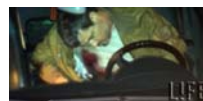


Ruslan Yamadaev Murdered in Moscow

Ruslan Yamadaev, the older brother of Vostok (East) battalion commander Sulim Yamadaev and former State Duma deputy who received a Hero of Russia award in August 2004 from then President Vladimir Putin, was shot to death in central Moscow on September 24. As is typically the case with high-profile murders in Russia, Yamadaev's killing has sparked a flurry of competing theories as to who was behind the deed.



Kommersant reported on September 25 that the attack on Yamadaev took place at 5:15 p.m. local time the previous day when the Mercedes S600 he was driving stopped at a stoplight on the capital's Smolensk Embankment. An Audi 80 pulled up beside it and someone opened fired with a Kedr machine pistol. The bullets penetrated the Mercedes - despite the fact that it was armored—killing Yamadaev. Also in the car was Sergei Kizyun, the former military commandant of Chechnya who recently stepped down as first deputy commander of the Leningrad Military District. Kizyun was seriously wounded in the attack.

Vremya Novostei on September 25 quoted another Yamadaev brother, Issa, as saying that the attack on Ruslan Yamadaev took place as he was returning from an important meeting with an unidentified Russian presidential administration official.

According to Kommersant, the investigators who arrived at the scene of the crime discussed theories that were all, in one way or another connected, to the ongoing conflict between Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov and the Yamadaev brothers. That conflict was sparked this past April by an armed confrontation in the Chechen city of Gudermes between members of the Vostok battalion, which is subordinated to the Russian Defense Ministry's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), and members of Kadyrov's security detail (North Caucasus Weekly, April 17 and 24). Still, Kommersant reported that the "generals" in charge of the investigation are looking at all possible theories concerning Yamadaev's murder, including that it was the result of a "razborka," or settling of scores, connected to a business dispute, or of a vendetta by friends or relatives of Vostok battalion victims.

All of the Yamadaev brothers—including Badrudin, besides Sulim, Ruslan and Issa —essentially went "underground" following the confrontation between Vostok members and Kadyrov's guards in April, Kommersant reported. The newspaper noted that Badrudin and Sulim were put on the Chechen government's wanted list and that Kadyrov had publicly called all the Yamadaev brothers criminals and enemies of the Chechen people. According to Kommersant, Sulim Yamadaev was taken off the wanted list after he and other Vostok battalion members "distinguished themselves" during the five-day war with Georgia in August. Soon after that, however, Sulim Yamadaev was discharged from the Russian armed forces and "clearly stopped being a real threat for official Grozny," particularly given that he could face life in prison for the murders and kidnappings allegedly committed by the Vostok battalion in Chechnya, the newspaper reported. Still, Kommersant noted that Sulim Yamadaev had expressed fears that he could end up like Movladi Baisarov, the former commander of the Goretz special unit of the Federal Security Service (FSB), who was shot to death in Moscow in 2006 by Chechen police officials (Chechnya Weekly, November 22, 2006).

Kommersant quoted an unidentified close friend of the Yamadaev brothers as saying that "Khalid," as Ruslan Yamadaev was known in Chechnya, was the "brains of the opposition to Kadyrov." The source added: "Sulim is a real force, but he did everything his older brother told him to do. To take out Khalid means to neutralize Sulim for a time and then afterwards to get to him." Kommersant's source said that Sulim Yamadaev had lately tried not to appear in public and switched apartments several times. Kommersant reported that while Ruslan Yamadaev did not use bodyguards, he always had high-level military officers with him—something that he thought was a guarantee of safety.

Kommersant's source also said that the "special operation against enemies of official Grozny" did not start with Ruslan Yamadaev's murder, but on September 17, when Bislan Elimkhanov, commander of the Zapad (West) special battalion, was seriously wounded in an attack in Grozny's Starpromyslovsky district. "I heard about the events in Moscow," Elimkhanov told Kommersant from a military hospital. "They also wanted to kill me; my men literally shielded me with their bodies." However, Elimkhanov refused to discuss any theories concerning the attack on him, saying it was not a subject for a telephone conversation.

Meanwhile, Issa Yamadaev stated publicly that Ramzan Kadyrov may have been behind his brother Ruslan's murder. "My family has information that he is preparing reprisals," Kommersant quoted Issa Yamadaev as telling journalists on September 24.

Vremya Novostei on September 25 quoted Issa Yamadaev as saying that Ruslan Yamadaev had left politics to spend more time with his family but remained greatly concerned about the Vostok battalion's fate. According to Issa Yamadaev, the meeting that Ruslan Yamadaev and Sergei Kizyun had with the Kremlin administration official just before they were shot concerned the battalion. He also said that there had recently been a growing number of attempts to convince Vostok battalion members to join units controlled by Kadyrov, using both enticements and threats. "And while everyone who wanted to betray [the Vostok battalion] already left it, the attempt to influence the soldiers did not end. The threats increased recently," Issa Yamadaev told Vremya Novostei. He said that threats against Ruslan and Sulim Yamadaev had become constant, and that around two months ago, two carloads of relatives of "Wahhabis" killed in fighting with the Vostok battalion were sent from Chechnya to Moscow for the purpose of killing Ruslan and Sulim Yamadaev. Issa Yamadaev told Vremya Novostei that his family informed the FSB and GRU about these "Wahhabi" hit squads, but that nothing was done.

Leonid Slutsky, first deputy chairman of the State Duma's International Affairs Committee, who worked on the committee with Ruslan Yamadaev, told Kommersant he knew there was bad blood between Yamadaev and "the Chechen president's entourage" but added that as far as he knew, the conflict had subsided in recent months. "Therefore I rule out the possibility that someone from Ramzan Kadyrov's entourage was involved in that [Yamadaev's murder]," Slutsky said. Konstantin Zatulin, the first deputy chairman of the State Duma's Committee on CIS Affairs and Compatriots Abroad, told the newspaper he was sure there would be "many versions" put forward for the murder, including "the well-known conflict between Kadyrov and the Yamadaev brothers, but said he would warn against "rashness" in drawing conclusions, given that the conflict between Kadyrov and the Yamadaevs was very widely known and someone could have used it to "destabilize" the situation in Chechnya.

Kommersant reported that as of late on September 24, investigators were starting to put the theory that Ruslan Yamadaev was killed by Chechen "siloviki" connected to Ramzan Kadyrov on the back burner and thought that he was probably killed as the result either of a business dispute or a vendetta. The newspaper quoted a law-enforcement source as saying that Yamadaev had controlled gambling establishments and commercial property in Moscow and reportedly had stakes in several large-scale projects. "They have been trying to squeeze him and other Chechens out of here from a long time, so it was most likely a contract killing resulting from a business conflict," the source said. According to Kommersant, some sources suggested Sulim Yamadaev was the intended target of the attack, given that the brothers used the same car (which has darkened windshields) and often traveled the same route. "Sulim was a suspect in dozens of criminal cases launched in connection with instances of murder and attacks," a source told the newspaper. "And he was probably the target of a hunt, not his brother. A relative of those murdered may have been trying [to?] take vengeance on him."

Kommersant asked Abubakar Arsamakov, whose two brothers were allegedly kidnapped and murdered by members of the Vostok battalion in Chechnya in 2007, to comment on the theory that Ruslan Yamadaev was the victim of a vendetta. "I extend my condolences to the family and friends of Khalid; I am sure, that he was killed by the enemies of Russia," he said.

First Deputy Federation Council Speaker Aleksandr Torshin said there may be a Georgian connection to Ruslan Yamadaev's murder, given that the killers may have thought Sulim was driving the car at the time of their attack and that Sulim commanded Vostok battalion members during the war with Georgia. According to Torshin, the Vostok battalion members under Sulim Yamadaev's command performed "brilliantly" in "repulsing the Georgian aggression in South Ossetia." Torshin, who is a member of the Russian parliament's commission on South Ossetia, said the "Saakashvili regime" thus had good reason to hate Sulim Yamadaev.

Torshin also said he did not rule out that Ruslan Yamadaev's murder was aimed at destabilizing the situation in Chechnya on the eve of its parliamentary elections, which are set for October 12. He said he doubted it was the result of a power struggle between the Yamadaevs and Ramzan Kadyrov, given that the Yamadaevs did much to support Kadyrov's father, the late Akhmad Kadyrov, and that "it is not in the tradition of the Chechen people to raise a hand against friends of the family." Torshin also said that he was convinced that the murder was not in Ramzan Kadyrov's interest. "Kadyrov totally did not need this; someone wanted to set up Kadyrov this way, to hang this bloody crime on him," he said.

Viktor Ilyukhin, deputy chairman of the State Duma's Committee for Constitutional Legislation and State Building and a member of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), said the theory that Georgians were behind Yamadaev's murder was the least plausible. The most likely version, he told Interfax, was a business dispute, while the second most likely was the conflict between the Yamadaevs and Kadyrov.

Newsru.com on September 25 quoted Aleksandr Gurov, a member of the State Duma's Security Committee and the United Russia party, as calling Ruslan Yamadaev's murder "criminal-political" and adding: "Judging by the way they followed Yamadaev's car, the way the crime itself was carried out, the perpetrator had a lot of practice—the kind that certain kind of people from certain kinds of services have." The fact that a well-known person was killed in broad daylight in central Moscow is a "challenge to the authorities," he said. "The criminals were basically saying: we do whatever we want." However, Gurov said he doubted Kadyrov was behind the attack, given that the Chechen president had to understand that suspicion would fall on him and that it would be seen as a challenge to the federal authorities. Gurov said the murder was most likely the result of a business dispute.

Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy said Yamadaev's murder was probably connected to a dispute over the distribution of high-level posts between representatives of different clans in Chechnya.

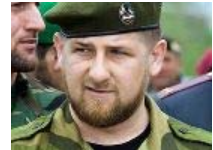
RBK Daily on September 25 quoted Dmitry Oreshkin, head of the Mercator Group, a Moscow-based think-tank, as saying of Yamadaev's murder: "There is an 85-percent probability that this was done by the 'kadyrovtsy'. The Yamadaev clan controlled Gudermes and opposed Kadyrov." Oreshkin said that this latest murder of a Chechen in central Moscow is evidence of the "Caucasus-ization" of life in Russia—a development, he said, which has been completely predictable given that that the "model of order established by the federal leadership leads to this." Oreshkin said that Moscow had made a mistake in giving the Chechen leadership carte blanche to act with no restraints. "If the Kremlin will not be able to pay \$1.5-\$2 billion in payoffs [to the Chechen government] annually, Kadyrov will easily set off [in the direction of sovereignty]," he said. "He will take away the oil wells and nationalize the oil companies. And this will happen very soon. And Russia will not be able to stop him, given that no federal power structures remain there. Vostok is being safely squeezed out, and the remaining siloviki are directly subordinated to Ramzan."

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Chechens Debate Significance of Ruslan Yamadaev's Murder

In his first public comments on Ruslan Yamadaev's murder, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov told reporters in Grozny on September 26 that he was "80 to 90 percent certain that the murder could be motivated by a blood feud," Interfax reported. According to the Moscow Times, Kadyrov suggested Yamadaev may have been killed by relatives of the purported victims of the Vostok battalion, which was headed by Ruslan Yamadaev's brother, Sulim. Kadyrov also said he regretted Yamadaev's death. "If Ruslan Yamadaev was guilty of something, he should have been tried in court," he said.



Speaking at Ruslan Yamadaev's funeral on September 26, Sulim Yamadaev accused Kadyrov of killing his brother and vowed to take revenge, Reuters reported. Meanwhile Kadyrov's spokesman, Lyoma Gudaev, suggested the assassination was an attempt to destabilize the situation in Chechnya. "Forces that want to foment tensions in Chechnya could be interested in killing Yamadaev in such audacious fashion," Interfax quoted Gudaev as saying.

A day earlier - September 25 - Gudaev had said in the Chechen government's first official comments on Ruslan Yamadaev's murder that Kadyrov was "shocked" and "never expected such a development of the situation." Kommersant.ru that day quoted Gudaev as saying he was certain the murder was politically motivated and aimed at destabilizing the social-political situation in Chechnya and the North Caucasus generally.

Kavkazky Uzel on September 25 quoted local observers in Chechnya as saying that Ruslan Yamadaev's murder could have serious consequences in the republic. "Whoever was behind this crime, it will all the same be imputed to Ramzan," the website quoted one anonymous local observer as saying. "And there is every reason to do that. In recent months there were serious conflicts, mutual threats and accusations between Kadyrov and the Yamadaevs. Kadyrov, who had earlier accused the Yamadaev brothers of a whole series of grave crimes, demanded that local law-enforcement organs work day and night on the 'Yamadaevs case', [that they] establish with whose money [the Yamadaevs] purchased posh homes, and so on. The [Yamadaevs], for their part, threatened to make public illegal actions of the president. Naturally, everyone will now think that Ramzan Kadyrov was behind the murder of the elder Yamadev, although I don't think that is the case."

The anonymous local observer continued: "It is my deep conviction that the murder was carried out deliberately to destabilize the situation in the republic. Ramzan may simply have been set up in order to have a pretext to start a large-scale purge in the Chechen leadership. It is no secret that some within the leadership of some of our special services view Kadyrov highly negatively. If clashes begin ... between supporters of the Yamadaevs and Kadyrov (no one has yet abolished the practice of the blood feud here), then this can be used by the 'hawks' from the power agencies for 'putting things in order' anew. One can say it is no coincidence that rumors were circulating in the republic earlier about the inevitability of ... a third military campaign in Chechnya."

Another local observer told Kavkazky Uzel: "Ruslan Yamadaev and his brother Sulim were once on Kadyrov's side. They were among the first to support his father after he switched to the federal side at the start of the second [Chechen] war. But now their ways have parted. I don't think that Ruslan Yamadaev's murder benefited Kadyrov; the contrary is more likely. It cannot be ruled out that someone from his [Kadyrov's] entourage was involved, having decided ten days before the president's birthday to give him the head of one of his enemies as a gift. But Ramzan personally did not need this. The Yamadaevs had already had the book thrown at them and essentially—with the Vostok battalion having been taken away from Sulim—robbed of their armed component, so there could not have been any further problems with them. And now the situation is unfolding according to a completely unpredictable scenario, in which the 'yamadaevtsy' and 'kadyrovtsy' could start shooting one another."

Aslambek Apaev, a North Caucasus expert with the Moscow Helsinki Group, gave a similar interpretation of events. "Ramzan Kadyrov is not guilty of what has happened," he said. "This crime was committed by the special services, just like the recent murder in Ingushetia of President Zyazikov's cousin. The goal is the same: to destabilize the situation in the region and have a pretext for the start of a new mass repression. It was aimed, above all, against Ramzan Kadyrov."

Grozny resident Saidi Makaev told Kavkazky Uzel. "It was broadcast on the news that the car in which Ruslan

Yamadaev was killed belonged to his younger brother Sulim. From this we can conclude that he [Sulim] was the target of the killers. And Sulim, as is known, is a vehement enemy of Ramzan Kadyrov. Of course, everyone will now be thinking that this was done on his [Kadyrov's] orders."

An anonymous Vostok battalion member who is a relative of the Yamadaev brothers told Kavkazky Uzel that he had little doubt about who was behind the murder of Ruslan Yamadaev. "They probably killed Ruslan thinking it was Sulim," he said. "I have no doubts about that. Thus they are trying once again to intimidate us, but nothing will come of this. In 2006, Movladi Baisarov [commander of the FSB's Gorets special unit] was killed in Moscow, after which his unit fell to pieces. They want the same thing to happen with us. I am sure of that."

Kavkazky Uzel reported that some residents of Chechnya whom it interviewed also drew a parallel between the murder of Ruslan Yamadaev and the murder of Movladi Baisarov, citing the fact that both men were in conflict with Ramzan Kadyrov and that both killings took place in Moscow.

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Alekseyeva: Situation in Ingushetia Today Resembles Stalin-era Terror

Lyudmila Alekseyeva, the veteran human rights activist who heads the Moscow Helsinki Group and was recently in Ingushetia on a fact-finding mission (North Caucasus Weekly, September 19), has said that the present situation in Ingushetia is comparable to recent events in Chechnya in terms of kidnappings, torture and extra-judicial killings and also resembles the Soviet Union during the 1930s. Another member of the Moscow Helsinki Group who traveled with her to Ingushetia warned that the republic could explode into a civil war.



Alekseyeva told reporters at a press conference in Moscow upon her return from Ingushetia on September 23 that what is happening in the republic is “unthinkable and shouldn’t happen in a country which respects the rule of law,” the BBC reported. “In Ingushetia, they arrive at people’s homes, some are taken away, others are killed right away, [and] there is torture. These actions by the authorities can never be justified in the name of fighting terrorism.” According to the BBC, another Moscow Helsinki Group member, Valery Borshchev, warned that “civil war could break out” in Ingushetia. “One part of the population is keeping quiet, but another part is taking up the fight,” he said. “Fear creates rebellion; the federal government takes responsibility for that.”

In an interview with Novye Izvestia published on September 22, Alekseyeva, who met with Ingush President Murat Zyazikov and other top republican officials during her trip, said she asked Zyazikov “why innocent, peaceful people who are not involved in armed combat are killed so often in Ingushetia.” She said Zyazikov claimed that people are arrested by federal structures, not the Ingush authorities, and are then driven to Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, and therefore “he is not in a position to track them, because this is a different republic.” Alekseyeva said she met with Ingushetia’s Interior Minister, Musa Medov, and its public prosecutor, who “confirmed that the federal authorities are engaged in the abductions.”

According to Alekseyeva, relatives of abductees also told her that federal authorities, not Ingush ones, were most likely responsible for the abductions. She said that she and Valery Borshchev actually went to the scene of a “zachistka,” or security sweep, and that the security forces involved were all “undoubtedly” Russians. Alekseyeva said that Ingush Interior Minister Musa Medov called her on her cell phone and said he would send guards to ensure that she and her colleagues were also not arrested in the sweep.

“I asked Medov: why are you worried, if these are your people?” she told Novye Izvestia. “And he replied: these are not my people; this is the FSB with its mobile squadron. I then asked what exactly a mobile squadron was, and I was told that these are federal troops who are located in Ingushetia for such operations.”

Asked whether she discussed with Zyazikov why demonstrations by Ingushetia’s political opposition have been violently broken up, Alekseyeva replied: “He believes that the opposition is directly tied with the terrorist underground that is killing Ingush police officers and civil servants, including relatives of Zyazikov himself. I am convinced that this is not the case. The protest actions and signature collections are absolutely genuine. I would say that the atmosphere right now in Ingushetia is how it was in 1937, when every person went to bed not knowing if he would wake up in the morning in his own home, or ... would be seized in the night, driven somewhere, tortured and then killed. The only difference between 1937 is that everyone was indiscriminately seized then, and now it is principally men aged 15 to 30 ... Evidently they believe that this age group is a reserve for terrorists. But by their actions, they are increasing the terrorist resistance, if it exists. I imagine myself in the place of a young person, an Ingush who lives in such fear. Maybe it would be better to go into the woods, go into the mountains and be calm knowing that you won’t be grabbed like a rabbit. Two, three, four people disappear every day in a republic where the population is 450,000.”

Alekseyeva also met with the father and uncle of Magomed Yevloev, the owner of the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website, who was recently shot and killed while in police custody. Ingush officials claim Yevloev was accidentally shot after he tried to grab a gun from a policeman, but his relatives and supporters insist he was deliberately killed (North Caucasus Weekly, September 5). Ingushetiya.ru recently posted a list of the 14 people it said were involved in Yevloev’s murder. The first three were President Zyazikov; the head of his security team, Ruslanbek Zyazikov; and Musa Medov, the republic’s Interior Minister.

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Briefs

Servicemen Killed and Wounded in Ingushetia and Chechnya

Three people were found dead in Ingushetia on September 22 while another two people were wounded and the republican Deputy Interior Minister's official car was blown up in separate attacks in the republic later that day, RIA Novosti reported on September 23. Three men were found shot dead in Nazran by local residents. According to the news agency, two of the men were killed in a car by automatic weapon fire, while a third body was found on the ground near the vehicle. Separately, unidentified attackers fired a grenade at an Interior Ministry arms store in Nazran, injuring two servicemen, while two explosive devices were set off as the republican Deputy Interior Minister's official vehicle passed. The official was not in the car and the driver was not injured. In neighboring Chechnya, unknown assailants fired automatic weapons and grenades at Interior Ministry troops near Grozny, wounding one of the servicemen. In a separate incident in the Chechen capital, explosive experts from the Interior Ministry and Federal Security Service (FSB) officers disarmed a homemade explosive device at a car repair shop. The bomb contained plastic explosive and nuts and bolts to increase its killing power, RIA Novosti reported.

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North Caucasus Rebels Seek to Expand into Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Azerbaijan

By Andrei Smirnov

Last fall, the top leader of the rebels in the North Caucasus Dokka Umarov declared the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate, an underground state that unites all rebel groups in the Caucasus in one political structure. In the statement declaring the Emirate, Umarov stressed that the Caucasus Emirate “will have no fixed borders.” One could assume that Dokka Umarov meant that the rebels would try to expand their activity from the Caucasian republics northward to ethnic Russian-dominated Stavropol Krai and Krasnodar Krai. However, it now seems that the insurgents are also trying to expand their activity to the south—to the Georgian breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Azerbaijan.

Umarov said in the same statement that “we have bases along the whole Caucasus, from Azerbaijan to Abkhazia.” At the time Umarov made his declaration—the end of 2007—it sounded more like bravado. Yet now given the recent events in northern Azerbaijan, one should take this declaration more seriously. Clashes between rebel groups from Dagestan and Azeri forces that took place in August and September in parts of Azerbaijan adjacent to Russia (North Caucasus Weekly, September 11) demonstrated that the North Caucasian insurgency indeed has the capability to set up its guerrilla network in the regions of Azerbaijan populated by minorities from Dagestan—the Lezgins, Avars and Kumyks.

The recent events in Azerbaijan also make the rebels’ declaration a more vital issue given that they claim that they also have supporters in Abkhazia. A majority of Abkhaz regards Georgia as their main enemy and look at the Russian authorities as their main defender from Georgian domination. However, some Abkhaz Muslims may have another opinion.

There are three main religions in Abkhazia: Orthodox Christianity, paganism and Islam. Paganism in Abkhazia has deep historical roots, while Christianity and Islam do not have a significant weight in Abkhaz society. Many Abkhaz can be called Muslims or Christians only nominally. The primitive state of Abkhaz society gives an opportunity for Muslim and Christian preachers to spread their religions to more and more pagans in Abkhazia. As has happened elsewhere, propaganda on behalf of Islam has been more effective in Abkhazia than propaganda on behalf of Christianity. A group of devout Abkhaz Muslims positioned itself as an active and independent force in the republic. Khamzat Gitsba became the main unofficial leader of the Muslim community in Abkhazia. He had become the imam of the first mosque in the republic, in the town of Gudaouta.

Abkhaz Muslims receive financial support from Turkey, where there is a large Abkhaz community, but it is the North Caucasian insurgency that is really interested in spreading Islam in Abkhazia. Only Muslims of the republic can support the rebels’ anti-Russian propaganda. Imam Khamzat Gitsba, who was also nicknamed Rocky because of his big interest in boxing, had close ties with the Chechen rebels and their supporters in Turkey. Some sources even say that he was a brother-in-law of the famous Chechen warlord Shamil Basaev, who helped the Abkhaz in their war against the Georgians in 1992-1993 (Kommersant, August 18, 2007). Gitsba was a member of Shamil Basaev’s squad during the war in Abkhazia and was one of those terrorists who took Russian tourists hostage on the Avrasia ferry in Turkish waters in 1996. The terrorists demanded the end of war in Chechnya (Kavkazky Uzel, August 18, 2007).

Gitsba returned to Abkhazia after 2000 and became a member of the Spiritual Directorate of the Abkhaz Muslims and he opened the first real mosque in the republic. Gitsba had many contacts with informal Muslim leaders in Russia. Whether he was linked with the Caucasian rebels or not, it is now clear that the Russian security services regarded him as a rebel envoy in Abkhazia. On August 17, 2007, Khamzat Gitsba and a guest, a Muslim from Bashkortostan (a Muslims-dominated region in Russia), were killed by unidentified gunmen. At a press conference organized by Abkhazian Muslim leaders after Gitsba’s murder, they made it clear that the imam was most likely killed by Russian or Abkhaz security forces. “We appealed to the leadership of law-enforcement bodies of Abkhazia, informing them about our worries about our security,” they said. “We knew that we were under surveillance and informed the security service about it, but without any results. Finally, the leader of the Abkhaz Muslims was killed.”

The Muslim leaders said that over several years they tried to prove that they had no links with extremists, but the authorities still regarded them as a potential threat to peace and security in Abkhazia (the website of the president of Abkhazia, August 20).

Gitsba's murder demonstrates that Russia's security services indeed fear rebel penetration into Abkhazia and have taken measures to prevent it. Even if the rebels cannot initiate military actions against Russian forces on Abkhaz territory, they can use their supporters in the region to buy weapons and ammunition in the republic to use them in the North Caucasus. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are regions where there is a huge black market for weapons that is not easy to control.

Given the porous nature of the South Ossetian and Abkhaz borders with Russia, it does not look like there are any serious obstacles to smuggling weapons and ammunition into Russia. In 2006, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested five Russians for attempting to sell several shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles that they had bought in Abkhazia in the North Caucasus. In 2008, they were sentenced to long prison terms (RIA Novosti, September 3).

Abkhazia is now full of trophy weapons from Georgia, which are difficult to control given the level of corruption in the Russian army, so that the problem of illegal arms trading is becoming more acute there.

The situation in South Ossetia is similar. On March 8, a group of Ossetian Muslim rebels issued a statement saying that they are "analyzing the situation and plan tactical operations in South Iriston (South Ossetia-AS), in the zone of conflict between the Ossetian and Georgian crusaders" (Kavkaz-Center, March 8).

Thus the anti-Russian war in the North Caucasus could easily move to the south.

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<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374444>

Karachaevo-Cherkessia Faces Renewed Militant Activity

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

The new president of Karachaevo-Cherkessia Boris Ebzeyev inherited the old problems from his predecessor Mustafa Batdiev. The new head of the republic is a very famous person. As a member of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, he has had the reputation of a bright person unmarred by corruption allegations. It is possible that all of Karachaevo-Cherkessia's nationalities for the first time accepted the Kremlin's choice, because his candidacy satisfied Karachays, Cherkess and Russians alike. However, even before assuming the presidency, the new head of the republic had to face militant activities in the region. In particular, three police officers were assassinated in the capital of the republic, Cherkessk, on July 17 (Kavkaz.tv, July 18). On the evening of September 13, the head of the Karachaevo-Cherkessia Interior Ministry's department for extremist crimes, Colonel Alibek Urakchiev, was gunned down by automatic weapons on the doorstep of his residence in Cherkessk. He died later in the local hospital from gunshot wounds sustained in the attack (Regnum.ru, September 14). Literally within hours, members of the republic's traffic police came under fire. Two police officers were wounded in the attack. On September 17, Karachaevo-Cherkessia's law-enforcement structures carried out an operation in the capital to apprehend the suspects. As a result, two militants were killed and one arrested (Skavkaz.rfn.ru, September 18).

It should be noted that such a level of militant activity in Karachaevo-Cherkessia has not been seen since 2006-2007, when, as a result of special operations in the Teberda resort town, the village of Storozhevaya and Cherkessk, the authorities managed to eliminate a number of militants, including members of the republic's Jamaat and its leader, Vakhtang Aliev (Kavkaz-uzel.ru, September 17). After sustained losses, the Karachay Jamaat was no longer active and the very fact that this region was included in the United Vilayat (Oblast) of Caucasus Emirate (a virtual state entity based on the resistance movement) by the separatist leadership headed by Dokka Umarov was an explicit confirmation of the weakening positions of the Karachay Jamaat, which was actually one of the earliest associations formed on the basis of Salafi viewpoints during the twilight of the USSR in 1991.

Thus, Karachaevo-Cherkessia President Boris Ebzeyev has had to start his term by facing a very real threat that the republic's Jamaat is renewing its militant activities. This will undoubtedly have a negative impact on his image as an impartial judge, given that he will be forced to confront his Salafi compatriots, for whom he will be as implacable a foe as his predecessor, Mustafa Batdiyev.

At the same time, the authorities in Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria were forced to solve the problems of interactions between Kabardins and Balkars—or, to be more precise, their different attitudes towards a particular historical date. The issue here is the commemoration of the Kanzhal battle of September 1708, when the 7,000-strong Kabardin army defeated the numerically superior forces of the Crimean Khan Kaplan-Girei. The Turkic-speaking Balkars and Karachays are alarmed by any appeal to history that deals with the linguistically-related Crimean Tatars. The Kabardins view this date as a declaration of independence from the Crimean Tatars, while the Balkars and Karachays are convinced that there was no battle to begin with. Moreover, the battle is never mentioned in either the history of the Crimean Khanate or the Russian state (Regnum.ru, September 18). With the authorities' approval and support, the Kabardins organized an equestrian march through cities across the North Caucasus to Mount Kanzhal, which is located in a Karachay-populated area. When the equestrian march reached the Balkar-populated village of Kendelen, the local residents blocked the road and refused entry for passage to the Kabardin equestrians. The standoff between the Kabardins, who were actively supported by the authorities of Kabardino-Balkaria, and the Balkars, who were supported by the Balkaria national association headed by Ruslan Babaev, lasted for two days. In the end the Kabardin equestrians had to abandon their original route and chose to ride along the bypass road. Kabardino-Balkaria President Arsen Kanakov denounced the protest organizers and called for their punishment to the fullest extent of the law (Regnum News Agency, September 18). The Balkars once again made it clear that the issue of interaction between the two titular ethnic groups comprising the republic is still very much alive and is now simply a slowly smoldering conflict that could turn into a full conflagration at any time, as was the case in the early 1990s, when the Kabardins and Balkars demanded the republic's partition along ethnic lines.

Meanwhile, the authorities in Kabardino-Balkaria have been trying for five months to form a jury for the trial of those of accused of participating in the rebel assault on Nalchik on October 13, 2005, and close to one hundred people

have refused to become jury members. People simply do not believe the trial will be conducted in a fair manner and this is why nobody wants to take responsibility for that in front of their relatives and friends of the defendants. According to experts, the court proceedings will likely take years, given the scale of the case and the sheer number of witnesses and victims (Kavkaz-uzel.ru, September 18). The militants' October 2005 operation triggered anti-Russian attitudes in the republic, due mainly to the actions of the Russian authorities against suspected participants in the Nalchik assault.

Several ethnic and territorial conflicts are currently smoldering in the North Caucasus. These include the Ossetian-Ingush conflict over the Prigorodny District of North Ossetia; the Chechen-Laks conflict over the Aukhov District; the Kumyk-Dargin conflict over the lands of the Kumyk Plain; the Kumyk-Laks conflict over the resettlement of Laks in the Makhachkala District; the Karachay-Cherkess conflict over national representation in the government based on ethnic affiliation; the Avar-Chechen conflict over the lands in the Khasavyurt District (Dagestan) and mountainous Cheberloy (Chechnya); the Cossack-Chechen conflict along the Terek River; the Cossack-Adyg conflict over the disproportionate distribution of government positions; the Cossack-Shapsug conflict in the Sochi District; the Kabardin-Balkar conflict over the lands around Nalchik; the Nogai-Dagestani conflict over the lands in the Nogai Steppe; the Nogai-Chechen conflict over the lands in the Shchelkov District; the Nogai-Cossack conflict over lands in the Stavropol Territory; and the unresolved "Lezgin question," which involves the problem of an ethnic group divided between Russia and Azerbaijan. So it is truly premature and groundless to talk about the absence of urgency regarding the problem of ethnic separatism in the North Caucasus region (Kavkaz-uzel.ru, September 12).

Ethnic separatism is most highly advanced among Chechens while it is at best in its infancy among other peoples of the North Caucasus. This state of affairs dates back to the beginning of the second military campaign in Chechnya in 1999: that is, the Chechen conflict should be considered the single factor that contributed the most to the emergence of separatist attitudes among the peoples of North Caucasus, because it expanded across the region and spread the virus of separatism.

The most direct confirmation of this state of affairs can be seen in the militant activities in different parts of the North Caucasus, because their overarching objective is formulated in an unequivocal manner and it does not allow for multiple interpretations. The goal is to overthrow the Russian lackeys and declare an Islamic state across the entire North Caucasus. Perhaps the concept of Islamic justice scares a majority of the population, because it experienced decades of militant atheism before the breakup of the Soviet Union and is therefore far less religious. Nonetheless, the resistance to the authorities by the armed opposition represented by the militants makes it more attractive for the population than the Moscow protégés in the region. Presently, only Ingushetia's president, Murat Zyazikov, remains in power among the leaders ousted or replaced in the North Caucasus since 2002, and it appears that his fate will be determined very soon, given that it is impossible to continue to ignore the massive disturbances taking place in this tiny North Caucasus republic.

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