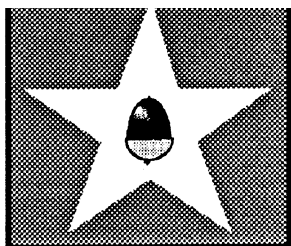


Conflict Studies Research Centre

C W Blandy

**Dagestan: The Storm
Part 3
The Expulsion of Chechen
Bandit Formations
From Novolakskiy Rayon**

October 2000



P33

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DAGESTAN: THE STORM

PART 3 – THE EXPULSION OF CHECHEN BANDIT FORMATIONS FROM NOVOLAKSKIY RAYON

C W Blandy

INTRODUCTION

The first paper in this series¹ sought to identify some of those underlying questions arising from the ‘invasion’ into Avaristan by Chechen illegal armed formations (NVF)² and Islamic extremists under Shamil’ Basayev and Emir Khattab in the first few days of August 1999. The second paper³ continued the story by examining: first, the arrival of the Wahhabi movement in the North Caucasus set against the traditional forms of ‘unofficial’ Islam practised by the majority of the Muslim mountain peoples in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia; second, the establishment of a Wahhabi complex in the villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar in the Buynaksk rayon of Dagestan, the Kadar zone; third, the reasoning which led to the decision by Federal Forces to conduct an all-out assault operation on the Kadar zone and fourth, the course of the operation and the main shortcomings of the Federal Forces in clearing this area of Islamic extremists.

The purpose of this third paper is to analyse the Federal Forces’ operation in countering Chechen NVFs during the second ‘invasion’ into Dagestan on 5 September 1999 and the preliminary measures taken by the *Federaly* immediately prior to their armed intervention into Chechnya in the period late September-early October 1999. This second ‘invasion’ was preceded by the assembly of *boyeviki* under Chechen field commanders Arbi Barayev and Ruslan Gelayev on 1 September 1999 in Chechen border areas adjacent to Novolakskiy rayon of Dagestan. The concentration of fighters and subsequent ‘invasion’ was triggered in part by the commencement of the Federal assault against the Kadar zone complex on 29 August 1999. A campaign of explosions in Moscow and provincial urban centres was to form an additional backdrop to Federal counter-terrorist operations⁴.

It is possible to view this third large-scale operation on the territory of Dagestan, for the moment at least, as the culminating point in Federal military operations in support of the Dagestani government in Makhachkala. Overall, the Federal counter-terrorist operation was distinguished first by its initial slow reaction to the events in Avaristan. Second, there was an urgent need for the *Federaly* to gain the initiative through a demonstration of effective action against the long-running example of disaffection and ‘mutiny’ posed by the Wahhabi Kadar complex; but in practice it was to become a drawn-out, poorly coordinated and clumsily executed assault operation. A real change of emphasis and scale was to take place with the eventual, forceful

¹ C W Blandy “*Dagestan: The Storm – Part 1 – The ‘Invasion’ of Avaristan*” P30, CSRC, March 2000.

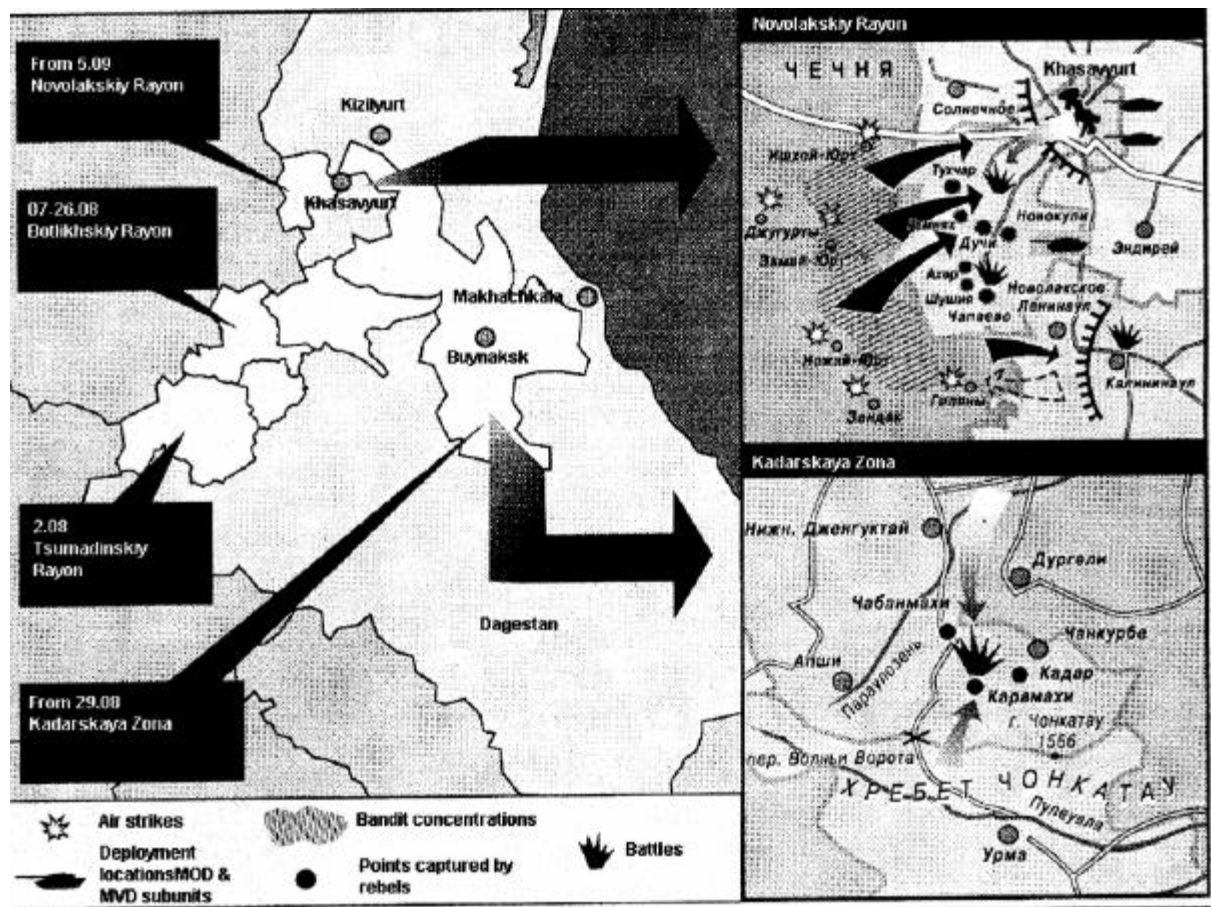
² “Nezakonnyye vooruzhennyye formirovaniya”.

³ C W Blandy “*Dagestan: The Storm – Part II – The Federal Assault on the Kadar Complex*” P32, CSRC, June 2000.

⁴ See Blandy “*Dagestan: The Storm – Part 1 – The ‘Invasion’ of Avaristan*” p11-12.

expulsion of NVF from Novolakskiy rayon, where it became evident that expulsion was but a stepping stone for the massive military intervention into Chechnya by the Combined Group of Forces (OGV). Even in this third phase of the Dagestan counter-terrorist operation there was still a lack of dynamic, consistent action by Federal Forces. Map 1 below provides a diagrammatic sequence of the battles in Dagestan between 2 August and 24 September 1999. Map 2 shows the general terrain characteristics, the settlements of Ishkhoy-Yurt, Zamay-Yurt and Nozhay-Yurt in Chechnya and emphasises the position of Khasavyurt as an important, if not a vital nodal point for both rail and road communications.

Map 1 - Sequence of Battles in Dagestan - 2 August to 24 September 1999⁵



⁵ Kommersant-Daily, 7 September 1999.

MILITARY OPERATIONS

5 September 1999

Tactical Surprise and Initial Actions

Clearly, the explosion in a five storey apartment block in Buynaksk, home to 136 Separate MR Brigade at 2145 hrs on 4 September 1999, was a coordinated, diversionary operation with the objective of gaining surprise, masking the immediate intentions of the Chechen NVF, and sowing confusion amongst the Federal and Dagestani structures. Barely a few hours after this terrorist act in Buynaksk, at 0430 hrs on 5 September 1999, from areas around Ishkhoy-Yurt, Dzhugurty, Zamay-Yurt and Nozhay-Yurt in Chechnya some 2,000 Chechen *boyeviki* crossed over the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border into Novolakskiy rayon of Dagestan and occupied the foothill villages and settlements of Shushiya, Gamiyakh, Akhar and part of the rayon centre of Novolakskoye. Refugees, women and children abandoned the occupied villages, but the *boyeviki* put the menfolk to work on engineer fortifications.

The raiders advanced on three axes: first, towards the settlement of Kalininaul in Kazbekovskiy rayon, lying to the east of Novolakskiy rayon and where the local Wahhabis were strong in numbers; second, to the town of Khasavyurt which the *boyeviki* intended to name as the capital of the "Islamic State of Dagestan" and where more than 50,000 Chechen-Akhin lived, and third to the rayon centre of Novolakskoye.

The engagement between the Lipetskiy OMON and the Dagestani militia against the Chechen illegal bandit formations seems to have started early in the morning of 5 September, when the militia platoon commander, accompanied by the detachment doctor, were making what must have been a routine tour of inspection of the position, checking militiamen at their posts and making an assessment of the local situation. There were no indications of terrorist activity in the area around Novolakskoye. However, this period of seeming rural peace was suddenly broken by the attempted seizure of the platoon commander and the doctor by bearded bandits hiding in the thick undergrowth near the local mosque in Novolakskoye. The platoon commander, after a struggle, managed to get back to the sports hall. This then led to the blockade of the Lipetskiy OMON in the sports hall complex of the House of Culture and a firefight.

Bratishka, the journal of spetsnaz subunits, provides some insights into the actions of the Lipetskiy OMON Group in Novolakskiy rayon over the period 5 to 6 September 1999. The article naturally supports the official version of events.

Box 1 – Actions of the Lipetskiy OMON Group⁶

Adverse Effect of Splitting the Group

"In previous assignments the group had operated and successfully carried out their tasks as a single group. On this occasion in Dagestan they had been split into two parts with one being deployed to Kazbekovskiy rayon and the other to Novolakskiy. Individual soldiers of the detachment viewed this as an evil omen. Everyone hoped for a peaceful solution of the tension, though what took place early in the morning of 5 September in Novolakskiy was not unexpected."

⁶ *Bratishka* - No 11, November 1999, p18-19, "Novolakskiy proryv - Lipetskogo Omona" by Ivan Muchak.

The division of the Lipetskiy OMON group into two detachments of 25 men was also to have a negative effect on close relatives of the servicemen involved, for “news about the blockade of the Lipetskiy OMON in the ROVD building and the sports hall of the House of Culture immediately became the main news on the television. Facts, each more tragic than the last in the course of a few days did not release family members and close militia comrades fighting in Dagestan from the television screens. Everyone knew that only part of the detachment of 25 men were in Novolakskiy rayon. “*In which group is mine*”, each mother, wife, sister thought.” Secretly they all hoped, not in that group which was fighting a bloody battle in Novolakskoye.

Action in Novolakskoye

Several minutes before the attempted seizure of the platoon commander and doctor, “the ROVD had already received a signal from a patrol group that the *boyeviki* were advancing into the depths of the rayon. Both the Dagestani and Lipetskiy militiamen immediately picked up their weapons and were in their fire positions before sounds of shooting by the bandits. The fact that the bandits concentrated their main fire on the sports hall was absolutely logical. It was vital in the first place to destroy the OMON. Towards the Dagestani Militiamen they decided to manifest a ‘loyalty’ in maintaining the image of ‘Liberators of the Caucasus’ ... The militiamen saw from the direction of Chechnya vehicles approaching, bandits going into houses, collecting villagers’ possessions that they fancied and loading them onto lorries”.

“The militiamen, both Dagestani and Lipetskiy, found themselves in a situation where only one thing remained: to defend themselves and fight their way out of the blockade ... As the fire slackened a little (the *boyeviki* were dispersing around the settlement) the company commander Major Sergey Skovorodin entered the ROVD building without being seen, assessed the situation and made the decision to relocate all his subordinates there. Here ammunition was concentrated, the Dagestani militia were also here. With combined forces it was easier to organise all-round defence. The *boyeviki* invited the Dagestani militiamen to leave in good time, they even promised to return weapons to them, only abandon the Lipetskiy OMON. The decision was taken to repel them together and to leave the encirclement. After this the bandits discarded any diplomacy and with dusk falling started to engage targets. Wounded militiamen were distributed on the second floor where the probability of being hit by a bullet or grenade splinter was considerably reduced”.

“From the start the *boyeviki* bided their time. The tactic of their actions had been perfected since the Chechen War: blockade a subunit, wait until the arrival of reinforcements and then destroy them in an ambush. To assist the OMON servicemen a tank and two ‘*beempeshki*’ (BMPs) with Internal Troops tried to break through. The *boyeviki* destroyed them. The militia platoon attempting to break into the blockaded *rayonotdel* (rayon department office) from the direction of Khasavyurt was hurled back by massed fire from every type of weapon. Then the besieged understood that their radio transmissions were being overheard by the *boyeviki*. To call for assistance meant to expose the lives of other militiamen and soldiers to danger”.

“Sergey Skovorodin and Muslim Dakhayev took the decision to get out independently. The Novolakskiy militia knew the terrain well. Muslim Dakhayev with a high degree of probability determined that the *boyeviki* would expect their breakthrough across the small river to their own colleagues. There they were most likely to set up an ambush. They decided to break out in the direction of Chechnya and later, along the administrative border, to the positions of Federal Forces. By 0800 hrs they had got to the village of Novokuli, where their own colleagues were located. In the breakout from the blockaded settlement the Novolakskiy militia lost 14 killed and 8 wounded. The Lipetskiy OMON lost 1 killed and 6 received wounds. The doctor (Eduard Belan) who had been doing the round of militia posts with the platoon commander was numbered amongst those who had disappeared without trace. ”

“Money, Ammunition and Information were not much in evidence”

The Lipetskiy OMON were certain that there was not a lot of ammunition. For their nearest and dearest - not a lot of information existed. Although at times there was too much

information, sometimes it outstripped events and was insufficiently verified. On Dagestani television it was announced that the bandits had surrounded the Lipetskiy OMON and all their colleagues had been butchered. It was certainly the *boyeviki* plan.

Countering some of the views of local Dagestani communities in Novolakskiy rayon, Vladimir Smirnov, the Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) Directorate for Dagestan, denied reports from refugees that all the members of the militia rayon detachment and the local FSB detachment sleeping in the FSB building had been killed during the night when the building was destroyed. According to Smirnov⁷, the Dagestani militia and the Lipetskiy OMON (special purpose militia units) in the course of the 24 hours before the arrival of mobile armoured subunits of Interior Troops MVD and the Ministry of Defence had maintained a posture of all-round defence and had succeeded in breaking out of the encirclement by the morning of 6 September. In these battles 15 militiamen were killed and three BTRs were put out of action. Battles continued in the rayon centre of Novolakskoye.

Whilst the lack of information arising from the action at Novolakskoye caused concern to families and comrades, it is also worth noting that there were three resolutions in the Autumn of 1999 concerned with “*the objectives of strengthening the social protection of servicemen and members of their families by the Ministry of Defence Russian Federation in the period of operations which were urgently prepared and published in documents*”⁸.

Box 2 – Measures to Strengthen Social Protection of Servicemen and their Families⁹

Resolution No 930-54 of 20 August 1999 “About additional guarantees to servicemen and employees of Interior Ministry organs carrying out tasks for the restoration of order and public safety in the Republic of Dagestan”;

Resolution No 936 of 25 August 1999 “About additional measures on social protection of servicemen’s families and employees of Internal Ministry organs directly participating in the struggle against terrorism on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan and who had been killed (lost without trace)”;

Resolution No 1294 of 25 September 1999 “Additional measures on offering material assistance for travel of relations of wounded servicemen to the places of treatment and sojourn there”.

Colonel-General V F Kulakov, writing on the moral and psychological well-being of troops¹⁰, concluded with the points that social protection of servicemen and members of their families must be constantly strengthened; moreover, “*officers, praporshchiki, sergeants and soldiers carrying out combat tasks must know that commanders, the older and experienced officers and local state organs care about their families*”¹¹. The points that General Kulakov made are undoubtedly valid, but

⁷ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 7 September 1999.

⁸ *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No 1, January-February 2000, p65.

⁹ *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No 1, January-February 2000, p65.

¹⁰ *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No 1, January-February 2000, p65, “*Moral'no-psikhiologicheskoye obespecheniye kontrterroristicheskoy operatsii v Respublike Dagestane*” by Colonel-General V F Kulakov, Doctor of Military Science, Academician AVN.

¹¹ *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No 1, January-February 2000, p65.

in counter-terrorist operations involving rapid dynamic changes of the situation there is also a requirement for an established, well-oiled system for the passage of information. In some ways this article demonstrates the process and effects of 'scraping the barrel'¹² to find sufficient servicemen from anywhere to counter the threat posed by the Chechen illegal bandit formations. As during Soviet times, theory and practice were and remain two dissimilar phenomena¹³.

General Situation in Novolakskiy Rayon There had been a suggestion that *boyeviki* under the control of the disgraced Duma deputy Nadirshakh Khachilayev had 'invaded' this rayon. Khachilayev himself categorically refuted this allegation. In an interview "he stated that he was continuing to conduct talks from Karamakhi with the military about the cessation of the operation and the removal of local inhabitants from the villages, **but the invading boyeviki were not subordinated to him and were 'aggressors and the enemies of the Dagestani peoples'**"¹⁴.

However, Vladimir Smirnov was of the opinion that *boyeviki* who had 'invaded' Dagestan a second time belonged to Shamil' Basayev and Khattab, having regrouped following their actions in Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony and subsequent 'withdrawal'. They launched attempts along several routes to assist the beleaguered *Karamakhintsy* in Buynaksk rayon. Besides relieving Federal pressure on the Kadar zone, he did not exclude the possibility of a breakthrough in the direction of Khasavyurt, Kizlyar, carrying out large-scale terrorist acts, the seizure of hostages in Makhachkala, Kaspiysk, and "'provocations' along the Dagestani-Azerbaijan border"¹⁵ further to the south.

The seizure of foothill villages, mountain settlements and auls in Novolakskiy rayon not only posed an immediate threat to Khasavyurt, an important nodal point, and to Khasavyurt rayon as a whole, but the terrain also afforded a certain degree of protection to the Chechen NVFs. This last factor was later to provide problems for Federal Forces in capturing dominating heights, with concomitant casualties amongst servicemen. In general terms the rivers flow on a south to north axis, making assaults in an east-west direction difficult or even hazardous, almost forcing Federal Forces to move into a north-south pattern of movement from the main Khasavyurt-Gudermes road. One cannot ignore the position of Gerzel Bridge which spans the northward flowing Aksay River, close to Gerzel-Aul and the village of Koshkel'dy. Gerzel Bridge had been the scene of many a skirmish with Chechen raiding parties who took advantage of the south to north longitudinal folds in the ground to gain surprise in attacking the rear of the check point through dried-up water courses. Furthermore the commanding positions of villages, auls and

¹² See Michael Orr in "Some Provisional Notes on Current Russian Operations in Dagestan and Chechnya", CSRC, 3 December 1999. An additional insight into efforts to counter the *boyeviki*, particularly this phase of the counter-terrorist operation in Dagestan, is the constant arrival at Makhachkala and Kaspiysk airports of small packets of OMON from all over the Russian Federation.

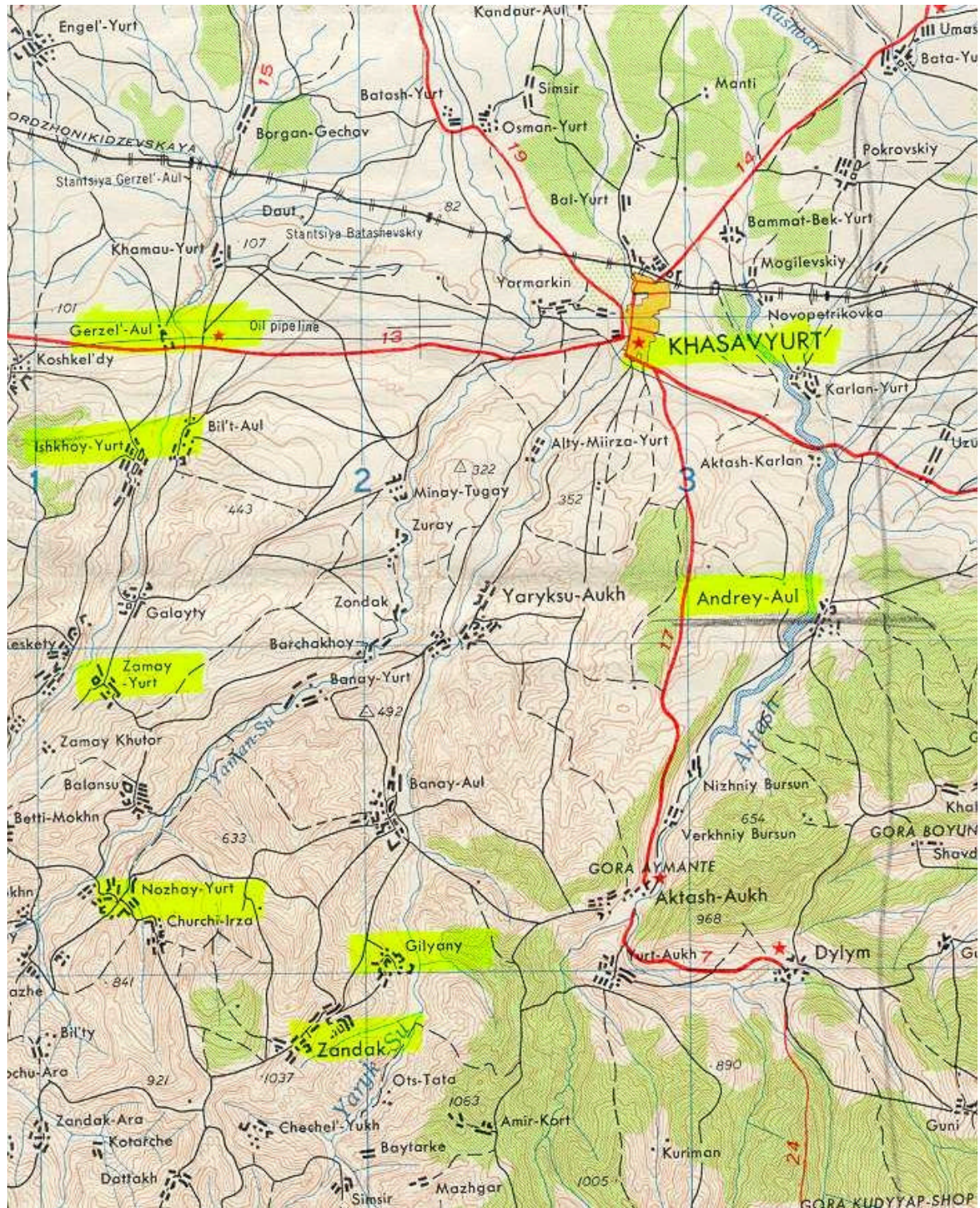
¹³ Another indicator of military practice with regard to service families was the tragedy of the "Kursk" in the Barents Sea on 12 August 2000 and the seeming lack of attention and care by the service authorities toward the families which was reported by the Russian mass media.

¹⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 165, 7 September 1999, p1 and 5 "V Dagestane idut boi za tselostnost' Rossii" by Milrad Fatullayev. (Emphasis is mine in the quote).

¹⁵ Ibid.

settlements over routes and tracks, as exemplified by Aktash-Aukh, Banoy-Aul, Yarukhsu-Aukh and Nozhay-Yurt made them into almost natural 'blokposts' and obstacles to movement by vehicle.

Map 2 - Khasavyurt and Surrounding Area - General Terrain Characteristics¹⁶



¹⁶ NK 38-3 Series N501 revised 1942-43.

Failure of Federal Intelligence and Security Organs

It is also interesting to note that despite the multitude of warnings concerning the 'massing' of *boyeviki* on the administrative border the local authorities dismissed this as '*super-charged hysteria*', and in essence criticism of the actions of the Army and the Army Command were assessed by the authorities as a "*demolition of the image of the Russian fighting man and aiding the bandits*"¹⁷. However, the widely predicted events in the Novolakskiy rayon bordering Chechnya were not expected by the authorities. Absolutely all the mass media and observers had vied with each other in announcing that the wide-scale war unfolding in Dagestan had been predicted by them much earlier. Nevertheless, there was no doubt that Makhachkala and Moscow were clearly embarrassed, but for different reasons.

As mentioned in "*The Federal Assault on the Kadar Complex*"¹⁸ there was considerable dissatisfaction in Dagestan government circles in Makhachkala with regard to the performance of the Federal structures and the Command of the Internal Troops, together with concerns that an excessively robust approach from the military could alienate the Dagestani population. At a sitting of the Dagestan State Council on 5 September 1999 sharp criticism was levelled at the Federal Forces for their '*listless actions*'¹⁹ against the Wahhabi extremists following this second invasion of Dagestan, into Novolakskiy rayon. Questions had already been articulated on the lines of, "*Where is the Army and why is the Minister of Defence of Russia Igor Sergeev flying off to Uzbekistan, when he should be here in Dagestan, where a war is going on?*"²⁰

Certainly, the blinkered attitude, lack of effective preventive measures and the somewhat somnolent reaction of the Federal power-wielding structures to some extent called into question the effectiveness of the Federal intelligence and security services. The deterioration of the political-military situation in the North Caucasus brought to the fore an urgent need for greater activity on their part. Quite obviously there were defects in the whole system which should have "*obtained timely information about the intentions of extremists to guarantee effective planning of combat operations, to maintain continuity of decision making and to carry out timely neutralisation of possible terrorist appearances*"²¹.

According to Igor' Korotchenko²², at that time the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), Federal Security Service (FSB), Federal Government Communications and Information Agency (FAPSI) and the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU) did not carry out the provision of information-analysis of the situation in Dagestan for the political leadership of the Russian Federation. Besides, the Headquarters of the Group of Federal Troops carrying out combat operations on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan provided part of the nominated special forces.

¹⁷ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 165, 7 September 1999, p5 – Milrad Fatullayev.

¹⁸ Blandy, "*Dagestan: The Storm – Part II – The Federal Assault on the Kadar Complex*".

¹⁹ "*Voyna v Dagestane. Khronika sobytii – Boyevyye deystviya 5 September 1999*".

²⁰ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 165, 7 September 1999, p5 – Milrad Fatullayev.

²¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 166, 8 September 1999, p3, "*Poka vysshaya gosudarstvennaya vlast' budet plestis' v khvoste sobyitii, vedy ne minovat*" column by Igor' Korotchenko.

²² *Ibid.*

The tasks which should have been allotted to and undertaken by the secret services are shown in essence below.

Box 3 – Breakdown of Secret Services Tasks in Dagestan and Chechnya²³

SVR First, to uncover hidden financial channels originating from abroad aiding Chechen fighters. Second, names of Islamic organisations and separate individuals involved in giving support to Chechens. Third, to gain knowledge through foreign mass media and diplomatic channels to prompt Near and Middle East countries to take concrete measures to halt financial support for Chechen extremists.

FSB The FSB must be concentrated on the deployment of a functioning network of agents operating on Chechen territory. This is not a simple task. Moreover, the organisation of resources requires considerable financial expenditure since the recruitment of agents amongst the Chechens can only be carried out exclusively on a material basis. It must not preclude the possibility of offering assistance to those field commanders who could conduct destructive actions in relation to the especially dangerous terrorists – Shamil' Basayev and Shirvani Basayev, Salman Raduyev, Khattab. Taking into account that the FSB is 'starved', it is difficult to expect real quick results.

FAPSI The main task of FAPSI is the continuous electronic monitoring of communication channels functioning on the territory of Chechnya and areas of Dagestan. For the fulfilment of the given tasks it is necessary to subordinate and include special subunits of the General Staff Directorate of Electronic Warfare.

GRU The GRU should carry out satellite photographic reconnaissance and surveillance of the main deployment areas of the Chechen bandit formations. Reconnaissance and surveillance should be concentrated on sabotaging transport communication links used by the fighters. One radio-controlled explosive device positioned at the right time and place – and the problem with ideologies and inspirations of Chechen extremism might be solved once and for all. Furthermore, spetsnaz recce groups could be used in target indication for aircraft, in much the same way that Dzhokhar Dudayev was killed in April 1996.

A case in point was the fact that the “*Udugov' television station²⁴ worked along the border of Nozhay-Yurtovskiy rayon of Chechnya broadcasting to the Dagestani border rayony and transmitting the old and new programmes of the self-proclaimed Islamic Shura and Basayev's Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan, where the call of Sheikh Mukhammad Yaraginskiy²⁵ originally made in 1825 to rise up against*

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 165, 7 September 1999, p5 – Milrad Fatullayev. See also Blandy “*Dagestan: The Storm – Part 2 – The Federal Assault on the Kadar Complex*”, p23.

²⁵ Yevgeniy Krutikov writing in *Izvestiya* on 14 August 1999 “*Natsional'naya ideya dlya Chechni*” made the following points under the paragraph heading of “Dagestan – the Motherland of Chechen Independence”. “The Chechens never (even in the period of the Caucasian War with Russia) had their own religious and political leaders. The first Imam who lived in the middle of the last century in the North Caucasus theocratic state, was Gazi-Magomed – an Avar from the Dagestani mountain aul of Untsukul’, who spent his childhood years in the aul of Gimri. Initially his spiritual tutor was Sagidefendi – an opponent of the war with Russia, lover of wine and the secular life. The pupil did not like his teacher. Maromed Yaraginskiy, a holy and intelligent type of Lezghin elder became Gazi Magomed’s tutor, never having participated in any battle, but set out the ideology of the Caucasian War, the djihad and anti-Russian doctrine. Magomed Yaraginskiy was a Murshid and Sheikh of the Sufi Naqshbandi order and he taught Murisdism to Gazi-Magomed – Muslim mysticism which sanctified the infinite political authority of the leaders – the Imams”.

the Russians was again widely disseminated".²⁶

But of course, the most critical indictment was the impression that as a whole, "it seemed that the national secret services were not ready to make an adequate response to events in Dagestan due to the fact that practically all of them (less the GRU) were locked directly on the President, who as a result of his health was not able to ensure the process of operational leadership and coordination of Russian intelligence services"²⁷.

Perhaps of greater importance in confirming the lack of preparedness and the reasons for the ensuing muddle, exactly one year after the 'impertinent assault' on Dagestan was President Vladimir Putin's address on 2 August 2000 at a memorial stone ceremony for fallen airborne assault troops in Pskov, where he emphasised: "The fact that it was unexpected for the overwhelming majority of the population is the fault of the leadership of the country, the Armed Forces, the law enforcement organs"²⁸. But obviously in recognition of the crucial role played by airborne assault troops when they were committed to battle, he went on to say, "the decisive actions, directed towards the establishment of legality, the Constitution, and citizens' rights prevented the process of state disintegration"²⁹.

An unnamed source in the higher levels of the Dagestan MVD came to the conclusion after he had familiarised himself with the situation in Khasavyurt rayon that the "boyeviki were dictating conditions here. Pressure from the Federal Forces on them was minimal. It allowed the Mujhahedin to carry out impudent sorties to Khasavyurt and in the relatively peaceful situation they were fortifying occupied positions"³⁰.

6 September 1999

During the course of 6 September the *boyeviki*, numbering some 2,000, continued to widen the area under their control, repeating the previous scenario of combat operations in Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony. In addition to the villages already in their possession, namely Shushiya, Gamiyakh, Tukhchar, Akhar and part of the rayon centre of Novolakskoye, the *boyeviki* occupied two further villages, Chapayevo and Duchi. A proportion of the villages were easy targets for small arms fire from the surrounding dominating heights occupied by the extremists. Apparently on 5 September the Dagestani volunteer force with aviation support had been successful in beating off the second attempt by the extremists to occupy the town of Khasavyurt. The line of contact between the *boyeviki* and *federaly* was now some 5-7 kilometres from Khasavyurt. It was the Dagestani *opol'chintsy* (Volunteer Emergency Militia Home Guard) who filled most of the Federal positions along the contact line. Periodically, extended battles took place along the whole of the border with Chechnya as attempts were made to breakthrough towards Kizlyarskiy and Kazbekovskiy rayony; there were also reports of fighters concentrating on the Kizlyarskiy and Tsumadinskiy axes. The attempted breakthrough to Kalininaul in Kazbekovskiy rayon by the *boyeviki* met with resistance from the local inhabitants.

²⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 165, 7 September 1999, p5 – Milrad Fatullayev.

²⁷ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 166, 8 September 1999, p3.

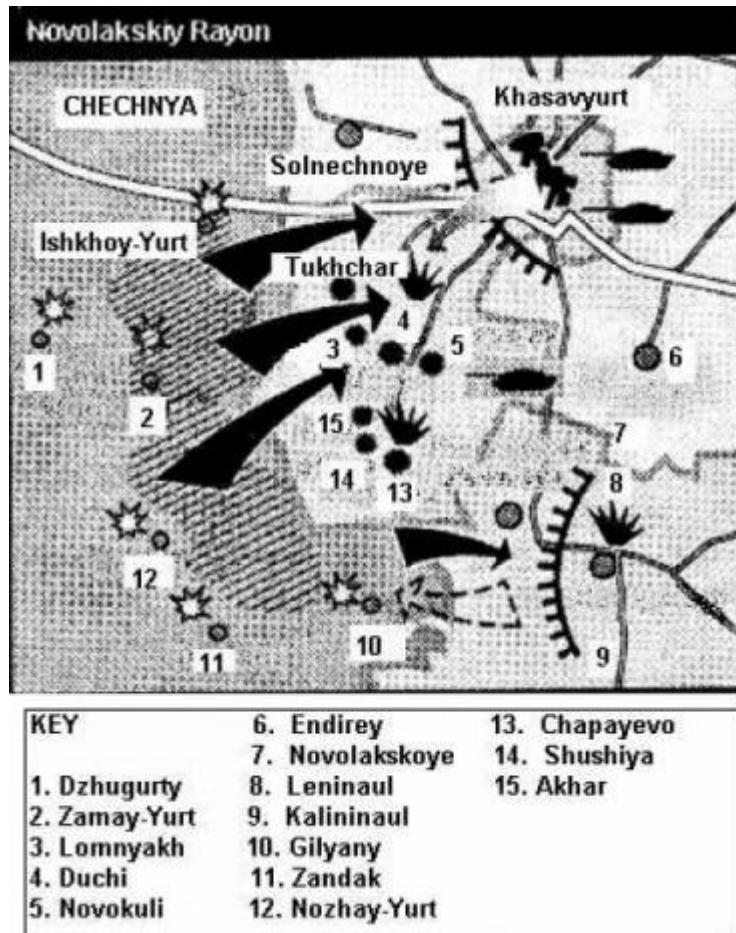
²⁸ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Temi dnya – 2 August 2000, "Napadeniye na Dagestan bylo neozhidannost'yu ne dlya vsekhn."

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 166, 8 September 1999, p3.

Employees of the Kazbekovskiy ROVD³¹ took part in the battle which lasted some seven hours. Nevertheless, the attempt to break through to Kalininaul was thwarted. In Makhachkala everyone recognised that the situation would become much more serious if the *boyeviki* captured Kizlyar or even Khasavyurt or even if they penetrated through to Kazbekovskiy rayon, where “80% was covered in a mantle of inaccessible nut groves”³².

Map 3: Novolakskiy Rayon



One difference from the campaign in Botlikh was that in this latest one the *boyeviki* who had lost hope of support from the local population, according to testimonies of refugees, immediately resorted to marauding and pillaging. In villages all privately owned vehicles were confiscated, cattle were rustled, equipment was removed, “even old tractors and combines were removed”³³ to Chechnya. Moreover, people were left wondering in a state of absolute incredulity as to the reason why helicopters completed aimless flights over the terrain without inflicting powerful rocket strikes on the *boyeviki* who had not dug themselves in, and moved around

³¹ Rayon detachment of Internal Affairs.

³² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 168, 10 September 1999, “*Boyeviki gotovyatsya k dlitel'noy oborone Vlasti Dagestana pruzyvayut raspravitsya s ekstremistami do kontsa sentyabrya*” by Il'ya Maksakov and Milrad Fatullayev.

³³ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 166, 8 September 1999, p5 “*Boyeviki nastupayut na Khasavyurt*” by Milrad Fatullayev.

without hindrance, making attempts to seize the nearest villages and the town of Khasavyurt.

“*We are defending ourselves of our own accord*” said Rasul Abduragimov, Commander of the Home Guard detachment, and “*We do not know from where the enemy might appear. We have set up patrols on distant approaches so that we will not be surrounded*”³⁴ or taken unawares.

7 September 1999

General Staff Restrictions on Information

At the meeting that day of the Russian Security Council, which the Head of State had opened “*in a pretty sharp tone*”³⁵, the decision was taken to form a special centre for the dissemination of information about the actions of Federal Forces in Dagestan. At about this time, “*according to information obtained from a source in the Secretariat of the Ministry of Defence*”³⁶, Chief of the General Staff Anatoliy Kvashnin issued a directive which forbade the publication of information about the military situation in Dagestan. This embraced all deployments, transfers and movements of subunits belonging to the Federal Combined Grouping of Troops (OGV). This security measure also proscribed publication of base locations, dispatching locations and logistic locations of subunits, the names of personnel under orders to move and their military specialisation, and more significantly the number of wounded servicemen and those killed in action. According to the Ministry of Defence Press Service, the Chief of the General Staff also prohibited publication in *Krasnaya Zvezda* of the daily operational summary about the situation in Dagestan: after the *Genshtabisty* had sanitised it there was nothing left besides general phrases.

General Situation - Novolakskiy Rayon and Checheno-Dagestan Border Areas

On the Khasavyurt direction Internal Troops MVD, militia organs and the Dagestani Home Guard were involved in fierce fighting with the separatists. The separatists still held and controlled the populated points of Gamiyakh, Shushiya, Akhar, Ukhchar, Chapayevo and Novolakskoye where they had strengthened their positions. Some 2,000 refugees had started to move out of Novolakskiy rayon. It was expected that that figure would increase to somewhere in the region of 5,000 people. In the Novolakskiy zone of combat operations the build up of the Federal OGV continued with aviation, artillery and armour. According to aerial and radio voice intercept a large grouping of *boyeviki* was concentrated on the Kizlyar direction with orders to cut the railway network connecting Dagestan with the rest of the country. Reports from the press-centre indicated that in order to prevent attempts by the *boyeviki* to cross the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border, units of Interior Troops MVD³⁷, Dagestani militia subunits and Home Guard detachments had been brought up to a higher state of readiness. The new 80 km railway line between Kizlyar and Karlan-Yurt to bypass Chechnya had been opened

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka, “Events 7 September 1999”, p1. It will be remembered that this sharpness of tone had even made Viktor Chernomyrdin drop his briefcase on one occasion.

³⁶ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka, “Events 8 September”, p1.

³⁷ Previously references had only been to subunits of Interior Troops MVD – now, to units, reflecting an increased build up of forces.

Map 4: Chechen Republic



on 26 July 1997³⁸. Kochubey is an important military transloading-unloading station on the North Caucasus railway system and doubtless would have been an important target for the bandit formations. It is of interest to note that *“the installation of a five sectioned metal apparatus at Kochubey station on the North Caucasus railway and the use of a stationary loading-unloading structure, situated*

³⁸ Charles Blandy, *“Chechen Status – Wide Differences Remain”*, P27 CSRC, February 1998, p22-23.

close to a plant, allows the unloading capability of the station to increase from one to three echelons in a 24 hour period and with that a significant amount of time is saved in the creation of the troop grouping on the southern direction"³⁹. On the most vulnerable and dangerous sectors Army Aviation Command of the North Caucasus Military District guaranteed an aerial escort for military trains. For instance, movement on the sector Artenzian-Kizlyar only took place during daylight hours. Military trains that were not able to cross this railway sector before the onset of nightfall were stopped and held on the approach.

Army reconnaissance had also noticed a concentration of illegal bandit formations on the Tsumadinskiy and Botlikh directions, in particular a large, powerful detachment under the command of Magomed Aslutdinov which had been located in the area of the populated points of Kenkhi, Chadyri, Khundukh. Once again it was thought that a main strike was planned against the rayon centre of Agvali, and also on the populated points of Gakvari, Gigatl', Khidili, Gakko, Sil'di and Echeda.

Aslutdinov's plan was to continue the effect of the appearance of small groups of fighters on the Yagodak and Zani passess. Under the cover of night they were to try and break through into the border villages and settlements with the aim of confusing members of the local Home Guard and forcing them to refrain from even the thought of offering resistance. The concentration of bandit formations in Chechen border areas forced the Command of the OGV to reinforce the blockade on the whole of the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border rather than the 500 km sector. However, to do this was extremely difficult: "You could not post a soldier at every metre"⁴⁰. The military had counted on establishing and using the Home Guard, forming them into self-defence detachments to compensate for the deficiency in the numbers of proper servicemen.

The Federal Forces gave especial attention to the control of three important passes lying between Chechnya and Avaristan, namely the Yagodak, the Zain and the Kharami Passes. On the probable routes that could be used by the bandits, rocket-artillery strikes, the use of aviation and remote mine laying were planned. In the intervals between strong points active reconnaissance-search activities were carried out. It was announced that on Sunday 5 September 1999 a group of spetsnaz operating in the area of the Yagodak Pass had ambushed and killed five bandits and captured two, one of whom was a radio operator who volunteered the information that he was on a reconnaissance and propaganda mission from Chechnya in Tsumadinskiy rayon.⁴¹

In the operational headquarters of the Commander of the Chechen Armed Forces an announcement was made about a dawn air raid on the Chechen settlement of Nozhay-Yurt. It was maintained that the bombs landed in the centre of the settlement alongside the rayon hospital, killing two people and wounding seven. It will be remembered too that Nozhay-Yurt was one of the concentration points for the *boyeviki* before their incursion into Novolakskiy rayon. At this stage air interdiction

³⁹ *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No 4, July-August 2000, p60 "Sluzhba voyennykh soobshcheniy Rossii: Problemy funktsionirovaniya I perspektivy razvitiya" by Lieutenant-General G G Sokolov.

⁴⁰ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 166, 8 September 1999, p5, "Staryye problemy na novom etape" by Dmitriy Nikolayev.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

was more concerned with disrupting the *boyeviki* than armed intervention into Chechnya by the OGV. Even on 9 September 1999 the new Commander of 58 Army, Major-General Vladimir Shamanov, was reported as stating from his headquarters in Vladikavkaz that “*troops will not be introduced onto the territory of Chechnya*”⁴². Air raids were also carried out on the outskirts of the Chechen settlement of Vedeno, for the same reasons, interdiction of movement by *boyeviki*. Vedeno lies on one of the main routes through Kharachoy leading south from Chechnya to south west Dagestan over the Kharami Pass, to the aul of Andi and into Botlikhskiy rayon. The situation around Botlikhskiy rayon was reported to be comparatively stable with troops occupying positions prepared earlier and sapper subunits working on the mine clearance of roads and important objects and destroying ammunition found in secret caches and dumps left over from the earlier August ‘invasion’ by bandits.

During the night of 6/7 September 1999 a terrorist act took place against Russian Border Troops, No 41 Border Detachment, on the track Gergebil’- Khunzakh, where terrorists used a 60 metre telephone line connected to metal fragments in a container to blow up vehicles en route from Buynaksk.

Retired Army General Andrey Nikolayev, former Director of the Federal Border Service, emphasised the need to reduce the threat to national security in the North Caucasus by introducing firm control over Chechen airspace. He was convinced that from the direction of Azerbaijan and Georgia arms, ammunition and foreign mercenaries were being delivered to this region⁴³. Nikolayev proposed an immediate meeting with the leaderships of Azerbaijan and Georgia to implement a strict regime along the borders and at entry points. Routes had become well established during the first Russo-Chechen conflict from Azerbaijan through Dagestan north into Chechnya, to locations such as Zandak⁴⁴. It should also not be forgotten that there are compact settlements of Avars numbering some 15,000 in the northeast of Georgia⁴⁵ and a significant number of Chechen-Kistins living in the Akhmeta rayon of Georgia, in particular in the Pankisskiy Gorge, centred on Dzhokolo⁴⁶.

⁴² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 167, 9 September 1999, p2, “*Kommanduyushchiy 58-i Armii Vladimir Shamanov – Na territoriyu Chechni voyska vvoditsya ne budet*” by Vladimir Gutnov. The article also provides a miniature pen-picture of Major-General Shamanov who is “42 years old. A native of Barnaul (Author's note: a major nodal point on the Siberia and Far East Railway system). Completed Tashkent Tank Academy, General Staff Military Academy. Candidate Sociological Science”. See also “The Russian Decision Makers” by Henry Plater-Zyberk, p73 of “The Second Chechen War” edited by Mrs A C Aldis, P31 CSRC, June 2000.

⁴³ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii, p2.

⁴⁴ C W Blandy, “*Chechen Caravan Trails*”, P21 CSRC, April 1996 provides further background on routes.

⁴⁵ “*Sodruzhestvo NG*”, March 1999, No 3, p1, “*Po raznyye storony Kavkazkogo Khrebeta*” by Il'ya Maksakov.

⁴⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 154, 18 August 2000, p8, “*Voyna narisovannaya i nastoyashchaya*” by Valeriy Kazhdaya of ??? some interesting details which relate to the arrival and continued presence of Chechens in the north of Georgia. “At the beginning of the 30s in the last century, when the Caucasus War had developed into the escalation phase, the *Chechentsy*, whom the Georgians had called *Kistins* since early times (from the small River Kistinika which discharges into River Terek at Lars [Author's note – just to the south of Vladikavkaz]) started to relocate themselves to the Pankisskiy Gorge. Along this natural corridor lies the Alazani River on the southern slope of the Great Caucasus Range, the

Additionally, the new Grozny to Itum-Kale road through the Argun Gorge, along the Chanti Argun River as opposed to the Sharoy Argun, to the Georgian border village of Shatili, was to become another important factor in the later stages of the Federal counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya from February 2000 onwards. Later, Russian concerns were to grow not only over the refuge Pankisskiy was to provide for Chechen refugees from Grozny and elsewhere in Chechnya, but the fact that it was also to become an essential rest and recuperation location for Chechen fighters and as a staging post for sick and wounded fighters on their way to Azerbaijan and Turkey.

On 7 September 1999 a composite detachment of OMON from Tomsk oblast' arrived in the Dagestani town of Kaspiysk. The detachment consisted of 50 servicemen. For 23 of them Dagestan was not the only 'hot spot' where they had served; many had served previously in Afghanistan and Chechnya. Their tasks were to guard the approaches to Kaspiysk and the local airport and to ensure law and order in the town itself. Another composite detachment of 50 servicemen from the Irkutsk OMON and 10 members of the Irkutsk GUBDD were sent on their way to Dagestan. Somewhat surprisingly, media reports showed how keen men were to serve in the latest 'hot spot'.

Box 4 - 'Keeness' of Servicemen to Serve in Dagestan⁴⁷

As the Directorate of the Interior Ministry for Transport in Moscow reported, at around 2000 hrs some 100 servicemen from the Kantemirov Division gathering together at Nara station, having been summoned from Dagestan demanded that the divisional command immediately dispatch them back to the area of combat operations in Dagestan. In order to prevent disorder and ensure the safety of other passengers, a militia sergeant on duty at the station fired a warning shot into the air. The leadership of the MUVDT (railway police), 10 OMON servicemen, representatives of the town administration and also the military garrison procurator came out to the scene of the incident. As reported by the MUVDT, in the course of the explanatory discussion at 0210 hrs on 7 September the servicemen returned to the unit location.

Chechens from time immemorial have driven sheep into Georgia and sold them to the *Kakhetintsy* in exchange for grain, cloth and all sorts of other things. But in 1836 Naib Dzhokolo, a Chechen, not wishing to subordinate himself to the Avar Shamil', two years before [Shamil] was chosen as the Imam of Dagestan and Chechnya crossed over into Pankisskiy with his whole teip and established a village there which until this very day still bears his name. The Kistins continually increased in numbers, and now the Pankisskiy Gorge is entirely populated by them. Before the Chechen-Kistins became affected by the Autumn events of last year [1999] they numbered some 7,000 people. The Kistins are bilingual, they speak equally freely in Georgian and in their native tongue: education in schools is carried out in Georgian, domestically the language is Chechen ... At the end of the last century [sic] the newcomers from over the range began to actively adopt Christianity and to take Georgian names. Suffice it to say that this circumstance was also to save the Kistins from deportation in 1944: not one of them was touched. After the revolution, when the Georgian Orthodox Church was deprived of all rights, missionary activity was forbidden, the second Islamisation of the Kistins began. And now they all to a man profess Islam, although in former times would rather be a Christian".

⁴⁷ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: "Kavkazskiy Krisis, terakty v Rossii - 7 September 1999", p3.

8 September 1999

According to intelligence data, 'powerful' strongpoints had been created by the separatists in the villages of Novolakskoye, Tukhchar, Shushiya, Akhar, Chapayevo and Gamiyakh with the ominous portent that they would cause high troop casualties when the Kasavyurt front became the main one in Dagestan. A source in the Dagestani MVD felt that it was vital that Federal Forces really activated their operations in the Khasavyurt area and did not to wait until the operation in the Kadar zone had been completed. OGV reconnaissance reported that several hundred *boyeviki*, broken up into small, groups were now trying to trickle into Khasavyurt through depressions and dried up water courses. Refugees arriving in Khasavyurt from captured and occupied villages talked about the marauding and plundering *boyeviki*.

Box 5 - Crimes Committed by Boyeviki against the Local Population⁴⁸

200 tonne of grain stolen from Tukhchar to Chechnya. From Chapayevo to the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border a column of vehicles loaded with stolen goods. On roads despite artillery fire strikes cattle were rustled. Federal Forces subunits deployed here were neither in a position to prevent robbery nor the delivery from Chechnya of supplies and ammunition. A Dagestani family fleeing from Akhar reported that *boyeviki* had driven the menfolk to the outskirts of the village, and threatening them with weapons forced them to dig defensive works, dig trenches and shelters, lay telephone lines. Besides, according to the testimony of the refugees, *boyeviki* began to slaughter cattle in farmsteads and pillage. One of the inhabitants of the village of Shushiya reported that *boyeviki* had seized houses and taken anything of value away to Chechnya. The *boyeviki* paid special attention to vehicles. If a HGV was requisitioned for military necessity then light private vehicles could be used by extremist detachment commanders. It was interesting to note that no one amongst the local inhabitants perceived the *boyeviki* as 'warriors of Islam', for in each village they defiled the mosques, smashed up their so called barracks where in noisy groups they drank alcohol and took drugs.

In Khasavyurt from the night of 7/8 September a curfew was in force from 2200 hrs to 0600 hrs. People were not allowed out in the streets and neither was any transport or road movement permitted. Aviation missile strikes were made against the village of Novolakskoye and the right bank of the River Yamansu was also targeted where the field headquarters of Basayev and Khattab was situated. In addition, artillery carried out fire missions on the mountainside by the village of Gamiyakh. An important strategic point, the Eki-Tyube mountain in Novolakskiy rayon switched from being in the hands of the illegal bandit formations to the complete control of Federal Forces following intense artillery and aerial bombardment. The positions of the *boyeviki* along the road between Khasavyurt and Novolakskoye were also to suffer from the effects of Federal artillery and aviation strikes. The strategic feature of Eki-Tyube was to change hands many times during the course of the counter-terrorist operation in Novolakskiy rayon.

Despite the assurance of the politicians that the military would conduct the operation, in fact it was the OMON special subunits, the spetsnaz and SOBRs who were spearheading the ground operations in Dagestan.⁴⁹ Whilst their presence

⁴⁸ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: "Kavkazskiy Krisis, terakty v Rossii - 8 September 1999", p3.

⁴⁹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 167, 9 September 1999, p2, "Voyna priobretayet vyalotekushchiy kharakter" by Mirad Fatullayev. The articles in *Bratyshka* tend to support that view, as do the actions of the Lipets OMON in Novolakskoye described above, the parallel actions in Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar villages in Buynaksk rayon and the

demonstrated to an extent the inability of the military to provide sufficient, organised, well-trained troop subunits, the other side of the coin is that the counter-terrorist operations in Dagestan and of course later, when the second armed intervention into Chechnya took place, were also an opportunity for law enforcement organs throughout the Russian Federation from the Far North, Siberia and the Russian Far East to gain experience of conflict under particularly difficult circumstances which could be put to good effect at some later date should a similar problem arise. Between 2 August and 8 September 1999, taking into account the Tsumadinskiy-Botlikhskiy phase, the Karamakhi-Chabanmakhi-Kadar phase and the Novolakskiy phase, Federal Forces' losses amounted to: killed – 66; wounded – 246; lost without trace – 17. So, combat experience, the effects of trauma and the phenomena of internal conflict from Dagestan and Chechnya are being distributed to law enforcement agencies throughout the Russian Federation.

News also came through on 8 September from the MVD RF press centre, that in the central hospital at Urus-Martan in Chechnya as a result of severe wounds suffered during the night of 23/24 August 1999, the Chechen field commander R Khaykharoyev had died. The press centre went on to state that Khaykharoyev had wide connections with the North Caucasus Republics and was answerable for two forms of *boyevik* criminal business: the transfer of hostages captured in Ingushetia and North Osetia-Alania to Chechnya, and for illegal dealing in oil products.

On 8 September 1999 there were reports that Aslan Maskhadov had in fact been dislodged as President of Chechnya by the 'so called shura', following statements made by Ibragim Suleymenov, one of the two elected Chechen Deputies in the State Duma of the Russian Federation. In the words of the Deputy, "*Before the beginning of the Botlikh-Tsumadinskiy operation into Dagestan the shura burst into Maskhadov's palace and disarmed him*"⁵⁰. Suleymenov, speaking on the 'Ekho Moskvy' radio station, stated that the events taking place in Dagestan were planned in 1996-1997: "*In the course of the last three years active preparation went on, Chechnya was packed with villains and criminals from the whole of Russia, and because of the border, mercenaries arrived there especially from Arab countries*". It will be remembered that Suleymenov's election to the State Duma was in December 1995 during the relatively long ceasefire in the first Russo-Chechen War. Chechens fighting against Russian armed intervention in the cause of Chechen independence would not even have voted in the Duma elections, let alone occupied a seat there. Suleymenov's words should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt. Dr Mayrbek Vachegayev, a well respected Chechen historian, was secretary to President Maskhadov in September 1999. Vachegayev was later to become the Chechen President's official representative in Moscow. Soon after taking up his new appointment he was arrested by the Federal authorities on a charge of being in possession of a pistol in October 1999 shortly after his return from a visit to the United Kingdom. In his interview with Il'ya Maksakov of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*⁵¹

advance into Chechnya around the villages of Zamay-Yurt, Galayty and Meskety described below.

⁵⁰ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: "Kavkazskiy Krisis, terakty v Rossii – 8 September 1999", p5.

⁵¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 31, 19 February 2000, p1 and 4, "*Ya blagodaren sudbe za etot urok*" by Il'ya Maksakov. However, during the interview Vachegayev stated quite categorically that whilst "at that time relations between them [Basayev and Maskhadov] had reached the limit, Shamil' could not permit himself to take up arms against Maskhadov".

in February 2000 whilst still being held in the Butyrskiy Filtration Centre in Moscow, Dr Vachegayev makes no mention of the incident described by Suleymenov.

However, speaking on the NTV television channel on 8 September Ramazan Abdulatipov, President of the Assembly of Peoples of the Caucasus, said that either the President of Chechnya could not control the situation in the republic or he was acting in concert with the bandits. The position that the Chechen President was occupying in relation to events in Dagestan excluded the possibility of negotiating with him. Abdulatipov concluded by saying that the announcement of Maskhadov to the effect that the Chechen border guards and customs personnel had been given an order not to allow even one person to cross over the border was inexplicable when at the same time some 2,000 armed fighters crossed over from Chechnya into Dagestan.

Throughout 8 September the build up of large troop subunits in Dagestan continued. Composite detachments of Federal MVD, Dagestani militia and armour continued to accumulate. The feeling of intense military activity resulting from the continuous influx of troops is encapsulated in the fact that “*even Makhachkala airport had become reorganised in the military way*”⁵². Every 30 minutes military transport and cargo aircraft were landing with military personnel and equipment. For the return flight the severely wounded and the bodies of the dead were airlifted out of Dagestan. Continuing the search for additional service manpower, a ‘Dagestan Company’ was formed in Moscow Military District and sent to Dagestan on 8 September. The company was 87 men strong. Its task was to be at the disposal of North Caucasus Military District in conformity with a General Staff directive. From Primorskiy Kray a further detachment of 50 OMON from Vladivostok under the command of Colonel Tarabarov, armed with small arms and mortars, was due to land at Makhachkala.

Whilst Makhachkala and Kaspiysk airports demonstrated their importance as airheads it should also be remembered that a large proportion of military movements connected to and in support of the counter-terrorist operation in Dagestan still depended on railway transport, just as in those far-off days during Soviet times for movements from beyond the Urals destined for the Central Front or Southern Direction. It is perhaps important to note that according to Lieutenant General Sokolov⁵³ in recent years many new functions and tasks have appeared in the activities of organs belonging to the service of Military Communications (VOSO) which exists under the Central Control of Military Communications of the Ministry of Defence (TsUP VOSO MO RF). TsUP VOSO MO works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Routes and Communications (MPS). One of its tasks is the organisation of inter-state military transport within the territorial limits of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the course of the counter-terrorist operation in the North Caucasus, some 469 passenger carriages, 135 kitchen wagons, 310 covered wagons used for ammunition and equipment and more than 6,000 ‘flats’ were prepared and loaded in the shortest possible time by VOSO; this undoubtedly included both the Dagestan and armed intervention into Chechnya phases. The average distance travelled by military trains was 900-950 km and by separate military transport 600-800 km within a 24 hour period.

The OGV had been successful in seizing the strategically important height of Eki-Tuybe on the outskirts of the village of Gamiyakh which lies somewhere to the east-

⁵² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 167, 9 September 1999, p2.

⁵³ *Voyennaya Mysl'*, No 4, July-August 2000, p62.

northeast of Zamay-Yurt. The bodies of some 50 *boyeviki* were found on the slopes of Mt Eki-Tyube⁵⁴, following the assault by Federal Forces “*after a four-hour storming of the height*”⁵⁵. Less than 24 hours earlier this important strategic height in Novolakskiy rayon had been under the control of bandit formations. The Federal authorities found documents on the corpses indicating that the main part of the fallen *boyeviki* consisted of Arabs and a few Turks. The taking of Eki-Tyube, which controlled the low ground around Novolakskoye and the road from Novolakskoye to Khasavyurt in turn allowed spetsnaz subunits to move forward to the northern outskirts of Novolakskoye and to engage the *boyeviki* located there.

9 September 1999

A report from the MVD RF press centre in Dagestan stated that after the regrouping of Federal Forces, from 0400 hrs a special operation to destroy terrorists in the area of Gamiyakh, Chapayevo, Shushiya, Tukhchar was under way in Novolakskiy rayon. Continuing from yesterday, artillery and aviation inflicted damage on targets located on the right bank of the Yamansu River where the headquarters of Basayev and Kattab was located on the mountain side near the village of Gamiyakh. The command post of the OGV in Dagestan was redeployed closer to the front line near the outskirts of Gamiyakh. The *boyeviki* continued to reinforce their positions in Novolakskoye, Tukhchar, Gamiyakh, Akhar, Shushiya and Chapayevo. According to reconnaissance reports the *boyeviki* also continued to replenish their positions with personnel, weapons and ammunition. In particular in the “*last 24 hours around 800 boyeviki in 47 KAMAZ trucks had arrived in Novolakskoye*”⁵⁶. At the same time reconnaissance reports stated that the ‘invasion force’ of *boyeviki* had been withdrawn from Novolakskiy rayon to Chechen territory to the areas of the towns of Serzhen-Yurt and Gudermes for ‘rest, recuperation and regrouping’. In the populated points seized by the *boyeviki* in Novolakskiy rayon, marauding and pillaging on the part of the bandits continued, with heavy goods vehicles from Chechnya transporting personal effects and chattels belonging to the local population to Chechnya. From the populated points of Chapayevo and Tukhchar respectively some 300 tonnes and 500 tonnes of grain were removed. *Boyeviki* carried out an intensive programme of constructing defensive works on the slopes of the heights along the Khasavyurt-Gudermes road. They tended to operate in small mobile groups with infantry fire support weapons, employing ‘hit and run’ tactics, constantly changing their positions. Similar small groups of *boyeviki* were also attempting to percolate into the town of Khasavyurt.

The headquarters of the OGV issued a further list of casualties up to 9 September which amounted to: killed – 149; wounded – 522. A further 20 servicemen and militia were missing. According to military reconnaissance the greatest number of bandit casualties was occurring amongst the 16-18 year olds. The more experienced fighters in the combat zone were kept in the so called ‘second echelon’ and their casualties were obviously significantly smaller. Bandit casualties were taken to the central hospital in Groznyy. Perhaps the youth of the fighters partially explains the lack of discipline mentioned above.

⁵⁴ Probably also identified as Ht 423.1 located between Khasavyurt and the village of Novokuli.

⁵⁵ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 168, 10 September 1999, p2, “*Boyeviki gotovyatsya k dlitel’nu oborone*” by Aleksandr Al’f.

⁵⁶ Natsional’naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: “Kavkazskiy Krisis, terakty v Rossii – 9 September 1999”, p3.

The main grouping of the Ministry of Defence in Dagestan consisted of units and subunits of the North Caucasus Military District. Colonel-General Sergey Mayev, Chief of the Main Directorate of Armoured Forces (GABTU) Ministry of Defence, volunteered information to the effect that the temporary grouping of Federal Forces consisted of a special mobile battalion from 136th Buynaksk Brigade, 7th Division Airborne Forces and 205th Brigade. He confirmed that among the armoured equipments in the conflict zone were BTR-70s, BTR-80s, BMP-1s, BMP-2s, BMDs and an insignificant number T-72 tanks. Federal Forces continued to be reinforced. On 9 September from Khabarovsk 52 servicemen of the OMON UVD Khabarovsk Krai flew into Dagestan. The detachment was made up entirely of volunteers, many of whom were no strangers to 'hot spots'. Other detachments from Yakutia and Primorye also arrived, each consisting of 50 men.

10 September 1999

In the *press-dos'ye* of 10 September 1999⁵⁷ the point was made that in Dagestan, not only did Federal Troops have the business of dealing with Chechen *bandformirovaniya* or Wahhabis but also that the 'aggression' into Dagestan was an extremely well planned operation. Testifying to this were not only the initial deception measures and the manner in which the bandit operation was being conducted but also the high degree of their preparation and training, the scale of armament and equipment, including modern weaponry such as the 'famed' sniper rifle, and the presence of **“internationalists' amongst their battle order”**⁵⁸. Of course, the more that the Federal authorities could point to an external threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and the Constitution, such as that posed by Islamic extremists from abroad extending to the spectre of bin Laden and his financial support, the greater the justification became for involving the Ministry of Defence and using the Army to counter this threat. There can be little doubt that the military were bitter about their defeat in 1996, perhaps encapsulated by comment made in 1994 that *“with our tanks we could not beat a load of shepherds”*⁵⁹.

Front aviation carried out strikes against the rayon centre of Novolakskoye and on the populated point of Gamiyakh. The duty unit of the Dagestani MVD reported that Internal Troops subunits and Dagestani militia *spetsnaz* from the morning of 10 September were conducting battles for the liberation of the populated point of Gamiyakh. The commencement of 'sanitisation' of Gamiyakh from *boyeviki* had been started before the end of the previous day, after a devastating aerial and artillery preparation. However, the *boyeviki* as expected offered fierce resistance to the advancing troops, forcing them to abandon their assault. A new attack on the enemy position was made on 10 September, once again after a powerful artillery preparation. There was no indication of *boyeviki* casualties, but 11 servicemen belonging the Internal Troops and two Dagestani militiamen were wounded. Nevertheless, they successfully concluded their operation to liberate Gamiyakh by 0930 hrs on 10 September. Increased fire support of artillery and aviation of the Ministry of Defence RF enabled the liberation of Gamiyakh. Thanks to such a

⁵⁷ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii 10 September 1999, p1.

⁵⁸ Ibid (emphasis mine).

⁵⁹ *Ogonek*, No 8, February 1996, p18, *“Vooruzhena i Ochen' Opasna”* by Aleksandr Bodolazov quoting Nikolai Yegorov from December 1994, when Presidential Deputy in Chechnya.

favourable turn of events, the Khasavyurt ROVD entered the village and were able to carry out 'sanitisation' action, whilst Ministry of Defence sappers carried out mine and booby trap clearance.

The successful capture of the Eki-Tyube height by Federal Forces was their first success: the liberation of Gamiyakh became their second. The capture of a second height with a television tower allowed them to advance towards achieving the relief of Novolakskoye. Journalists were shown the bodies of dead *boyeviki* in positions captured by the *Federaly*, where according to Milrad Fatullayev⁶⁰ there were no less than 30 people, the majority of whom were foreigners and Chechen young men aged between 16 and 18. Also amongst them were even younger teenagers who helped the fighters with preparation of food and other domestic chores. According to the locals, a number of the dead, mainly Chechens, were taken back into Chechnya. Some had abandoned their dead Brothers: the locals said the fighters buried them without marking the place so that the bodies would not be exhumed by special elements of Russian and Dagestani MVD commissions. The extremists hoped to collect the bodies of their fellow tribesmen with the help of the Chechen-Akhin who lived around Khasavyurt at some later date.

11 September 1999

The main event in Novolakskiy rayon was confirmation that 10 September had seen the complete removal of illegal bandit formations from the border village of Gamiyakh which had now been restored to the complete control of the local administration.

President Aslan Maskhadov of Chechnya announced the introduction of general mobilisation in the republic, adding, "*Everyone who can hold a weapon is summoned to the ranks of the Home Guard, every village must be turned into a strong point*"⁶¹. It is difficult to ascertain whether this was the point where Maskhadov came to believe that Federal Forces would actually 'invade' Chechen territory, although Mayrbek Vachegayev was to maintain some six months later that it was not until the beginning of October that Maskhadov eventually came round to the view that 'invasion' was imminent⁶². He also signed the order promulgating a state of emergency in the republic. Maskhadov also called on any Chechen volunteers, "*if they found themselves in Dagestan to return home immediately*". Kazbek Makhachev, a Deputy Premier of the Chechen government, commenting on Maskhadov's address called for every effort to be made to prevent the kindling of a new war in the Caucasus. Makhachev emphasised that neither the Chechen leadership, nor the Chechen people had any connection with the events in Dagestan. Furthermore, the Chechen President had invited the Russian side to a political dialogue in the name of preserving peace in the Caucasus. It will be remembered that the first paper in this series mentioned the fact that:

"Many peoples who were considered to be within the Dagestani family of nationalities and ethnic groups actually live outside the bounds of Dagestan in other administrative-territorial entities, such as Chechnya, and in the independent

⁶⁰ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 169, 11 September 1999, p1, "*V ozhidannii novykh provokatsii*" by Milrad Fatullayev.

⁶¹ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Bilioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii - 11 September 1999, p2.

⁶² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 31, 19 February 2000, p4.

*sovereign republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan ... Perhaps the comments and denials of President Maskhadov and Mayrbek Vachegayev with regard to the participation of Chechens in the 'invasion' of Avaristan contained more than a grain of truth*⁶³.

The second 'invasion' by *boyeviki* from Chechnya into Dagestan, this time into Novolakskiy rayon, must cast doubts on the authenticity and reliability of the earlier statement purporting to come from the Chechen leadership. However, conflicting statements appeared from several different groups, Shamil' Basayev stated at a press conference in Grozny that Maskhadov was obliged to declare war on Russia. He even went so far as to add that the declaration of a state of emergency and general mobilisation was merely a spectacle. Furthermore, Basayev continued with the statement that if Maskhadov did not fulfil these demands "*We will choose other methods of conducting the war*"⁶⁴. Basayev denied any involvement with the explosions in Moscow or Buynaksk. Basayev concluded his statement at the press conference by saying that he was not resorting to a campaign of terror but he intended to continue the struggle for the unification of Dagestan with Chechnya. The press centre of the Joint Command of the Modjahedin, of which Basayev was a member, let it be known that all the fighters had abandoned Novolakskiy rayon; there was not even one fighter left and furthermore Russian artillery was pounding away and aviation was inflicting air strikes on deserted villages.

12 September 1999

The *Press-Dos'ye*⁶⁵ of 12 September 1999 gave details of the shooting down of a Mi-8 helicopter by the village of Akhar in Novolakskiy rayon; all three crew were killed. The pilots successfully managed to use their parachutes but were in fact killed by small arms fire from the fighters during their descent. Also on 12 September news came about an explosion on the Babayurt-Kizlyar section of the new railway line bypassing Chechen territory. The damage was not serious.

In Novolakskiy rayon the situation was described as remaining complicated. Fierce battles continued for key heights and populated points. By far the most active operations were taking place in the areas by the villages of Novolakskoye and Tukhchar. There were reports that the fighters were still receiving additional forces, including mercenaries from Arab countries and Turkey. Marauding and pillage continued to be the practice of the *boyeviki* in villages captured and occupied by them. It was also being said that the *boyeviki* were using mosques as storehouses and even turning cemeteries into strong points and fire positions, thus violating the laws of Islam. The leaders of the *boyeviki*, having lost their faith in the possibility of finding support from the local population attempted to develop a propaganda campaign. Details from radio intercept stated that a certain representative of the *boyeviki* command - 'Emir' - had been killed. Also, severe wounds had been sustained by a commander of one of the bandit groups, Abdulsabr.

Around 40 fighters had been killed whilst a further 70 extremists had been taken to various medical establishments in Chechnya. As at 12 September, the overall casualties suffered by Federal Forces amounted to 157 killed and 645 wounded. A further 20 were posted as missing.

⁶³ Blandy, "Dagestan: The Storm - Part 1", p28.

⁶⁴ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii - 12 September 1999, p3.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p1.

13 September 1999

The order given by Basayev and his joint command concerning the retreat of the bandit formations from Novolakskiy rayon was regarded in the headquarters of the OGV as outright disinformation, when according to the chief of the Ministry of Defence interim press centre, Gennadiy Alekhin, only a small part of the fighters for some unknown reason had abandoned the village of Tukhchar. Furthermore, the actual numbers of fighters occupying the villages of Novolakskoye, Chapayevo, Akhar and Shushiya had not changed. Federal units had sealed off the villages. Artillery and aviation had been inflicting strikes on their positions. Reconnaissance had fixed their positions, and attack helicopters had interdicted attempts to resupply ammunition and food to Novolakskoye. The OGV in Novolakskiy rayon were in the process of being strengthened; the redeployment of units and subunits of the Federal Forces grouping from Kadar had commenced. One dominating height remained in the hands of the fighters in Novolakskiy rayon – Ht 713.5 (which also appears as Ht 715.3) close to the village of Gamiyakh. However, in Novolakskiy rayon the situation remained without substantial change. Battles continued for the liberation of the villages of Tukhchar, Chapayevo and in the centre of the rayon – the village of Novolakskoye.

14 September 1999

The important height Ht 715.3 was reported to be completely under the control of Federal Forces. In the opinion of the Command of Federal Forces this would now allow Ministry of Defence and Internal Troops MVD to enter the village of Novolakskoye and finally to liberate the populated point of fighters. By 1730 hrs the national flag was raised over the administrative building in Novolakskoye at the same time as a similar flag-raising ceremony took place in Chapayevo. Tukhchar by now had been freed from the clutches of the *boyeviki* and transferred to the control of the local administration and the Home Guard.

According to Milrad Fatullayev, following the dissemination of Basayev's order on the Udugov website concerning withdrawal of the 'peace-enforcement brigade' which had intervened into Dagestan, the *boyeviki* were now continuing to abandon the rayon⁶⁶. Even though the Dagestani militiamen and Home Guard entered Novolakskoye and into the village of Tukhchar without a fight, wariness still remained because of *boyeviki* sniper fire experienced earlier in forest massifs and in the outskirts of villages. Despite reports in the media, Fatullayev wrote, the military only succeeded on 13 September in liberating the dominating height with the television mast as a result of dense fire from the extremists.

Fatullayev noted that the Home Guard from the village of Tukhchar, who were now occupying the liberated village, had changed their relationship towards their Chechen neighbours from forbearance to one of an extreme lack of enthusiasm. In the area of Babayurt, at a railway station which had recently experienced a *terakt*, approximately 300 local inhabitants closed the Federal route Makhachkala-Astrakhan and demanded from the authorities the adoption of proper security measures along the border with Chechnya. It was obvious, according to Fatullayev that, even if the border was guarded and patrolled by the militia and armed personnel of the Home Guard it was hardly likely that they would be an effective deterrent in the face of more than 1,000 *boyeviki* and therefore it was necessary for cardinal measures to be taken "for reinforcing the two brigades of the Ministry of

⁶⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 171, 15 September 1999, p2, "Voyna v Dagestane prodolzhayetsya" by Mirad Fatullayev.

*Defence and Internal Troops MVD deployed in Dagestan with an overall strength of 10,000 men with the transfer of five reinforced battalions of assault troops*⁶⁷.

In the neighbouring town of Kizlyar approximately 2,000 members of the Home Guard with the rayon department of Internal Affairs had divided the town into four sectors, where defensive engineer work was being effected. Trenches were also being dug around the town. The approaches buildings were protected by sandbags. Precautionary measures were called for by the fact that lying in wait on Chechen territory were some 2,000 fighters, who despite preventive strikes by Russian aircraft periodically penetrated the border through reconnaissance by battle marking out favourable means and 'invasion' routes.⁶⁸ Bearing in mind the infamous abortive raid by Salman Raduyev on Kizlyar in January 1996⁶⁹, it is not difficult to understand the state of near panic which had gripped the authorities and townsfolk of Kizlyar.

In a television address to the people of Chechnya, President Maskhadov spoke about the very real threat of aggression against Ichkeria and summoned the population to be prepared for the defence of Chechnya. He emphasised the necessity to build defensive works and adapt buildings to protect the inhabitants. The operational headquarters of the High Command of the Chechen Armed Forces maintained that Russian aviation had bombed the track between Alkhan-Yurt and Urus-Martan. Furthermore air raids had continued on the village of Benoy in Nozhayyurtovskiy rayon and on the rayon centre of Nozhay-Yurt. All through the night, according to the Chechen operational headquarters, Russian aircraft and artillery had engaged the villages of Galayty and Gilyany in Nozhayyurtovskiy rayon.

15 September 1999

On the Khasavyurt front and around Novolakskiy rayon in particular, it was not until 15 September, following the completion of the assault and disarmament operation in the Kadar zone complex, with the arrival of those additional forces and the presence of Lieutenant-General Gennadiy Troshev, Commander OGV, that the Federal Forces began to get the upper hand. Slowly, events were beginning to turn in favour of the Federal Forces. The *press-doss'ye*⁷⁰ on 15 September stated that the decisiveness with which Troshev, having arrived at the Khasavyurt front on 14 September, oversaw the liberation of the village of Novolakskoye had a decisive influence on the Chechen *boyeviki* and disorganised their forces in the rayon. After the capture by Federal Forces of the dominating heights of Pts 573, 715.3, 744.7 and 761.3 around Novolakskoye there was a marked absence of *boyeviki* in the villages of Chapayevo, Gamiyakh, Duchi and Tukhchar. Now that these populated points had been freed, Federal Forces were able to carry out 'sanitisation' and mine clearance. Information had also been received on 15 September that the *boyeviki* had already abandoned the villages of Akhar and Shushiya, but troops did not enter these villages until they had confirmed by reconnaissance; then subunits of Internal Troops completed 'sanitising' these populated points.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See C W Blandy, "The Significance of Pervomayskoye", P19 CSRC, April 1996.

⁷⁰ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii - 15 September 1999, p5.

Rumours abounded that in the near future *boyeviki* numbering some 1,000 men would invade on the Babayurt axis into Dagestan. However, some local observers were concerned about the possibility of a further two variants as part of a third 'invasion' by the terrorist groups from Chechnya. The first variant was the seizure of hospitals, other vital establishments and the kidnapping of hostages in border towns such as Babayurt and Kizlyar which would then require the redeployment of Federal Forces' subunits from previous 'hot-spot' areas to these towns. There was another factor causing concern. There were reports that regular subunits of the Chechen Army were also being concentrated along the border, to defend the republic from any possible Russian invasion. In particular, threatening Babayurt were concentrations of extremists close to the Chechen *stanitsas* of Shelkovskiy and Borozdinovka which had been nominated by Shamil' Basayev for the third phase in the operation for the "*Liberation of Dagestan from Russian occupation under the codeword of "Imam Shamil"*"⁷¹. The second possible variant of a new 'aggression' was once again an incursion from Chechnya into mountainous Dagestan, into Avaristan.

A meeting took place on 15 September involving the leaderships of the Federal structures in Vladikavkaz, at which Colonel-General Vladimir Rushaylo, Minister for Internal Affairs and General Kvashnin, Chief of the General Staff, discussed a whole complex of anti-terrorist precautionary measures under the title of 'Anti-Terror – Whirlwind' which were to be implemented in the rayony bordering Chechnya. From the implementation of measures in these rayony, provided force levels and troop strengths were sufficient, an armed intervention into Chechnya would not be a very great step. From this stage onwards the feeling that armed intervention into Chechnya was now inevitable continued to grow. It was not strange that the military expressed the wish: "*not to restrict the counter-terrorist operation to within the confines of Dagestan but to continue it into Chechnya. To destroy this hornets' nest, otherwise Russia will not have a peaceful life – such thoughts were shared amongst practically all officers – the main thing – so that we are not stopped as in 1995 and in 1996*". ... "*However, euphoria from a successfully conducted, but not yet completed campaign, must not cloud the eyes of the Command*".⁷²

16 September 1999

Defence Minister Marshal Igor Sergeev informed Prime Minister Vladimir Putin that the territory of Dagestan was now completely freed from terrorist occupation. '*Zachistka*' (cleansing) of the terrain was being carried out. Lone bandits were still attempting to escape but they were being pursued and destroyed.

From Chechnya, the Chechen Ministry of Defence reported that Russian aircraft had bombed the village of Engel's-Yurt in Gudermes rayon. There were also rumours that Basayev and Khattab had turned to the Islamic Party of Rebirth of Tajikistan with a request for assistance in obtaining reinforcements and volunteers and additional funds to continue the campaign against the Federal Forces in Dagestan. An unidentified source said that radical Islamists in Tajikistan were in the process of recruiting volunteers, promising sums in the region of \$1,000 per month each if they agreed to participate in the conflict. Additionally, there were

⁷¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 172, 16 September 1999, p2, "*Ekstremisty ob'yavili Rossii otkrytyy terror*" by Milrad Fatullayev. The two previous phases of the operation to free Dagestan were: Phase 1 – 'Gazi-Magomed' the 'invasion' into Avaristan, Tsumadinskiy and Botliskiy rayony; Phase 2 – 'Imam Gamzat-bek' the 'invasion' into Novolakskiy rayon.

⁷² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 172, 16 September 1999, p2, "*Volna pobednykh doneseniyy*" by Aleksandr Shaburkin.

some 500 *boyeviki* from Jordan who intended to come to Dagestan via Iran and Azerbaijan. Another source speculated on the formation of another party of volunteers from Bosnia to assist Basayev and Khattab.

17 September 1999

The cycle of bomb explosions in apartment blocks in Moscow and elsewhere was instrumental in the demands for effective measures not only to afford better protection for the civilian population, but also to take action against the 'hornets' nest' in Chechnya itself. From 17 September specific measures started to be introduced for taking the conflict onto Chechen territory to eradicate the bandit formations and their bases once and for all. A meeting of the Federation Council took place to consider in draft measures against terrorism in the North Caucasus. The meeting was conducted behind closed doors. The only known fact was that senators demanded the implementation of tough measures to strengthen the border with Chechnya. After the meeting Vladimir Putin remarked that "*the question of troops entering Chechen territory was not discussed*"⁷³.

Meanwhile, as reported by RIA Novosti, the Ministry of Defence was engaged in studying a plan for the possible conduct of a wide-scale operation for the liquidation of the bandit formations and their bases on Chechen soil. Additional forces were redeployed to the Dagestani areas bordering Chechnya which included: one composite battalion of Naval Infantry formed from the Northern and Black Sea fleets - strength approximately 1,000 men with organic weapons and equipment; from Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts fully prepared units and an additional five storm-assault battalions were also on their way to the North Caucasus. The overall strength of the reinforcements amounted to some 2,500 men. Their task - to destroy the bandit formations and their bases in Chechnya.

Despite the belated efforts of Moscow and the power-wielding structures to turn the situation in their favour there was much ground to recover in securing the hearts and minds of the people who lived in Dagestan. Dagestanis, who had long become accustomed to occupying a front line position, suffering raids from bandit groups, did not retain any radiant illusions concerning a timely and speedy completion of the counter-terrorist operation, despite the fact that the troop phase of the operation was approaching the end. The work of the law enforcement organs was increasing with each day, as exemplified by Internal Troops continuing '*zachistka*' of villages recently liberated from bandit occupation. Additionally, procurators had started to set up wide scale operational measures for the apprehension, arrest and eventual commitment to trial of *boyeviki* who had participated in combat operations and other people who had offered assistance to the bandits. Dagestani villagers remained sceptical.

As a consequence of information coming in about concentrations of *boyeviki* along the Checheno-Dagestan border tension in the republic remained high. According to reconnaissance the probability of another 'invasion' into Dagestan with new detachments was very likely. The probability of new incursions on the Babayurt and Kizlyar directions could not be excluded, neither could new attempts further south to penetrate into Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony. On completion of a village's recapture, Ministry of Defence subunits were redeployed to new sectors. Internal Troops carrying out 'sanitisation' operations then left those sectors after

⁷³ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 174, 18 September 1999, p1, "*Moskva prinyimayet bespretsedentnyye mery po borb'ye s terrorizm*" foreward to article by Lyubov' Golubeva and Galina Fominova.

four days. Dagestani militiamen remained, but they did not have a sufficient number of infantry weapons or combat equipment to be an effective deterrent against the *boyeviki* on their own. Thus, for the *boyeviki* there was practically nothing to stop their attempts to direct new blows against Novolakskiy, Botlikhskiy or Tsumadinskiy rayons, which in turn handed the extremists a considerable propaganda victory in being able to maintain a threat of possible action at any time. As Aleksandr Shaburkin wrote, "*with their actions they demonstrated the helplessness of the official authorities in bringing order and control to the liberated villages. No one doubted that combat operations would flare up once again in the very near future on the territory of the republic*"⁷⁴. However, there was hope from a very different quarter for the average, peaceful, Dagestani villager living near to the Checheno-Dagestan border of an eventual release from the threat of marauding bandit formations. The natural climate would hasten the departure of the *boyeviki*, for come the end of October heavy falls of snow in the mountains would block the passes and the *boyeviki* would not be able to cross over into the republic with such ease.

Behind the lack of weaponry for the Dagestani volunteer forces and militia there was more than a little debate about handing out weapons to the local population. Military counter-intelligence highlighted one-off occasions of supply of small arms to local inhabitants by servicemen. There was also the view of some Russian generals, as epitomised by General Shamanov, that under no circumstances should weapons be issued to the local population. Arming the population would of course be of great benefit to local leaders striving to strengthen their position and widen their sphere of influence, as is the case in Dagestan. Under the slogans of protecting home territory small local armies could be created to serve the interests of their leaders. Training volunteers would also reinforce clan power and could lead to further conflict between clans and government.

It was reported on 17 September that the OGV Command had received information from the MVD that there was more evidence that the official Chechen power structures had been actively participating in the incursions into Dagestan. Worthy of note was the report that 300 men from military unit No 0666 of the Military Forces of the Chechen Republic stationed in Gudermes had participated in actions in Dagestan. The unit was directly subordinated to the Chechen President, Aslan Maskhadov, giving rise to the question whether he still exercised any control over Chechen regular forces. In corroboration of this, the servicemen of this unit had returned to Gudermes on 11 September, and continued to render military assistance to small groups of *boyeviki* located in the Khasavyurt rayon of Dagestan. The MVD assessed that, despite tangible casualties, the extremists were able to carry out combat operations at a high level of professionalism. This stemmed from the high standard of training that fighters received in the Chechen populated centres of Serzhen-Yurt, Urus-Martan and Gudermes. For instance, in Novolakskoye a summary was found which belonged to one of the field commanders and explained the concept of the extremists' operations.

⁷⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 174, 18 September 1999, p1, "Dvoynaya opasnost" by Aleksandr Shaburkin.

Box 6 – Boyeviki Concept of Operations found in Novolakskoye⁷⁵

First Group of Mojahedin with a strength of approximately 100 men, would conduct combat operation against MVD troops and subunits.

Second Group of Mojahedin deeply clandestine people with past special training in camps on the territory of Chechnya and Dagestan. As a rule they had been taught the skills of sabotage and sniping. Their task was the penetration of government structures and social movements.

The Third Group was made up of local inhabitants, who collected information and carried out special commissions for commanders of extremist detachments.

Later on 17 September the active redeployment of Ministry of Defence subunits took place, with troops being concentrated in Novolakskiy rayon where fierce battles were still continuing with the remnants of the bandit groups. Their tasks were to block off dangerous areas and to destroy the encircled bandit groups by fire support weapons. In the words of a senior Ministry of Defence spokesman “*We must not allow the boyeviki to break out of the ring*”⁷⁶. In the villages and heights vacated by the bandits, Ministry of Defence sappers started to carry out mine clearance operations including those which did not explode as a result of Federal fire missions. In the area of Novolakskoye no dense minefields were located. In the main the fighters used fougasses. In the case of explosive devices of this type, there was a detonator with a 50 metre length of cable or wire. On the approach of armoured vehicles the *boyevik* would detonate the mine and an explosion would follow. From the experience of Karamakhi it was apparent that the *boyeviki* made wide use of booby-trap mines or explosive devices, in one instance, even to the extent of placing an anti-personnel mine MON-50 under the Koran on a table which exploded into 2,000 fragments. In the streets the *boyeviki* in the main used grenades, type F-1, with a fragmentation radius of some 50 metres. The average time to clear one such minefield for a platoon of sappers would be in the region of 15-20 minutes in a village such as Karamakhi, provided the opposition had been neutralised and expelled.

Despite an announcement by the authorities concerning the employment of only contract or long-service and experienced soldiers, in many subunits fighting in Dagestan there was a significant number of young soldiers. According to the representative of Surgutskoye section of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, Nina Mayenko, “*fighting in Dagestan there were 45 inhabitants from Khanti-Mansiyskiy Autonomous Okrug and 13 men from Surgut who had ‘got into the army’ in the June call-up*”⁷⁷. However, before the dispatch to the area of combat operations the Command had held a meeting, at which those who did not wish to go were given the opportunity to remain in areas of permanent deployment. Even amongst the young ‘warriors’ there did not appear to be any ‘refuzniks’. “*Nevertheless, contrary to their own directives, the military leadership were using the inexperienced and youthful energy of 18 year old lads and not being squeamish to prevent them being used as cannon fodder*”⁷⁸. However, it became known on 21 September that on 17

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 174, 18 September 1999, p1.

⁷⁷ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 174, 18 September 1999, p1.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

September Yel'tsin had signed an order forbidding the dispatch of young soldiers to serve in Chechnya and other 'hot spots' who had served less than six months in the army.

It was becoming clear that Dagestan was faced with a double danger, namely a possible further invasion of *boyeviki* and secondly, the possibility of internal inter-ethnic conflict against the background of a wider struggle for power in the republic. Whilst a significant grouping of Federal Forces remained in the republic, there was indeed the probability that though any advance or assault by the extremists could be repulsed even when forces moved into Chechnya, the problem of law and order in Dagestan remained.

18 September 1999

In Dagestan identifying and destroying single groups of armed extremists continued. Internal Troops subunits and OMON detachments continued the *zachistka* of the village of Shushiya in Novolakskiy rayon. Internal Ministry organs of Novolakskiy, Khasavyurtovskiy and Kizlyarskiy rayony carried out measures to establish which people had participated in combat operations on the side of the bandits and those who had provided assistance.

On the morning of 18 September Russian subunits crossed over the Chechen administrative border in the area of the village of Aki-Yurt from Ingushetiya, penetrating Chechen territory to a depth of 1.5 km and then dug themselves in. During the night, having freed the populated points in Novolakskiy rayon, Federal Forces opened fire from time to time on border sectors in the direction of Zandak in Nozhay-Yurtovskiy rayon of Chechnya. Russian front aviation of the OGV carried out air strikes and bombing raids on bases and assemblies of *boyeviki* on the territory of Chechnya. Rumours circulated that earlier Khattab's training centre together with another under the name of 'Kavkaz' had been destroyed by Federal bombing raids, with casualties estimated at 450 men. As Federal Forces gradually completed the military phase of the Dagestani counter-terrorist operation, emphasis became increasingly focussed on Chechnya.

In the increasing media focus on Chechnya it is possible to gain a glimpse of the mind of a Chechen fighter and military commander of proven ability, Khunkar-pasha Israpilov⁷⁹, a man who, if he had been given the proper financial support, the right equipment and effective communications during his appointment as Head of the Anti-Terrorist Centre⁸⁰ in Grozny would probably have stayed in that post. In

⁷⁹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 174, 18 September 1999, p1, "Dvoynaya opasnost" by Aleksandr Shaburkin. "Khunkar-pasha Israpilov had fought in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Ingushetia, participated in the raid of Chechen fighters on Kizlyar, led the breakout from encirclement at Pervomayskoye. Until the end of 1998 he headed the anti-terrorist centre 'Ichkeria'. Brigadier-General, awarded the highest order of the Chechen Republic. An active participant of the war in Dagestan. By profession a lawyer. Lives in Grozny".

⁸⁰ See Blandy, "Chechen Status - Wide Differences Remain", P27 CSRC, February 1998, p28, "I do not have a conclusive basis of negotiation with the kidnappers, photographs, evidence from witnesses. And I have no specialist equipment, I am not able to intercept their telephone conversations, to react operationally to all the movements of bandits and hostages. I do not even have transport to pursue the terrorists. My people are not paid and they simply work out of enthusiasm. Tell me, how is it possible to wage war against crime under such conditions?" See also "Chechnya - A Small Victorious War" by Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, Pan, 1997, p291, "Israpilov, known to all as Khunkar Pasha, was by contrast a commander of proven ability and intelligence. He was a veteran of Abkhazia, like

an interview for *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*⁸¹ he gave his reasons for fighting in Dagestan; they provide an interesting journey of logic. It also provides an indication of the depth of the negative relations between Russian and Chechen. It is of particular importance to note that Russia, in Chechen eyes, manipulated the situation to take revenge.

Box 7 - Points from an Interview with Khunkar-Pasha Israpilov

Q. You were a direct participant of the events in Kadar zone and Novolakskoye rayon of Dagestan. What was this – an export of revolution or assistance to Brother-Muslims?

A. Yes, I and likeminded people played an active part in combat operations on the territory of Dagestan. I am a soldier of Islam and my duty leads to helping my brother-Muslims, where they are in need. A few Russians fought on the side of the Serbs in the Kosovo meatchopper and they really did not announce it to the whole world, that they were going to the rescue of Orthodox brothers. I do not accept double standards. From the end of 1998 I was not part of the state service in Chechnya, but an ordinary citizen, having the right to go freely, wherever I wished. Lets remember Abkhazia. Why did the Russian military when they met us there accord us honour with exclamations of “Ura!”? It means in Abkhazia it is possible, but in Dagestan it is impossible.

Q. Did many Dagestanis participate in combat operations?

A. There, in the main Dagestanis fought in combat operations. And not only Muslims, but also Christians and representatives of other confessions. We found a common language easily. We had a similar understanding of freedom. Religion did not divide us, but united, despite registering religious differences. War is first and foremost a conflict of ideology, of different views on life ...

Q. ... Talk about the participation of the well-known Saudi patron?

A. I do not know any Saudi millionaire ben Laden, I only heard about him on Russian television ... Who devised insulting nicknames for people from the Caucasus ‘chuchmek, chernyy, churka’. How does one live in a state which hourly humiliates the dignity of man?

Q. Today a war is going on in Chechnya. Russian aircraft and artillery are daily inflicting massive missile-bomb blows on Chechen villages. People in border villages are abandoning their burning homes, accumulaing in towns, and naturally bitter for the fact that you gave Russia cause to once again bomb peaceful villages.

A. In the margins of the Khasavyurt negotiations in an unofficial meeting the well known political figure from the Duma Vladimir Lukin threatened one of the members of the Chechen delegation: “We will take revenge on you! We will train the army and we will return!” Look, they have returned ... Russia has never forgiven us for the shame of the Chechen War. She was prepared for aggression, she forced the situation, hauling troops to the border. Today in the area of Mozdok alone, on the border with Chechnya more than 150 items of armoured equipment are concentrated. Moscow is ready to occupy Zaterechniy, Shelkovskiy and Nayrskiy rayony. And Dagestan, the ensuing military actions were timed to the elections in Russia. Russian policies till now stoked up a civil war in Chechnya. The plan envisages regular bombing of greater Chechnya, forcing the population into the northern rayony of Chechnya, to accumulate them and hold elections there under the barrels of automatics.

The overall casualty figures for Federal Forces fighting in Dagestan as at 18 September were given as: killed – 243, wounded – 866, disappeared without trace 15. Internal Troops losses were put at: killed – 140, wounded – 594 and

so many of the commanders who rose to prominence during the war. With light, curly hair and hazel eyes, Israpilov has a crooked winning smile that belies a ruthless edge and a love of battle”.

⁸¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 174, 18 September 1999, p1, “*Moskva mezhdou Dagestanom i Chechney*” by Abdukhamid Khatuyev.

disappeared without trace – 15. The overall number of refugees from the combat areas according to the MVD press service amounted to 19,591 people: adults – 10,391, children – 9,200. According to a breakdown by rayony: Botlikhskiy and Tsumadinskiy rayony – 6,000, Buynaksk rayon – 6,919 and Novolakskiy rayon – more than 6,672 people.

19 September 1999

Whilst events seemed to be slipping towards Federal armed intervention into Chechnya, Grozny was the centre of intense preparation for a meeting between the Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin of Russia. Maskhadov continued to maintain that it would take place in the very near future. However from the Russian side there were denials about any plans for such a meeting.

20 September 1999

By 20 September, according to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*⁸² a new Chechen War had already started with the bombing of Chechen territory with a 'daily schedule'. Preparations for a forceful outcome of the Chechen conflict, the attempts of normalisation of which had come to a dead end a year or so ago, were proceeding in every direction, from the reinforcement of the border with the rebellious republic to the creation of an ideological and legal basis for the forthcoming decisive actions. The power-wielding structures had not restricted themselves simply to the liberation of Dagestani villages previously seized and occupied by the extremists, for terrorist bases on Chechen soil were now the targets for artillery fire missions and airstrikes. In these bombardments and air raids, the military maintained that "*preventive blows were very effective, not affecting populated points, but being inflicted exclusively on reconnoitred targets*"⁸³, but of course, the opposite was nearer the truth.

Further away, many kilometres to the north in Moscow, the proposal of Premier Putin to create a quarantine exclusion zone around Chechnya drew immediate support from senators. Not excluding further attempts by the *boyeviki* to break into Dagestan, Federal Forces reinforced their cover on the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border with particular reference to the Kizlyar, Babayurt and Khasavyurt directions. On the western side of Chechnya, on the border with Ingushetia, Federal subunits were also being deployed. In Grozny people were rushing about to announce that Russian troops had already crossed the Chechen border. In fact troops were in place on the dominating heights of the Terek and Sunzha ridges. Border Troops from the Nazran' and Khunzakh detachments of the North Caucasus Regional Directorate of the Federal Border Service (FPS) had been given orders to cover a series of sectors situated close to Chechnya. Elders of a series of villages in Shelkovskiy rayon of Chechnya, north of the River Terek, had addressed themselves to President Maskhadov with a demand that all the *boyeviki* should be removed from populated points since they were in fear of their lives from Federal bombing raids.

21 September 1999

A 'cordon sanitaire' had been created along the perimeter of the Chechen administrative border, announced Colonel-General Valeriy Manilov, Deputy Chief of

⁸² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 175, 21 September 1999, p4, "*Novaya Chechenskaya vojna uzhe nachalas*" by Il'ya Maksakov.

⁸³ Ibid.

the General Staff at a press conference, where he went on to state that the second phase of the anti-terrorist operation against the *bandformirovaniya* and their bases in Chechnya had begun. The cordon itself would consist of perhaps one to two or three lines. On the first line Internal Troops would be deployed together with vehicle control points manned by the militia. Their tasks were to implement and enforce “*total control and scrutiny of all cross-border movement over the administrative border with Chechnya*”⁸⁴. Ministry of Defence subunits would be stationed on the second and third lines where their task would be the destruction of any *bandformirovaniya* penetrating through from the territory of Chechnya. Manilov concluded by emphasising that the cordon was not simply one line but a whole complex of decisions concerned with the problem, which included not only military but also diplomatic and economic measures, including those to do with information.

Despite steps to implement a cordon around Chechen territory, tension remained high in Kizlyarskiy, Babayurtovski and Khasavyurtovski rayony of Dagestan on account of the activities of religious extremists who were ready to carry out sabotage and other diversionary acts against the Russian armed forces and government organs in and around the Chechen border. There were reports that on Khasavyurt direction of *boyeviki* reconnaissance groups of three to five men were collecting information about the relocation of Russian troops. Colonel-General Anatoliy Kornukov, Commander in Chief of the Russian Airforce, announced that the air space over Chechnya was fully under the control of the Air Defence forces and assets of the Russian Air Force.

A three-sided meeting took place in the Ingush capital of Magas between Aleksandr Dzasokhov (President of North Osetia-Alania), Ruslan Aushev (President of Ingushetia) and Aslan Maskhadov, agreed with the Federal authorities. However, whilst this meeting may have been helpful to the major participants, it did not result in any meeting or contact between Aslan Maskhadov and Prime Minister Putin.

Once again, a scenario seemed to be developing which bore similarities to that of some five years earlier, when President Yel'tsin refused to meet Dzhokhar Dudayev, when so much destruction might have been avoided. President Maskhadov was given to recalling on a number of occasions the remark of Dzhokhar Dudayev to the effect that if he had had just half an hour with President Yel'tsin there would have been no war. As on the first occasion, the only winner was to be a sense of false pride which in turn was to repeat the exactment of payment through the waste of human life, infliction of misery and suffering.

It was also learnt that in the very near future several groups of fighters from Bosnia were expected to arrive in Chechnya. This came from a source within the immediate circle of Aslan Maskhadov, the Chechen President. In the words of the source, the official authorities in Groznyy “*did not approve of Basayev's activities in drawing mercenaries to Ichkeria*”, although it is far more likely that the actual thoughts applied to Shamil Basayev were of a much stronger nature, for many Chechens were to hold Basayev responsible for the second Federal armed intervention into Chechnya, the subsequent suffering of the civilian population and the complete utter ruination of the Chechen infrastructure. For the Chechen President the actions of Basayev and others of similar mind ruined any positive steps on the way to Chechen independence or a grant of a much wider autonomy by the Federal Centre.

⁸⁴ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii - 21 September 1999, p4.

According to the Russian FSB Directorate for Dagestan⁸⁵ besides Muslims from Bosnia there were many others from Islamic states. The majority of them had been under arrest in their own countries for being involved in criminal activities. Heading the fighter groups were: the Egyptians – Abu-Akhmad and Abu-Ayman; the Algerian Abu-il'-Maali, the Tunisian Abu-Khamsa, the Palestinians Abu-Ysama and Abu-Ali, the Saudi Arabian Sheikh Nadir and Bosnian Pezo. The 'mission' of fighters from Bosnia was financed not only by Muslim extremist organisations but also by a series of Bosnian businesses. They also had information about 'payments' of factories, for instance "Oil Travnik" and the meat preparation combine "Baydar Bosna". The recruitment of mercenaries was through an organisation called "United Bosnian Muslim Youth".

There were further reports that both Shamil' Basayev and Emir Khattab had received US\$ 25 mln for carrying out the operation into Dagestan. Now they had received a further US\$ 26 mln for organising the second 'invasion' of Dagestan, this time into Novolakskiy rayon. Again the source of funding for Basayev and Khattab was given as ben Laden. At this time, it is also interesting to note the published figures for the counter-terrorist operation by Federal Forces which were in excess of US\$ 2 mlrd (US\$ 2 x 1,000,000,000)⁸⁶, but now with the creation of a 'cordon sanitaire' around Chechnya and with action envisaged in Chechnya itself, a source from the General Staff indicated that a further expenditure of US\$ 15-20 mlrd could be expected⁸⁷.

The Federal Migration Service⁸⁸ at this time began to provide assistance to the inhabitants of Dagestan who had suffered as a result of terrorist invasions into Dagestan. The Federal government had agreed to provide over 300 mln roubles for the restoration of houses destroyed in the conflict. More than 27,000 people had to abandon their homes: over 20,000 from Botlikhskiy and Tsumadinskiy rayony; around 7,200 people remained without shelter in the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi. As a result of combat operations more than 1,400 houses had been destroyed, of which 660 could not be restored.

22 September 1999

In the situation in the North Caucasus which was now evolving there was not so much talk about whether or not there would be a forceful operation against the Chechen criminal groupings, but about when this would happen and in what form. The temporary press centre of the OGV announced that during the past 24 hours in Dagestan a definite stabilisation of the situation had taken place. The Command OGV had carried out measures to complete the regrouping and deployment of forces and means with troops being brought to a state of permanent readiness in order to repulse any attempt by the *boyeviki* to break through on the three axes of Botlikh, Kizlyar and Babayurt. The main reinforcements were directed to strengthening the administrative border of Dagestan on the probable lines of penetration by *bandformirovaniya* from Chechnya. Kizlyar, like Khasavyurt, was a rayon centre where both rail and road communications were of a regional significance, linking

⁸⁵ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krisis, terakty v Rossii - 21 September 1999, p9.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p3.

Astrakhan and the north with the south of Dagestan and beyond to Baku in Azerbaijan. The authorities needed to bear in mind that if the *boyeviki* captured Kizlyar, then they would be hard to dislodge owing to the presence of the civilian population and the inability of the OGV to use Federal aviation to maximum effect. It was one thing to bomb and obliterate mountain villages, but quite another matter to do the same with a rayon centre. In many ways the situation along the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border resembled a phoney war, for fortifications were being created both on Chechen territory and on the Dagestani side of the border, so that “*an impression was being formed that each side was in a state of expectancy waiting for the order from the Command to either attack or to defend*”⁸⁹.

Military sources reported that in the course of 21 September, artillery and front aviation had inflicted strikes on collections of *boyeviki* assembling along the administrative border. The gradual concentration of Federal ground forces and combat equipment enabled them to carry out fire missions to a greater depth into Chechen territory, for both defensive (perhaps more accurately described as ‘preventive’) strikes or for an advance. To carry out these fire missions in greater depth, 122 mm RSZO⁹⁰ ‘Grad’ launchers were ‘pulled up’ close to the border enabling engagement and destruction of area targets at a range of 20 km. From the Kadar zone, following disarmament and capture of Wahhabi extremists, an artillery battalion of 152 mm “Acacia” SP howitzers was deployed to the border. Federal Forces aviation, in addition to bombing *boyeviki* along the Chechen border, also carried out air raids on the Argun Gorge, the area south west of Botlikh, the area west of Kizlyar and in particular the area of the village of Dubovskaya, which lies on the road on the left bank of the River Terek, just to the south-southwest of Kizlyar. With the aim of preventing redeployment of Chechen *bandformirovaniya*, Federal aviation also bombed the bridge across the River Argun, possibly the one by the town of Argun itself. Further confirmation of an impending intervention by Federal Forces into Chechnya came from a MVD RF Deputy Minister, Lieutenant-General Igor’ Zubov, that Federal Forces were ready to carry out a ground operation in Chechnya.

23 September 1999

It became more than clear that the Federal objective was in fact an armed intervention into Chechnya, particularly following a missile-bomb strike at 1230 hrs on Groznyy’s Sheikh Mansur airport. This was reported by the ‘operational headquarters with Command in Chief of the Chechen armed forces’. According to the headquarters the bombs fell on the northern outskirts of Groznyy. Over Groznyy combat aircraft traversed the sky. An order from the headquarters to all subunits was transmitted to the effect that they were not to open fire in order not to provoke new air strikes which in turn could increase civilian casualties.

According to information from HQ OGV (Dagestan) the ground operation against Chechen fighters could begin at any time in the very near future. All the military preparations for the ground operation were almost complete. Whilst artillery and Federal aviation increased their bombardment on terrorist concentrations of fighters, a source from the General Staff gave one to understand that the operation would most likely be started from the direction of Dagestan. In the areas of Ingushetia and North Osetia, as reported by a source in the immediate circle of the Commander of 58 Combined Arms Army (Vladikavkaz), Major-General Vladimir

⁸⁹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 176, 22 April 1999, p1, “*V ozhidanii novoy voyny*” by Aleksandr Shaburkin.

⁹⁰ ‘Reaktivniyy sistem zalpogo ognya’.

Shamanov, the position of Federal Forces still lacked sufficient strength. It was believed that there were several hundred armed fighters in the Dzhayrakhskiy gorge on the Checheno-Ingush border. Only a small group of a few dozens of Federal Border Troops stood in their way. 3 Motor Rifle Division, deployed to the area of Mozdok from Nizhniy Novgorod, had arrived without its tanks. According to the military news agency, the First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Colonel-General Valeriy Manilov⁹¹ had been charged with implementing measures concerned with the political coverage of the "operation for the liquidation of the criminal enclave in the North Caucasus". Under his leadership in the Ministry of Defence a mass information campaign in the Russian and foreign mass media was being worked on.

The Russian Deputy Minister for Internal Affairs, Lieutenant-General Igor' Zubov, stated that the Chechen power structures had about 7,000 men who were not under the control of Aslan Maskhadov and only carried out those decisions which were of benefit to the various field commanders. Characterising Chechen military potential, General Zubov reckoned that it could be in the region of up to 30,000 men, also bearing in mind that Khattab had 5-7,000 men under training in camps in Dagestan⁹². By 23 September 1999 some 50,000 had been assembled in the OGV around Chechnya. It was becoming clear that armed intervention was imminent with a vast increase in the scope and scale of air raids and destruction of important targets, such as the raids on Groznyy's Severnyy airport, although Prime Minister Putin, on a visit to Kazakhstan, stated from Astana that "*No wide-scale military operation in Chechnya is being planned. Our task is to protect the population of Russia from bandits*"⁹³.

Information that missile-bomb attacks had been made on objects used by Chechen *boyeviki* located on the site of Groznyy airport were confirmed by the Russian Ministry of Defence. Strikes in particular were made on weapon dumps and radar stations. The RIA "Novosti" correspondent in Groznyy, visiting the location where the bombing had taken place, reported that the bombs had landed on the runway which had been partially destroyed. The airport building had not been damaged and neither had the Tu-154 presidential airliner, but a small AN-2 had been destroyed on the runway. The operational headquarters of the Chechen President confirmed that there had been a mass airstrike on the villages of Serzhen-Yurt, Avtury in Shalimskiy rayon of Chechnya, the rayon centre of Vedenno, the outlying village of Petropavlovskoye situated some 10 km from Groznyy and on the northern outskirts of Staropromyshlovskiy district of Groznyy. One bomb fell on the oil storage facility at the small town of Khayan-Kort, Staropromyshlovskiy district.

An extended meeting of the Chechen government and Parliament which lasted more than six hours took place on 23 September to evaluate the situation both in and surrounding Chechnya. As the comparatively new press secretary to the Chechen President Selim Abdulmuslimov stated (Mayrbek Vachagayev having been appointed as the Chechen Presidential Representative in Moscow), the objective of the meeting was to assess the Russian airstrikes on Groznyy airport and a whole series of outlying villages and populated points. Results from the meeting included the decision to form a state committee of defence and cabinet of ministers to bring in a state of emergency. Vice Premier Kazbek Makhachev was commissioned to carry

⁹¹ Plater-Zuberk, op cit, p69, provides details on the career of General Manilov, his experience and particular skills.

⁹² Emir Khattab's main training camp was at Serzhen-Yurt in Chechnya.

⁹³ Ibid, p4.

out consultations with other North Caucasus Republics and obtain their support to bring about a normalisation of the situation. At 1835 hrs Russian aircraft again carried out raids on two urban districts of Grozny, Staropromyslovskiy and Zavodskiy. In the words of Khuseyn Akhmadov, the Chechen military command had decided to take appropriate measures for the defence of Grozny, for Russian air raids had led to huge casualties amongst the local population and had forced 30,000 people to abandon their homes.⁹⁴

Further information was released by a source from the FSB Directorate on Dagestani Affairs that the Chechen Defence HQ had deprecated the decision of Basayev and Khattab to carry out sabotage and terrorist acts against the government troops and the Dagestani authorities. In the last 24 hours several groups of *boyeviki* had abandoned the Chechen training camps and were being directed towards the Dagestani border. HQ OGV stated that the date for the penetration of the sabotage and diversionary groups had not as yet been fixed. Artillery and aviation continued to bombard collections of fighters along the extent of the border between Chechnya and Dagestan.

Turning the focus slightly further north the FSB Directorate for Stavropol' Kray published information to the effect that Basayev's headquarters was planning terrorist acts against airfields in Stavropol' along with attacks against other important objects. FSB operatives stated that it had become public knowledge that there was more than a degree of dissent between Basayev and Khattab, on the grounds that Khattab was "*extremely dissatisfied with the inability of Shamil' to ensure the support of Dagestanis and to adjust the uninterrupted flow of money, weapons, ammunition and replenishment of detachments with fresh forces*"⁹⁵. He also condemned Basayev⁹⁶ for concealing a significant part of the assets from being taken into the field in Dagestan. It will be remembered that there were rumours of dissatisfaction on the part of Basayev towards Khattab earlier during the 'invasion' at the beginning of August, over his failure to attract Dagestanis to their cause.

Other pieces of information were also made public on 23 September, namely that three *boyeviki* of Khattab's organisation had been apprehended by the law enforcement organs in Neftekumskiy rayon of Stavropol' Kray. According to Stavropol' Kray's Economic and Social Security Council, around 100 young people from two rayony bordering Dagestan, Neftekumskiy and Stepnovskiy, had been recruited by the Wahhabis, many of whom went for specialist training in Chechnya.

It is interesting to note that during the week beginning Monday 20 September a meeting took place between leaders of the Chechen diaspora and the Plenipotentiary Representative of the Russian President for Stavropol', Aleksandr Korobeynikov. One of the results of this meeting was the decision to create a special information headquarters or staff which would work with the regional law enforcement services. The main objective of the diaspora would be to offer its good offices to the authorities in attempting to stabilise the situation which was constantly being

⁹⁴ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii – 23 September 1999.

⁹⁵ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii – 23 September 1999, p4.

⁹⁶ Later, during the intervention by Federal Forces into Chechnya in late spring - early summer 2000, there were reports about Basayev's almost unnatural greed for money.

disrupted by provocative acts. In the opinion of those participating in the meeting, it was made different in principle by the open and frank aspirations in creating conditions for a normal life and work of the thousands of Chechens who had been based in the Kray for generations. Members of the Chechen diaspora spoke in support of the official statements and addresses which condemned the criminal acts of the extremists in Dagestan and those carrying out sorties into the border areas of Stavropol'. All these terrorist acts perpetrated by *bandformirovaniya* from Chechnya tended to throw a dark shadow over Checheno-Stavropol' relations.

Obviously, Chechens who lived for generations in Stavropol' Kray had made a living there with a closer relationship with Russians and possibly benefiting during Soviet times in a way not enjoyed by their relations living in the mountain fastness of the Black Mountains in the south of Chechnya. So whilst a degree of scepticism needs to be retained over this report⁹⁷, one should also bear in mind the general feelings of Chechens living close to the right bank of the River Terek and certainly those who lived along the left bank, who were either lukewarm or absolutely against further conflict with Russia. One only has to remember the events of 1994 and the efforts of the Interim Council based in Nadterechnyy to overthrow Dudayev which ended in the abortive attack on Grozny on 26 November 1994. In contrast to relations between the Chechen diaspora in Stavropol' Kray, the Chechen diaspora in Moscow urged the Moscow and Russian mass media "*not to succumb to the provocations of those who are interested in unleashing anti-Chechen hysteria and are attempting to provide a sign of equality between the bandits and the Chechen people*"⁹⁸.

The Russian government information department announced on 23 September that the Prime Minister had signed an order providing assistance to individuals who had suffered from terrorist acts perpetrated in Tsumadinskiy and Botlikhskiy rayony. An outline of the funding from the government reserve fund to alleviate the dire conditions following the conflict in Avaristan is shown below.

Box 8 - Russian Government Assistance to Inhabitants of Avaristan⁹⁹

To Dagestani Government: Roubles 339.5 mln in compensation payments for the destruction and repair of houses, loss of family members and damage to health.

To Ministry for Emergency Situations: Roubles 9 mln for expenditure on food, technical-material resources and their delivery to Dagestan.

To Federal Migration Service: Roubles 19.7 mln for temporary accommodation and feeding of displaced citizens.

24 September 1999

Further evidence was really beginning to accumulate about Federal intentions towards Chechnya. The Federal anti-terrorist operation in the North Caucasus entered a new phase, namely "*a wide scale use of aviation against the bandit formations over the whole of Chechen territory*"¹⁰⁰. In daylight two Federal bombers unloaded bombs

⁹⁷ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii – 22 September 1999, p4.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii – 24 September 1999, p9.

¹⁰⁰ *Voyna v Dagestane. Khronika sobytii – Boyevyye deystviya 24 September 1999.*

on the Starpromyslovskiy district of Groznyy, the district in which the legally, freely elected President of Chechnya had his residence. According to reports from ITAR-TASS bombing raids were also conducted against oil installations, the Oktyabryskiy industrial district of Groznyy and a column of vehicles by Samashki. It was from this point that parallels started to be drawn between the air campaign in the Persian Gulf against Iraq, the NATO air operation against the Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia itself, with evidence of escalation by the Federal Centre. The Chechen government and parliament continued to implement plans for the defence of Chechnya against Federal military intervention.

Likewise, Federal Forces continued to regroup on the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border, taking measures to strengthen their position, with engineers developing defensive positions on dominating heights. Many observers, commenting on the concentration of Federal troops on the Chechen border, believed these measures were not so much connected to the construction of a 'cordon sanitaire' but to the possibility of a new invasion or intervention into the recalcitrant Chechen Republic by Federal forces. Despite the "*whole differences of opinion and assessment they coincided on one point: the conduct of a ground operation on Chechen territory was possible*"¹⁰¹. Their deductive reasoning for this was on the following lines. First, besides troops stationed in the North Caucasus in peacetime under the terms and within the limits of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE), "*the army grouping numbered up to 75,000 servicemen, 600 tanks, 2,200 BMP and 1000 artillery pieces*"¹⁰², the additional forces and means which had been drawn into the region for the counter-terrorist operation could make an increase over the CFE ceiling of no less than 50%. Secondly, up to this time, neither the military command nor the power-wielding structures had made any statement which could be regarded as fully excluding the possibility of a ground phase against the terrorists into Chechnya. Thirdly, there would be many problems over the creation of a 'cordon sanitaire', for Russia simply did not have the material, financial or the physical means to construct such a cordon. From the financial point of view, "*a cordon of some 850 km around Chechnya would cost in the region of 6 to 10 mlrd roubles which would be the equivalent of around 10% of the whole military budget of 1999*"¹⁰³. Moreover, it would need no less than 3 to 4 divisions of Internal Troops to be permanently deployed on it for 'cordon' duties.

There were other pressing considerations arising from the concept of a ground phase of armed intervention into Chechnya. Given the bitter experience of the campaigns of November-December 1994, that if there was to be an armed intervention it must be carried out this autumn, before the arrival of fog and rain, in other words, before the onset of the time when air support would be at minimum effectiveness due to bad weather conditions. In the North Caucasus this meant that there would only be six weeks before the weather closed in completely. Air support was deemed to be vital to reduce casualties. In the first year of the first Russo-Chechen conflict in recent times, Russian casualties amounted to: 1,800 servicemen killed, three aircraft, 10 helicopters, more than 200 ACVs and 60 tanks. In the two months of battles in Dagestan, August and September 1999, the losses were given as: 230 servicemen killed, 1 aircraft, six helicopters, no less than 30 ACVs and 10 tanks. From the political viewpoint, the sooner the situation was sorted the better:

¹⁰¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 178, 24 September 1999, p1, "*Voyna v Chechne vozmozhna*" by Andrey Sergut.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

the successful eradicator of the hornets' nest would gain public support in the forthcoming Duma and Presidential elections.

Every important economic object was put under increased protection. By far the largest number of Federal Forces were concentrated on the Kizlyar direction where, according to reconnaissance, they faced significant forces of fighters. The massing of Russian troops in the area of Kizlyar at this time was another indicator that the Dagestani 'front', as opposed to the Western front, would probably be the first to be activated in the forthcoming armed intervention onto Chechen territory, since from Kizlyar itself there was no requirement to cross the River Terek. It was a straightforward matter to cross the Chechen border and roll down the route Borozdikovskaya - Dubovskaya - Karagalinskaya - Kurdyukovskaya - Starogladkovskaya - Voskresenskoye - Grebenskaya to Shelkovskaya, with the additional forces coming in further from the east via Oktyabr'skoye using the Grebenskiy bridge over the River Terek.

Further indications in the escalating cycle of pre-intervention bombardment by artillery and aviation that intervention was imminent were not only the increasing scale of strikes on Groznyy airport and on a whole series of other objects, but also the news that a meeting had taken place on 23 September at Vnukovo-2 airport situated just outside Moscow between leaders of the MVD, the Ministry for Emergency Situations and the Ministry of Defence and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Many observers came to believe that it was at this point that the decision was taken to widen the scope and intensity of air raids on Chechnya, for on 24 September at 1025 hrs front aviation which included Su-24 and Su-25 fighter bombers again took part in air raids on the Oktyabr'skiy district of Groznyy, where the 'Novosti' correspondent reported in somewhat dramatic terms that there was *"the deafening roar of aircraft flying at low level"*¹⁰⁴; all part of a programme to intimidate the civilian population. Earlier Vladimir Putin had emphasised that *"the general situation is that the bandits will be pursued to wherever they are located. If they have appeared at the airport, that means the airport"*¹⁰⁵. A representative from the Russian Ministry of Defence repeated the phrase that the bandits would be destroyed wherever they were to be found. At a press conference in Kazakhstan, Prime Minister Putin denied the charge that Russia was carrying on a civil war: *"this was not a civil war, but a war declared by international terrorism on Russia with the aim of dismembering and detaching territories rich in mineral resources - the means for this war are directed from the rebellious Chechen Republic, the stronghold of terrorists"*¹⁰⁶.

Vladimir Rushaylo, the Minister for Internal Affairs, took up the same theme at the first all-Russia meeting on the campaign against organised crime on 24 September in Moscow, stating that *"Organised crime, including foreign, leaning on the Chechen bridgehead has developed widescale, subversive activity against Russia"*¹⁰⁷. Furthermore, he believed that the foreign organisers of criminal acts in the North Caucasus region wanted to establish control over oil resources in the Caucasus to

¹⁰⁴ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii - 24 September 1999, p7.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

obtain additional finance, including a widening of terrorist activities. At a press conference in Dagestan the Interior Minister (Dagestan) Adul'geriy Magomedtagirov announced that international arrest warrants had been issued against the brothers Shamil' and Shirvani Basayev, Khattab, Abdallo Aliyev, Magomed Tagayev, Zharulla Gadzhimagomedov and others¹⁰⁸. Two others had already been arrested, namely Magomed Khasaymirsayev and Ramazan Cheerov.

The explosions in Moscow, Buynaksk and Volgodonsk in a shopping mall, apartment blocks and military married quarters must all be borne in mind, all of which helped to provide a supportive boost for government action against Chechnya. Particularly interesting is a report which emanated from the FSB in Moscow. General Aleksandr Zdanovich, Chief of FSB Public Communications¹⁰⁹, stated on the television programme "Hero of the Day" referring to the explosions mentioned above that he could not prove the involvement of a single Chechen¹¹⁰, but he could not exclude the fact that the perpetrators had an escape route. There was the possibility of going into hiding in CIS countries but the most likely scenario was that they had returned to their 'bosses' in Chechnya. Almost following the lines of some third rate spy novel he added, "*We have definite sources of information on the territory of Chechnya and we know what goes on there*"¹¹¹. General Zdanovich emphasised that the FSB knew about people who were planning and carrying out terrorist acts, taking part in illegal financial operations, kidnapping and holding hostages to ransom and preparing explosions.

Whilst earlier on in this paper some space was allotted to the problems and deficiencies of the Federal secret services, it should not be forgotten that since the arrival of Bol'shevik Communist power from 1921 onwards¹¹², there had been a large network of Russian or Russian-managed secret service 'operatives' and informers in Chechnya. However, according to General Zdanovich "*from 1991 to 1994 the FSK actually did not carry out any operational work on the territory of this republic, but after 1994 we performed definable work*"¹¹³. This may well be why the attempted coup operation against the Dudayev regime in Chechnya on 26 November 1994 ended in complete and dismal failure, exhibiting all the hallmarks of poor preparation and lack of attention to detail. Even during the first Chechen war and the period preceding the second Russo-Chechen conflict there is no doubt that links were maintained between Moscow and shadowy figures in Grozny, Gudermes and elsewhere in Chechnya. It will be remembered that often reference was made to a 'third force'.

¹⁰⁸ Shamil' and Shirvani Basayev and Khattab had taken part in the first 'invasion into Dagestan. Shirvani Basayev was rumoured to have been wounded in that invasion.

¹⁰⁹ Nachal'nik Tsentra Obshchestvennykh Svyazey (TsOS) FSB Rossii.

¹¹⁰ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii - 24 September 1999, p9.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Abdurakhman Auturkhanov, "The Chechen & The Ingush During the Soviet Period", p154, in "Russia in the North Caucasus Barrier: The Russian Advance Towards the Muslim World" edited by Dr Marie Bennigsen Broxup, 1992, Hurst & Co Ltd, London.

¹¹³ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii - 24 September 1999, p10.

Similarly, and certainly since the end of the first Russo-Chechen conflict in recent times, another phrase has obtained a certain currency, namely “*Chechenskiy sled*”¹¹⁴, about which General Zdanovich also offered an explanation. He emphasised that a Chechen footprint (*sled*) did not signify that anyone blamed or condemned the population of Chechnya or Aslan Maskhadov, for “*we condemn specific criminals, terrorists who are located on Chechen territory. That is where the name Chechen footprint comes from*”¹¹⁵.

25 September 1999

The operational summary of the OGV press centre covering the last 24 hours gave optimistic indications that there was a marked tendency towards a stabilisation of the situation in Dagestan. Federal Forces and power organs continued to control the situation. Further measures towards reinforcing the Chechen border continued to be under way. Federal Forces’ subunits had now created a reliable system of fire support which allowed interdiction of approaches to populated points. In the zones of previous combat operations, namely Botlikhskiy, Tsumadinskiy, Buynakskiy and Novolakskiy rayony, sapper subunits carried out mine clearance operations along roads and the terrain, destroying ammunition and explosive materials. Over the last 24 hours mine clearance groups had located and destroyed more than 7,000 artillery shells¹¹⁶, mortar bombs, grenades, engineer mines, fougasses and ‘home-made’ explosive devices. The OGV press centre also stated that *bandformirovaniya* in Chechnya were preparing for a new level or phase of combat operations. Fighter detachments continued to be ‘topped up’ with foreign mercenaries. Propaganda efforts were being stepped up in Chechen rayony bordering Stavropol’ Kray. The administration of these rayony, using nationalistic slogans, invited Chechen youths to enlist in Home Guard detachments and to participate in a change of the border of Chechnya and Stavropol’ Kray. Pamphlets urging all Muslims to join a ‘holy jihad against Russians’ were distributed in the populated points of Yamangoy, Artezian, Nabrguz and Kayasula.

In the campaign against terrorism Russian structures switched to unprecedented measures, not only in scale but also in method. Evidence of this was the wide scale checking of the readiness of the law enforcement organs before their commitment to battle and the buildup of bomb-missile strikes on *boyeviki* bases in Chechnya. The detailed checking revealed serious shortcomings in the operations of all the power-wielding structures, including local FSB organs, to the regret of General Zdanovich, for law enforcement organs had not reacted to noting terrorists in several towns. A special operation was carried out in the Gunib rayon by MVD forces and other Dagestani law enforcement organs. The operation was directed at protecting the inhabitants of this region in the central part of Dagestan from religious extremists, namely Wahhabis. Whilst details were not commented upon, it was believed that the operation involved the seizure of religious propaganda literature, for instance the writings of people such as Magomed Tagayev, weapons, explosive substances and caches. A source commented that this was the first special precautionary measure to be carried out since the Law “Forbidding extremist activity on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan” came into force following the recent session of the Dagestan National Assembly. The result of the operation was that more than 20

¹¹⁴ “Chechen footprint”.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Natsional’naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii – 25 September 1999, p11.

Wahhaby leaders were apprehended in a series of villages, namely Kudali, Bykhta, Sogratil' and some other villages, where a large number of weapons were also seized.

Federal aviation on 25 September continued to carry out air raids on Groznyy, notably on Oktyabr'skiy and Staropromyslovskiy districts, where according to the Chechen Presidential operational headquarters bombs fell on an oil storage facility, resulting in the ignition of its contents. Similarly, the Chechen Headquarters maintained that during the night of 24/25 September the villages of Ishkhoy-Yurt and Tsatsan-Yurt were subjected to bombing raids. Figures relating to the scale of the operation conducted by the air grouping of the Federal Air Force were also released.

Box 9 - Federal Air Operation against Illegal Bandit Formations
3 August-24 September 1999¹¹⁷

Scale of operation

More than 1,700 operational sorties

Results

Liquidated: 2,000 fighters; more than 250 strong points; 150 bases, training centres and assembly areas; more than 60 armoured vehicles; more than 20 air defence equipments; more than 20 ammunition dumps; 20 fuel dumps; more than 10 mortar detachments, more than 30 enemy fire points.

Destroyed: More than 30 bridges; 6 radio transmitters and 4 radio-relay stations; mining has destroyed over 250 km of mountain roads.

Degree of Destruction Achieved: 50-80% of designated objects.

Both Su-24 bombers and Su-25 fighter-bombers of front aviation participated in these operations. Their main types of armament are shown below.

Box 10 - Main Types of Armament used by Su-24 and Su-25¹¹⁸

Su-24: guided air to ground missiles with a passive, infra-red self guiding warhead; and guided bombs of 7.5 to 8 tonne.

Su-25: armed with 4 missiles with laser guidance, missiles and 500 kilogram bombs.

Colonel-General Anatoliy Kornukov, Commander in Chief of the Russian Air Force, announced to journalists that the air grouping would continue to inflict strikes on objects and targets situated on the territory of the Chechen Republic until such a task had been carried out to the satisfaction of the Supreme Commander of the Russian Armed Forces, Boris Yel'tsin, President of the Russian Federation, and the Head of the Government Vladimir Putin. Kornukov also categorically denied media reports that the Russian Air Force had been bombing civilian targets on the territory of the Chechen Republic. At around 1600 hrs news came in that a helicopter belonging to Internal Troops Russia had crashed in Tsumadinskiy rayon of Dagestan due to a technical fault.

¹¹⁷ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii - 25 September 1999, p2.

¹¹⁸ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 179, 25 September 1999, p1, "Voyna bez vykhodnykh" by Valeriy Aleksin and Aleksandr Shaburkin.

Meanwhile in Chechnya President Maskhadov held a special meeting with the heads of the Chechen power structures to evaluate the increasingly dire situation in the republic. As reported by the President's secretary, Selim Abdulmuslimov, Aslan Maskhadov had approached the OSCE and the European Council requesting the dispatch of an expert commission to evaluate the situation in the republic. It had become known to RIA "Novosti" from British journalistic sources that Mayrbek Vachagayev had visited London on 24 September 1999 as a 'high ranking emissary of the Chechen government'¹¹⁹, where he made a speech at the London School of Economics and on 25 September met a group of British journalists to try to enlist their support for his country. Shamil' Basayev announced that the aims and activities of his 'colleagues' were not limited to the establishment of 'one Dagestan', for his main objective was the liberation of the whole of the Caucasus. He had vowed to establish an Islamic Republic in the North Caucasus which would include Chechnya and Dagestan. At the same time he took the opportunity of repudiating any suggestion that the *boyeviki* were in any way involved in the terrorist acts in Moscow and Volgodonsk¹²⁰. It is interesting to note that there was no mention of denial over the explosion in Buynaksk in his statement.

26 September 1999

Tension began to arise on the border between Chechnya and Ingushetia. Movement along the Federal Kavkaz autoroute was completely blocked by columns of vehicles with refugees which stretched for several kilometres. They were trying to travel in the direction of Ingushetia from Groznyy and from the border areas between Chechnya and Dagestan. From 26 September the Ingush authorities closed the border, preventing the entry of vehicles carrying refugees. On the border post between Sernovodskaya and Sleptsovka they explained that the introduction of this measure was due to the fact that the Ingush Republic was not in any way able to take the necessary measures to cater for the forced migrants from Chechnya¹²¹. According to the Ingush Migration Service Ministry in just the last few days more than 10,000 refugees had arrived. As a result of Federal armed intervention into Chechnya from October onwards, more than 200,000 Chechen refugees, the old, women and children were to seek sanctuary in Ingushetia.

More information began to emerge about the likelihood and the possible variations of any land operation which might be undertaken by the OGV. The Defence Minister of the Russian Federation, Marshal Igor' Sergeyev, in a meeting with journalists whilst on a visit to wounded Russian servicemen at the Burdenko military hospital, did not entirely exclude the possibility of carrying out a ground operation in Chechnya where the main objective would be the liquidation of bandits and the creation of a security zone around Chechnya. Marshal Sergeyev later came to admit that the military authorities were planning several variants of a ground intervention into Chechnya. He did not designate the time and date of such an intervention but as Andrey Korbut wrote, "*if a ground operation were to begin within a week, then it would have a local character and in the first place would pursue aims*

¹¹⁹ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis , terakty v Rossii - 25 September 1999, p4.

¹²⁰ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis , terakty v Rossii - 25 September 1999, p3.

¹²¹ See Blandy, "*Chechen Connections: An End to Conflict in Chechnya?*", P25 CSRC, August 1997, p28.

connected with creating a 'cordon sanitaire' around Chechnya"¹²². The General Staff had already announced that it was not planning to conduct wide scale operations similar to the ones carried out in 1994-1996. President Vladimir Putin and the Deputy Chief of the General Staff Colonel General Valeriy Manilov had also expressed themselves in a similar vein.

Maybe it is at this stage just prior to intervention that signs of differences between the Minister of Defence and the Chief of the General Staff become more noticeable, for Marshal Sergeyev concretely maintained that his department was planning the 'creation of a security zone with adequate depth'¹²³. Intervention by Federal forces was that intervention with the objective of taking over the whole of the rebellious republic was unlikely, simply due to the fact that there were not enough troops, even if a greater number of reserve forces were produced. Therefore, it began to look at this stage as if only part of Chechnya would be occupied. The plan that was being talked about was the occupation of the northern part of Chechnya, namely along the left bank of the River Terek, in some ways reminiscent of the Mozdok Line (1763) to Kizlyar along the left bank of the Terek as part of the Caucasus Fortified Lines¹²⁴. Occupation of Chechen lands north of the Terek would be a much easier option than the one undertaken in 1994. Occupation of the northern region of Chechnya would provide an early boost to the Federal authorities and government in Moscow. The creation of a 'cordon sanitaire' along the River Terek would considerably reduce the cost to Moscow in localising the conflict with the Chechen bandit formations.

Whilst occupation of the northern part of Chechnya was an obvious scenario, the question still remained as to when would the operation start. A multi-scenario ground operation by the *Federaly* could be implemented depending on how the situation would evolve. Sergeyev's hint also seemed to suggest that the military department as yet had no clear cut concept of operations. The statement by Colonel General Yuriy Baluyevskiy, Head of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff, First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, that "*It was not excluded generally that troops will not go into Chechnya*"¹²⁵ tended to increase uncertainties about a possible intervention operation. It raised questions about why the troops were being regrouped and concentrated there.

Was the absence of any firm announcement designed to be some form of deception about Federal intentions, to achieve surprise when the blow was struck? Whilst a *maskirovka* plan embracing the whole scope of deception measures would undoubtedly form part of any military operation, could it also be that the military were hostages to some larger and deeper political plan which had nothing to do with the real situation in and around Chechnya and Dagestan but more to do with the wishes and desires of one or other political group in Moscow who were interested in objectives far removed from those which were dictating the military situation. Sources from the General Staff gave a sensible explanation as to why the preliminaries of possible intervention into Chechnya were being so prolonged, for

¹²² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 180, 28 September 1999, p1, "*Plany sukhoputnoy operatsii*" by Andrey Korbut and Il'ya Kedrov.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* Volume 19, 1953, p274, "Kavkazskiye Ukreplennyye Linii" – Caucasus Fortified Lines.

¹²⁵ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, No 180, 28 September 1999, p1.

they were actually connected to ensuring proper preparation of troops unlike in 1994, matters which entailed proper logistic backing, the organisation of cooperation and coordination, and that most important aspect of any military operation - reconnaissance. In an interview on the television programme 'Zerkalo' RTR, Colonel-General Yuriy Baluyevskiy said that most of the main terrorist bases were known already; these were in the Urus-Martan, Shatoyskiy and Shalinovskiy rayony.

27 September 1999

Each day brought new details which tended to confirm the view that the *Federaly* were not confining their operations to an aerial campaign of bombing objects on Chechen territory but were getting ready for a ground operation. Over the last 24 hours in Dagestan the OGV had not conducted any active combat operations; furthermore the situation in Dagestan remained fully under the control of Federal Forces and the local law enforcement organs. Over the whole administrative border additional precautionary measures to improve the defensive system had been implemented. Sapper subunits mined approaches to defence locations. Internal Troops and militia continued their tasks at check points along the Checheno-Dagestan administrative border. Artillery was ready to answer 'calls for fire'. Aviation had inflicted accurate strikes on television centres, fuel storage facilities, *bandformirovaniya* strong points on Chechen territory; 38 sorties on 25 September, and 37 on 26 September. As a result the threats of reprisals against the families of the aviators were continually growing. Higher states of security were implemented on airfields with increased guard posts and patrols. These additional security measures were reflected in military townships where pilots and technical personnel lived, with the implementation of a strict pass-control system. Fighter aircraft on airfields closest to Chechnya had been put on a state of permanent readiness. A weapons dump and command post belonging to one of the *bandformirovaniya* south of the village of Urus-Martan, and *boyeviki* vehicles in the area of Zandak in Nozhay-Yurtovskiy rayon were destroyed together with two bridges over the River Argun. Bombs were also dropped on the television centre, oil storage facilities and other oil installations in Groznyy.

28 September 1999

In Dagestan, areas bordering Chechnya and in large towns such as the capital Makhachkala, Kizlyar, Khasavyurt, Buynaksk and Kizilyurt, militia personnel carried out general checks on registration of citizens, hotel checks, vehicle parks such as the caravanserai at Khasavyurt, railway stations, bus and railway terminuses. A typical discovery of the illegal movement of weapons was made by the Transport Militia mobile group when they stopped and searched an "IZH-Jupiter" motor cycle sidecar combination not far from the Karlanyurt-Kizlyar railway section bypassing Chechnya. There were three inhabitants from Babayurtovskiy rayon, and in the sidecar two light machine guns, one grenade launcher, six grenades, three shells, explosive material, 16 fully charged magazines, a silencer, and a camouflage smock¹²⁶.

A step of perhaps long term significance was that Premier Putin held a meeting with the Interior Ministry heads of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in Moscow, at which Colonel General Vladimir Rushaylo was also present. Representatives at the meeting were: Kakha Targamadze from Georgia, Suren Abramyan from Armenia and

¹²⁶ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis , terakty v Rossii - 28 September 1999, p4.

Ramil' Usubov from Azerbaijan. The theme of the meeting was that if the CIS states joined forces against terrorism then the terrorists would not stand a chance. Premier Putin remarked that at the moment over the whole expanse of the space occupied by the FSU in many places international terrorism had declared war on the peaceful population, so it was vital that the cooperation process between the Internal Ministries was developed further with "*the creation of a single anti-terrorist centre on the base of law enforcement organs, created within the framework of the CIS*"¹²⁷. Vladimir Putin stressed the necessity for the pooling and exchange of information, since "*its absence hinders the work and terrorism must not be left any chances*". The acquisition and exchange of information is vital in any campaign against subversive activities or the fight against naked terrorism. Here, Vladimir Putin's KGB experience came into its own. Whilst these steps were obviously formulated to be of greater benefit to Russia, they would also be of use to Armenia, since Basayev and others had already indicated during their incursions into Dagestan that having liberated Dagestan their next step would be the liberation of occupied Muslim lands, such as Nagornyy Karabakh and other areas of Azeri territory occupied by Armenian forces. Azerbaijan, acting not only as a corridor linking Turkey to Chechnya in the movement of people, arms and ammunition, but also as a conduit for wounded *boyeviki* on their way for rest and recuperation in Turkey or elsewhere in the Middle East, might be in a position to provide information on the movement of Chechens but also of potential recruits coming from Pakistan and Afghanistan and moving northwards across the Samur River into Dagestan.

Information exchange between Georgia and Russia would help Russian efforts to interdict cross-border movement on the Checheno-Georgia frontier in the south of Chechnya and also between Georgia and Dagestan. Of great interest to Moscow would also be any indications of movement of Chechen sympathisers from Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo, or even from Ukraine, making their way to the North Caucasus in support of a Muslim *jihad* against Russia. Border Troops of the North Caucasus Regional Directorate (NCRU) of the Federal Border Service took under their protection two sectors of the administrative border with Chechnya, which were linked to the Russo-Georgian state border. One was in Dagestan, in Tsumadinskiy rayon, and the other was in the Dzheyrakhskiy rayon of Ingushetia.

29 September 1999

As each day passed it was becoming more and more obvious that Federal Forces were about to cross over into Chechnya: "*It is not excluded that the special operation could begin in the very near future or has already begun in Chechnya against the bandformirovaniya with the participation of ground forces*"¹²⁸. Whilst the roar of Russian aircraft at low level came to be associated with an increasingly ferocious air bombardment of Grozny, its airport and suburbs, supplemented by the crump of artillery interdiction on routes in the border areas of Chechnya, the news was released from Makhachkala that armour had advanced toward Zandak in the east of Chechnya. Moreover, according to information from Grozny, a Russian armoured column was observed some three kilometres from the village of Bamut on Chechen territory in the west. The Russian Ministry of Defence press service neither confirmed nor denied these reports. A later statement from a competent source in the Ministry of Defence said that there were numerous variants for a ground

¹²⁷ Ibid, p2.

¹²⁸ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis , terakty v Rossii - 29 September 1999, p1.

operation in Chechnya, it all depended on the operational situation which was developing at the time, but “*in any case no one intends to storm Grozny*”¹²⁹, a statement which was to be repeated several times in the next two months or so and believed by nobody.

On the morning of 29 September Russian aircraft unleashed another raid of bombs and missiles on the southern suburban districts of Grozny. The village of Berdykel' situated some 10 km from Grozny and the village of Mesker-Yurt in Shalimskiy rayon were subjected to air raids; the town of Argun suffered mass air strikes, as did the Chechen oil network and the engineering factory “Krasnyy Molot”. According to the Chechen operational headquarters mass bombing and artillery strikes were inflicted on Chechen border areas close to Dagestan at Ishkhoy-Yurt, Meskety, Zamay-Yurt and Galayty. The republic had been without electricity for over 24 hours. Russian military sources explained the reasons for bombing oil installations in Chechnya: these oil related enterprises and oil storage facilities belonged to the leaders of the bandit formations. The military also maintained that part of the revenue from the production and sale of fuel in Chechnya was directed towards the purchase of arms and ammunition. A representative of one of the Russian secret services stated that the switch of *bandformirovaniya* to winter in the mountainous area of Georgia at Svanety had already begun.

It should also be remembered that efforts were still being made by President Maskhadov to prevent a new war breaking out in the Caucasus. A possible meeting between him and Magomedali Magomedov of Dagestan which should have taken place on 29 September failed to materialise, since the inhabitants of Novolakskiy and Khasavyurtovskiy rayony of Dagestan blocked the road leading to Khasavyurt to prevent any such meeting. The residents in these two rayony felt that the situation at the time did not warrant a meeting, as the Chechen President should have been ready much earlier to begin talks during the time of the *boyeviki* ‘invasion’ into Dagestan. The circle surrounding Shamil’ Basayev had expressed complete indifference to the possible meeting in Khasavyurt. Field commanders maintained that in the present situation Maskhadov did not have the power to change anything; real power lay in the hands of the field commanders such as Shamil’ Basayev, Khattab and their supporters. Maskhadov's authority had practically been reduced to zero.

30 September 1999

In *Obshchaya Gazeta* an article appeared by Viktor Litovkin giving details of the formations and units of Federal Forces which were being concentrated around the borders of the ‘mutinous’ republic.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p7.

Table 1 - Federal Forces Concentrated around Chechen Borders¹³⁰

Peace Location	Fmn or Unit	MOD/MVD	Strength	Tanks	ACVs	Arty eqpt
Stavropol' Budennovsk	205 Separate MR Bde	MOD	4,076	T-72 - 50	191 (BTR 80 - 33)	23
Vladikavkaz / Prokhladnyy	MR Bdes/regt	MOD				
Novorossiysk	7 AB Div ¹³¹	MOD				
Volgograd	20 MR Div	MVD	10,844	T-72 - 93	340	99
Nizniy Novgorod	3 MR Div ¹³²	MOD	10,850 on estbt	T-80 - 251 (majority)	494	134
Buynaksk (Dagestan)	136 Separate MR Bde	MOD	3,762	23	237	24

It became known on 30 September that the air raids carried out by Russian aircraft on the evening before had put out of action the very largest dam or weir situated on the River Argun close to the village of Staryye Atagi. With a direct hit by several bombs the bridge on top of the dam was completely destroyed. Colonel Islam Khasukhanov, Deputy Chief of the Chechen Presidential operational headquarters, stated that the same flight of aircraft had earlier subjected a bridge two kilometres further downstream to a rocket-bomb attack. Through the last 24 hours nine bridges had been completely destroyed over the Rivers Argun, Terek and Dzhalka. The dam and water reservoir known known as the Groznyy reservoir was situated in the southern part of Groznyy by the settlement of Chernorech'ye. From 29 September the supply of water into the seven channels which went into the Argunsko-Khankal'skiy reservoir was terminated.

The Chechen Minister of Defence Magomed Khambiyev told journalists that in the event of an invasion by Federal Forces the war would affect Russia. He confirmed that under his command he had "50,000 well armed fighters who were trained to operate in the rear of Russian troops"¹³³. A report from "Ekho Moskvyy" radio stated

¹³⁰ *Obshchaya Gazeta*, 30 September 1999 electronic version "Generaly gotovyatsya vypolnit' lyuboy prikaz, no pokoryat' Chechnyu poka ne khotyat" by Viktor Litovkin. However this list, as the author himself states, did not take into account Naval Infantry battalions from the Northern, Baltic and Pacific Fleets, regiments from the Taman MR Div and Kantemirov Tank Div from Podmoskviye, artillery battalions from heavy artillery brigades. The list still remains incomplete. See M J Orr "Some Provisional Notes on Current Russian Operations in Dagestan and Chechnya", 3 December 1999, and Dr Stephen J Main "North Caucasus Military District: Defending Russia's Interests in the Caucasus (1996-August 1999)", CSRC A101, June 2000, p43. Appendix Two includes the following main formations and units absent from Litovkin's list: **Internal Troops MVD** - 102 Op Bde MVD (Makhachkala); Indep Regt MVD (Kursk region); Independent Operations Division MVD (Vladikavkaz): **MOD** - 21 MR Div (Volgograd); 21 AB Bde (Stavropol'); HQ 58 Army - military airfield and base (Mozdok); Special Int Bde GRU (Rostov-on-Don); two heli regts (Kizlyar and Mozdok); two offensive Air Force sqns (Krasnodar and Volgograd).

¹³¹ See Orr, op cit. In all a total of five airborne subunits (battalions) were supplied from 7 Guards Airborne Division (Novorossiysk) 76 GABDiv (Pskov), 98 GABDiv (Ivanovo), 106 GABDiv (Tula).

¹³² See Orr, op cit with regard to manning problems of 3 MR Div.

¹³³ Natsional'naya Elektronnyaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis, terakty v Rossii - 30 September 1999, p3.

that President Aslan Maskhadov as Supreme Commander would personally conduct the defence of the republic. It also became known that three fronts had been formed, one of which, the Eastern Front, would be commanded by Shamil' Basayev. Meanwhile, according to an announcement by Magdi Gadzhiyev, Secretary of the Dagestan Security Council, the ground operation could be started at any time.

The headquarters of the OGV reported that over the last 24 hour period Federal aviation had completed almost 40 sorties into the area of Chechnya. For bombing the bridges across the Argun, Terek and Dzhalka Rivers, Su-25 fighter bombers were used in four sorties and Su-24 of front aviation made six sorties. Eighteen flights were directed against training centres and camps belonging to the *boyeviki*. In all two training camps, three checkpoints, a Kamaz HGV with armaments, a field camp, a strong point and two bridges were destroyed. Su-25s began to be used in the free-hunting role on the look-out for terrorists. Russian aircraft in every 24 hour period were now completing some 50-55 sorties, which included photographic reconnaissance, and missile strikes with laser guided bombs on ammunition dumps, POL storage systems, camps and training centres, concentrations of *boyeviki* and radar systems. Typical of the destruction being wrought from the air occurred over the period 26/27 September, when Su-25 fighter-bombers bombed plants, installations and enterprises connected with the oil industry in Oktyabr'skiy and Staropromyslovskiy districts of Groznyy, setting alight to oil reserves amounting to more than 7,000 tonnes. According to Colonel-General Anatoliy Kornukov the Russian Air Force had completed more than 1,700 aircraft sorties (of which 1,300 were combat sorties) and furthermore "there was not one on a populated point in Chechnya"¹³⁴. Perhaps the visible spectacle of utter desolation and ruin tells another story.

1 October 1999 - Start of Intervention into Chechnya

On 1 October 1999 an armoured column of Federal Forces crossed the border with Chechnya penetrating Chechen territory to a depth of 5 km. The crossing of the administrative border took place within Naurskiy and Shelkovskiy rayony of Chechnya, north of the River Terek. According to information from the Chechen side, the Federal armoured column stretched for more than 8 km. Russian armour which crossed the border into Naurskiy and Shelkovskiy rayony started to dig themselves in. Chechen Home Guard detachments and subunits occupied defensive positions, digging trenches and shelters around populated points. Whilst the Ministry of Defence RF in Dagestan refuted the news that a Federal armoured column had crossed into Chechnya, the General Representative of Chechnya in Moscow Mayrbek Vachegayev in an interview with "Ekho Moskvyy" confirmed that the border had been crossed by Federal troops¹³⁵. Over the course of the last 24 hours Federal front aviation completed 30 combat sorties, according to the OGV press centre; strikes with laser guided bombs and missiles were used against the *boyeviki*, river crossings, bridges, ammunition dumps, and oil installations which belonged to Chechen terrorist leaders.

Russian ground forces subunits had begun their push forward in depth into Chechnya in all directions. The Chechen Minister for Security Turpal Atgeriyev confirmed that a Russian armoured column had crossed the border and was orientated on the Shelkovskiy and Naurskiy directions reaching the villages of

¹³⁴ *Obshchaya Gazeta*, 30 September 1999 electronic version, "Generaly gotovyatsya vpolnit' lyuboy prikaz, no pokoryat' Chechnyu poka ne khotyat" by Viktor Litovkin.

¹³⁵ Natsional'naya Elektronnaya Biblioteka: Kavkazskiy krizis , terakty v Rossii - 1 October 1999, p1.

Kirovo, Severnaya, Sary-Su and Karagalinskaya, and that from Novolakskiy rayon of Dagestan Russian units had penetrated to a depth of 5 km in Nozhayurtovskiy rayony. Atgeriyev also confirmed that battles were raging by the settlement of Daragorsk on the Checheno-Ingush border; there had been casualties in personnel and equipment belonging to both sides. Box 11 below provides a few insights into the workings of a Federal subunit in the area of Galayty, Zamay-Yurt and Meskety.

Box 11 - Insights from Elements of Federal Forces on the Chechen Border¹³⁶

The route into the assault battalion's zone of responsibility which covered around 10 kilometres of the Chechen-Dagestan border not far from Khasavyurt lay along steep mountain roads. Everywhere there were signs that a war had taken place. Furthermore there were the uncleared bloated carcasses of cattle which had trodden on mines, destroyed houses and farms, remains of burnt out equipment. Heavier breathing as awareness increases of approaching war in the headquarters tent of the battalion commander. The officers' supper, by tradition no departure without the frontline 100 grams for victory, the radio operator interrupts: "In the zone of responsibility of one of the companies, from the side of Chechnya six BTRs are moving". Maybe our spetsnaz are moving back, and perhaps not ours. It requires clarifying, quickly communicate with the regimental commander.

The established silence was broken only by tank fire. Shells flew into the side of the Chechen village of Meskety situated in the depression below. The movement of goods vehicles was noticed there. All the local inhabitants from the two villages situated below the company - Meskety and Galayty - had left long ago.

300 metres below us, as on palm trees lies the small Chechen village of Galayty, a touch further, beyond the river, somewhat bigger, a kilometre away the village of Meskety follows the course of the river. The abundance in both villages of very rich houses hits one in the eye. How strikingly different they are from the ones in Dagestan!

As the curtain begins to fall on the events that have taken place in Dagestan over the last two months, comprising the three phases of the Federal counter-terrorist operation, it is perhaps apposite to mention some of the concerns expressed by people other than the military or journalists before Federal Forces undertook the step of crossing the Chechen border.

Aleksey Arbatov, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Defence asked these questions amongst others: "*Is it possible to say that today we are better prepared for a war in Chechnya than we were some five years ago?*"; "*Are our power structures ready for a victorious war in Chechnya?*"¹³⁷. Arbatov's view was that regrettably the Dagestan operation had shown the opposite to be the case. He cited the fact that the FSB, judged as a whole, did not have sufficient confirmed information about the preparation for an 'invasion' by the Chechen bandit formations. On the performance of Internal Troops in Dagestan, "*Had there been a demonstration of high military art?*" Judging by what a group of Deputies from the State Duma had seen on a visit to the combat zone in Dagestan there was much to remind them of the confusion and muddle of the 1994-1996 conflict: in particular the troop grouping response to the conflict had been slow, on the required sectors there were not enough forces, troop control and direction were uncoordinated. But

¹³⁶ *Bratyshka*, No 11, November 1999, p20, "*Temnyye nochi, da tol'ko ne v Sochi*" by Konstantin Rashchepkin.

¹³⁷ *Obshchaya Gazeta*, 30 September 1999 electronic version, "*Ne vykhod v odnu voynu dvazhdy*" by Aleksey Arbatov, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Defence, Doctor of Historical Science.

the most important matter was that in the theatre of military operations, despite the previous Chechen experience, the Command was neither skilful nor did it wish to apply tactics for combat operations against partisan formations in mountainous terrain. Populated points freed from *bojeviki* were subjected to massive destruction. Casualties suffered by government troops and Dagestani Home Guard were completely incompatible with the scale of the operation. For one and a half months of battles in three small isolated areas of Dagestan the *Federaly* lost more than 250 men killed and 800 wounded. Arbatov also made the point that these figures were twice the casualties of the anti-Iraq coalition in Operation Desert Storm. In Dagestan the group of Deputies became acquainted with the deplorable conditions under which Russian soldiers had to live and fight. Moreover there were deficiencies in weapons and communications.

Looking over the 'front line' into Chechnya, Arbatov believed that the Chechen armed forces over the last three years had become somewhat stronger than they were in the previous conflict, as President Maskhadov was to remark later. This was due to the addition of assets, weapons and equipment, much of which had come from abroad. In fact from a military point of view the Chechens had a professional, well armed, superbly trained, well paid separatist army. At the moment the field commanders had 'under arms' 20,000 to 30,000 'regular' soldiers, but they could very quickly increase their number, having mobilised literally all the men and teenagers. Those lads who were 13 years old during the first conflict were now 18-19 years old. A whole generation had grown up which was accustomed to being under the bullet; from childhood they had learnt to shoot, to lay mines, to destroy tanks. They were skilled at fighting and did so with pleasure.

Possibly these remarks of Arbatov encapsulate the situation from the Russian point of view: *"Of course, Russia is bigger and more powerful, and if it wants to wipe Chechnya off the face of the earth, it has sufficient forces and means. But such a mindless task - to finish off the bandits at the expense of a whole people does not hold [water]. Once again the Army will be doomed to conducting an exhausting anti-partisan war, which with its old tactics has practically no chance of winning"*¹³⁸, but in fact armed intervention was to demonstrate wholesale obliteration.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

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Fax : (44) 1276 686880

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