

Rebels Reportedly Kill Dozens of Servicemen in Ingushetia

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

Following the capture of the foothill villages of Muzhichi and Yandare in Ingushetia on the evening of October 16 (North Caucasus Weekly, October 16), militants from the Ingush Jamaat "Shariat" carried out another series of high-profile actions against Russian troops. According to various sources, more than 50 Russian military personnel were killed and wounded in two assaults by the militants on the Galashki Highway on October 18, which would make this the most audacious attack by the jamaat members in Ingushetia to date. According to the media reports, the attack on the Russian military motorcade took place on the Alkhasty-Surkhokhi road in Ingushetia's Nazran district at ten in the morning. According to Ingush Prosecutor General Yury Turygyn, only two soldiers were killed and five were wounded in the attack. All of them were from Interior Ministry detachments based in the village of Alkhasty (RIA Novosti, October 18). According to Turygyn, the assault was carried out by members of "illegal armed formations" with the purpose of destabilizing the situation in the region. Turygyn, however, was apparently referring to the casualties in an attack on another column of servicemen that had occurred earlier on October 18, and the Regnum News Agency quoted a source in the Interior Ministry department for Ingushetia's Sunzha district as saying that all the soldiers in the column targeted in the second attack were killed except for one and that the total number killed was around 50. The surviving serviceman was transported to the Sunzha Central District Hospital, the source said (www.regnum.ru/news/1071507.html). Thus, according to the Ingush police, two attacks took place, not one, as the Ingush Prosecutor General's Office claims.



The opposition website Ingushetia.org referred to the specific spot where the attack took place—in the vicinity of a sanatorium located between the villages of Galashki and Muzhichi—and put the number of Russian military personnel killed in the attack at between 60 and 90 (Ingushetia.org, October 18). The website also reported that the militants destroyed three BTRs (armored personnel carriers), two Ural trucks and two UAZ vehicles and that most of the soldiers killed in the assault were in the Ural truck, "which came under the massive fire from different points" (<http://www.ingushetia.org/news/16137.html>). According to Ingushetia.org, two assaults were carried out against the Russian servicemen in different locations on October 18 (<http://www.ingushetia.org/news/16140.html>).

It is noteworthy that the Russian side, uncharacteristically, did not cite casualty figures among the militants. In addition, a counter-terrorist operation targeting the militants involved in the attacks ended without producing results (Ekho Moskvyy radio, October 18).

Estimates on the number of militants involved in the attacks also varied. The information on the number of militants differs as well. According to various sources, they numbered no less than eight (Gazeta.ru, October 18,) and no more than 30 (<http://newsru.com/russia/18oct2008/kolonn.html>). From this, one can infer that the attacks were carried out by one of the operational units of the Ingush jamaat and not the united forces of jamaats of Chechnya and Ingushetia. It is possible to conjecture that there were two groups: the first one attacked the motorcade at 9:40 a.m. in the vicinity of the sanatorium located between the villages of Galashki and Muzhichi, while the second group was no larger than half the size of the first one and was tasked with providing cover for the main group (http://gazeta.ru/news/lastnews/2008/10/18/n_1284563.shtml). This accounts for the varying estimates in the Russian media of the number of militants involved in the attacks.

In any case, the assault on the Russian military motorcade represents one of the most audacious acts by the Ingush jamaat. It is also worth noting that on the same day—October 18—an FSB officer was killed (<http://newsru.com/russia/18oct2008/fsb.html>) and a vehicle was blown up in the vicinity of the village of Kantyshev, in close proximity to a school (Ingushetia.org, October 18).

The militants from the Ingush front of the resistance movement are carrying out fierce attacks on the power structures within the boundaries of the Republic of Ingushetia. Not a day passes without a news report about yet another victim of attacks carried out by the armed opposition.

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Rebels Step Up Attacks in Dagestan

Rebels stepped up attacks in Dagestan this past week. Five police officers were killed and nine injured in attacks along the administrative border between Dagestan's Sergokalinsky and Karabudakhkentky districts on October 21. One policeman was killed—he was identified as chief Captain Ruslan Muidov, deputy head of the Sergokalinsky police department—and three wounded when gunmen fired on the car in which they were traveling. A police source told RIA Novosti that a group of OMON riot police sent in to help the first group was hit by an explosion, after which gunmen opened fire on them from a nearby woods "As a result of the attack, four servicemen died at the scene, while six sustained serious injuries and were taken to a local hospital," the source said. Police mounted a search for 15-18 militants who were believed to have been involved in the attack, but the perpetrators were not found. The rebel Kavkaz-Center website described the attack as an ambush of murtads (apostates) carried out by mujahideen.



The following day, October 22, gunmen fired on a car in which Dagestan's deputy sports minister, Budun Budunov, was traveling in Makhachkala. Budunov was not hurt. Earlier that day, a bomb went off in the path of a traffic police patrol car in Makhachkala, slightly injuring two officers and breaking windows in the Toyota Service building nearby.

On October 23, a bomb that went off in the path of a traffic police patrol car in the city of Khasavyurt injured two police officers, who were hospitalized. According to an item posted on the rebel Kavkaz-Center website that day, the bombing in Khasavyurt was an operation carried out by the Khasavyurt sector of the Dagestani Front of the armed forces of the Caucasus Emirate targeting police murtads (apostates).

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North Caucasus Weekly

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Chechen Rebels Target Servicemen and Police

A serviceman was killed and two others wounded on October 23 when a bomb went off in Chechnya's Shali district as a column of Russian troops was passing by, RIA Novosti reported. Two hours later, a landmine exploded when a group of police officers were en route to put out a blaze in a house on the outskirts of the Urus-Martan district. One of the officers was injured. When another group of police officers from the Chechen Interior Ministry arrived at the scene of the landmine explosion an hour later, a bomb went off, injuring seven of them.



Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported on October 20 that 27 Russian Defense Ministry servicemen had been killed since the start of the year according to the Defense Ministry's own official information. The newspaper noted that while the federal Interior Ministry and Federal Security Service has not provided such data, open sources show that around 30 policemen and Interior Ministry Internal troops have been killed and more than 40 wounded since the start of 2008.

Nezavisimaya Gazeta quoted Major General Nikolai Sivak, the commander of the Combined Group of Forces in the North Caucasus, as saying that Chechnya's rebels have considerably stepped up their activities, particularly bombings. According to Sivak, in September, bomb disposal experts defused six explosive devices and security forces discovered and destroyed 12 rebel bases and 11 rebel arms caches.

"As is known, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov repeatedly said that the bandits in the republic would be finished off once and for all by the end of 2007," Nezavisimaya Gazeta wrote. "But in 2008, an outflow of Chechen youth into the [rebel] bands is occurring, and the militants themselves, having received resources and financial replenishment from abroad, are planning new terrorist acts and murders in the republic."

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Briefs

Gunmen Take Hostages at Checkpoint and Gambling Parlor in Ingushetia

Reuters reported on October 24 that armed men drove into Ingushetia from neighboring Chechnya and abducted up to 15 people including policemen from a checkpoint and a slot machine parlor. According to the news agency, witnesses said the gunmen, dressed in camouflage, entered Ingushetia from Chechnya late on October 23 and presented themselves as police officers. Chechen authorities said they had nothing to do with the raid. An Ingush police officer, who did not want to give his name, told Reuters the attackers drove to a checkpoint on the border between Chechnya and Ingushetia, disarmed the guards and took at least one Ingush policeman hostage. The officer said the attackers, who claimed to be Chechen police but did not present any documents to prove this, then headed to the nearby Ingush village of Ordzhonikidzevskaya, where they went into a slot machine parlor and kidnapped more people. "At this stage the investigation cannot give the precise number of those kidnapped," the officer said. "We still believe their number is between 10 and 15. It is certain that there are several policemen among them, and their life is in danger." RIA Novosti quoted an anonymous police spokesman as saying that the attackers abducted around 15 people, including one Ingush police officer, three Chechen police officers and civilians. Reuters quoted some witnesses as saying they believed the gunmen had fled with their hostages in several cars in the direction of Chechnya, but added that other witnesses said the gunmen had driven deeper into Ingushetia. As the news agency noted, Islamist insurgents in Ingushetia frequently target gambling halls and shops selling alcohol, saying they contradict Islam.

General Says Terrorists From 52 Countries Have Died in the North Caucasus

The deputy commander of the Russian Interior Ministry's Internal Troops, Gen.-Col. Valery Baranov, claimed in an interview published in the newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda on October 22 that over the course of the counter-terrorism operation in the North Caucasus, Russian forces have killed militants from 52 countries. "During the time I've been there, we destroyed mercenaries from 52 countries of the world," he told the paper. "Professionals in military affairs, in sabotage work, [and] lavishly financed. Many made it into Chechnya via the special services of various countries." Baranov said that international terrorism continues to threaten Russia's territorial integrity. "And it is worth noting that in recent years that internal armed conflicts more and more often arise and develop with the participation of a third force that remains in the shadows – international terrorism," he said.

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Events in Ingushetia Spin Out of Moscow's Control

By Fatima Tilsova

The Kremlin does not control Ingushetia and that is why control of the republic may be transferred to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. Yet this sort of "Chechenization" will only further exacerbate the Ingush crisis. The territory of Ingushetia became a zone of active and large-scale military operations this past week. Both sides carried out operations, although from the geographic and tactical viewpoints the Ingush Jamaat led by Amir Magas was more active and effective. As a result, the Russian forces limited their response to necessary defensive actions, whereas the Ingush underground pursued offensive operations that covered practically the entire territory of Ingushetia, including the republic's main cities and adjacent settlements.



A number of Russian and Ingush experts characterized the situation as the completion of the process of "Chechenization" of Ingushetia by comparing it with the beginning of the second war in Chechnya (<http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2008/10/20/focus/386603>). In an interview with Gazeta.ru published on October 20, the former president of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev, assessed the situation as a full-scale civil war (http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2008/10/17_a_2858634.shtml). Echoing the well-known journalist Andrei Babitsky, Aushev stated that it is very likely that the Kremlin will attempt to transfer control of Ingushetia to Kadyrov. According to experts, the Kremlin is no longer confident that such anti-crisis measures for Ingushetia as replacing its unpopular president, Murat Zyazykov, will be effective. Experts say that for the Kremlin, the so-called "Kadyrov" methods that proved to be effective in Chechnya are like the last ditch effort of a drowning man. According to Babitsky, evidence of this is the demonstration held in Grozny demanding the incorporation of Ingushetia into Chechnya (<http://www.ingushetia.org/news/16133.html>). Babitsky noted that such public events are impossible without the organizational involvement by the Chechen authorities and that such demonstrations are intended to prepare public opinion before beginning the unification of the two republics.

However, Aushev and Ivan Sukhov, a correspondent with the newspaper Vremya Novostei, believe that the "Kadyrov-ization" campaign is not in the interests of either the Ingush or Chechen people and it will lead to a drastic deterioration of Chechen-Ingush relations (<http://www.svobodanews.ru/Transcript/2008/10/20/20081020180505557.html>).

The experts, however, may be making a mistake in assuming that either "Chechenization" or "civil war" characterizes the situation in Ingushetia. In practice, the military operations in Ingushetia cannot be classified as an internal civil conflict, but as a liberation struggle brought to Ingushetia from the outside by the Russian military and police detachments, who are resisted by the partisan groups from the Ingush sector of the rebel Caucasus Front.

Over the weekend of October 18-19, the combat jamaat of Ingushetia announced a resumption of active combat operations against the Ingush employees of the law enforcement structures. The moratorium on combat activities against ethnic Ingush who collaborate with the Russian authorities and who are also referred to as "murtads," which was adopted during the holy month of Ramadan, did not extend to the "kafirs," as the rebels call Russian military personnel and operatives from the special services. That is why defensive and offensive combat operations were intensively carried out in Ingushetia even during the period of the ban on the killing of ethnic Ingush. The Ingush Jamaat's statement announcing the resumption of active offensive operations against kafirs and murtads, which was posted on the Kavkaz-Center website on October 20, includes an account of the clashes that took place daily in September (<http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/10/20/61666.shtml>). According to the figures quoted in the statement, the militants' combat losses amounted to 9 "mujahideen," while the Russian side suffered 27 dead and 45 wounded. "We quote figures of which we are certain," the Ingush Jamaat stated. "The real combat losses of the murtads and kafirs are actually above those which are published, but we did not include them because we do not have sufficient information about them." The statement also noted that in September alone the combat groups of Ingush Jamaat carried out 22 attacks on various facilities, detachments or individual employees of the law-enforcement structures and that the combat losses on the Russian side included a number of high-ranking officials from the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Interior Ministry.

The character of assaults indicates that the Ingush guerrilla leader Magas possesses good intelligence about the plans and movements of the enemy on the territory of Ingushetia. That he is well informed is also evident in the factual details cited in the aforementioned statement by the Ingush Jamaat, which includes specific information on all Russian special services employees killed and wounded (i.e. names, ranks, positions and places of service). The statement mentions, for instance, the combined police teams that have been dispatched to Ingushetia from Rostov-on-Don, Kemerovo, Khabarovsk and Magnitogorsk, and the precise names of combat units, FSB special squadrons as well as "kadyrovtsy" from the personal army of Kadyrov. Such details are usually classified and their possession suggests that Magas controls not only the forests and mountains of Ingushetia, but also has agents or sympathizers in the various branches of power.

Special attention should be given to the fact that the list of operations carried out by the jamaat was entitled "The Report for the Muslim Population of Ğalĝaj (Ingushetia in Ingush) on Accomplished Tasks."

The positive image of jamaat within the population is one of the main conditions not only for the continued success but also for the very existence of the resistance underground. Magas pays attention to the ideological war and his victories on that front are no less impressive than in the area of combat operations.

The jamaat report card describes in detail each operation that led to the killing or wounding of not just Russian but Ingush military officials or special operations officers. Such acts are explained as punishments or warnings. Punishment is assigned for such crimes as active cooperation with or participation in the Russian power structures. The high-ranking officials and officers of the Interior Ministry and FSB, Ingushetia's Interior Minister Musa Medov and President Murat Zyazykov all fall under this category. Among others who were targeted for punishment is a pimp who used to send women of dubious reputation to the military barracks and a university rector who prohibited female students from wearing a hijab. Hence, Magas is inculcating in the population of Ingushetia the idea that he is not fighting against common folks and that he targets the marginal elements who betray the interests of the people. The jamaat members do not refuse their Ingush enemies a chance to "return to the people." Interior Minister Medov, who earlier recently survived an assassination attempt (North Caucasus Weekly, October 3), is openly offered a choice—to die or to join

the jamaat.

Apart from the punitive measures, the ideological arsenal of the jamaat also incorporates a clearly organized support system for the families and relatives of the mujahideen with the special attention paid to the families of the deceased.

The romantic portrayal of the slain mujahideen and the creation of a heroic narrative, in which they are portrayed as having fought and died for their faith and land, should also be counted among the Ingush Jamaat's ideological victories. In principle, the creation of a heroic image is not that difficult because many jamaat members represent fine examples of Caucasian nobility and selflessness. Many stories about the lives and deaths of these heroes have a special place in contemporary Ingush folklore. As these stories are repeated orally from person to person they become important vehicles for recruiting an increasing number of young Ingush who lost faith in the ideals of democratic society because its Russian manifestation assumed particularly ugly features in the North Caucasus.

The time when it was possible for the Ingush crisis to be resolved with Moscow's participation has probably already passed. From now on the course of events will develop independently of the will and interests of Russia, given that the crisis of Moscow's credibility within Ingush society reached its apex in the aftermath of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict in August and with the subsequent recognition of South Ossetia's independence.

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Autumn in the North Caucasus Means Increase in Rebel Attacks

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

Militants in the North Caucasus often strike in the autumn, and October this year has not been an exception. Attacks on the structures and personnel of Russia's Interior Ministry, Defense Ministry and Federal Security Service (FSB) not only have not abated, but appear to be part of a mass action of armed opposition against the authorities across the region.

With increasing frequency one now hears news reports about the situation in Kabardino-Balkaria, where the Yarmuk Jamaat is no longer considered by the authorities to be a mythical entity. They are forced to acknowledge the jamaat's existence and to take action against its members. Indeed, the president of Kabardino-Balkaria, Arsen Kanakov, unlike his predecessor Valery Kokov, recently admitted the existence of jamaat activity in the Republic (Gazeta, October 13). Moreover, he has acknowledged the fact that young people in the republic are joining the militants in the mountains and even went as far as not to rule out the possibility of a repeat of the capture of Nalchik by the militants, as happened on October 13-14, 2005 (Caucasus Times, October 9). This was the first official acknowledgement of the fact that the youth in the republic are joining the ranks of the armed opposition. That is, a fact which has already been acknowledged in Chechnya and Ingushetia and is now the case in Kabardino-Balkaria as well.

Thus, it is possible to state that the phenomenon of youth joining the ranks of radical jamaat groups is not characteristic of Chechnya: indeed, it has expanded to the areas where jamaats are active and consequently can become the Russia's main problem in this volatile region. In other words, the entire region of the North Caucasus will not be exhibiting signs of stabilization for the foreseeable future regardless of how much that is desired by the Russian leadership in anticipation of the impending Olympic games in the city of Sochi.

Against this backdrop, the comments made by FSB Director Aleksandr Bortnikov on October 14 came as no surprise. Bortnikov said that more than 69 terrorist acts have been prevented so far this year alone, including several terrorist acts that were set to take place in the vicinity of Sochi and Adler in accordance with orders issued by Dokka Umarov (www.lentacom.ru/news/11827.html).

It should be noted here that Sochi and its surrounding districts are the historical homeland of one of the ethnic sub-groups of the Adyg people—the Shapsugs (www.memo.ru/hr/discrim/meshi3/6krasd011.htm). During the period of the colonization and conquest of the North Caucasus by the Russian Empire in the 19th century, the majority of Shapsugs were eliminated and the few survivors were deported to Turkey. At present the remnants of this tiny ethnic group residing in the Sochi district number only about several thousand people (according to the 2002 population census, 3,200 people). This circumstance can become an attractive factor for the jamaats because any strike there will be extremely painful for Russia and at the same time it can be presented as an act of revenge for a legitimate historical grievance. The indirect confirmation of this sort of strategizing was the arrest of Arsen Setov, identified as “the leader of Adyg Wahhabis.” To be sure there was much speculation about the existence of an Adyg Jamaat, but there was no concrete information proving that it represented an active combat unit within the structure of the armed opposition in the North Caucasus (Interfax, October 9).

No less important was an unexpected public demonstration in support of the unification of the republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia (North Caucasus Weekly, October 16). Officials of Chechnya's pro-Moscow administration have voiced this idea frequently in the past, but the harsh responses from the Ingush authorities often pushed this issue off the agenda temporarily. Yet, taking advantage of the on-going elections to Chechnya's so-called “Kadyrov's Parliament,” this time around the demonstration took place in the village of Sernovodsk in Chechnya's Sunzha district without the approval or support of the republics' heads, Ramzan Kadyrov and Murat Zyazykov. Residents of both republics were brought there by buses, which has not happened since 1992. Thus, Moscow's desire to unify the two fraternal peoples in a united Checheno-Ingushetia was publicly announced as if it was on the two peoples' behalf: such a demonstration would never have taken place before the elections unless it was on Moscow's orders.

In pushing the idea of the unification of Chechnya and Ingushetia, Moscow wants to resolve several tasks at the same time. One of these tasks is to replace Zyazykov, who is hated by the Ingush, with the even more odious figure of Ramzan Kadyrov (see Radio Liberty correspondent Andrei Babitsky's comments, www.svobodanews.ru/Article/2008/10/17/20081017191324617.html). A second task is to resolve the territorial dispute between the Chechens and Ingush over the Sunzha district, caused by the fact that no border was drawn there between the two republics in 1992. The most important task that Moscow is seeking to resolve by merging Chechnya and Ingushetia is to spread the “visible success” Moscow has achieved in Chechnya, where all symptoms of separatism are drowned out by the loud exhortations about the loyalty of Ramzan Kadyrov and his team toward Moscow and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin personally. A successful unification would reduce tension in Ossetian-Ingush relations because the Ingush would be busy sorting out their position within the new republic and the problem of North Ossetia's Prigorodny district, which the Ingush claim from the Ossetians and led to an ethnic cleansing in 1992 (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, February 11, 2007).

All of this is forcing Moscow to adopt ways that resolve the question of the unification of these republics. At the same time, popular opinion will not be taken into account: the only opinion that will be considered will be that expressed by the small part of the population, which is loyal to the authorities. In Chechnya proper, the proposed unification does not promise anything for Chechens other than the loss of a certain percentage of high-ranking positions, given that an administrative reform will be carried out, over the course of which it will be necessary to determine who will have the top roles—Ingush or Chechens. At the same time, this will reduce to naught all the efforts the Ingush have made over the past 16 years to organize their republic, leaving them once again as the provincial periphery of a republic in which the center will undoubtedly be in Grozny, which will again attract the Ingush intelligentsia and political elite. It took several days for the Ingush authorities to finally announce that they had not been consulted regarding the organization of the aforementioned demonstration (“Govorit Moskva” radio, October 17).

In the meantime resistance fighters carried out a series of audacious acts, including the occupation of two foothill settlements populated by the Ingush—Muzhichi and Yandare. It should be noted that these villages are relatively sizeable—with populations more than 1,000 and 10,000, respectively—and are located on the way to the mountainous part of Ingushetia. The occupation of these villages was so unexpected and unpleasant for Ingushetia's leadership that the authorities were clearly not ready to react in a manner appropriate to the circumstances. For instance, the republic's prosecutor general, Yury Turygyn, was compelled to state that “he did not have the information” about the actions

(Ingushetia.org, North Caucasus Weekly, October 16), even though Muzhichi and Yandare are located only 30 kilometers away from where the prosecutor spoke and he could have traveled there in 15-20 minutes from his residence in Nazran or at least called the local administration in these villages or even sent a courier in order to determine what was happening on the ground. Meanwhile, the militants set up a checkpoint and calmly inspected passing vehicles and examined passenger's documents while urging residents to abandon pernicious habits such as alcohol consumption and gambling.

The militants who occupied Muzhichi and Yandare were waiting for a reaction from the Russian law-enforcement and defense authorities, but that gargantuan machinery always takes time before it moves forward. The militants left the villages without losses and since then became sort of heroes on the Internet. On on-line forums such as Ingushetia.org and Kavkazchat the youth in a characteristic manner presented this action by the militants as an assault carried out by the Ingush Jamaat "Shariat." It is noteworthy that this jamaat has been continuously headed by Amir Magas (Akhmad Yevloev) ever since it was founded at the start of the combat operations in Chechnya during the second military campaign in 1999.

This was not the first attack on the village of Muzhichi. During a similar operation this summer, three people were killed and several were wounded (Interfax-russia.ru, July 9). In addition, the rebels' occupation of villages was accompanied by a number of lower scale attacks in various villages around Ingushetia, including explosions, shootings and assaults on the structures associated with the authorities.

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Kadyrov's Power and Cult of Personality Grows

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

Chechnya has been literally shaken this month. According to Russian sources, 25 tremors were registered in Chechnya on October 11-12 alone (Novye Izvestia, October 13). The epicenter of the strongest shock, which took place on October 11 and was estimated at 6 on the Richter scale, was located in the mountainous part of Chechnya—the Kurchaloi, Nozhai-Yurt, Shali and Gudermes districts. After the earthquake, the authorities tried hard to convince the population that nothing had happened. This was because the elections for Chechen parliament, known as “Kadyrov’s parliament,” were scheduled for the very next day and the authorities were really afraid that the aftermath of a natural disaster would reduce the voter turnout. Moreover, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov stated during a television interview carried live by the central Russian TV channels that the voter turnout during the “elections” in Chechnya would “be no less than 100 percent and maybe even more” (RIA Novosti, October 12; North Caucasus Weekly, October 16).

Nonetheless, the elections on Sunday, October 12, went ahead and became a new shock for the residents of the republic. As was expected, it was officially announced that more than 95 percent of Chechens had participated in the “elections” and close to 89 percent had voted for Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin’s United Russia party. These figures, similar to the figures cited during previous elections, were of exclusively formal significance for a population that by now has become used to the fact that the authorities always speak on its behalf during the elections. According to some sources, on the ground there was an absolute indifference toward the elections and the only people who were active were those who are officially employed by the local administrations and republican ministries. This means that only officials and bureaucrats, who simply could not ignore the elections out of fear that they would lose their jobs, actually voted. Fear of losing your job is a weighty consideration given that even according to official information released in February of this year, the number of unemployed in Chechnya reached 75 percent of the entire labor force (Rossiiskaya Gazeta – Severny Kavkaz, February 20), while unofficial estimates suggest that closer to 90 percent of the republic’s able-bodied citizens are unemployed.

On October 12, Election Day, people buried their relatives who died during the earthquake. Thirteen people were killed and hundreds wounded—dozens of those—and more than 1,000 homes were destroyed. In such villages as Bachi-Yurt and Mairtup in Kurchaloi district, the level of destruction of homes reached almost 90 percent. Mystery surrounds the degree of devastation in Kadyrov’s home village of Tsentoroi, which is also in Kurchaloi district. Apparently a decision was made that the earthquake could have no consequences in the village where Kadyrov resides. At the same time, people found out after the elections that on the day that the authorities were trying to instill calm in the population, hospitals, schools and administrative buildings lay in ruins in Kurchaloi and Shali (Polit.ru, October 14).

Above all, people were relieved that the earthquake spared Grozny, where its force was negligible. Had the earthquake been more powerful there, the dilapidated houses that had been damaged by Russian aerial bombardment would have crumbled in front of everyone. The Grozny residents were only frightened, and fear of aftershocks forced many to leave the Chechen capital and take refuge with relatives in nearby villages. However, those who did not have means to leave the city spent two nights in a row under the clear skies because they did not want to risk entering the high-rise residential buildings. They knew well that those buildings were not safe because they had undergone hasty cosmetic refurbishment of their facades for the sake of the Chechen president’s loud and beautiful public statements, not for the benefit of the people of Grozny.

On October 16, Putin, who arrived in Chechnya to inspect the devastation caused by the earthquake, stumbled on the phenomenon of Kadyrov, who, without waiting for the federal assessment of the devastation in the area, issued an order to begin reconstruction in the hope that he would eventually receive funds from Moscow. To this, a visibly irritated Putin, who had hoped to appear against the background of destroyed houses, remarked that nobody should violate financial laws: first an assessment must be made and only then the funds will follow. Putin’s remark was intentionally kept secret from the people of Chechnya because it was necessary to show Putin as always pleased with Kadyrov, the president of Chechnya.

Prime Minister Putin had nothing else to do but to tour Ramzan Kadyrov’s grandiose project—the mosque built in memory of his father in Grozny. The mosque officially opened on October 17, and it has already become a symbol of Grozny. Built based on the model of a mosque in the Turkish town of Konya, the new Grozny mosque is the largest in Europe and can accommodate up to 10,000 persons. Decorated with real gold and surrounded by fountains, a spiritual directorate building, a hotel, and a Muslim institute, the compound of the new mosque occupies six hectares and is overall impressive, especially against the background of a devastated Grozny. An international conference on Islam was held there immediately after the opening ceremony. Not surprisingly, the conference agenda’s main theme was criticism of Salafi teachings. At the same time, all of this looks excessively propagandistic given that close to 200 figures from various Muslim countries, including Libya, Lebanon, Sudan, Kuwait, Mauritania and others, were invited to this forum and most of them were favorably predisposed towards Russia and thus unlikely to disappoint the Russian authorities by making unnecessary statements.

Prime Minister Putin was not shown the avenue in Grozny named after him (North Caucasus Weekly, October 10), although it starts precisely from where the new mosque now stands. In his constant desire to show personal loyalty to Vladimir Putin, Kadyrov is inadvertently doing him a bad favor. In Grozny the public billboards with photos of Putin are everywhere, but one can hardly find photos of President Dmitry Medvedev. At the mosque opening ceremony on October 17, Kadyrov called Putin “the hope and buttress of the Muslim world” (Interfax-religia, October 17).

The news programs on Chechen television feature constant reports about Kadyrov’s activities, including his trips, meetings and public speeches. Furthermore, anyone who wishes to appear on Chechen television, no matter what topic they are discussing, must always mention that everything is done because of Ramzan Kadyrov’s personal efforts. On October 15, for example, practically all the programs on the Chechen television contained reverential references to Kadyrov. They can include the recitation of a poem praising him or songs about his father or even a discussion by historians regarding the impact of his personality on the collective memory of the people. Many research papers on Ramzan Kadyrov and his late father are being studied and even books about them have been published on them.

Both the opening of the new mosque and Putin’s visit are signs of an increase in Kadyrov’s power. The huge mosque will become a new edifice to his self-styled usurpation of power and unlimited possibilities under Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

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