

Russia's Chechen War Continues

Research Paper 95/41

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The background to and initial phases of the war in Chechnya were described in Research Paper 95/4 *Russia and the Chechens*. The present paper seeks to complement that one by providing an account of subsequent developments and of the implications for Russia.

Richard Ware
International Affairs and Defence Section

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Introduction

After a prolonged assault on the centre of Grozny, the main city of Chechnya, which began on 31 December 1994 and resulted in the withdrawal of General Dudaev's Chechen forces from the presidential palace on 19 January 1995, Russian forces succeeded in winning tenuous control of the city by the first week in February.

Fighting has continued sporadically in the south-eastern outskirts of Grozny and further to the south. There have been many reports of the Chechen fighters regrouping in southern strongholds. According to some estimates they number around 40,000 men.¹ The Chechens seem to be preparing to continue the war from the mountains, but it is still unclear whether they can deny significant territory to Russian forces for a prolonged period. Some accounts have stressed the difficulty which the Russian forces have in moving heavy vehicles and equipment into the mountains, while others emphasised the difficulties which the Chechens would have in obtaining supplies of food and ammunition for a prolonged guerilla war.

In mid-March two peace plans for Chechnya were unveiled, one by the prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the other as the outcome of an officially sponsored "peace conference on the Caucasus" which was chaired by Ruslan Abdulatipov, a deputy speaker of the Federation Council and native of Dagestan. The Chernomyrdin plan would disarm the Dudaev forces, while seeking to draw Chechen community leaders and anti-Dudaev forces into a dialogue which would eventually prepare the ground for free elections.² The document prepared by the peace conference (in which some Chechens loyal to General Dudaev took part) appears to offer more to the Chechen resistance since it urges the Russian authorities to recognise the situation as "an armed conflict of a non-international nature" and seeks a round table negotiation involving all Chechen interests. There would be a joint ceasefire commission, but the Dudaev forces would still have to surrender their arms. A final settlement would be sought by a mediating commission which would involve religious leaders, representatives of the "constituent parts of the federation" (presumably leaders of other non-Russian entities in the federation) and Sergey Kovalev, the widely respected human rights commissioner.³ To date there is little sign that either plan is likely to form the basis of a settlement in the short term and there was some evidence on 18 March that the Russian offensive might be about to resume and on 23 March it was reported that Russian forces had taken the town of Argun.

Whether or not the conflict continues at a high level of activity, it seems likely that the Russian authorities will have great difficulty in restoring normal conditions in the parts of

¹ Frederick C. Cuny, "Killing Chechnya", *New York Review of Books*, 6 April 1995, p.15.

² *SWB* SU/2253 B/7

³ *SWB*, SU/2253 B/9

Chechnya now effectively under military occupation, particularly as Chechen resistance fighters filter back through Russian lines and mingle with the remaining civilians.

In the mean time the tragic events which have unfolded since early December 1994 are reverberating through the Russian political and military establishment and have far-reaching implications for the future of Russian democracy, for economic reform, and for Russia's relations with the rest of the world.

I Implications for the Russian Armed Forces

There is no doubt that the Russian armed forces have undergone a traumatic experience since they first became directly involved in the Chechen conflict in the early autumn of 1994. The senior military leadership has been painfully and publicly divided over its involvement, the forces on the ground have suffered repeated humiliations and much higher casualties than they, or the politicians responsible for the operation, can have anticipated and the inadequacies of military organisation and preparedness have been watched by the world on TV. All of this has been added to the feelings of confusion and guilt which are bound to be experienced by any army when it is instructed to carry out actions which are certain to result in the killing of fellow citizens, including many ethnic Russian civilians. US intelligence chiefs have described the result as a "shattering blow" to Russian military morale.⁴

A. Background of poor morale and organisation

These events have unfolded against a background of already deep demoralisation and loss of effectiveness. The US scholar D. Mendeloff is among those who have analysed this phenomenon:

Over the last several years Russian officers have expressed grave concern over the deterioration of all facets of military readiness and cohesion. Nearly 90 per cent of officers in one survey noted they "were fully or partly unsatisfied with the present conditions and quality of battle-readiness in their units". Another poll reported that 70 per cent of officers believed their units "incapable of fulfilling their tasks effectively".⁵

⁴ *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 18 January 1995, p.5.

⁵ David Mendeloff, "Explaining Russian Military Quiescence: the "Paradox of Disintegration" and the Myth of a Military Coup", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 1994 27(3), 227-8.

The main reasons for this were the mass resignations of junior and middle-rank officers since 1991, the failure to enforce conscription, the shortfall in contract soldiers, declining standards of discipline and training, low officer salaries and poor housing. Mendeloff concludes that the deterioration of effectiveness has been such that even the most aggrieved officers have no confidence in their ability to carry out a military coup,⁶ but similar conclusions could be drawn about any large-scale military operation requiring organisation, cohesion and discipline.

Other authors have drawn attention to high levels of criminality and drug abuse among conscripts, poor standards of health in the army and the continuing prevalence of brutal bullying and general indiscipline in the Russian army. Charles Dick summarises the evidence and concludes:

The army's moral decay, declining discipline and reliability and falling cohesion are not only undermining military effectiveness, however. They pose a threat to the very existence of the army and to the state as well.... There are growing social tensions, both within the barrack blocks and within the officer corps... These tensions threaten a social explosion within the army or conflict between the army and society over the death and humiliation of servicemen and over corruption and maladministration.⁷

B. Dissention among senior commanders over Chechnya

While it is clear that the military leadership has been divided over intervention in Chechnya and there have been rumours that defence minister Grachev was originally opposed to it himself, the way in which some very senior army commanders have commented in public on the conduct of the Chechen conflict is symptomatic of the extent to which the central apparatus of the Russian state is in disarray, while the spirit of *glasnost* lives on.

For example, General Boris Gromov, who is well-known as the commander who organised the Soviet army's withdrawal from Afghanistan and has recently served as a deputy defence minister, has been extremely forthright in his condemnation of the Chechnya operation. Since expressing his criticisms he has been transferred to an advisory post in the foreign ministry and stripped of his deputy minister rank. In a TV interview on 27 January 1995 he claimed that he had first heard about the involvement of Russian forces from the press, that the collegium of the defence ministry had not been informed and that some officers were not told that forces under their command had been recruited to the operation. At his first meeting with defence minister Grachev in December 1994 Gromov had expressed his view that "the

⁶ *ibid.*, 239

⁷ Charles Dick, "The Russian Army - present plight and future prospects", *Jane's Intelligence Review Yearbook: The World in Conflict 1994/95*, 40-5.

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armed forces should not have been involved at all... This is not their function or task". He also claimed that the high level of casualties could have been avoided:

It seems that the operation was absolutely unprepared. What they were hoping for and what they were expecting is quite incomprehensible to me.(...) There aren't any values which merit the operation in Chechnya being carried out like that. There aren't any values which merit so many people dying.⁸

Gromov also said that the decision to intervene militarily in Chechnya had been taken by civilians in the Security Council, but that Defence Minister Grachev had agreed to it, when he should have said clearly that the army was unprepared.

General Lebed, another veteran of the Afghan campaign, now commander of the Russian fourteenth army in Moldova, and regarded as one of the most popular military figures with the public and junior officers, has written:

The Russian troops crawled into Grozny, having neither battle-plans nor maps nor even a clear-cut mission... The whole world has come to know the main Russian military secret: the reforms of our armed forces under the leadership of "the best defence minister of all times and peoples" has ended up with their complete collapse. It is terrible and bitter to understand. Russia no longer has an army - what it has is only military formations of boy-soldiers which are hardly capable of achieving anything.⁹

General Eduard Vorobyev, now relieved of his post as deputy commander of ground forces, announced in public that he had refused Grachev's request that he should head the military operation in Chechnya. He had done so "in view of the army's complete unpreparedness for combat actions".¹⁰ There have been numerous reports of more junior officers and units refusing to serve in Chechnya and one senior general who did serve in the attempt to storm Grozny from the north has refused to accept the decoration offered to him.¹¹

It seems probable that the outcome of the Chechnya operation will eventually result in a purge of the senior army command, but it is not yet clear what form this will take. Until the

⁸ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2220 B/7

⁹ *Moscow News* [English edition], 6-12 January 1995, p1; in a subsequent interview for Polish television General Lebed has stressed that the inadequacies of the current campaign do not indicate that "the Russian bear is dead" and recalled that Russia still has 150m "very patient" people with the blood of Suvorov and Zhukov coursing in their veins - *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2211 B/6.

¹⁰ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2214 B/5

¹¹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2223 B/6

end of January 1995 it seemed that General Grachev was succeeding in forcing his military critics into retirement or suspension. Now it seems more likely that he himself will be forced to resign and that some at least of the critics might be reinstated. Some, such as Gavriil Popov (former mayor of Moscow), have suggested that a full-scale purge of the army is being prepared.¹² For the moment it is remarkable how many senior commanders have been taken ill.¹³ Some of the most outspoken critics of the campaign - such as Gromov and Lebed - could, if they are forced into retirement, quickly re-emerge as political campaigners for the restoration of Russian honour and military efficiency.

C. The level of casualties

There are still no precise figures for Russian or Chechen casualties, military or civilian, but it seems beyond doubt that the number of Russian soldiers killed (including interior ministry troops, marines and special forces) in the whole operation has been much higher than the officially released figures which. On 16 March it was reported that estimates by the Commission for Prisoners of War and Interned and Missing Persons put the figure at 1,376 killed and 408 missing, of whom 148 were believed to have been taken prisoner. An earlier "preliminary estimate" had put the wounded at over 3,400.¹⁴ Some estimates have put the true figure as high as 5-6,000 killed.¹⁵ *Moscow News* estimated that 800 had died before the end of December and another thousand in the attempt to storm Grozny in the first days of January. Some reports have indicated systematic attempts to conceal the numbers of soldiers killed.¹⁶

There have certainly also been very high numbers of non-fatal casualties, leaving thousands of young men maimed.

Even the lower figures represent extraordinarily high levels of casualties for a short campaign against a small and lightly armed enemy force. The military operation by the US and its allies to liberate Kuwait in 1991 was conducted against a very much more powerful military

¹² "Komu i zachem nuzhna diskreditatsiya armii", *Izvestiya*, 26 January 1995. Popov suspects that the whole Chechen campaign has been designed to discredit the army command. He sees President Yeltsin's hand behind this conspiracy and deduces that the motive is partly revenge for the hesitant support of the army in October 1993 and partly a desire to head off any possible coup or electoral challenge from an army candidate.

¹³ "a considerable number of the Defence Ministry's generals and officers are at present undergoing planned medical examinations" - a spokeswoman for General Grachev - *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2220 B/1.

¹⁴ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2255 B/5 and SU/2223 B/5

¹⁵ eg Cuny -see note 1

¹⁶ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2218 B/6. It has also been suggested that the official figures for those killed in the operation deliberately omit those who are recovered alive from the battlefield, but subsequently die from their injuries - *Izvestiya*, 11 January 1995, p4. See also SU/2223 B/5.

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force, albeit in very different circumstances, but the number of allied servicemen killed was 219.¹⁷

Many reasons have been given. Some accounts suggest that an operation against a determined enemy in urban conditions will always be costly in terms of casualties. Others catalogue failures and errors which left the Russian forces especially vulnerable. For example, it is said that they had few large-scale maps and poor intelligence, and that they underestimated the weapons available to the Chechen fighters. Russian tanks and armoured vehicles commanded by General Rokhlin fought their way into Grozny from the north starting on 31 December without any means of targeting and putting out of action the light anti-tank weapons with which the Chechens systematically destroyed the Russian columns as they passed through the narrow streets. Typically, the Chechens used grenade-launchers to set the leading tank in each column on fire and then attacked the others, with snipers picking off those who tried to escape from the burning vehicles. In one of the most disastrous actions outside the main railway station the 131st "Maikop" brigade is said to have lost 20 out of 26 tanks, 102 out of 120 armoured personnel carriers and almost all of its officers, including the commanding officer. According to military doctors quoted in *Izvestiya*, the northern group which included the "Maikop" brigade lost a total of 1000 dead and more than 5,000 wounded in the first 18 days of January.¹⁸

There have clearly also been high levels of casualties on the Chechen side and among civilians of both Russian and Chechen ethnic background. However, no reliable figures are available. The human rights group working with Sergey Kovalev reported on 7 February that it had compiled a list of 25,000 civilians either known or believed to be killed.¹⁹ Another observer has put the figure of civilians killed at around 15,000, but insists that the great majority of these have been ethnic Russians - a fact which could be very damaging for President Yeltsin if it is confirmed.²⁰ The number of refugees registered by the Russian Federal Migration Service since 8 December 1994 was put at 262,146 on 7 March 1995.²¹

During February 1995 the army command brought in fresh forces to replace those which had taken part in the earlier phase of the conflict and by 7 March it was claimed that almost all had been replaced. Unlike the original forces, some of the newcomers have been given special intensive training. The officer making this announcement claimed, contrary to the

¹⁷ *HC Deb* 17 April 1991, c.198w

¹⁸ This paragraph is based on eye-witness accounts by V. Litovkin, A. Frolov and B. Vinogradov published in *Izvestiya* on 11 and 24 January 1995.

¹⁹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2223 B/5

²⁰ Cuny, p.15. Cuny also observed that there very few Chechens left in Grozny by early March, but he estimated that 30,000 mostly elderly ethnic Russians were living in the rubble of the city.

²¹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2248 B/8

general impression, that on the whole conscripted soldiers had performed better in Chechnya than contract professionals.²²

II Possible Spreading of the Conflict

Research Paper 95/4 discussed the possibility that the Chechnya conflict might spill over into neighbouring areas or turn into a general uprising of the smaller nationalities of the Caucasus against Russian domination (pp.8-9). This was not expected, mainly because of disputes between the nationalities and the absence of external support. To date the conflict has been largely contained within Chechnya, but there have been signs of strain in the immediately neighbouring territories of Dagestan and Ingushetia, and in the longer term the outflow of refugees may lead to a general increase in tension in the region.

A. Dagestan

Dagestan, which lies to the east of Chechnya and borders Azerbaijan to the south, has a complex ethnic mix in which no single group dominates. There is a significant ethnic Chechen population which has been swollen by refugees. There are currently around 60,000 refugees from Chechnya in Dagestan.²³

According to the *Izvestiya* correspondent A. Chelnokov, Dagestan was very tense in early February and many Dagestan Chechens anticipated that sooner or later Russian forces would turn their attention to those in Dagestan who had supported General Dudaev. Chelnokov also quotes the local Russian commander with the task of trying to seal the border as saying: "Judging by the number of refugees and the mood of the local population the war could well spill over into Dagestan".²⁴ The Russian dilemma is that in order to regain control of the strategic lines of communications - rail, road and pipeline - which connect Russia to Dagestan and Azerbaijan, they must capture the town of Gudermes, at present still in the hands of Dudaev's forces. Gudermes, however, is close to the border with Dagestan from which the Chechen resistance can be supplied and reinforced. Any effective measures to prevent this would be likely to draw the Chechens of Dagestan into the conflict.

The deputy speaker of the Russian Federation Council (the upper chamber of the federal parliament), Ramazan Abdulatipov, himself an Avar from Dagestan who has represented

²² SWB, SU/2247 B/7

²³ SWB SU/2248 B/9

²⁴ A. Chelnokov, "Territoriya Dagestana mozhet stat novym platsdarmom voiny" [the territory of Dagestan could become a new theatre of war], *Izvestiya*, 8 February 1995

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Russia in delegations to the Council of Europe has been active in attempts to prevent the spread of the war to Dagestan and organised a peace conference in March which was designed to promote stability throughout the whole region.²⁵

B. Ingushetia

Ingushetia, to the west of Chechnya, had already been unsettled for several years by a conflict between ethnic Ingush and Ossetians in North Ossetia. The Ingush, like the Chechens, had been deported *en masse* by Stalin and parts of their traditional territory were occupied in their absence by Ossetians. After fighting broke out in the disputed Prigorodny region of North Ossetia many ethnic Ingush fled to Ingushetia which now hosts a total of 50,000 refugees from this conflict and 110,000 from Chechnya.²⁶

The Chechen and the Ingush have closely related languages, but distinctive histories in the Soviet period.

C. Other territories

There have been isolated incidents related to Chechnya in other territories of the North Caucasus. For example, representatives of the "Kabarda national movement" were arrested in Kabarda-Balkaria on 26 February for demonstrating in support of Chechnya in defiance of a local ban on rallies and demonstrations.²⁷ There are tensions between the two titular nationalities of this territory. The Kabardin also have a historical claim on the city of Mozdok in neighbouring North Ossetia which has been used as the main military base for the Chechnya operation.²⁸

III International Repercussions

The Chechnya conflict has had some repercussions for Russia's relations with most other countries and in particular has complicated its relationships with a number of international organisations where Russia is currently seeking assistance or acceptance.

²⁵ SWB, SU/2247 B/9 see also Introduction

²⁶ SWB, SU/2247 B/9; 2248 B/9

²⁷ SWB SU/2240 B/7

²⁸ Charles Blandy, "The Battle for Grozny", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 1995, p.53.

A. Bilateral relations

For the most part Russia's major foreign interlocutors have preferred to keep to "business as usual" in their bilateral dealings with Russia, while making clear their anxiety about events in Chechnya. The confusion within the Russian political system has made it difficult to determine whether or not particular leaders, including President Yeltsin, should be held fully responsible for these events. President Yeltsin has not travelled abroad since shortly before the military advance on Chechnya and the German defence minister made clear in January that his Russian counterpart would not be welcome in Germany, but prime minister Chernomyrdin and foreign minister Kozyrev have continued the normal round of diplomatic visits. Chernomyrdin visited London on 1-2 March 1995.

Kozyrev told the Duma foreign affairs committee on 26 January 1995 that, despite some domestic pressure and criticism of Russia for the excessive use of force, no country had questioned Russia's territorial integrity, recognised Chechnya as a separate state or introduced economic sanctions against Russia.²⁹

The Defence Secretary, Mr Rifkind, told the House of Commons on 31 January:

I think that we have all been appalled... at what appeared to be the indiscriminate bombing of civilians, and at the way in which, despite various assurances to the contrary, those attacks have continued over a considerable, period leading to many casualties in Grozny.³⁰

British relations with Russia were debated in European Standing Committee B on 28 February 1995 in relation to the proposed interim trade agreement (see below). In the course of his opening statement to the committee the Minister of State, Mr Hogg said:

Some people have said that the west should punish the Russians by withdrawing cooperation. In my view, that would be an error, we have too much to lose. The west cannot turn a blind eye to what is going on in Chechnya, but neither should we abandon those within Russia who are foremost both in supporting reform and in criticising the Chechnya operation.³¹

²⁹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2215 B/8

³⁰ *HC Deb* 31 January 1995 c.839w

³¹ Parliamentary debates: European Standing Committee B, 28 February 1995, c.3

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In the same debate Ms Joyce Quin, speaking for the opposition, said:

We do not want to take action that economically penalises the large majority of people within Russia. However, there are ways in which we can express our strong disapproval of what is happening in Chechnya which should be considered.³²

The Foreign Secretary told the House of Commons on 1 March 1995:

I have certainly made it clear in private and in public to the Russians that the House and the British people have been appalled and depressed by the brutality of Russian action in Chechnya.³³

The government had announced on 1 February that the ODA was committing £1m to humanitarian relief for Chechnya and that half of this sum would be channelled via the International Red Cross.³⁴

B. The European Union

A common European Union response to events in Chechnya has been agreed within the framework of the common foreign and security policy (the "second pillar" of the European Union).³⁵ The EU had concluded a Partnership and Cooperation agreement with Russia on 22 June 1994,³⁶ but this still has to be ratified, which will require the approval of EU national parliaments,³⁷ the European Parliament and both chambers of the Russian parliament. An interim agreement covering only those trade-related measures which fall entirely within European Community competence was planned, but in January the EU decided to postpone this because of events in Chechnya. The Russian minister for foreign economic relations criticised this decision; he attributed it to underlying economic reservations on the part of France for which Chechnya was merely a pretext.³⁸ On 6 March EU foreign ministers again decided to postpone a decision on the interim agreement until after the visit to Moscow on 9 March by the troika foreign ministers (representing the current, previous and next

³² *ibid*, c.18

³³ *HC Deb* 1 March 1995, c.1030; see also 31 January 1995, c.620w, 1 February 1995, cc.1071-2 and 13 March 1995, c.375w

³⁴ *HC Deb* 1 February 1995, 1071

³⁵ *HC Deb* 20 February 1995, c.12w

³⁶ Partnership and cooperation agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation including exchanges of letters with declarations and Final Act. (Corfu,1994), Cm 2701.

³⁷ In the UK this would involve the approval of an Order defining the new agreement as a European treaty under the European Communities Act 1972. Draft orders were tabled on 20 March 1995.

³⁸ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2213 B/13

presidencies) and informal discussion of relations with Russia scheduled to take place in Carcassonne on 18-19 March.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on Chechnya on 19 January 1995 in which it drew attention to the fact that the proposed Partnership Agreement between Russia and the EU states that "respect for the democratic principles and human rights... constitute an essential element of partnership of the present Agreement". The resolution also condemned the use of Russian armed force in Chechnya and denounced "the completely disproportionate actions by the Russian authorities and the gross violation of human rights resulting from these actions". The European Parliament also called on the Commission and Council not to proceed with ratification of the Partnership Agreement "until the military attack and gross violation of human rights against the people of Chechnya have come to an end and a serious start has been made in finding a political solution to the conflict". It noted that one Member State, Denmark, had already clearly stated that it would not ratify the Agreement in the present circumstances.³⁹

The EU has relied on the OSCE (see below) both for information about the circumstances in Chechnya and for a yardstick against which to measure Russian performance. In a Declaration issued on 6 February 1995 the EU "noted with disquiet that fighting is still going on and that serious human rights violations are still taking place, as was established by the OSCE mission". It also called on the Russian authorities to "keep to the letter of the provisions of the OSCE Code of Conduct and of Additional Protocol No 2 to the 1949 Geneva Convention" and called on both parties to the conflict to negotiate a ceasefire and political solution.⁴⁰

The EU agreed on 26 January to allocate 5m ecu (US\$6.1m) for humanitarian relief programmes aimed at refugees from Chechnya and organised by the International Red Cross.

C. The Council of Europe

Ten eastern and central European states formerly under communist rule have now been admitted as full members to the Council of Europe.

Russian membership of the Council of Europe has been under discussion for more than a year and was due to be debated at the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly in early February 1995. As a result of the Chechnya events the assembly decided on 2 February to suspend its

³⁹ European Parliament Minutes (provisional), 19 January 1995 PE 186.411, part ii, p.27.

⁴⁰ Council of the European Union General Secretariat, Press Release 4551/95 [and 4554/95].

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consideration of the issue, while maintaining a dialogue. The report on which this decision was based commented: "the Council of Europe cannot accept the use of military force against civilians. It is difficult to understand that the Russian Parliament has no influence on the decisions of the Security Council."⁴¹

The session in Strasbourg was attended by a Russian guest delegation which included Vladimir Lukin, chairman of the Duma foreign affairs committee, who accepted that the timing for Russia's entry to the Council of Europe was not propitious.⁴²

D. NATO

During 1994 Russia had been negotiating a Partnership for Peace framework agreement with NATO against a background of anxiety in Moscow about the possible admission of some former Warsaw Pact states as full members of NATO within a few years.

On 1 December 1994 the Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev visited Brussels, but caused some surprise when he declined to sign agreements which had already been prepared for an individual Russia-NATO partnership programme and arrangements for special relations.

The belief held by many in the United States and Western Europe that the Chechnya conflict brings the eastern enlargement of NATO closer has been widely reported and commented on in Russia. A Russian foreign ministry spokesman denied on 18 January that Chechnya had any relevance to the NATO enlargement issue.⁴³

Contacts have continued between Russia, the USA and NATO headquarters, but it is not at present clear whether Russia will agree to proceed with the partnership for peace arrangements now, or will insist on first obtaining new undertakings about possible NATO enlargement, for example, on whether forces of other NATO states might be stationed in new members such as Poland.⁴⁴ At their informal meeting at Carcassonne on 18-19 March 1995 EU foreign ministers gave support in principle to a French proposal for a new security pact between NATO and Russia.

⁴¹ Council of Europe Document 7230

⁴² *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2219 B/8

⁴³ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2207 B/10

⁴⁴ *Atlantic News*, 15 March 1995

E. The International Monetary Fund

Russia and the IMF continued talks during February on a new stand-by loan. On 6 February the talks were postponed because of fears that extra expenditure on Chechnya operations and reconstruction would make a significant difference to Russia's plans for the 1995 budget and deficit.⁴⁵

F. Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

On the eve of the Russian move on Chechnya the former CSCE was transformed into the OSCE at the Budapest Summit. The CSCE/OSCE agreements, extracts from which were included in research paper 95/4, impose a set of obligations in the human rights sphere on all signatories.

Because of this it is the OSCE which has taken the lead in trying to monitor the situation in Chechnya on behalf of the international community. There have been two international observer missions to the region organised by the OSCE presidency (Hungary), in January and early March, and the OSCE is now planning to establish a permanent presence in Chechnya.⁴⁶ The OSCE already has permanent missions in several zones of conflict in the former Soviet Union. The Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, commented on 1 March: "That the Russians allowed the OSCE mission into the area is one of the few good signs to come out of Chechnya in recent weeks".⁴⁷

IV Recriminations

It is clear to everyone in Russian political life that the conflict in Chechnya has been a disaster from any humanitarian perspective. It may also prove to have very damaging consequences for the Russian economy and for Russia's longer term foreign policy interests. Inevitably the realisation of the scale of the disaster has led to bitter recriminations which now dominate the political debate and electoral prospects.

The recriminations can be divided into two categories: there is responsibility for creating the conditions of the conflict from mid-1991 to mid-1994 and responsibility for Russian actions

⁴⁵ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2222 C/1

⁴⁶ *SWB* SU/2248 B/9

⁴⁷ *HC Deb* 1 March 1995, c.1030

since mid-1994. Committees of the Duma and Federation Council have been set up to investigate the causes and circumstances of the Chechen crisis.⁴⁸ The Duma investigation is chaired by the film director Stanislav Govorukhin and began to take evidence on 21 February.⁴⁹

A. 1991-94

Although General Dudaev led Chechnya into a unilateral declaration of independence in 1991, and this constituted a clear act of defiance against the Russian central authorities and constitution, no serious attempt was made to quash the rebellion. Moreover, Dudaev's regime was allowed to acquire arms and equipment which had belonged to Soviet units based in Chechnya.

Given these circumstances and the pattern of covert Russian actions elsewhere in the region (especially in Abkhazia), there have been many suggestions that there was some kind of conspiracy orchestrated from Moscow, and that the conspirators, if such there were, manipulated events in Chechnya in order to influence Russian politics. Another, possibly complementary explanation would be that some powerful figures in Moscow profited materially from the Chechen connection. Emile Pain and Arkady Popov, who have published a detailed analysis of the criminal connections of the Dudaev regime concluded that much of what was happening in Chechnya, from drug smuggling to train robberies and oil deals, would have been inconceivable without widespread connivance by Russian officials.⁵⁰

Several different accounts have been published of what happened to the equipment of the 12th (training) motor-rifle division which was based in Grozny prior to 1991. The unit consisted of five regiments and had 45 tanks, 40,000 guns, 153 artillery pieces and 130 hand-held grenade launchers. It appears that General Dudaev entered into negotiations with the Russian defence ministry in February 1992 and in June 1992 struck a deal whereby he would keep 50% of the equipment in return for allowing remaining servicemen to leave the republic in an orderly fashion. Pavel Grachev was closely involved in these negotiations, first as deputy defence minister, and then as minister of defence from May 1992. His predecessor, Marshal Shaposhnikov, claims to have been against dealing with Dudaev. Yegor Gaidar had become acting prime minister at this time, but Shaposhnikov claims that he was kept in the dark. Others have taken the opportunity to blame Gaidar and other reformist ministers who held prominent posts at the time for turning a blind eye to what was happening in Chechnya.

⁴⁸ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2202 B/3

⁴⁹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2223 B/7

⁵⁰ "Kriminal'ny rezhim" [the criminal regime], *Izvestiya*, 8 February 1995

Despite the agreement to share the equipment with the illegal Dudaev regime the recent published accounts suggest that in fact by June 1992 there was nothing left to share - the entire inventory had disappeared after the division was formally disbanded early in 1992. Some of it appears to have been given or sold to the Abkhazian insurgents in Georgia or, possibly, to Bosnian government forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the rest remained in various Chechen hands to be used against the Russian army in 1995.⁵¹

Another set of allegations concerns covert political links between factions in Moscow and the Dudaev regime. The fact that a prominent Chechen politician, Ruslan Khasbulatov, was chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet (parliament) from 1990 to 1993 and was engaged in bitter conflict with President Boris Yeltsin and his reformist ministers during 1992-3 is clearly relevant to this, but the precise circumstances are unclear. The man whom Dudaev replaced as the effective leader in Chechnya, Doku Zavgayev (now in Yeltsin's administration as an adviser) accuses Khasbulatov of undermining him and trying to build his own power base in Chechnya, but this may have been justified by the fact that Zavgayev appeared to be supportive of the anti-Gorbachev coup attempt in August 1991.

Khasbulatov may have been partly responsible for bringing Dudaev to power, but their relations also seem to have been bad, at least from 1992 onwards. According to some accounts Khasbulatov initially backed Dudaev as a malleable figure-head and helped him to obtain arms, but fell out with him when he became too independent. The present head of counter-intelligence, Sergei Stepashin, has hinted at Khasbulatov's role and Khasbulatov has responded by accusing Stepashin of responsibility for the failed attempts to topple Dudaev during 1994.⁵² On 8 March 1995, in an interview given to a Saudi newspaper and designed to discredit Dudaev in the Arab world, Khasbulatov said that Dudaev falsified the election results in 1991 and owed his rise to power in Chechnya to certain unnamed Russian generals. He described Dudaev as a "petty dictator" and blamed him for all the recent sufferings of the Chechen people.⁵³

If Dudaev was in fact encouraged and sustained by powerful interests in Russia it is still not clear why at some point in 1994 it suddenly became imperative to remove him, unless it was because he had somehow overstepped the limits of his independence and ceased to serve the interests of his sponsors.

⁵¹ articles by Y. Bespalov & V. Yakov in *Izvestiya*, 10 January 1995; by V. Belykh & N. Burbyga in *Izvestiya*, 12 January 1995.

⁵² *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2209 B/11, 2218 B/8 and 2220 B/10; "V'sya vlast' v Chechne-sovetam?", *Izvestiya*, 13 January 1995.

⁵³ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2248 B/8

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Many allegations of incompetent or irresponsible conduct have been made concerning the covert and overt Russian military action.

A common allegation is that the President ignored the advice of his civilian analysts on the Presidential Council. Otto Latsis, a member of the Council, has described in *Izvestiya* how the consultative apparatus was completely sidelined. Another member of the Council and an acknowledged expert on ethnic issues within the Russian Federation, Emile Pain, said that ideas for political settlements of the conflict were brushed aside in favour of a "clandestine-adventurist" approach.⁵⁴

Another allegation is that the ill-fated attempt to take Grozny by storm on the night of 31 December 1994 was initiated by defence minister Grachev and deputy prime minister Soskovets after a drinking session to celebrate the former's birthday.⁵⁵ Grachev has attacked his critics, such as the former chairman of the Duma defence committee Yushenkov and human rights commissioner Kovalev in the most intemperate language and described them as traitors to Russia. His anger may have been the greater because, according to some accounts, Grachev may have opposed full-scale military intervention himself until it became apparent that forces supposedly under the control of the ministry of defence had already become involved in Chechnya at the instigation of the interior and security ministries.⁵⁶ Grachev also appears to have seriously underestimated the force required to take Grozny - he told journalists on 28 November 1994:

I would not put tanks into Grozny - that would be illogical. I would solve the whole problem with a parachute regiment in two hours.⁵⁷

V Russia and the North Caucasus

Russian soldiers and politicians have regarded their southern border in western Asia as one of the most vulnerable since the collapse of the Soviet Union and have transferred military assets systematically to the region as they have been withdrawn from Eastern Europe. There are several reasons for this sense of insecurity. The region is one of historical rivalry between

⁵⁴ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, SU/2222 B/7

⁵⁵ *Izvestiya*, 12 January 1995

⁵⁶ M. Galeotti, "Decline and Fall - Moscow's Chechen War", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 1995, p.51.

⁵⁷ quoted in A. Golovkov & T. Shaveshov, "Pervyi kvartal 'chechenskoi pyatiletki' [the first quarter of the "Chechnya five-year plan"]", *Izvestiya*, 10 March 1995.

Russia, Iran and Turkey; it has a complex and conflict-riven ethnic mix; it is close to the principal centres of Islamic fundamentalism and militancy; and many of the ethnic groups in the region have old grievances against Russia.

The demise of the Soviet Union meant that Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan became independent states. This fact left Russian military planners with two strategic options: they could recognise the *fait accompli* and create a new secure border between the Russian Federation and the newly independent states; or they could try to bring the new states into a new Russian-led military organisation and seek to defend the old Soviet frontier, as if little had changed. Similar options presented themselves in other sectors of the Russian Federation border (eg Belarus, Tajikistan) and in each case Russia seems to have hedged its bets, making some moves to secure the new frontier, but at the same time using a variety of military and diplomatic tactics to retain bases and forces near the old frontier.

In the Caucasus this policy seems to have included covert intervention in Georgian conflicts which made the regime of Eduard Shevardnadze dependent on Russian good will and military power and steady pressure on Azerbaijan to accept Russian peace-keeping forces as part of a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The apparently easier option for Russia of turning its back on the whole region seems not to have been seriously considered, partly for economic and geographical reasons (Russia would have lost its influence over most of the Black Sea and its potential stake in Caspian oil), partly, perhaps, out of nostalgia for the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire and partly because of doubts as to whether the southern edge of the Russian Federation could be stabilised without some control over the neighbouring states.

The policy seems to have succeeded in as far as both Georgia and Armenia have now concluded treaties with Russia whereby Russia will retain military bases in each country and continue to defend their frontiers with Turkey and Iran. Azerbaijan has not yet agreed to a substantial Russian element in the proposed Karabakh peacekeeping force.

Chechnya figures prominently in these calculations, despite its relatively small size and population. Its defiance of the Russian Federation constitution and insistence on unilaterally declared independence undermined the strategy of securing the North Caucasus frontier and also threatened the larger strategy of maintaining a strong military and political influence in the region. The main reason for this is that almost all of Russia's lines of communication with Dagestan and Azerbaijan pass through Chechnya, not only the oil pipelines, but all the major road and rail links.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ "Strategicheskie interesy Rossii na Kavkaze" [Russia's strategic interests in the Caucasus], *Izvestiya*, 12 January 1995.

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The US specialist on Armenia, Ronald Grigor Suny, has summarised Russian policy on the Caucasus under President Yeltsin as follows:

The dimensions of Russian interest in Transcaucasia are still unclear. Certainly, Yeltsin does not have plans to reannex the region, but he is promoting a greater military and political presence, even hinting that the United Nations should give Russia exclusive rights as gendarme in the area. What might be called the "Yeltsin doctrine" sees a paramount role for Russia in the southern tier of the former Soviet Union, recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the existing states, along with an explicit claim for dominance in the realm of security and, perhaps, a special role in protecting Russians and other minorities. Russia also wants partnership in the exploitation and development of the natural resources of the region, most importantly the off-shore oil in Azerbaijan.⁵⁹

VI Effects on Internal Russian Politics

The immediate effects of the Chechen crisis on domestic Russian politics were described in research paper 95/4 (pp.10-12).

A. Parliament

While a good deal of criticism of the conduct of the Chechnya operation has been voiced in parliament, particularly in the Duma (lower house), the majority of deputies are supportive of the general policy and somewhat intolerant of those who emphasise human rights abuses by the Russian side. The human rights commissioner Sergey Kovalev, who is regarded as a hero by many in the "democratic" camp, has been roundly abused by "patriotic" deputies and on 10 March the Duma voted by 240 to 75 to remove his parliamentary human rights mandate. Kovalev continues to be the presidential human rights commissioner.

The speaker of the Duma, Ivan Rybkin, who was co-opted to membership of the Security Council early in the crisis, has associated the Duma with the peace proposals which have been put forward by the government of Viktor Chernomyrdin.

⁵⁹ in *Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus and the US Response: fourteenth conference, January 12-17, 1994*, The Aspen Institute, 1994, p.34.

B. Political parties

The Chechnya crisis has accelerated the process of dissolving and reforming political factions in the Duma which was already under way as a result of deep divisions within the "democratic" and centrist camp and the approach of fresh parliamentary elections. New parties and factions inside and outside parliament have been announced almost every week, but none of the new groups has attracted sufficient parliamentary support to form an officially registered political group.

The democrats, many of whom still belong nominally to *Russia's Choice*, are divided between those who give priority to economic reform, liberalism and human rights and those "statesmen" who give priority to the interests of the Russian state and its integrity and who therefore tend to support the use of force in the interests of the state. The former have largely lost patience with Boris Yeltsin and would prefer an unambiguously democratic and liberal president, but are aware that in the present climate it will be difficult to find such a candidate who can command a mass following. The latter might still support Yeltsin's bid for a second presidential term, but are also drawn to alternative leaders who could combine a western approach to economic and social reform with a patriotic line on Russia's interests. The former finance minister Boris Fedorov is among those promoting this combination.

The Yavlinsky group of centrist reformers who had broken with Boris Yeltsin before the last elections have held together much better to date, as have the communists.

There have been repeated attempts behind the scenes - unsuccessful so far - to create a pro-Yeltsin centre faction in the Duma.

C. President Yeltsin

President Yeltsin seems fully committed at present to seeking a second term in the presidential elections due in 1996. At present his chances of success seem slight. As the full cost of the Chechnya operation becomes clear and the recriminations continue he has to decide how much responsibility he wishes to take personally. He could present himself as a patriot who was prepared to act tough for the sake of Russia, blame others for the operational disasters and woo the voters who have been attracted to Zhirinovsky; or he could distance himself as much as possible from the whole episode and appeal to all those who want reform and equally fear either a communist or a nationalist backlash. So far he seems to be attempting to straddle both possibilities and could end up with no clear or credible platform.

Sergei Chugaev comments on this:

In terms of the way in which they were adopted and executed, the decisions taken by the federal authorities in respect of Chechnya were decisions absolutely characteristic of a totalitarian state. And therefore the president's statements about his commitment to democratic ideals were taken by many of his former supporters as empty words.⁶⁰

D. Future of democracy

It is probably misleading to think of democracy as something which suddenly descended on Russia in 1989-90 and is now in danger of vanishing again. The democratic processes which brought President Yeltsin to power were imperfect and have continued to be fragile, limited by relatively low participation in elections, by widespread corruption, by habits of secretive non-accountable decision-making, especially in the "power ministries" (defence, interior, security) and by the absence of a settled political party system. The Russian Supreme Soviet (parliament) of 1990-93 was dominated by people who had belonged to the more conservative wing of the communist party and had an over-centralised presidium, but when it came into conflict with the president over economic and constitutional reform the methods used to enforce its dissolution were also high-handed and undemocratic. The bicameral Federal Assembly elected under new rules in December 1993 could only produce an approximate reflection of the views of a confused and disenchanted electorate, many of whom did not vote, and the new constitution adopted at the same time gave parliament little control over the president and government.

In short, the attempt to democratise Russia has not resulted in a smooth transformation and the mishandled operation to re-conquer Chechnya without parliamentary sanction or accountability and in defiance of legal and humanitarian considerations underlines how incomplete the process has been. A writer in *Izvestiya* suggests that if the Chechen campaign had been triumphantly successful then this would indeed have spelled the end of democracy, because it would have strengthened the least democratic elements in the political system, but that the failure and humiliation experienced by the principal organisers of the campaign leaves democracy precariously balanced.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Izvestiya*, 28 February 1995

⁶¹ L. Radzikhovsky, "Sobytiyaa v Chechne ostavlyayut shans demokratii v Rossii" [the events in Chechnya leave democracy with a chance in Russia], *Izvestiya*, 1 February 1995.

VII Conclusions

The conflict in Chechnya is not yet over. Russian forces have established a tenuous occupation of Grozny and the northern half of Chechnya, but have so far made little attempt to gain control of the southern half. They seem to face a difficult choice this spring between a new offensive to take the south, which could be very costly again in Russian and Chechen lives, or an unstable stand-off which would leave the Russians unable to consolidate their hold on Grozny or to bring about the normalization and reconstruction on which their internal and international credibility depends. It is too soon to judge the ultimate implications of these choices for Russia, but already it is clear that the crisis has transformed the terms of the political debate in Moscow.

It has exposed profound weaknesses and divisions in the post-communist Russian state and revived some uncomfortable echoes from the communist past. For example, many have drawn comparisons between the way in which Soviet Russia became embroiled in Afghanistan in 1979 and the beginning of the Chechen war and there has been a reversion to the use of crude propaganda by the government apparatus.

One of the most damaging revelations, but not an altogether surprising one, is the fact that military operations have been initiated and conducted by a secretive group deriving its scant legitimacy from the president with minimal accountability to the two chambers of parliament. Even the chairman of the council of ministers, Viktor Chernomyrdin, seems to have had little influence over events. His attempts to maintain a dialogue with Chechen politicians have so far been marginalised by the determination of the "power ministries" (ie defence, interior and counter-intelligence) to crush Chechen resistance. The former defence minister, Marshal Shaposhnikov, has commented in connection with the confused events of 1991-2:

As is well known, there were two governments in our country then, as there are now. One for finance and economics and the other for military and political questions.⁶²

It seems inevitable that there will be a settling of accounts in Moscow sooner or later. The army could emerge still further demoralised and humiliated. Some soldiers and politicians will argue, as they have already begun to do, that the answer lies in a massive injection of resources to restore military effectiveness. Such resources are unlikely to be forthcoming, given the state of the economy, and the more realistic answer would probably be to carry out a massive reduction in the scale of the military effort, concentrating on the creation of

⁶² quoted in *Izvestiya*, 10 January 1995, pp.1-2

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professional elite formations. In the mean time the Chechnya war is already said by some Russian experts to have cost some \$5bn.⁶³

There will also be a great deal of public anger and revulsion over the loss of life and Russia's international humiliation. General Grachev may have seriously misjudged the public mood when he claimed on TV that eighteen-year old Russians were dying with a smile on their lips for the sake of Russia. Indignation at the pointless waste of young Russian life in Afghanistan was one of the strongest factors in undermining the legitimacy of the Soviet regime in the 1980s. Indeed, as Yuri Burtin has argued in *Moscow News*, wars involving Russia, have frequently led in the past to social and political upheavals.⁶⁴

It is difficult to predict how this will effect the next parliamentary and presidential elections, but candidates and parties which can make a credible claim to be free of the taint of Chechnya and at the same time offer to restore Russian great power dignity are likely to benefit, almost regardless of their economic policies.

RJW/JML

⁶³ Andrey Illarionov, quoted in *Izvestiya*, 2 March 1995.

⁶⁴ *Moscow News*, 20-26 January 1995, p.1

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