

# **The Struggle for Dagestan**

**Abdurashid Saidov**

**Correspondent, *Dagestanskaia Pravda***



During these complicated times even the small republic of Dagestan in southern Russia has not remained free of problems. The republic occupies the eastern part of the Northern Caucasus. An interior republic during the Soviet period, Dagestan is now one of Russia's borderlands, Dagestan sharing borders with Azerbaijan and Georgia, and a maritime border running from Astrakhan oblast in the north to Azerbaijan in the south. The overall territory of the republic is 50,200 sq km, the population (according to the census of 2002) is 2,577,000, giving Dagestan an overall population density of 51.2 people per sq km. The republic is unusual in that there are at least 30 indigenous ethnic groups with their own languages living within its borders. This means that even if the most extreme separatist tendencies within the republic were realized the language of inter-ethnic communication would have to be Russian.

Of all the Muslim regions of Russia, Dagestan was the most religious yet at the same time was considered the most respectful of the traditions (adat) of the various ethnic groups that lived within its borders. And these traditions, as we all understand, do not always match religious teaching. Similarly, despite the fact that Russia converted to Christianity over a thousand years ago the contemporary Orthodox faith contains holidays and traditions derived from the polytheistic past that are not acceptable to fundamentalist Christians. The famous imam Shamil fought tooth and nail against such traditions while leading the mountaineers' struggle against tsarist Russia. As they like to say today, even Shamil could not Islamize Dagestan to the same degree that some contemporary radicals would like.

Dagestan was the most learned republics within retrograde and medieval Russia. During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when people were traded for pure-bred dogs in Russia, Dagestan had numerous societies of *uzdens*, a word that means "free men." Elements of civil society were highly developed, much more so than in some European countries. Even during the Caucasus War of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Russian soldiers, burdened with serfdom and forced military service, chose the status of free men and went over to the side of the mountaineers and entered these free societies. Orthodox churches were built in the mountains of Dagestan for those who had laid down their weapons.

During the Soviet period all freedoms were destroyed. The intelligentsia and the clergy did not escape the sad fate of the rest of the country during the 1920's-40's. Lomonosov, the NKVD minister of Dagestan during the pre-war years, used to say that, "my goal is that not a single thinking person remains in Dagestan" (from the memoirs of Lev Razgon, an author who passed through all the horrors of the Stalinist camps, and the abovementioned Tarasuk<sup>1</sup> was the commander of a camp where Razgon did time). By the end of the Soviet period the republic had only a few dissidents or clergymen who were willing to speak out against the regime. At the time of the dissolution of the USSR Dagestan was quite committed to the ideals of Communism, and until 1993-94 the leadership of the republic was unwilling to believe that the changes then occurring were irreversible. This attitude was clearly evident in how the hammer-and-sickle flag continued to hang above all of the governmental buildings during these years. The early 1990's, a period when Russia underwent the most painful and important reforms of its economy, was marked by the Dagestani government's quiet sabotaging of the Kremlin program. The government-run media mocked the notions of private property, civil liberties and the idea of privatization and the transition to a market economy.

It was at this time that the conservative portions of the Kremlin's special services tried to split the republic along ethnic lines and foment ethnic strife, a process began during Mikhail Gorbachev's

time. They used their connections with the nascent criminal groups of the time, including racketeers, scam artists, and even bandits. Besides these criminals the Kremlin also used certain retired military men as leaders of ethnic movements. The real, undeclared goals of most of these movements were anti-democratic, totalitarian, and often militaristic and destructive.

For instance, the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus was created in 1990 and led by Shanibov, a totally unknown professor, and a colonel of the Russian Army, Ibrahimbeila. It called for war against Russia and the right of all the Northern Caucasus republics to secede. Such organizations caused many problems for the democratic movements of the region. General Kakhriyanov, a political commissar of the Soviet Army, still considers himself the leader of the divided Lezgin people and periodically makes provocative statements that complicate relations with neighboring Azerbaijan and make the lives of the Lezgin living there more difficult. During the rule of Elchibey the representatives of the People's Front of Azerbaijan came to know the full destructive, anti-democratic effect of the Lezgin "Sadval" movement led by Kakhriyanov.

During the late 1980's certain ethnic movements in Dagestan worked for a partial secession from the republic in the hope of joining the USSR (ostensibly, the RSFSR, that is the Russian Federal Soviet Republic which later became the Russian Federation). The same goals were put forth by the criminal and nationalistic regimes of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Pridnestrovie. All of these were motivated by conservative agitation, with the ostensible goal of the whole affair being to show the importance of the Politburo, Communist Party, and the USSR. The idea was to show that without the Party the whole country would explode and bring grief and blood to all those who refused to cooperate with the Communists. Today life has shown that grief and blood has actually come to those who followed the lead of the reactionaries from the Kremlin.

In Dagestan, only several of the many ethnic groups that inhabit the republic have their own writing systems (based on the Cyrillic alphabet), their own radio and TV programs, their own theaters, publishing houses and the ability to study their language in school. These languages are Avar, Dargin, Kumyk, Lezgin, Tabasaran, and Tat. Russian is, of course, a mandatory and necessary language for all these ethnic groups, which they learn beginning in the first grade. The population breakdown of the republic is shown in Table 1 (see Appendix).

It should be noted that there are whole ethnic groups that speak entirely different languages that have absolutely nothing in common with Avar or Lezgin, but which are included into the Avar or Lezgin groups. See Table 2 (Appendix). For example the Bagvalins, Chamalins, Andiytsy, Godoberintsy, Botlikhtsy, Khvarshintsy and many other peoples without their own written languages make up nearly half of the 800,000 Avars that live in Dagestan. Also, there are more than 10,000 Bagvalins in Dagestan. There also exist very small groups the size of a small village that speak their own unique, unwritten language. On the eve of the recent census some of these ethnic groups attempted to identify themselves as being separate from the Avars, but many of them succumbed to influence from above. The Didoi-Tsez group, however, counted as part of the Avars until 2002 now self-identify themselves as Didoi (Tsez). The problem with providing alphabets and grammar textbooks for these poorly studied, unwritten languages is very important today, but the government does not have the will to do so.

Despite all the crude mistakes made in the field of ethnic politics during the Soviet period, the idea of "ethnic strife" is rather a fantastic one in contemporary Dagestan. It is an entirely

different story when various members of the business or political elite, being part of different ethnic groups, use their leadership and finances to stir up the peace with slogans of ethnic loyalty and self-defense. In the early 1990's any threat to a government official was explained as an attack on an ethnicity's rights and demonstrations and street disorders were organized under the banner of protecting the tribe. Thus any attempt to remove a thieving Communist in the early 1990's was always greeted with protests held under such slogans as "The Avars are maligned!" and "The Kumyks are oppressed!," leading to disturbances in the squares and road closures.

During the same time period several ethnic armed militias were formed under the guise of "protecting the national interests" of a particular ethnicity. This is an absurd excuse, since the illnesses, problems, and hopes of all the peoples of Dagestan, as well as all the peoples of Russia, were the same during that time. These "national movement" militias controlled the nascent business in the republic and levied tithes from all of their co-nationals using the pretense of needing funds for defending the group's interests and the procurement of weapons. By 1993-95 the leaders of these groups had entered the government. Some had become members of the State Duma, some became ministers within the republic, and some managed to secure ownership of a factory, or some other piece of profitable real estate. By 1994-96 the criminals' control over the republic's economy was complete.

A new period had begun – a period of total control over the economy and the republic's supposed new leaders by those who actually hold power through the security apparatus. This meant that the obedient and totally controllable paid leaders of the mob became the titular masters of the republic, while true authority lay with the shadow leadership on the principle of, “we helped you then, you serve us now.” Both sides hold enough information to compromise each other many times over, and the balance between them is not preserved on the basis of law or on the Constitution, but on the basis of making deals typical of professional criminals.

This balance was disturbed when the brothers Khachilaev, leaders of the Lak national movement, tried to move their activities into a completely legal sphere. While their murders are attributed to their criminal past, the real cause is their attempt starting in 1994-95 to play an independent role in the political and economic life of the republic. Nadyr Khachilaev became a member of the State Duma, and Magomed a deputy of the National Council of Dagestan. Nadyr is the one and only man in modern Russian history to be stripped of his legislator's immunity and accused of a dozen crimes. Having overcome all accusations he remained free, but along with his older brother was felled by the assassin's bullet.

The district attorneys, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, the men who work in the courts all got their claws into the businesses of the republic by the mid-1990's. The legal owners of all these businesses were those men who had illegally controlled business in the early 1990's. Today any shop in Dagestan, even if it has a daily revenue of several thousand rubles (several hundred dollars) has its own “supervisor”, a local beat cop who receives a portion of the profits on a monthly basis. Officials from the security services have essentially become owners of all vital objects within the republic. An interesting example is the case of a man who acquired a large business because his nephew was a district attorney, but later declared war on his own relative because of the unremitting pressure from the official.

According to Mukha Aliev, the president of Dagestan, the shadow economy accounts for more than 50% of business activity within the republic. While he was still the speaker of parliament,

Mr. Aliev criticized the practice of selling the posts of district attorney and judge throughout the republic, a practice common in 2002. Aliev even had a list of prices that needed to be paid at the time. After being appointed president of Dagestan by Vladimir Putin, and after harshly condemning the tax agencies of the republic and the need to legalize the economy, Aliev has been unable to make any real changes. The rate of tax collection during the first quarter of 2002 only rose 9.98%.

It is simply impossible to speak of business being conducted legally today. It's perfectly reasonable to suppose that not all murders and terrorist acts directed against the security services are cases of Islamic or some other type of radicalism. They are often the work of a crushed and oppressed businessmen. According to the anti-monopoly agency of Dagestan the Dagestani minister of internal affairs acts as an arbiter between contesting sides in the republic, even in cases when one of the sides is a state agency like the tax police or the anti-monopoly agency! This sort of relationship between business and the state is not just typical of Dagestan, but is common to all of Russian business, and to all of Putin's Russia, as demonstrated by the recent events concerning Mr. Khodorkovsky and YUKOS. Locally, however, such events tend to be much more brazen. Tax inspectors complain of being unable to collect taxes from those businessmen that have patrons who are high-ranking Dagestani officials.

It would seem that with the end of Soviet rule the republic and its people have finally received economic freedom. They have the ability to make every piece of city land work and turn a profit and astonishing opportunities for private enterprise. All of this should be fueling the growth of the republic's tax revenue, but instead year after year Dagestan becomes ever more dependent on federal aid and the economy continues to stagnate. It doesn't take an economist to realize the essence of what's going on – theft. When the shadow economy accounts for over 50% of the total, this is theft, pure and simple.

There is also another flowering form of theft – the misuse of governmental money. Starting with 1994, or more correctly with the operation in neighboring Chechnya, a veritable downpour of money has descended on Dagestan. "Hit the Chechens with rockets, hit their neighbors with cash!" "Federal money" became a synonym for "nobody's money." After a decade of mass misuse of funds, there hasn't been one successful, thoroughly run prosecution. One gets the feeling that the Kremlin, terrified of what happened in Chechnya, has taken the attitude of, "do anything you want, but do it as part of Russia" when dealing with Dagestan and the other republics of the region.

Today the republic is actually home to a unique phenomenon. Unlike all the other regions of the Russian Federation, Dagestan has a president who is not involved in business, not involved in criminal activity, and actually is an honest, decent man with a reputation of being a clean politician. If Mr. Abramovich does not sleep nights, he's thinking of his oil company or about soccer. Is some senator or governor does has insomnia, it means he's worrying about his vodka business or his real estate. But it seems that if the president of Dagestan does have sleepless nights, it is because he is worrying about the current situation and the future of Dagestan.

The first six months of this man's administration show the true nature of contemporary Russian politics. Today Russia does not need such leaders, it only seeks to preserve that which has been created over the past fifteen years. All attempts to change something in the republic seem to hit an invisible, insurmountable wall. The president has said that it's not possible to work or live

like this any longer. But except for a change in the attorney general, nothing has happened. Furthermore, the attempts to remove the minister of internal affairs of the republic, a minister that many analysts and journalists believe is one of the causes of continuing terrorism in Dagestan, have been blocked by the federal authorities, by the President of Russia himself! Dagestan was recently visited by the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, Rashid Nurgaliev, who brought with him a medal and Putin's personal messages of gratitude for a job well done for the Dagestani minister. It is simply not possible to remove a minister who has received Putin's gratitude and a medal be removed from office. But while he is minister, he will not change his ways of trying to enforce the law, and that means that terrorism will never disappear from the republic.

Starting in 1999, when armed conflict first came to Dagestan, the mass arrests of all who kept even the most superficial Muslim norms began. A young man who attends Friday prayers, doesn't drink or use drugs and who has no criminal activity to his name would be at least suspected of supporting the "wahhabites." The release of such a man following his arrest could only be achieved if his family paid off the authorities. If no "ransom" were forthcoming, it would be simple to fabricate an indictment of illegally bearing arms or possession of ammunition. It became common at this time to plant weapons, ammo, or drugs in the pockets or homes of the accused and to obtain confessions under torture. The torture and beatings going on in the pre-trial holding cells have been described by all the media outlets with the exception of the internal newspapers of the ministry of internal affairs and the attorney general's office. The police have become the most important threat to the safety of the citizenry.

The most popular method of counter-terrorism in Dagestan is to wreck any building that suspects may be hiding in. It's true that after Mukha Aliev became president the destruction of homes has declined (Table 3, see Appendix), since he has declared on numerous occasions that such a tactic is not acceptable outside of wartime. And it should be remembered that multi-story city houses are being attacked with tanks and artillery alongside with any suspects that may be hiding within. Dozens of families have had their possessions destroyed by fire.

A recent operation in Makhachkala ended with the death of the suspects and the destruction of the home of 69-year-old Zubail Khiyasov, a former Dagestani deputy minister of culture and the director of a Kumyk theater. According to his family and coworkers Khiyasov was distant from radical Islam, and had even quarreled with his own daughters over their marriages to observant Muslims. He was a director of a secular, reasonably avant-garde Kumyk theater, not a church choir or a Sufi lodge. The concepts of "director of a modern theater" and "Islamic radical" are inherently incompatible. And yet ministry of internal affairs staff claim that he screamed "Allah akbar!" while firing at them as they tried to storm the building. Most of the residents probably didn't even understand what was going on. The last scene for the aging director was his own death.

According to Russian law the bodies of terrorists are not released to their relatives for burial. This is why the body of the Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov was never released to his family. This is despite the fact that he was the most moderate, sober, and reasonable politician that modern Chechnya has had, with the exception of Ahmed Zakaev. Maskhadov's connection to terrorism existed only in the speeches of Kremlin ideologues and prosecutors. Even his death was not the result of the professional quality of Russian intelligence services, but the dishonorable exploitation of Maskhadov's naiveté and trust – he had tried to communicate with

the Russian government, he sought to peacefully end a conflict that had taken hundreds of thousands of lives. In any event, the director's body was finally released under popular protest, but the other victims of the same operation were only released upon payment of \$15,000. The Magomedov family lost two sons in this operation, one of whom had been released from pre-trial detention on suspicion of terrorist activity only the day before. The Magomedovs tried everything to get the bodies of their sons, but were refused. The Khiyasov family got his body, the Magomedovs got nothing.

If we want to discuss terrorism as a result of the activity of the security services and law enforcement the case of Rasul Makasharipov, the leader of the Dagestani faction "Shariat," is most illuminating. In 1999 all video recordings show him to be a virtual shadow of Shamil Basayev, for whom he worked as an interpreter. By 2000, when the military campaign in Chechnya had gotten underway, the Kremlin announced an amnesty for all those who voluntarily turned themselves in. Rasul was one of the first to comply. Having spent several weeks in an FSB cell, he was declared innocent of especially severe crimes that would prevent him from being amnestied and was released. Shortly afterwards he was detained and questioned by men from the 6th department of the Dagestani ministry of internal affairs (the department for combating terrorism and organized crime).

This department's torture methods have shocked even men from other security services. One such torture is completely grinding down the teeth of a strapped-down victim using a file. Another – inserting a tube into the anus, threading through a piece of barbed wire, removing the tube and then pulling out the wire until the victim confesses. There is also the suspension of people by their handcuffed hands and forcing someone to sit on a bottle so that it penetrates the anus. After dealing with people like this Makasharipov chose to flee to the forests and fight against his torturers. If a man can't find his place in civilian life, if he's constantly suspected and dishonored, what else can he do?

When Rasul couldn't be caught, it was his relatives and men from his village that suffered. Thus Makhach Khabibov, born 1976, a father of two young children and a second cousin to Rasul was abducted along with other men from his village of Novyi Sasitli of the Khasavyurt region at the end of 2004. They were taken to Chechnya and several months later the killing of the abducted Dagestanis was presented as "yet another battle with terrorists, during which the military successfully destroyed the bandits." The slain were eventually identified by their relatives based on their clothes and other distinguishing marks. The pre-burial autopsy conducted in Chechnya where the men were still listed as "unidentified" showed that all of them had empty gastrointestinal tracts, suggesting that they were starved by their captors.

Another second cousin, Halil, a man who is legally blind, was forced to go into hiding starting in March 2006 because weapons had been planted in his house and he was declared wanted by the authorities. People from his village say that he never left his home or his family, and even his health never allowed him to undertake any sort of criminal activity. A month later he was killed in an anti-terrorist operation near Buinaksk, which led the famous journalist Yulia Latynina to say that "A blind terrorist can't live long."

A more recent case involved some 14-16 year old boys from a region that borders Chechnya. An unknown "benefactor" got them together for a trip to the sea, though one boy couldn't go because his grandmother kept him home to help with the household. Overseen by this "benefactor" the

group was driven to the Chechen border where the leader told the boys to go ahead and that he would catch up with them in a second. They proceeded towards Chechnya, only to be met with a wall of automatic fire from Kadyrov's men. The murdered boys were then declared to be a group of Dagestanis heading towards Chechnya in order to support the guerrillas there. This supported Ramzan Kadyrov's repeated statements that Chechnya is actually at peace, and that Dagestan is the terrorist den from which all of Chechnya's troubles grow. This is not the first attempt by the current leadership in Chechnya to draw Dagestan into large-scale anti-terrorist operation. Of course many Russian generals are just itching to repeat what they did in Chechnya to Dagestan.

The shortsighted politics of the Dagestani leadership towards those men who are willing to return to civilian life needs to be noted. In Chechnya Kadyrov can order the amnesty of any insurgent who can then be taken, without being disarmed, into one of Kadyrov's bands. Things are very different in Dagestan. For three years, I had to deal with various Dagestani and federal agencies in order to arrange the return of the famous Dagestani poet Adallo, a seventy-year-old man who had been declared wanted by Interpol. I was threatened with being arrested as a terrorist sympathizer and was told that the whole undertaking was a dead end. The only condition set by the poet for his return was that he would not be held in pre-trial prison. He asked for this as he had just undergone heart surgery while in exile abroad. Adallo is a well-known songwriter and poet whose only fault lay in the fact that he knew Dudaev, Maskhadov, Yandarbiev, Basayev, and Khattab, and thus had been declared an international terrorist. Over the course of three years I appealed to numerous community leaders and members of the regional parliament. In the summer of 2004 the attorney general of the republic gave his guarantee that no repressive measures would be taken until a court had made its decision on the issue. The fact that the poet was not imprisoned was due to the positive attitude of the authorities, of the positive approach taken by the then-leader of Dagestan Magomedali Magomedov and the federal officials who agreed to accept Adallo and not hold his past against him.

The religious confrontation that ended with armed conflict in 1999 actually began in the early 1990's. Young men who questioned some of the traditions that had arisen over the past several decades appeared among the Sunni Muslims of the republic. It should be remembered that in the past the religious community was not united behind one leader or mufti, but instead followed a number of Sufi leaders (ustaz) who didn't always get along with each other. (Almost every single Sufi leader considers only himself worthy of being called a Sufi ustaz. Therefore any followers of another Sufi leader are declared as having gone astray, a claim that a believer sees as tantamount to being declared a godless heathen.) It's possible that these tensions were provoked and controlled by the intelligence services, since a united community of believers with one leader could have been a powerful force during the late 1980's and early 1990's. Such a community could have even assumed political power, since no genuine, respected authority existed in the republic at that time. During the dissolution of the USSR and the fall of Communism there was a schism in the religious community following the appearance of "wahhabite" enemies that completely split and confused the community.

The differences between the wahhabites and the representatives of traditional Islam were not important enough to warrant the spilling of blood. All too often they concerned secondary, even by Islamic standards, superficial attributes. "The wahhabites think that a Muslim can marry his own mother" was one absurd accusation. An adequate and reasonable answer would be "Even if they think this possible, I won't avail myself of the opportunity!" Muslims, just like Jews, permit the marriage of cousins and similar relatives, but this does not force either religious group to do



so. Uneducated members of the clergy were incredibly aggressive towards the new teachers and preachers of Islam, even though they were part of the same Dagestani Sufi school, since almost all Salafis were actually former pupils of Sufis from the republic.

By 1993 calls for physical violence against one's opponents were openly made and various villages saw fights between members of the clergy break out. In response the opposition chose to peacefully separate themselves from the traditionalists, leading to the construction of separate mosques in some settlements. But this was insufficient for the traditionalists who continued to ratchet up the social pressure and sometimes even attacked and destroyed functioning mosques under the pretence of them being "wahhabite." The authorities, instead of pulling both sides back into a legal and orderly resolution to the conflict, sided with one side and thus supported its illegal demands.

In 1994-95 the threat of physical destruction of the activists of the religious opposition became very real, causing their leader Bagaudin and his closest followers to leave Dagestan. The Chechens, who had dreamed of including their neighbors in the revolutionary process taking place in their republic, happily accepted these refugees in Grozny. Without committing any crimes dozens and even of hundreds of Dagestanis fled their republic and sought refuge with their leader Bagaudin, and it was his followers that most actively defended Chechnya during the first Chechen war. It needs to be remembered that until the incursion of Russian forces into Chechnya Bagaudin was skeptical both about Chechen president Dudaev and all the talk of sovereignty and independence. Unlike the "radical" Bagaudin, the traditionalists stayed in Grozny during the peaceful 1991-94 period and supported Dudaev and his regime in every conceivable way. As soon as hostilities broke out, however, the traditionalists started to help the Russian military, while Bagaudin and his followers entered the very heart of combat.

Volunteers had started to arrive from Muslim countries at this time, with Khattab among them. During the interwar period (1997-99) Khattab and Bagaudin quarreled. Specifically, when Khattab made his famous raid on Buinaksk and attacked the Russian military in 1998, the Dagestani Salafi leader Bagaudin sternly told him that it was unacceptable to move military operations onto the territory of Dagestan. During his presence in Chechnya in 1994-99 Bagaudin did not participate in the work of local organizations and had his own political agenda, believing that any initiatives not founded on sharia law would not bring about positive results.

I can relate one story of my personal contact with Bagaudin in 1990. One of the regional newspapers in Dagestan had published an article personally attacking Bagaudin and containing libel and lies directed at him. This was a time when the "Regarding publishing" law had come into effect in the USSR. According to this law Bagaudin could have filed suit in court and sent a rebuttal to the very same newspaper, which is what I suggested he do. In return he merely laughed. "I can only make use of a sharia court! For a Muslim to make use of any other court means to acknowledge the existence of a power other than the power of the Almighty. This is faith-breaking. Show me a sharia court, and I will appeal to it." I tried to explain myself to him; saying "Let the press learn to behave better. Let this be a lesson to them, we can win this suit, and they will stop insulting not just you, but also others! In this case, even if you do not act completely in accordance to the principles of Islam, more good than harm will come out of it." He responded by saying that "The insults of all mankind are less meaningful than the least bit of God's anger! I will remain a Muslim, and only God is our judge."

Another incident occurred in 1991 during the presidential elections in Russia. I met with Bagaudin and asked him to support the candidacy of Boris Yeltsin. He asked me "Will Yeltsin establish sharia law and an Islamic government across Russia?" And I answered that "No, but his platform is closer to the notions found in sharia – it includes a free market, the ability to leave the country freely, private ownership of land and other means of production, and much else." Nonetheless Bagaudin replied that he could vote only for someone backing sharia and Islam, since everything else belongs to Satan.

The Salafis were also opposed to the authority of president Maskhadov in Chechnya. The absence of funding from the Kremlin led Maskhadov to make concessions to the Islamic radicals and to lead a double game when dealing with the religious community. In the spring of 1999 Bagaudin's men were suspected of planning an assassination attempt on Aslan Maskhadov, which led to an investigation by the attorney general of the Chechen republic of Ichkeria. It was this investigation, as it gradually moved towards arresting Bagaudin's men on assassination charges, that led to the migration of the Dagestani Salafis to the Tsumadin region of Dagestan in July 1999. The night before the military confrontation began I was told by one of the field commanders that "We have no way of going back – Maskhadov's special services will meet us. We would prefer for the Russians to meet us."

By 1999 Chechnya was becoming not only the refuge of the religious opposition, but of criminals. In order to avoid being prosecuted these men began joining Bagaudin's movement. Seeing the danger of this process certain Dagestani officials (parliamentary members and leaders of different levels of government) had contacted Bagaudin in the spring of 1999 and asked him to leave Chechnya and return to Dagestan, promising security and the cessation of persecution. Taking into account these invitations Bagaudin decided to return and came back to his home in Tsumadin region, refusing, however, to lay down his weapons. "If no one shoots at us, we won't use our weapons first," he said.

In the afternoon of the 2nd of August, however, the village of Gigatli was the site of a completely accidental, unintentional fire. The participants were actually a group of men quite distant from Bagaudin's faction, which had settled near the village of Echeda. The group in question was led by field commander Ramzan and was located in the village of Kenkhi, near Gigatli. The two groups were almost 35 km apart, with only a difficult mountain road connecting them. By midnight on August 2nd Bagaudin's men had moved forward towards the administrative center of the Tsumadin region, while the men near Gigatli were hit by helicopter rocket strikes and forced back into Chechnya.

During the night, 2 km away from Agvali village several dozen of Bagaudin's men confronted a police checkpoint, leading to casualties on both sides. The military arrived in the region on the night of August 4th and made no attempt to negotiate a peaceful settlement. In response to my attempt to start negotiations, contact the officials in Grozny, and thus prevent wide scale bloodshed, M. Omarov, the acting military commandant of Tsumadin and deputy minister of internal affairs of Dagestan, answered harshly. "We know where, we know in what villages they are hiding. We'll destroy every last one of them! There will be no negotiations!" And so the second Chechen war began.

The attempts to pursue and destroy those who had entered Dagestan ended with the attack of Basayev and Khattab, who tried to cut the military forces off from the rear. They did so by

freely, without firing a shot, occupying several villages in neighboring Botlikh region and started to blackmail the authorities with their grandiose plans of attacking Makhachkala. There were actually no real attempts to leave their position near the villages of Rakhat and Ansalt. Naturally, the military ended their pursuit of Bagaudin's small group and turned to confront Basayev and Khattab. All the branches of the military now worked in Botlikh. Following the return of Bagaudin's men to Chechnya Basayev and Khattab successfully did so as well, being passively watched by the Russian forces the entire time they retreated.

Combat in Botlikh, including the use of air strikes, continued for more than a week, even though the locals knew that none of the invaders were left in the region. Basayev and his men actually watched the course of the operation on Russian television while sitting in Chechnya. "The funniest thing about all of it," I was told by men who watched these TV news in Basayev's home in Vedeno, "was that they showed guerilla prisoners, even though we hadn't left even one heavily injured fighter in the place!" The only attempt at negotiation with Maskhadov was made by the Head of the State Council of Dagestan, Magomedali Magomedov, when they tried to discuss the situation in early September 1999. The Federal authorities, however, said that such a meeting simply CANNOT BE. And as it may be expected "the Dagestani peoples blocked the road to Chechnya, and prevented the meeting."

The wide scale anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya began, having been intended to last "several months" according to Russian Prime Minister Putin, who also promised to normalize the situation in Dagestan in "a few weeks." As we can see the anti-terrorist occupation has not only taken far longer, but has also spread geographically. Today tension grows in Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Dagestan, and Osetia. This tension negatively affects the economy of the region. Dagestan, which has a huge potential for tourism, is simply unable to develop this branch of the republic's economy. Similarly, with great possibilities for animal husbandry, no development is possible due to the lack of investment and the lack of processing facilities. Agriculture in the mountains tends to rely on manual labor, with extremely limited arable land being worked with a plow and oxen, the haying done manually, and the transport of feed being conducted by donkey or even on the shoulders of women.

The national Russian media has deliberately created the image of an unsuitable, criminal region for Dagestan, strongly reducing the development of tourism and the improvement of the investment climate. It should be noted that if one does not count the terrorist acts directed at law enforcement and various officials the level of crime in Dagestan is actually low in comparison with other regions. Felonies have declined year after year, and unlike Moscow, Petersburg, or other Russian cities there are absolutely no hate crimes motivated by ethnicity or race. One example should show the attitudes of simple Dagestanis. In the April of this year I accompanied a group from RenTV to the sites of some of the military clashes of the second Chechen war. Passing through the distant mountain village of Inkho, in the valley of the Andian Koisu, we were stopped by a gray-bearded old man who asked us in Avar to stop in his village for a short time and take part in the festivities celebrating the prophet Mohammad's birthday. I answered that I would be delighted, but that the men with me were Russians. This answer was actually a sort of test. To the surprise of the men with me the old man said "They too are the men of our prophet Isa, both they and us have one God, so we happily invite all to share!" This is not an exception, but the real attitude of the vast majority of Muslims in Dagestan.

The peoples of Dagestan are generally very friendly, and tend towards internationalism and religious tolerance. On the other hand, crude interference in the community that involves repression and insult leads to limitless and unpredictable resistance. That which is currently occurring in Russia – the growth of nationalism, of "Russian fascism" – which has come to victimize not only Jews, but also people from the Caucasus, has come to negatively impact the ethnic and religious equilibrium within society. Recently a tiny Dagestani baby was killed by fascist nationalists who attacked the child and its Dagestani nurse in Moscow. Using rebar they broke the child's skull and put the nurse into a two-week coma caused by a skull fracture. A similar negative effect is created by America's attempt to set up democracy in Iraq and other Muslim countries using tanks and warplanes. The United States becomes an enemy of all the world's Muslims when we see Abu Ghraib, Falluja, or occupied Baghdad. Those who saw Saddam Hussein as a bloody dictator before the American invasion now tend to sympathize with him. This is the result of the policies of the current White House. It is reassuring that America doesn't only contain Bushes, but also the brave movie director Michael Moor, and an intelligentsia that shares his views. One would hope that America's future will be linked to exactly such men.

Returning to Dagestan's problem with terrorism, I would like to say that the spread of terrorism in the republic is heavily tied to the socio-economic conditions of the region. According to official statistics more than 200,000 people are unemployed out of a total population of 2.5 million! More than half of these are young people under thirty. There is no demand for higher education, and highly qualified specialists must take any work available in order to feed their families. In his recent speech the president of Dagestan has stated that the sources of terrorism are the "socio-economic, community-political, and spiritual and moral problems, as well as the loss of trust in government due to its corruption, injustice, crassness, and soullessness." It has been five years now, and it's time for the authorities to finally admit what the true causes of terrorism are. As a doctor I can say that the diagnosis is correct, and it remains only to treat the disease.

It doesn't seem necessary to explain that blood-soaked surgery in the form of a military intervention is unnecessary for treating the above-mentioned problems. On the contrary, it would be enough to rebuild the trust of the people towards their government, to destroy corruption, to improve the socio-political situation and the moral climate of the republic. None of these can be done with tanks or flamethrowers. We need to work with people, we need professionals trained in conflict resolution, we need psychologists, we need highly trained specialists in the employ of the republic's government. The official statistics from last year show that 50 officials of the highest rank within the republic do not have a college degree. If these were the 1920's or 1930's that would be understandable. But in addition to these fifty men, how many men have fake diplomas that they have simply bought? Only the truly lazy officials do not receive PhDs these days, with the older Kadyrov managing to get a PhD in the sciences, and the younger becoming an Academician, though he never attended a university!

There are no wild or backward peoples. There are only peoples that have been prevented from being enlightened and that have been driven into being wild. The once famous Dagestani poet Rasul Gamzatov wrote "Would Africa be as black, had not her path to the light been blocked?!" Ethnic groups and peoples should not have their path to the light closed off, people should be helped towards civilization, but not with tanks and bombs. What is the difference between the United States, which today establishes democracy in Iraq, and the Bolsheviks, who established

Communism across one sixth of the globe with assault rifles in hand, who turned this part of the world into one giant GULAG for hundreds of millions of people?

Despite all of today's difficulties, Dagestan is rich with intellectual potential. The famous torpedo engine designer Shamil Aliev, a man whose designs are used across the world, was from highland Khunzakh. The world-famous composers Murad Kazhlaev and Shirvani Chalaev, poets, writers, scientists – one simply doesn't have the time to list all those personalities who are the treasures not just of today's Dagestan, but of today's Russia. Another example can be drawn from the previously unknown facts of Dagestan's Soviet period. At the beginning of the 20th century Ahmed Nabi of Godoberi, while still a beardless youth, fought against the Bolsheviks for the Gornaia Respublika ("Mountain Republic"). His contemporary Halilbeg Musayasul from Chokha was a friend of Nazhmutdin, the imam of the Gornaia Respublika. After the establishment of the Communist dictatorship in Dagestan, both were forced to flee Russia. A member of one of the ethnicities of Dagestan that lacks a written language, Nabi found himself in Prague where he graduated from the university, defended his dissertation, and finally became a department head in the university of Prague. Later, while living in Hitler's Germany he helped hundreds of thousands of people from the Caucasus who were imprisoned in concentration camps in Poland, Austria, and Germany. Halilbeg Musayasul became a world-famous painter and lived out his life in the United States, where he died in 1949. A marble impression of his hand, along with a similar impression of Rakhmaninov's hand, is still preserved in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. All of this shows that the intellectual potential of the mountain peoples of Dagestan has been limitless in even the toughest times.

Today, an important investment in developing the intellectual potential of Dagestan has been made by the American financier George Soros. Thanks to his contributions a computer center was created in Dagestan's university, which provides 100 computers with internet access to the community. Over the first five years of the center's operation, 11,000 students have come to be familiar with the internet without having to pay for the access. Thanks to Soros' help the republic has received a powerful impetus in developing today's modern technologies. It would be wonderful to continue similar projects in helping schools and other children's institutions to develop civil education and acquaint the pupils with humanism and love of their fellow man. Today only 14% of all schools in the republic are up to health and fire code, and Putin's so-called national project in the realms of education and healthcare is a completely empty gesture when no material is available for education and when schools look like cattle barns.

According to official figures 15,000 children in Dagestan dropped out of school this year. This a catastrophe, but it has not elicited due attention or involved analysis that such an issue deserves. This is the beginning of total degradation! Some of the kids in question might not see the point of continuing their education. College admission is based on bribes, and the bribes due to the professors every semester are a prequel to further bribes necessary to moving up in one's chosen profession. Thus the youth are never free of problems, even if they get through college. Admission to the police academy, an institution that prepares future keepers of the law, necessitates a bribe of roughly \$6,000! But most of these 15,000 children left school in order to help their parents. Parents are often unable to bear the burden of maintaining their large families, so at 12 or 13 boys start to work in the fields and make their own contributions to the family budget. A certain part of those who left school, however, entered specialized religious institutions, which need to be discussed separately.

Dagestan has about 20 Islamic colleges and thousands of madrasas. This would not be a problem if the secular part of society, the ministry of education, and the appropriate committees within the government could answer society's question, "what are they studying there?" I can assure you that they are not studying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or international law, or modern political science. Thousands of imams, religious scholars, sharia experts, and other religious specialists are being prepared. Where will this veritable army be sent? What will this do for the economy, culture, science, diplomacy, industry, or agriculture of the republic? But the republic's leadership doesn't seem to care, just as it didn't care about the outflow of thousands of young men to foreign Islamic institutions in the early 1990's.

It's not true that all those who graduated from Islamic institutions in Egypt, Syria, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia in the early 1990's returned home with ideas of jihad or combating secular society, but they have all been declared "unwanted and potentially dangerous" by the official clergy. Many of these foreign graduates are progressive thinking, rational, preach peaceful ideals, and have deeper religious knowledge than the official clergy, who in Dagestan are often distinguished by their limited worldview and stubbornness. Tensions among the clergy often become a reason for social disturbances and schism among the faithful. Even those foreign graduates that attended secular institutions are often unwanted by society. And those unwanted in their specialties will probably seek other outlets for their knowledge and skills.

## Appendix

**Table 1. The ethnic composition of the population of Dagestan.**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Size of group (2002)</b>	<b>Percentage of total population</b>
Avars	758,438	29.44%
Dargins	425,526	16.52%
Kumyks	365,804	14.20%
Lezgins	336,698	13.07%
Laks	139,732	5.42%
Russians	120,875	4.69%
Azerbaijanis	111,656	4.33%
Tabasarans	110,152	4.28%
Chechens	87,867	3.41%
Nogais	38,168	1.48%
Rutuls	24,298	0.94%
Aguls	23,314	0.90%
Tsakhur	8,168	0.32%
Armenians	5,702	0.22%

**Table 2. The Avars – population numbers of the component ethnic groups.**

Avars (avaral, maarulal)	814,473
Andiytsy (andii, andal, gvanal, kvannal, kuannal)	21,808
Archins (archi, archib)	89
Akhvakhtsy (akhvalal, ashvatl, ashval)	6,376
Bagulals (bagvalaly, bagvalins, bagulav, gantlialo, kvanalketsy, tlibishintsy, tlissintsy)	40
Bezhtins (kapuchins, khvanal)	6,198
Botlikhtsy	16
Ginukhtsy	531
Godoberintsy (gibdidi, ibdidi)	39
Gynzibtsy (gunzal, nakhada, khunzalis, khunzaly)	998
Didois (tsezy, tsyntintsy)	15,256
Karatintsy (kirdi)	6,052
Tindaly (idari, ideri, tindii, tindintsy)	44
Kharshiny (inkhokvarintsy, khvarshal, khvarshintsy, khuani)	128
Chamalaly (chamalins)	12



**Table 3. Comparative statistics of anti-terrorist activity in Dagestan.**

	January-August 2005	January-August 2006
Members of special services killed	53	22
Radicals killed	48	22
Members of special services wounded	115	29
Radicals wounded	3	0
Homes destroyed during anti-terrorist operations	12	2
Radicals and their supporters detained	54	47
Famous officials killed	7	6

**ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> It is unclear from the original what the proper name – Lomonosov or Tarasuk – should actually be. Translator's note.