

Chechnya - Narrative

Introduction

Chechnya was the first of the autonomous North Caucasian republics to declare independence. In 1990 a Chechen National Congress was convened, proclaimed a sovereign Chechen republic and drew up guidelines for a new constitution and separate armed forces.

The leadership in Moscow, however, has feared that the Chechen will provoke further secessions throughout the Russian Federation.

The situation in Chechnya is marked by a complex network of external and internal factors that contribute to economic and political uncertainty and rising social tension.

BACKGROUND CONDITIONS OF THE CHECHEN CONFLICT

Russian military involvement into the Caucasus started early in the 18th century and in 1785-1791 the first major rebellion in Chechnya against the imperial rule took place. In early 19th century several Georgian princedoms and Abkhazia had appealed to join the Russian Empire; several successful military campaigns against the Ottoman Empire and Persia made it possible to consolidate control over Transcaucasus. However, resistance in the North Caucasus continued; it was only in 1864 that the Caucasian war was over.

The status of the North Caucasian republics was determined in 1936, but some changes took place in 1944. The Chechen-Ingush Republic was disbanded (both peoples were blamed for collaboration with Nazi Germany in 1942 and deported to Kazakhstan); Chechens and Ingush were rehabilitated and allowed to return in 1957. At the same time, their republic was re-established, with somewhat changed borders.

In 1989, Russians made up 23% of the population of Chechen-Ingush Republic, but intensive migration has sharply reduced this figure.

On November 27, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR adopted a on the State Sovereignty of the Chechen-Ingush Republic."This declaration did not cause particular concern, despite the implicit upgrade in status from that of Autonomous Republic within the Russian Federation.

The CNC was held in spring 1991 and called for early parliamentary and presidential elections, for adoption of a new constitution and a law on citizenship, and for a referendum on the Republic's status. The CNC set as prerequisites for signing a treaty with the USSR or Russia the unconditional recognition of the Chechen nation's right to independence, compensation for crimes committed against the Chechen nation, trials of the guilty, and establishment of a government based on democratic principles.

THE REVOLUTION IN CHECHNYA (August-December 1991)

Political situation in Moscow has its impact on events in Chechnya. Zavgayev was then in Moscow to sign the proposed Union Treaty. Almost all officials in Grozny either favored the attempted coup or avoided taking sides by calling in sick.

In contrast, on August 19, Dudaev and the CNC Executive Committee issued a decree denouncing the organisers as group of government criminals,"appealed to population of the Chechen Republic to show perseverance, determination, and courage in defending democracy and human dignity,"and called for "a campaign of civil disobedience."Large demonstrations in Grozny's main square supported Dudaev and the CNC. Zavgayev, who returned from Moscow on August 21, could not regain control of the situation in Chechnya; on August 22 Dudaev's armed

supporters seized the Grozny television station; on August 24 they pulled down Lenin's statue in the town center; by the end of August a national guard was formed; on September 1-2 the third session of the CNC passed a resolution transferring power in Chechnya to its Executive Committee; and on September 6 the National Guard stormed a meeting of the Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet, forced Zavgaev to sign an of abdication."

On September 11, Gennady Burbulis and Mikhail Poltoranin were dispatched from Moscow by the federal leadership to try restore order. On September 14, Ruslan Khasbulatov, a Chechen elected in 1990 to the RF Supreme Soviet from Grozny and its acting chairman after June 1991, arrived in Grozny. On September 15, at a special session of the Chechen-Ingush Supreme Soviet, he persuaded the deputies to remove Zavgaev and to disband, in anticipation of new parliamentary elections, which were set for November 17. The political struggle between the radical nationalist forces, grouped around Dudaev and pushing for independence, and the conservative nomenklatura, trying to preserve the status quo, continued.

Instability in North Caucasus has increased since October 1991, when the Chechen Republic declared its independence. On October 8, the Presidium of the RF Supreme Soviet adopted a Resolution on the Political Situation in the Chechen-Ingush Republic, which expressed concern regarding the situation in the Chechen-Ingush Republic "where escalation of violent actions by illegal formations is continuing" and life, rights, and property of citizens of the Chechen-Ingush Republic are subject to growing danger." The Presidium then declared that the Provisional Council was the only legitimate state power in the Republic, that this Provisional Council should take all necessary measures to stabilize the situation, that armed formations "should hand in their weapons by midnight October 10, and that the forthcoming elections should be held on the basis of the Russian Federation's existing legislation.

On November 7, President Yeltsin declared a state of emergency in the Chechen-Ingush Republic. The newly-elected Chechen parliament responded by voting emergency powers to Dudaev, who ordered martial law in Chechnya and mobilized the National Guard. When planes carrying Russian troops landed at the airport near Grozny, their deployment was blocked by Chechen forces.

On November 10, the RF Supreme Soviet voted to withhold the confirmation of Yeltsin's state of emergency decree.

STALEMATE IN 1992-1993

After Russia's failure to reassert sovereignty over Chechnya in November 1991, an extended stalemate developed. Chechnya attempted to assert the prerogatives of an independent sovereign state, while Russia continued to regard the Chechen Republic as part of the Russian Federation and subject to its laws.

Chechnya for three years managed to function effectively outside Russia's control, refusing to participate in any federal initiatives including the elections/referendum in December 1993. That did not provide for internal stability, and the contradictions between the Chechen parliament and President Dudaev, elected in October 1991 by a very questionable ballot, escalated to confrontation. In March 1992 an attempted coup was crushed by force, and in June 1993 President Dudaev, in a last resort to avoid a referendum on a vote of no-confidence authorised by the parliament, used his troops to dissolve it and to dislodge the opposition from Grozny to Nadterechny district bordering with Stavropol krai. Limited clashes and terrorist activities continued after this.

Increasing instability in the Chechen Republic in 1992-1993 was related primarily to the competition between several major teips (clans) which started to struggle for control over oil, narco-trafficking and arms smuggling. In 1993, several presidential decrees and government orders were issued in Moscow for tightening control on the Chechnya borders - but with little practical effect, since Daghestan was not particularly interested in implementing those while the border between Chechnya and Ingushetia was not even demarcated after the split. The first half

of 1994 saw increasing demands in Russia to seal off Chechnya, due to several incidents with hostage-taking and highjacking in Stavropol and Krasnodar krai in which all Chechens were involved. An official propaganda campaign was intensified in Moscow depicting Dudaev's regime as criminal, illegitimate and losing popular support.

Moscow authorities have provided a policy of peaceful coexistence with the Grozny authorities until spring 1994. However, nationalists in Moscow wanted to reassert Russian rule by force. Liberals wanted to bring Chechnya within the framework of the Russian Constitution and the rule of law by means of a process of peaceful negotiation. The average Russian was angered by stories of Chechen abuse of local Russians and saw Chechnya as a dangerous center of mafia activities. Local opposition in Chechnya to Dudaev had grown because of the Republic's failure to win international recognition. Some districts of Chechnya had come under the control of the opposition, notably Nadterechny raion, dominated by Umar Avturkhanov, who in December 1993 organized a Provisional Council as a potential alternative government for Chechnya and appealed to Moscow for assistance.

In the spring of 1994 Yeltsin and his advisors decided to provide financial and military assistance to the opposition in Chechnya in hopes that Dudaev could be overthrown and that a reconstituted Chechen government would accept the Russian Constitution and the status it granted to the Chechen Republic.

By summer 1994, the internal clashes in Chechnya had escalated to full-scale civil war. Several groups of opposition consolidated their control on Nadterechny district and established bases in other areas, threatening to reduce Dudaev's control to the capital Grozny. For Moscow it became increasingly tempting to extend its support for the opposition in order to bring into power a more controllable regime. This support initially included financial aid and some military equipment; but Dudaev played rather skillfully on discord among the opposition leaders and defeated their uncoordinated attacks. In early November, central authorities in Moscow decided to secure for the opposition a clear military superiority; But the decisive assault on Grozny on 26 November was repelled, with heavy casualties. Moscow tried to deny any involvement, but several dozen Russian officers captured by Chechen government forces confirmed that they had been hired by the Federal Counterintelligence Service with consent of the military authorities.

Since then the nature of conflict has changed. The opposition forces were demoralized, not so much because of the military failure as because of the connections with Moscow. Dudaev was able to turn his case from fighting with opposition into standing firm against external intervention.

RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN CHECHNYA (December 1994-September 1996)

Russia's full-scale military intervention was launched on 11 December 1994 as an "restoring" operation aimed at illegal groupings". Up to 40,000 troops with some 500 armoured vehicles marched toward Grozny from three directions: northern (from Mozdok), western (through Ingushetia) and eastern (through Dagestan). But the western and eastern groupings immediately faced massive resistance that seriously hampered the offensive and led to unexpected casualties. Only by the end of December were the Russian troops able to tighten their blockade of Grozny, but the armoured assault of 31 December was defeated with heavy casualties. That left the commanders of the operation with only one military option: indiscriminate bombardment of residential areas accompanied by slow advance of crack forces into the city. Despite forecasts of a quick victory, Russian troops made slow progress in advancing on Grozny, held up by unarmed civilians as well as by Chechen troops and a lack of supplies and seasoned soldiers.

The Chechen forces are made up of the National Guard and other regular army units, including many soldiers with Afghan war experience; the volunteer militia, subject also to central command and discipline, in which a great proportion of able-bodied Chechen males participate, some on a part-time basis. By mid-January 1995, Chechen fighters abandoned the presidential palace in Grozny and retreated to their bases in countryside, intensifying the guerilla warfare on the whole

territory of the republic. The Russian forces had been unable to contain the guerilla movement by the Chechen insurgents.

President Yeltsin declared the military phase of the operation over"but it was clear that only the Army could hold back Dudaev's forces. Moscow continued its efforts to set some puppet government, but there was little doubt that the captured territories would remain politically uncontrollable. The price of this "appeared enormous, both in terms of own losses and in terms of casualties among the civilian population and the destruction of the economic infrastructure.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND POST-CONFLICT PREVENTION (1996 - 1997)

Since 1996 the Russian Federation has turned to a new strategy - more consequent - where main emphasis seemed to be on the need to abandon solution by force.

Missions by then Secretary of the national Security Council Alexander Lebed on 14-15 of August and on 21-22 of August became an important input in prevention the further escalation of violence as a result of General Pulikovskij ultimatum.

On 27 August 1996 the commander of Russian forces in Chechnya, General Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, and then top separatist commander Aslan Maskhadov signed an accord to reinforce a six-day ceasefire. The agreement was called for planned joint Russian-Chechen patrols to start operating in Grozny. General Lebed then Secretary of the Security Council has presented his peace initiative.

On 31 August 1996 Alexander Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov have signed a Statement on Basic Principles of Relationship between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic (Khasavurt Agreements). Both sides have agreed to abandon the use of force, the question on Chechen status has postponed until 31 December 2001.

Outbreak of violence in the North Caucasus during spring 1997 has threatened to freeze the negotiation process between Russia and Chechnya. However, further projects on economic rewards to Chechnya seemed to be more effective as tools in the prevention of the re-emergence of hostilities.

During the meeting between Russia's President Boris Yeltsin and Chechnya's President Aslan Maskhadov on 12 May 1997 a political agreement normalizing relations between Russia and Chechnya, a banking agreement were signed and agreement on the oil industry is on its way. The oil issue is the main positive factor in stabilization of future relations between the Kremlin and Chechnya and in post-conflict reconstruction. Russia is interested to control the route chosen for the transport of so-called oil"from the first phase of exploitation of the Caspian oil through the Chechen segment pipeline to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. Chechnya is also interested in oil transit through its territory as one of the main sources of money for economic reconstruction.

Chechnya - Chronology

The Escalatory Dynamics of Chechen Conflict

Dispute Phase 1

25 November 1990: The convocation of a National Congress of the Chechen People

27 November 1990: The Supreme Soviet of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR declares sovereignty

Crisis Phase 2

6 September 1991: Dudaev's armed supporters penetrate the building of the Supreme Soviet during its regular session

October 1991: A National Congress of the Chechen People declares the mobilization of all males between 15 and 55 years of age

8 October 1991: A National Congress of the Chechen People declares the only power in Chechnya

27 October 1991: President and Parliament elections are held in Chechnya 1 November 1991: The Chechen Republic declares its sovereignty

2 November 1991: The Congress of People's Deputies of the RSFSR declares the elections in Chechnya illegal

7 November 1991: the President of the RSFSR declares a state of emergency in Chechnya

11 November 1991: the Presidential decree is set aside by the Supreme Soviet of the RF

June 1992: Dudaev dissolves the Parliament and introduces direct presidential rule

November 1992: The first attempt to use the Russian Army against Chechnya

Abatement Phase 5

January 1993: Negotiations in Grozny between the Russian delegation and representatives of the Parliament of the Chechen Republic

Massive Violence Phase 4

December 1994: Active Russian military operations in Chechnya

March 1995: The State Duma adopts a resolution which excludes the possibility of direct negotiations with Dudaev

Abatement Phase 5

March 1996: President Yeltsin presents a Plan of Peaceful Conflict Resolution in Chechnya

March 1996: The Congress of Vainakhs in Volgograd. Alternative plan of peaceful Chechen conflict resolution

27 May 1996: An Agreement on ceasefire and the end of military operations in the Chechen Republic is signed between Yandarbiev and Chernomyrdyn

25 June 1996: A Decree by President Yeltsin on withdrawal of Russian troops until the 1st of September 1996

Conflict Settlement Phase 6

January 1997: Presidential elections in Chechnya

12 May 1997: An Agreement on Peace and Principles governing relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic Ichkeria and economic intergovernment treaties are signed by Presidents Yeltsin and Aslan Maskhadov.