

Wanted Chechen Commander Leads his Battalion against Georgian Forces

Kavkazky Uzel reported on August 13 that members of the Chechen-manned Vostok battalion of the Russian Defense Ministry's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) were among the Russian forces that invaded Georgia. According to the website, the Vostok fighters were located in area of the Georgian town of Gori along with Sulim Yamadaev, the Vostok battalion commander. Yamadaev, who became a target of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov's wrath following a confrontation and apparent shootout last April involving Vostok members and security forces loyal to Kadyrov, was put on Russia's federal wanted list earlier this month (North Caucasus Weekly, August 7; see Mairbek Vatchagaev's article below).



Vostok battalion members in Tskhinvali

Kavkazky Uzel quoted a correspondent for the Gazeta.ru website as saying that he had been told by several Russian servicemen that Yamadaev and the Vostok battalion were deployed in the "conflict zone" in South Ossetia. Meanwhile, GZT.ru, the website of the newspaper Gazeta, reported on August 12 that the Vostok battalion was located near Gori and that Yamadaev had led it in an assault on the Georgian village of Kvemo-Nikozi, during which at least two Vostok fighters were wounded.

As Kavkazky Uzel noted, Sulim Yamadaev is wanted in connection with the February 1998 kidnapping and subsequent murder of Usman Batsaev, a 32-year-old businessman from the Gudermes district village of Dzhalka (North Caucasus Weekly, August 7). According to the website, on August 11, a local television channel in Chechnya broadcast a bulletin headlined "Attention: Wanted", in which photographs of Sulim Yamadaev and his brother Badruddi were shown and the voice-over stated that Badruddi Yamadaev, a resident of the city of Gudermes, was wanted for violating articles 105 and 167 of Russia's Criminal Code (concerning murder and willful destruction or damage of property, respectively). The advertisement then gave a telephone number that viewers could call with information about Badruddi Yamadaev's whereabouts and said callers would be guaranteed anonymity. There was no indication whether the bulletin, besides showing a photograph of Sulim Yamadaev, referred to his alleged crimes.

According to Kavkazky Uzel, on August 10, just a day before the bulletin showing photographs of Sulim and Badruddi Yamadaev and announcing that Badruddi was wanted for murder and destruction of property was broadcast on Chechen television, various Russian media had reported that Sulim Yamadaev and members of the Vostok battalion were in the "Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone" and fulfilling "tasks" as part of the Russian "peacekeeping contingent" there. That information was reportedly confirmed by Isa Yamadaev, the commander of one of the Vostok battalion's companies, at the battalion's base in Gudermes. Isa Yamadaev was reportedly preparing to go to South Ossetia together with 100 fighters.

Kavkazky Uzel on August 14 also quoted an unnamed Vostok serviceman as saying that the battalion had incurred "serious losses" in fighting around the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali. "I cannot say how many of us were there or the exact number killed, but I will say this: Three days ago the bodies of six of our guys who died in the conflict zone were taken back to Chechnya. In our group only half survived. A commander was also killed. Many were wounded. If reinforcements hadn't arrived in time, the Georgians would have destroyed all of us."

The anonymous Vostok member also said Russian media reports that the Georgian forces lacked preparedness to wage war were false. "These are extremely well prepared, trained and equipped soldiers," he told Kavkazky Uzel. "It would be wrong to make them out to be complete cowards and dilettantes. They know how to and can fight. The Georgians have their heroes and their cowards, just like in any army. It would be wrong to lump them all together."

An assignment in the war zone is the result of "voluntary compulsion," the unnamed Vostok serviceman told Kavkazky Uzel. "We had only two possibilities: either go to the war or be discharged," he said, adding that those who choose the latter will not receive back wages or other payments owed to them. "Not to mention the fact that everyone knows what it means to remain today in Chechnya, where 80 percent of the population is unemployed. So that's why we are fighting."

The Vostok fighter told Kavkazky Uzel that two companies from the Vostok battalion were fighting in South Ossetia and Georgia. "Sulim Yamadaev is commanding us," he said. "By the way, rumors that he has been removed from his

job are, putting it mildly, contrary to fact. True, they have said that some sort of high position in the [North Caucasus Military] District is being prepared for him, but, so far anyway, he's still our commander."

The Rosbalt news agency on August 13 quoted "an informed source in the Russian power structures" denying reports that Vostok battalion members were involved in acts of marauding blamed on pro-Russian forces in Tskhinvali. The source told Rosbalt that Vostok had stopped ten kilometers outside Gori on August 12 in expectation of receiving orders to storm the city but had returned to Tskhinvali on August 13. "Vostok [members] are soldiers, not marauders," the source said, adding that the Chechen battalion was in top fighting form and spirit and had been involved taking the Georgian village of Nikozi on August 11 after a tough fight with Georgian forces. "The Georgians put up fierce resistance, with massive support from Grad [missile systems] that hit a column of Russian infantry and paratroopers," the source told Rosbalt. "The Russian armed forces incurred losses but then, with close air support from helicopters, assumed the offensive and, after cleaning out the area, went back behind the administrative borders of South Ossetia."

Rosbalt reported that "individual acts of marauding" which had taken place on August 12 had been carried out by "representatives of the Ossetian side." It also reported that the head of South Ossetia's Security Council had announced the creation of special commission to prevent marauding, including in "liberated" Georgian villages, and that a curfew had been imposed. Both Russian and Western media reported that Ossetian irregulars had engaged in acts of looting and arson.

It should be noted that several Western journalists reported that Chechens were among the Russian forces involved in the fighting in and around South Ossetia and may have been involved in abuses. Britain's Times newspaper reported on August 13 that the personnel at a Russian army checkpoint on the approach leading from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to Gori were all ethnic Chechens and quoted one soldier as saying his unit was part of the "42nd Chechen Division." While it is not clear what he meant by that designation or whether something got lost in translation (for example, the soldier was identified as "Yuri," which is not a typical ethnic Chechen name), the Russian army's 42nd Motor Rifle Division is headquartered at Khankala, outside Grozny, and includes the Chechen-manned Vostok and Zapad battalions. The Times also quoted an elderly woman who was among the civilians who were fleeing burning Georgian villages surrounding Gori as saying: "They are killing people there, the Chechens and the Ossetians."

Likewise, the Guardian on August 13 quoted its correspondent Luke Harding as saying that "a whole column of irregulars"—who locals identified as Chechens, Cossacks and Ossetians—had entered the Georgia village of Rekha outside Gori behind a Russian military column that included at least 25 tanks and were, according to eyewitnesses, "killing and burning." Harding reported that the irregulars had killed three people and were setting fire to villages and taking away young boys and girls.

Find this article at:

<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374375>

Kadyrov Holds Forth on the Yamadaevs and the Russian-Georgian War

In an interview with RIA Novosti published on August 8, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov insisted that there is no personal conflict between him and the Yamadaev brothers—Sulim and Badruddi—but simply that the law must be upheld. “When a person serving a sentence in a prison on the order of a court suddenly ends up being commander of an armed group, not to mention a group of servicemen of the Defense Ministry of the Russian Federation, this at minimum raises questions,” he said. Kadyrov was apparently referring to Badruddi Yamadaev, who was convicted of attempted murder in 2003 but was subsequently freed from prison under murky circumstances and served as the commander of one of the Vostok battalion’s companies until being put on the federal wanted list for kidnapping earlier this year (North Caucasus Weekly, May 1). “I think that this happened with the connivance of the leadership of the 42nd Motor Rifle Division, to which the Vostok battalion is subordinated.”



Kadyrov added: “Some mass media and journalists have at times wrongly interpreted my statements concerning the Vostok battalion, groundlessly asserting that I supposedly spoke out in favor of its disbandment. I don’t understand why demands to obey the law arouse such loose talk and attempts to stir things up by various media! In fact, I noted that all the members of a military unit should not suffer because of certain individuals. The backbone of the servicemen is conscientiously fulfilling its military obligations. But a criminal should be in prison—I don’t know a more precise way to say it! The public also knows about crimes committed by the former commander of the Vostok battalion, Sulim Yamadaev, who not only covered for a criminal [i.e., Badruddi Yamadaev], but has himself participated in the kidnapping and murder of citizens of the [Chechen] republic. The Investigative Committee recently launched a criminal case against him and put him on the federal wanted list. We have received appeals from citizens of the republic who claim that their relatives were kidnapped by the Yamadaev brothers. We are simply obligated to get to the bottom of this. The criminal actions of the Yamadaev brothers and a number of persons operating together with them were a black mark on the entire Russian Defense Ministry and discredited the local authorities. It is completely natural that doubts arose among citizens of the republic, who [suspect that] the authorities are simply covering up the crimes of battalion servicemen. I have already said that I, as guarantor of the constitution, cannot allow a criminal, whatever his regalia and position, to stroll around in freedom. I will again repeat that I am not calling for the disbandment of the Vostok and Zapad battalions, although there are questions concerning the latter as well. There are complaints from citizens about unlawful actions by Zapad battalion servicemen.”

It is clear from Russian media reports over the last several days that, contrary to Kadyrov’s claim that Sulim Yamadaev is already the “former” commander of the Vostok battalion, Yamadaev is still in command of the battalion and has led elements of the battalion in battles with Georgian forces in and around South Ossetia (see the article above and Mairbek Vatchagaev’s article below).

RIA Novosti also asked Kadyrov to comment on the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia—specifically, about reports that Adyg peoples, including Circassians, Kabards, Adygs and Abazins, might offer armed assistance to Abkhaz forces fighting against the Georgian military. “First of all, I generally believe that war should be the last argument in resolving such conflicts,” he answered. “Chechens have in full measure experienced and seen what armed conflicts bring—ruin, hunger, death and destruction. Secondly, the Chechen Republic is a subject of the Russian Federation and we do not have the right to make such political decisions. In this connection, I note: the country [Russia] has a political leadership, and if it makes a decision, we are to carry it out undeviatingly and in any form, whether it is in the role of peacekeepers or the role of negotiators, or in any other form. I want to call attention to the fact that in that region, despite difficult conditions, Russian peacekeepers, the only guarantors of peace, are effectively and responsibly fulfilling their duties.”

As for the Georgian-Russian war itself, Kadyrov commented: “Georgia carried out an attack on South Ossetia on the first day of the Olympic games—on a day on which it has been, on the contrary, customary to halt any wars. That, in and of itself, says a lot. This is aggression. The situation in the region is genuinely dangerous and has already reached unprecedentedly dramatic bounds and arouses extreme concern. Now the main thing is to take immediate action to defuse the situation and restore at least relative stability. In my view, it is not too late to avert mass bloodletting and new victims. The Georgian leadership needs to come to its senses and return to civilized means for

resolving difficult political problems. I also think that the international community should not remain uninvolved ... when the fate of hundreds of thousand of people is being decided, and that it is simply obligated to express its fundamental view of the current situation in the region." The leadership of the North Caucasus rebel movement, for its part, has been sharply critical of Russia's actions in Georgia without embracing the Georgian leadership (see Mairbek Vatchagaev's article below).

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Moscow City Court Upholds Closure of Ingushetiya.ru

The Moscow City Court on August 12 upheld a lower court ruling ordering the closure of Ingushetiya.ru. In June, Moscow's Kuntsevsky District Court ordered that the opposition website be shut down for publishing extremist statements, but the website continued to operate while the Moscow City Court prepared to consider its appeal.

The Moscow Times on August 13 quoted Ingushetiya.ru's founder, Magomed Yevloev, as calling the latest decision "unlawful" and promising that the website would keep operating despite the court's ruling, which came into force right away. Yevloev said the web editors should be able to keep the site open on a technicality. "Only the website's editors can decide on it being shut down, but they were not involved in the trial, so they are not planning to abide by it," he said, adding that the website's editors will now file their own court appeal.

Yevloev has blamed "political pressure" for the court case and, according to the Moscow Times, called the investigation "an attempt to silence the last independent voice in the republic." As the English-language newspaper reported, he also has argued that the authorities have no right to shut down the website because it is registered in the United States. In March, the office of Ingushetia's president, Murat Zyazikov, who is one of Ingushetiya.ru's main targets, created a website with a similar address—Ingushetiyaru.net—in an attempt to compete with the opposition website.

Just prior to this latest court ruling against Ingushetiya.ru, Reporters Without Borders, the Paris-based international press freedom watchdog group, called on the Russian authorities to unblock access to the website. "Ingushetiya is an exceptional news outlet in Russia," Reporters Without Borders said. "The accusation of extremism is just a pretext for gagging a website that reports allegations of corruption implicating national figures. Its editor was forced to flee Russia after being threatened by the authorities. We condemn this harassment and we call for the immediate reopening of the site."

Meanwhile, Interfax reported on August 11 that Roza Malsagova, the editor of the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website who left Russia for Europe with her three children in July in the face of numerous criminal and administrative charges filed against her, intends to seek political asylum in France. "Malsagova contacted us through the Internet and said she was in France and would ask for political asylum," her lawyer, Kaloi Akhilgov, told the news agency. "I do not know at what stage the process is now. She has already submitted some papers." Earlier, Akhilgov told Interfax that Malsagova had left Russia after several criminal cases, all of them connected with her work with Ingushetiya.ru, were opened against her. "She figured out that it would be better for her and her three children, whom she is raising all by herself, to leave the country," the lawyer said.

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Briefs

Gunmen in Chechnya Attack FSB Officers and Army Commandos

Itar-Tass reported on August 3 that unidentified assailants in Chechnya fired automatic weapons at a Niva car carrying agents of the Federal Security Service (FSB), wounding one of them. The incident took place on the Kavkaz federal highway near the village of Dzhalka when gunmen driving a foreign car shot at the Niva, slightly wounding an FSB officer who was driving the Niva. Itar-Tass reported that a resident of the town of Bamut in Chechnya's Achkhoy-Martan district was wounded on August 9 when gunmen fired automatic weapons and grenade launchers at several cars carrying federal Defense Ministry commandos. None of the servicemen was hurt.

Former Rebel Health Minister May Return to Chechnya

Umar Khambiev, the former health minister of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) government headed by Aslan Maskhadov, has said that he may move back to Chechnya from exile in Italy. As Kommersant reported on August 12, Umar Khambiev made his announcement following a meeting with his brother, Magomed Khambiev, the former ChRI defense minister who is now a Chechen parliamentarian and who recently embarked on a trip to Western Europe on behalf of Chechnya's pro-Moscow government to convince top separatists living abroad to return to Chechnya (North Caucasus Weekly, August 7). Umar Khambiev told Kommersant that he has been very surprised by reports about the improvements that have putatively taken place in Chechnya but does not fully trust information disseminated by officials of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov's government and thus plans to visit Chechnya to see things for himself before making a decision to return for good.

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Rebels Call on Caucasus Not to Support Russia in its War with Georgia

By Andrei Smirnov

The Russian-Georgian conflict over control of the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has become an international crisis. The United States, the European Union, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey are now involved in the conflict in various ways, in addition to Russia and Georgia. Other forces in the conflict are the pro-Kremlin separatist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the governments of the North Caucasian republics inside Russia. There is also another actor in the conflict, one that is hidden in the shadows: the North Caucasian insurgency.

On August 9, the day after Georgian forces attacked Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital, the North Caucasian rebels' main ideologist, Movladi Udugov, declared that the militants had been monitoring the movements of the Russian forces in areas around Georgia. To confirm his declaration, Udugov cited two Russian armored motorcades that had moved from Chechnya to North Ossetia, and then to the Roksky pass located on the South Ossetian side of the Russian-Georgian border, the day before his statement. This information was confirmed by the Ingushetiya.ru website, which reported on August 8 that a huge column of Russian tanks and armored personnel carriers was moving from Chechnya to North Ossetia via Ingushetia (Ingushetiya.ru, August 8).

Udugov added that the rebels' intelligence apparatus had warned him that Russia planned to attack Georgia in August. The rebel envoy claimed once again that the rebels are active in all the mountain areas of the North Caucasus, from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea.

Udugov stated: "So far, neither Tbilisi nor Washington have turned to us with any requests or proposals." He also described Russian media reports about volunteers from the North Caucasus fighting on Russia's side against Georgia as "propaganda" and called the Caucasian squads fighting in South Ossetia "puppet formations" of the North Caucasian republics' "pro-Moscow regimes."

It is interesting to see how the rebel Kavkaz-Center website has been covering the Russian-Georgian war. Usually very anti-Russian, the website has focused more on Georgian failures and Russian successes, particularly during the first two days of the war. Given Udugov's declaration, it looks as if the Caucasian separatists were hoping for a situation in which the Georgian government would have to appeal to them for military help. Were that to happen, the insurgency in the North Caucasus would have a chance to be recognized as a political force and not simply a gang of Islamic terrorists.

The Kremlin also fears that the rebels in the North Caucasus could try to stab the Russian army in the back. Simultaneously with the invasion of the Russian troops into South Ossetia, the latter's borders with other Caucasian republics—Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia and Chechnya—were closed. On August 11, Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Aleksandr Bortnikov ordered the FSB, the Border Guard Service and the National Anti-Terrorism Committee to take measures to tighten border security in Russia's Southern Federal District. During a meeting with President Dmitry Medvedev, Bortnikov described the situation in the North Caucasus as "difficult, but under control." That same day, the FSB chief declared that according to intelligence reports a group of "foreign mercenaries" had made its way into Dagestan (Regnum, August 11).

On August 11, the Russian military forces in Ingushetia started to set up fortified checkpoints at the entrances to Ingush settlements such as Troitskaya, Plievo and Karabulak. Russian military and police garrisons are located in Troitskaya and Karabulak, while Plievo is a village on the road to Nazran, the largest city in Ingushetia, which is full of military and administrative facilities (Ingushetiya.ru, August 11).

It seems logical that the insurgents would use the fact that the best-trained Russian forces were focused on Georgia to conduct a large-scale raid on a city in the North Caucasus. That feeling is only reinforced by the suspicious calm in the region, including Ingushetia. However, on August 13, the Kavkaz-Center website posted a video statement by the two top rebel leaders, Dokka Umarov and Supyan Abdulaev, concerning the war between Russia and Georgia. Umarov and Abdulaev offered no direct support for Georgia's actions in South Ossetia, but simply called for peace

between Georgia, on one side, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, on the other. The main point of the declaration was that all Caucasian nations should unite against Russia.

“Russia has been firing up hostility between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia for the last several years,” said the two rebel leaders, who also strongly criticized the separatist leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, calling them “the Kremlin’s slaves.” At the same time, they said that there is no winner in a war between Caucasian nations—a message that could be addressed both to the Georgians and the Ossetians. The rebel leaders said that that all Caucasians have a common mentality and culture, while Russia hates them all and the Kremlin foments hatred of Caucasians among Russians. “The Russian leadership also acts like fascist thugs that kill Caucasians on the streets of Russian cities,” the declaration continued. Doka Umarov called on all Caucasians not to help Russia fight Georgia and not to join volunteer squads to go to South Ossetia.

“We should concentrate on driving the Russian colonialists who killed us for centuries out of the Caucasus,” the two rebel leaders stated. “Only then will real peace be restored in the Caucasus.”

Thus the leaders of the insurgency in the North Caucasus have not unequivocally taken the side of Georgia rebels, but instead are trying to act as peacemakers or mediators and unite the Caucasus on an anti-Russian basis.

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Moscow Faces a Sea of Troubles in the Caucasus

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

It appears that Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov still has not given up his ambition to crush his old rival Lieutenant Colonel Sulim Yamadaev, commander of the Vostok battalion (a Russian Defense Ministry special forces unit) and Hero of Russia. On August 6, all Russian information agencies reported the almost-sensational news that Sulim Yamadaev is wanted on a federal warrant for the murder of 32-year old Usman Batsaev near the village of Dzhalka in Chechnya's Gudermes district in February 1998 (http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2008/08/07/n_1253320.shtml, see also North Caucasus Weekly, August 7). The Chechen government quickly jumped into the fray by charging Yamadaev with a number of other prominent crimes of the last few years that until recently were considered unsolved (<http://www.interfax.ru/politics/txt.asp?id=25639>, see also North Caucasus Weekly, August 7). It is still mind-boggling that the charge selected for the warrant was a ten-year old episode, besides which, while it is known that Batsaev was kidnapped, the prosecution will still need to prove Yamadaev's personal involvement in his murder.

In the meantime, Yamadaev's older brother Ruslan, formerly a State Duma Deputy with the ruling United Russia party, denied the allegations and pointed out that far from being a fugitive, Sulim Yamadaev continues to live in Moscow and attend classes at the Russian Defense Ministry's Military Academy (<http://echo.msk.ru/news/532344-echo.html>).

The Yamadaev matter is a touchy one for the Russian government: in addition to his stature as Hero of Russia, which he received for his contribution to the battles against the separatists, Yamadaev hails from a family in which two other siblings have received the same award, and it is certainly a unique case for one family to have three recipients of that award. Moreover, both camps in this fray are likely to have supporters in Moscow, and while Kadyrov relies on his own backers, Yamadaev's allies can be found within the highest ranks of Russia's Defense Ministry, and they are unlikely to give him up without a fight. Therefore retaliatory strikes by the Yamadaev brothers against Ramzan Kadyrov should be expected.

Meanwhile, the North Caucasus republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessia now has a new president (http://stavropol.aif.ru/issues/776/02_01). Despite long and humiliating confrontations with the local public, former President Mustafa Batdyev managed to hold on to his post until the official replacement came through. Batdyev was saved from the threat of forcible physical ejection by the angry public only by the interference of Dmitry Kozak, who was presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District at the time. Kozak made a personal entreaty to those laying siege to Batdyev's office to leave and give him a chance to have a serious talk with Batdyev about all the challenges facing Karachaevo-Cherkessia (<http://izvestia.com/news/news90313>). Even former president Putin was forced to admit that the republic was dealing with a "governmental crisis due to criminal acts related to the redistribution of assets" (<http://interfax.ru/politics/txt.asp?id=25211>). All the while, Karachaevo-Cherkessia has been home to the Karachai Jamaat, one of the more prominent resistance groups that nevertheless has been on the decline over the last two years.

Karachaevo-Cherkessia's new president is Boris Ebzeyev, an ethnic Karachai who was born in Kyrgyzstan in 1950 after the deportation of the Karachai people in 1943 (<http://lenta.ru/news/2008/08/05/prez/>). Ebzeyev is an attorney by training and has built a name for himself during the formative years of the Russian Constitutional Court, which was established in 1991, and which he was a member of until recently (<http://www.rian.ru/spravka/20080730/115284302.html>). Moscow hopes that Ebzeyev's appointment will eliminate many of the problems his predecessor left behind. It should be noted that this choice for Karachaevo-Cherkessia's president is a very prudent one, and Ebzeyev may be able to rise to prominence as a leader of the North Caucasus region as a whole on the strength of his independence, support for the rule of law and lack of involvement in the internal conflicts tearing apart at his home republic.

In the meantime, Moscow is trying to expand the scope of the armed conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia and transform it into a regional factor by recruiting putative "volunteers" in the North Caucasus to help the Ossetians. However, the mood in the region is far from supportive for the latter; according to Kavkazsky Uzel, surveys of residents on the streets of Grozny showed unanimous support for Georgia and widespread sympathy for its people. South Ossetia's moves are seen as attempts to curry favor with Russia, which is still stung by Georgia's move out of

its sphere of influence (www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1226748.html). Naturally, the Chechen government is sticking to the official line set by the Russian Foreign Ministry, which has condemned Georgia's actions and expresses support for any steps undertaken by the government of South Ossetia.

Finally, a key recent development is the spread of bombings to the last place Moscow would like to see them—Sochi, the site of the 2014 Winter Olympics. On the morning of August 7, a bomb went off at the municipal beach in the greater Sochi area, killing two vacationers and wounding several, including a child (<http://www.radiorus.ru/news.html?id=289404>). The incident was only the latest bomb explosion in Sochi this year (<http://newsru.com/russia/08aug2008/teracts.html>). Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has personally instructed the presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District, Vladimir Ustinov, to deal with the problem and do everything in his power to prevent further explosions in the Olympic village.

It is worth noting that only a few days before the latest explosion in Sochi, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin warned the public about possible terrorist acts, stating that “the threat of terror in Russia presently is very high” (<http://top.rbc.ru/politics/04/08/2008/214153.shtml>). If the investigation confirms that these attacks are even remotely connected to rebel fighters from the North Caucasus, it would mean another painful blow for the reputation of the government, which claims that it long ago resolved the issue of armed opposition in the North Caucasus.

The developments in the small enclave of Ingushetia continue to be a concern for Moscow. Anti-government opposition leaders have circulated a petition calling for the return of the former president, Ruslan Aushev, who left his post early under pressure from the Kremlin, which considered Aushev too independent when it came to making decisions concerning Ingushetia. The petition committee has gathered 80,000 signatures demanding that Ingushetia's current president, Murat Zyazikov, step down and Ruslan Aushev be appointed in his place (<http://ingushetiya.ru/news/15067.html>). While during Putin's term no one dared to bring up the possibility of dismissing Zyazikov, a Federal Security Service (FSB) major general, this now appears more likely in the wake of Medvedev's accession as president and may end the long-standing confrontation between the public and Zyazikov. This is further confirmed by a recent interview with Ruslan Aushev, who for years has refused to criticize the current Ingush president, but is now making it clear that he will stand with his people (Novaya Gazeta, August 7; see also North Caucasus Weekly, August 7).

Meanwhile, the anti-terrorist operation conducted by the Interior and FSB near the village of Gimry in Dagestan's Untsukul'sky district from December 2007 through August 1, 2008 has been completed with little to show in the way of results (<http://www.riadagestan.ru/news/2008/08/01/69965/>). In the end, the village residents refused to give up those who took up arms and joined the underground. There was nothing left for Dagestani President Mukhu Aliev to do other than to exhort the locals, again, to try and influence their relatives who left to join the armed jamaats.

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