by federal forces at a roadblock near the Chechen city of Argun in 2001. In 2004, Amnesty International characterized her killing as part of an apparent "deliberate campaign" targeting Russian-Chechen Friendship Society activists. According to Kavkazky Uzel, Zaur Betilgireyev's brother, Zelim, died two years ago in a battle between security forces and militants in the village of Avtury.

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Ingush Rebels Target Police as Opposition Speeds Up Protest Preparations

Akhmed Murzabekov, a former chief of police of Karabulak, Ingushetia, was killed on July 14. Newsru.com, citing the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website, reported that Murzabekov was killed in the Plievo municipal district of Nazran, the republic's largest city, when unidentified gunmen fired on a Toyota Land Cruiser 100 in which he was traveling. Interfax reported that the attack took place at a railroad crossing between Karbulak and Nazran's Plievo municipal district. "Unidentified men opened fire on Akhmed Murazbekov with an automatic weapon and disappeared from the scene," the news agency quoted an Ingush police official as saying. According to Newsru.com, Murzabekov had been the target of several previous assassination attempts.

On July 14, unidentified attackers shot and killed a member of Ingushetia's OMON special police unit who was driving in central Nazran, Interfax reported. The incident took place near Nazran's Makhaba market when gunmen opened fire at the car, a VAZ-2110, at a railroad crossing on Moskovskaya Ulitsa (Street), wounding the OMON officer, who died later in the hospital. He was identified as Akhmet Isaev, a junior police lieutenant. Newsru.com reported that immediately following the shooting, police chased the attackers' car, cornering it and killing one of the attackers in an exchange of gunfire. The other attacker was reportedly wounded in the shootout, but nonetheless managed to escape. The slain gunman was identified as Ali Tsuroev.

On July 11, a policeman was shot and seriously wounded near his home in Nazran by unknown gunmen driving a VAZ-2112 automobile, Interfax reported. The victim was identified as Magomed Batyzhev, an officer with the operational-research unit of the federal Interior Ministry's department for the Southern Federal District. He died in the hospital the following day. Also on July 11, three policemen in the village of Ordzhonikidzevskaya were wounded when gunmen fired grenade launchers and automatic weapons at their UAZ vehicle (North Caucasus Weekly, July 11).

Ingushetia's political opposition, meanwhile, has begun preparations for a mass protest demanding that the republic's president, Murat Zyazikov, be removed and replaced by Ingushetia's former president, Ruslan Aushev, Newsru.com reported on July 16. The opposition Ingushetiya.ru website quoted the head of the protest's organizing committee, Magomed Khazbiev, as saying that an appeal to bring back Aushev would soon be forwarded to President Dmitry Medvedev along with the signatures of 80,000 of Ingushetia's inhabitants demanding Aushev's return (North Caucasus Weekly, July 11).

"In connection with the fact that the situation in the republic is worsening with each day, that people are dying and we have already started to be accused of being passive and ostensibly having already found a 'common language' with Zyazikov's corrupt regime, a decision has been made to hasten preparations for the national [protest] rally," Khazbiev told Ingushetiya.ru. "I think that this rally will draw in the entire republic. People are tired of waiting for changes for the better." Another opposition leader, Maksharip Aushev, said the republic-wide protest rally will be held in strict conformity with the law (see Mairbek Vatchagaev's piece below).

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Two Policemen Murdered in Kabardino-Balkaria

Unidentified gunmen shot and killed two policemen in Kabardino-Balkaria on July 13, Interfax reported. The two policemen were guarding the Russian Academy of Sciences' Baksan Neutrino Observatory, located in Kabardino-Balkaria's Baksan gorge, when they were attacked. They were identified as Magomet Sapabashev and Arsen Mezhgikhov, both of whom were senior sergeants. The attackers stole a PM pistol and an AKMS automatic rifle belonging to one of the slain policemen.

Meanwhile, police in Dagestan killed a suspected rebel fighter on July 14, Agence France-Presse reported. According to Interfax and Itar-Tass, the suspect opened fire after police tried to check his documents near the city of Derbent and was killed in the ensuing battle. "An unidentified armed man was walking on a mountain road towards the village of Sabnava, and police hailed him to check his papers," Interfax quoted a law-enforcement source as saying. "The man cried 'Allah Akbar' and tried to escape, opening fire at the same time. The policemen returned fire. The bandit threw a grenade at them but, according to preliminary reports, was himself fatally wounded when it exploded. Another grenade which the militant had may have detonated at the same time." Itar-Tass reported that the suspect was shot by police.

RIA Novosti reported on July 15 that police in Dagestan's Derbent district were conducting an operation in a wooded area near the settlements of Mugarty and Rukel, where an estimated six militants were thought to be hiding.

A powerful explosion reportedly occurred in Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala, on July 10. Itar-Tass on July 11 quoted police officials as saying that the blast had taken place near the Marrakesh banquet hall, not far away from where a joint squad of patrol-post police and traffic police was on duty. One policeman was reportedly injured in the blast. The Marrakesh banquet hall was the site of a shootout last March in which three people were killed. Shortly after that incident, a bomb detonated as a police patrol car was passing by the banquet hall, but no one was hurt in that explosion (Chechnya Weekly, March 13).

Meanwhile, a group of women held a demonstration on Makhachkala's Lenin Square on July 17 to demand the removal of Dagestan's Interior Minister, Adilgerei Magomedtagirov, from office. The demonstration was organized by Mothers of Dagestan for Human Rights, and the group's leader, Svetlana Isaeva, told Kavkazky Uzel that the demonstration was being held to protest the actions of the republic's power structures, which she accused of abducting, torturing and murdering young people. Members of Mothers of Dagestan for Human Rights and relatives of kidnapping victims held a two-hour anti-kidnapping demonstration in downtown Makhachkala in February (Chechnya Weekly, February 7). The following month, another leader of the group, Gyulnara Rustamova, wrote a letter to the Moscow Helsinki Group and the Memorial human rights group accusing Dagestan's power structures of "lawlessness and impunity." According to Kavkazky Uzel, at least eight people have been kidnapped in Dagestan so far this year.

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Russia Holds Military Exercises in the North Caucasus

A large-scale Russian military exercise called “Caucasus 2008” is underway in Russia’s North Caucasus. Russian news agencies on July 16 quoted an aide to the commander of the North Caucasus Military District, Lieutenant Colonel Andrei Bobrun, as saying that the exercise would involve about 8,000 military personnel, 700 combat vehicles and more than 30 aircraft, and take place on the territory of Chechnya, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachaevo-Cherkessia. Russian military officials were quoted as saying that the aim of the exercise was to work on interoperability between federal troops, Interior Ministry troops, border guards and the Air Force in special operations against militants in the North Caucasus, as well as defending Russia’s state borders and supporting Russian peacekeepers in Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Indeed, Kommersant on July 17 quoted Igor Konashenkov, an aide to the commander of the Russia’s infantry forces, as saying that the exercises will involve resolving “anti-terrorism” tasks, but that in addition, “considering that the situation in the zones of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and Georgian-Ossetian conflict have become much more tense in recent times, several military units will develop a solution to peacekeeping tasks as problems.” Konashenko told the newspaper that exercises will be held at an altitude of more than 2,500 meters in the area of Roki and Mamison passes, which connect Russia and South Ossetia, and that special forces units and mountain brigades will take part in those exercises. Along with units from the North Caucasus Military District, mainly the 58th Army, the 4th Air Force Army, Interior Ministry troops, and border guards, units from the 76th Airborne Division based in Pskov will also take part in the exercise.

Georgia’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement released on July 16 that statements made by Russian military officials about the aims of the “Caucasus 2008” military exercise “can be viewed as a continuation of the aggressive policy the Russian Federation has been pursuing against Georgia in the recent period.” The ministry added: that “not a single document on conflict resolution authorizes Russian armed forces to carry out any kind of activity on the territory of Georgia” and thus that the statements by Russia’s Defense Ministry and top Russian military officials must be viewed as “a threat of aggression directed against the sovereign state.”

The Georgian Foreign Ministry’s statement concluded: “The Russian Federation’s aggressive policy against Georgia poses a threat to peace and stability in the Caucasus region as a whole. The Russian side should be well aware that against such background of developments, successively higher levels of tension in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria and numerous armed clashes between local combatants and Russian law enforcement agencies may slide into increasing instability that, in our belief, must be far from serving the interests of the Russian Federation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia urges the Russian side in the strongest terms to refrain from irresponsible statements and stop its aggressive policy against Georgia.”

On July 15, Georgia began its own large-scale military exercise in conjunction with the United States, dubbed “Immediate Response 2008,” near its capital of Tbilisi. Some 1,650 personnel, including troops from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine, are to take part in the exercise, which was planned by the U.S. Armed Forces European Command and financed by the U.S. Defense Department.

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Briefs

"Magas" Accused of Last Year's Bus Bombings in North Caucasus

The federal Investigative Committee announced on July 17 that investigators have concluded that two bus bombings in the North Caucasus last year were the work of a group of militants headed by Ali Taziev, aka Magas, the Ingush rebel field commander who was a close associate of the late Chechen rebel warlord Shamil Basaev. Itar-Tass quoted Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin as saying that a decision was made on June 4 to name Taziev as the organizer of the bombing of a bus in Nevinnomyssk, Stavropol Krai, last December (Chechnya Weekly, December 13, 2007), and the bombing of a bus near the Bratsk police checkpoint at the internal border between North Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria last November (Chechnya Weekly, November 29, 2007). Those bombings killed eight people and wounded 30.

North Caucasus Hit by African Swine Fever

In response to an epidemic of African swine fever in several districts of North Ossetia, authorities in Kabardino-Balkaria have banned the importation of pork and other pork-derived meat products, Kavkazky Uzel reported on July 17. Farmers in North Ossetia called on the republic's authorities to help them fight the epidemic after 116 pigs died of African swine fever the republic's Prigorodny and Alagirsky districts. The deputy head of North Ossetia's administration, Stanislav Baskaev, called on the federal authorities for help in fighting the epidemic and said it would be necessary to consider compensating farmers, who have to slaughter pigs, Itar-Tass reported on July 15. "There is no vaccine or any other treatment against African swine fever," Baskaev said. "You have to cull pigs, there is no other way out." According to Itar-Tass, 150,000 pigs face slaughter.

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Village Attacks Signal New Level of Rebel Coordination

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

The attack on the village of Muzhichi in Ingushetia on July 8 was noteworthy because it shows that the Chechens have begun to support comrades-in-arms who are within the Emirate but are located in close proximity yet belong to another vilayet (oblast). In this case the actions were in support of the Ingush resistance fighters. Close to two years of inaction by the Chechen militants put the resistance across the North Caucasus under tremendous pressure from the Russian special services, armed forces and police units, with most of the shock absorbed by Ingushetia and Dagestan.

To a large extent the "silence" of Chechen militants was related to problems connected with the reorganization of the resistance movement's internal mechanisms. The shift from the struggle for independence to the general Islamization of the Caucasus—which was expressed in the declaration of a virtual state entity—the Emirate, in which the core undoubtedly still consists of the Chechen nucleus of the North Caucasian resistance movement, led to a situation in which all national jamaats can find their niche within the Emirate.

The Chechen militants launched their new tactic this spring by implementing some measures first on their territory, which aroused anger and outrage in the pro-Moscow government of Chechnya led by Ramzan Kadyrov, who was tirelessly feeding the press news about the end of war in Chechnya and declaring that the militants holed up in their mountainous hideouts number only a couple dozen at most. In the words of the former Soviet political prisoner and rights activist Elena Sannikova: "In Chechnya one can hear everywhere that there is peace in the republic, while citizens later acknowledge in whispers that they are simply afraid to raise objections" (http://www.kasparov.ru /material.php?id=4876441FC96DF). Indeed, that those who dare to criticize the authorities and their policies can come under pressure was confirmed in an article in Novaya Gazeta by Vyacheslav Izmailov, in which he quotes a detainee who was arrested by the pro-Moscow Chechen authorities based on a slanderous accusation by Sultan Mirzaev, the mufti of Chechnya (http://www.novayagazeta.ru/data/2008/49/10.html). The detainee, Muhamad-Salah Masaev, said that the Russian special services not only witnessed his arrest, but also were fully aware of what was taking place at the detention facility where he was held. Of course, this is not surprising, but this is the first testimony of a live witness who decided to publicize this fact without concealing his identity.

The combat operation in the Ingush village of Muzhichi on July 8 was conducted in a manner similar to the operations that occurred recently in Chechnya (in the villages of Alkhazurovo, Vedeno, Benoi and others). The objective of the operation was to execute village residents suspected by the militants who carried it out in collaboration with the special services. The operation was probably organized by Chechen militants and the local Ingush volunteers. It is likely that the guerrilla brigade was mixed and included both Chechens and Ingush. Furthermore, some of the Ingush participants were probably village residents, as the militants appeared to know well the addresses of the people they were looking for. During the raid one of the militants even recognized a passerby as a local school teacher. Because he was suspected of collaborating with authorities, he was shot on sight (http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id /1225058.html). With regard to the estimates of the size of the guerrilla brigade, it is always advisable to significantly reduce the numbers quoted on the propagandist websites such as Kavkaz Center, which put the number of militants at 100 (http://kavkaz.tv/russ/content/2008/07/09/59357.shtml). It should be noted here that the initial posting indicated 30 militants, but seven hours later the Kavkaz Center ideologists apparently decided that this was too small a number and inflated it to 100. In the meantime, those who actually participated in the raid have given a modest estimate of between 12 and 15 people. This last range seems to be closer to the truth, because such operations are usually not carried out by "hundreds" of militants (http://www.watchdog.cz /index.php?show=000000-000008-000001-000492〈=2). This lower estimate, however, should be probably doubled if we take into account those who provided cover at the intersection of the roads connecting the village with other settlements (Muzhichi-Galashka, Muzhichi-Arshty). Thus, the real figure is probably 25-30 militants at most. Still, it is possible that there was no need to provide cover, because according to the well-established "tradition," neither police nor military venture out to assist their colleagues at night. The operation in Muzhichi, which is located in the southern part of the Republic of Ingushetia, demonstrated this once again. Instead of rushing to the rescue of the Muzhichi residents, the police officers at the local police station, which is located in the village of Galashka only about five kilometers from Muzhichi, took perimeter defense positions and stayed there until morning. This suggests that the

police are still deathly afraid of the militants and that no propaganda effort can compel the military or police to venture out at night in response to repeated phone calls by local residents asking for help.

Literally one day after the attack in Muzhichi there was another armed assault in the settlement Ordzhoninikidzevsakaya, during which unknown gunmen opened automatic fire on an armored UAZ all-terrain vehicle in which members of a combined police brigade from the Central Directorate of Internal Affairs of St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast were traveling. After that, on July 11, the residence of the head of the Sunzhensky District Office of Internal Affairs, Bagauddin Chaniev, came under attack and three police officers guarding it were wounded (Ingushetiya.ru, July 11). That same day, unidentified assailants opened fire on police officers at a checkpoint close to the village of Nesterovskaya and a police officer was shot in downtown Nazran. This is just a chronicle of three days and it clearly demonstrates the dogged determination of the resistance movement against the federal center in this tiny republic. The statements by the representative of Ingushetia in the Federation Council, Vasily Likhachev, about the importance of developing a special program for Ingushetia's socio-economic rehabilitation and the inadmissibility of equating Ingushetia with other regions of the Southern Federal District was an obvious attempt to shift the center of real problem into the virtual, propaganda realm (http://dalpravda.ru/14104-ingushetii-nuzhna-federalnaja-programma.html). That is, everything is done in order not to draw attention to the standoff between the militants and authorities.

In Moscow the opposition to Ingushetia's president, Marat Zyazikov, decided to restore to the throne Ruslan Aushev and made a sensational declaration about those who have been murdered or disappeared during Zyazikov's reign. From 2002 to 2007 more than 700 people were killed in Ingushetia. "From 2002 to 2007, 158 people went missing and more than 700 were killed in the republic," stated the head of the organizational committee of the all-national Ingush rally, Magomed Khazbiev, at a press conference in Moscow (Chechenpress, July 10; North Caucasus Weekly, July 11). The figures cited by Khazbiev are truly enormous for such a small republic (whose territory covers about 4,000 square kilometers) and can serve as a barometer of the people's dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, when practically every week someone is killed or abducted in a republic in which everyone is more or less related to each other.

The Ingush opposition is weakly organized and lacks a real leader. It is oriented toward old Ingush traditions, on whose basis the opposition hopes to revive the institutions that exhausted themselves two or three centuries ago. The opposition has always appealed to Moscow and does not pose a threat to the Kremlin's strategists, who know that beyond constant petitions and open letters, they have little to worry about from this so-called Ingush opposition.

It is possible to close ones eyes to what is happening in the North Caucasus, to talk about the end of war there and say the problem of separatism disappeared into the deep underground. Yet this underground is carrying out strikes against the authorities on a daily basis and forcing the federal government to keep armed forces, special services and police detachments in the region in absolutely bloated numbers. For instance, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, during one of his addresses on Chechen television, stated that he was in command of a 27,000-strong Chechen police force. Here we also need to take into account thousands of police units dispatched to this region from other oblasts, territories and regions of Russia. If earlier such detachments were usually sent only to Chechnya, now the geography of their deployment has expanded dramatically, and they are sent not only to Chechnya, but also to Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. The constant mobilization of forces in the region and the on-going expansion of the conflict zone represent a clear answer to those who wish the conflict would simply go away.

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