

REGIONAL POLITICS

**THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS:
SCRUTINIZED BY TERRORISTS**

Marat IORDANOV

*Research associate,
Research Institute of Religious and
Communication Studies
(Makhachkala, Russia)*

At the turn of the 21st century terrorism spread wide across the world; Russia and the Northern Caucasus have not avoided their share of it. Its pernicious effect was most pronounced in Chechnia and Dagestan.

Analysis of Terms

Different sources agree on the interpretation of the word “terror” borrowed from Latin as “extreme fear” or “a time of, or government by, terrorism.” Another term “terrorism” comes close to the second interpretation as “an organized system of intimidation, especially for political ends.” Sometimes the two terms are used as synonyms.

It is not my aim to provide a detailed investigation of the two terms. I shall point out that legal acts, academic investigations, and dictionaries have failed to supply an unambiguous interpretation in order to enable the world community to identify “terrorism” with more precision and clarity. There are several hundreds of more or less similar interpretations corrected by the terrorist practice in each particular case.

There is the opinion that terrorism as a political weapon appeared less than two centuries ago. It clashed with another point of view that derives terrorism from hoary antiquity. Indeed: “Terrorism is not a recent sociopolitical phenomenon—its history goes back to at least a century and a half”¹ or “It should be pointed out that many academics and political scientists are convinced that terrorism was rooted in

¹ K.V. Zharinov, *Terrorizm i terroristy*, Harvest Publishers, Minsk, 1999, p. 3.

revolutions. Its birth is normally associated with the French Revolution of the 18th century and the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia. In fact, it is rooted in hoary antiquity; in different historical periods, and within different political trends it assumed different forms.”²

After studying different authors and various sources I came to a conclusion that terrorism has been accompanying mankind throughout its history and that the term gained currency during the French Revolution of the 18th century. So far, however, mankind has failed to agree on an internationally recognized interpretation of it.

History and practice of terrorism reveal several vectors determined by the targets of terrorist activities and those who initiate such activities. This provides the following conventional classification:

- State terrorism on the international arena;
- Terrorism of nations against tyrants;
- Terrorism of rulers against subjugated peoples of conquered countries;
- Terrorism of the authorities against their own nation, certain classes, followers of certain religions, members of certain social groups, organizations, sects, and groups;
- Terrorism of fanatics;
- Terrorism of groups of dissenters and the opposition against the authorities;
- Terrorism of subjugated people against their oppressors;
- Terrorism born by power struggle and redistribution of property;
- Terrorism among competing criminal communities;
- Individual “ideological” terrorism against members of the ruling groups;
- Terrorism as an instrument of revenge;
- Terrorism of despondency;
- Terrorism of “Herostratuses”;
- Terrorism of psychically unstable people;
- Sham terrorism.

The Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries, a product of political instability, appeared in Russia at the turn of the 20th century. It publicly described its aim as terrorism justified by expediency and prerequisites. This statement appeared in the party’s newspaper *Revoliutsionnaia Rossia* started in January 1902. The party leaders borrowed their theoretical ideas from their predecessors (members of the Narodnaia Volia organization) and from the ideology of Marxism that was spreading across Russia like fire.

Having married the ideas of Narodnaia Volia and Marxism (hardly compatible at first glance) the Socialist-Revolutionaries created a theoretical hybrid of sorts that accepted terror as an auxiliary instrument designed to ignite the “revolutionary fervor” of the popular masses. Viktor Chernov, the party’s chief ideologist, said: “Terror is not a self-contained form of struggle. We look at terrorist acts as part of struggle intimately connected with its other parts.”³ Assassinations and plunder justified by revolutionary expediency rested on theories offered by dubious authors in their dubious writings. A certain Ivan Pavlov, for example, published in Moscow a notorious leaflet called *Ochistka chelovechestva* (Cleansing Mankind).

A more or less detailed comparison of extremist theories and extremist practices suggests a conclusion that all terrorist theories rested in the following ideological platforms: political extremism, religious fanaticism, nationalistic ethno-centrism, and criminal radicalism.

² *Sovremenniy terrorizm: sostoianie i perspektivy*, Editorial URSS, Moscow, 2000, p. 39.

³ A. Geyfman, *Revoliutsionnyy terror v Rossii*, Kron-press, Moscow, 1997, p. 67.

Political extremism develops into terrorism if decisions are realized by radical means and violence irrespective of the level of decision-making. In some cases political extremism and religious fanaticism go hand in hand with nationalistic ethno-centrism. Driven to extremes nationalism develops into ethno-centrism and sets traps similar to those set by other types of aggressive radicalism.

Not infrequently, Mafia structures turn radical to confront society with criminal radicalism. This often happens under the conditions in which nationalists, fanatics and other extremists feel free to act. Sometimes they delimitate the spheres of influence, sometimes they are at daggers drawn among themselves, sometimes they prefer to act together. The same people or even organizations may assume different hypostases depending on circumstances. If concentrated in one and the same region these structures may trigger terrorism: armed people of different orientations cause havoc. This fully applies to Ichkeria that from the very beginning was a terrorist structure.

More likely than not those who speak of the ideological plank in the terrorists' platform have in mind the Muslim fanatics; it was these people who coined the strange term "Islamic terrorism" used and abused by the press. The term was obviously not a brainchild of a thoughtful academic: it seems that it was coined by a certain superficial journalist.

Recently, the world has seen many terrorist acts perpetrated by all sorts of groups that screen their true aims behind Islamic terms.

Terrorism in the Chechen Republic

Terrorists acting in the Northern Caucasus are especially fond of this. Chechnia and Daghestan are two seats of terrorism in the region. Traces of many terrorist acts committed across the country lead there.

For certain domestic and foreign, subjective and objective, important and unimportant factors Chechnia developed into a territory of unbridled criminal activity of terrorist groups, some of them organized and armed according to the regular army pattern. Ichkeria lost no time in setting up and arming its own army with the weapons Yeltsin and his generals had abandoned to Dudaev in huge quantities. There was enough to arm the regular units of the main headquarters of Ichkeria and fighter groups made up of criminals and adventurers. Here is a far from complete list of units and subunits of the "armed forces of Ichkeria": the Galanchozhski regiment, a mounted company, a mountain rifle regiment, an "Abkhazian" assault battalion, the presidential guard, signals battalion, guard company, and logistics. Units, or rather small armies, commanded by those who paid them were personal detachments of rich people whose money came from dubious sources and terror. Odious figures—Basaev, Khaykharoev, Ghelaev, Baraev, Khankarov, Israpilov, Atgeriev, and Raduev—had many armed people under their command.

It should be said that the units that were part of the Ichkerian sham-state structures and units under warlords were all involved in large-scale criminal activities and terrorism. In fact, they were the shock-force of terrorism in Chechnia. Terrorist acts had become a common feature of life in Chechnia even before the RF federal center brought its troops into the republic in December 1994. Judge by yourself.

On 27 October, 1991 Dudaev was elected president of Chechnia. This event triggered a wave of terror across the republic. Several days later, on 8 November the administration of the Naurskaia correctional facilities where criminals from all corners of the Soviet Union were kept freed them all; cruelty and crimes became common occurrences.

Soviet military personnel and military objects became the main target of terrorists and other criminals who needed weapons. Even the so-called United Congress of the Chechen People that had brought Dudaev to power had to call on him to stop criminal activities around the military units stationed in Chechnia. On 2 June, 1992 the presidium of its executive committee published a statement that said, in

particular: “The Executive Committee places the responsibility for the attacks against the military that caused loss of life, as well as for the grave economic situation on the executive powers in the first place. Speaking in the name of people and using the rights received from the congress the Executive Committee demands that the President should take urgent measures to stabilize the crime situation in the republic and to find and punish those responsible for the attacks against military units and embezzlements in banks.”⁴ This failed to stem terror; not only the functionaries of the new regime but also the opposition as well as individual people and families that had nothing to do with politics fell victim to acts of terror.

A family of Osset surgeons who had worked for many years in the republican hospital was exterminated; rector of the Chechen-Ingush University Kan-Kalik, a Jew, was abducted and murdered. Deputy Rector Chechen Bisliev who tried to defend him was killed on the spot with a submachine gun.

Cruel murders and abductions became common; official Chechen structures also found terror a handy instrument together with the opposition units and bandit groups that rejected all authorities. On top of this there were criminal groups of which nothing was known at all.

The chain of terror that claimed lives after Dudaev had come to power can be described in the following way: the rally of opposition on the Theater Square in Grozny was dispersed by force—the mayor’s office in Grozny was attacked—Labazanov’s base was destroyed—Gantamirov’s group was attacked in Gekhi—invasion of the Nadterechniy District controlled by Avturkhanov—a raid on Grozny by the opposition and the Russian special services—the first Chechen war. The last two actions were aimed at Dudaev, all others were initiated by the Chechen president himself.

The terrorist raids of Basaev’s on Budennovsk, Raduev’s on Kizliar, the 1999 invasion of Dagestan, as well as blow-ups of apartment blocks in Moscow, Buinaksk, and Volgodonsk were the largest acts of Ichkerian terrorists. Even though their scope, the composition of the criminal groups, the number of victims, damage incurred and other factors were different, all these crimes were rooted in Ichkeria. Those who carried them out had been trained in special centers in Chechnia; all crimes and preparations for them involved foreign mercenaries.

The terrorist raids and those who blasted the apartment blocks were mainly so-called Wahhabis, that is, they belonged to the extremely radical sham-Islamic sectarian teaching that had nothing in common with genuine Wahhabism, the nominally official ideology of Saudi Arabia. The chronology of the crimes was the following: on 14 June, 1995 Basaev’s gang attacked Budennovsk; on 9 January, 1996 Raduev’s unit invaded Kizliar. After a lull of three years terrorists resumed their activities: on 7 August, 1999 their detachments invaded the Botlikh District of Dagestan; on 4 September, the Novolakscoe District in the same republic; on 8 September an apartment block in Gurianov Street in Moscow was destroyed by an explosion; several days later, on 13 September another Moscow apartment block collapsed; on 16 September an apartment block in Volgodonsk (the Rostov Region) was blown up.

Then a counter-terrorist operation in Chechnia (the second Chechen war) began, followed by a new wave of terrorist acts. The largest of them were: blowing up the complex of government buildings in Grozny; the terrorist act in Kaspiisk on Victory Day (9 May, 2002); a blast in Grozny on 9 May, 2004 that killed President of Chechnia Akhmad Kadyrov. It seems that the simultaneous blasts of two passenger airliners and the monstrous attack on a school in Beslan culminated the list of crimes.

The neighboring territories were caught in the waves of terror that started in Ichkeria. This was especially obvious in Dagestan where the domestic situation and foreign factors were more or less conducive to crime and violence.

Terror in Dagestan

In Dagestan, too, terror was born by certain specific factors that affected different sides of everyday life in the republic. In Chechnia, however, there were large forces that wanted “independence”; in

⁴ *Krovaviy terror*, Olma-press, Moscow, 2000, p. 21.

Daghestan similar sentiments are not popular, while such forces cannot control the situation. Still, there are many other factors that promote terrorism. Here are some of them.

Daghestan has a long land border with Georgia and Azerbaijan that runs across the mountainous areas hard to control; on top of this the state border divides small ethnic groups with close ties and relatives in other states. There are Daghestanians (Avars, Lezghians, and Tsakhurs) in Azerbaijan, while there is a large Azeri community in Daghestan. There is a sea border between them; the territories of both republics are crossed by important trans-Caucasian transport, pipeline and multi-channel communication lines.

The Karabakh conflict in Azerbaijan and the conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia produced flows of refugees and victims who escaped to Daghestan; fighters sought refuge in Daghestan as well; weapons and money were illegally moved across its territory.

There are large Daghestanian diasporas in the troubled Middle East (in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and Israel) that have contacts with relatives in Russia and exchange visits with them. All sorts of radicals and religious fanatics use humanitarian contacts to come to Daghestan. Some of them bring extremist literature, weapons, drugs, counterfeit money and other illegal things. Numerous criminal cases have already been initiated in the republic; information about them can be found in the press.

The long land border with Chechnia along which live thousands of Chechen Daghestanians and Daghestanian Chechens with numerous relatives on both sides is another important terrorism-breeding factor. In the past Daghestanians and Chechens lived within one theocratic state; they fought side by side against the Russian empire throughout the 19th century.

The first Chechen war drove tens of thousands of Chechen refugees to Daghestan; being aware of special relations between the two peoples Russia did not bring federal troops into Chechnia from the Daghestanian territory and never created toeholds there. This did not save Daghestan from Chechen inroads under Basaev and Khattab; this happened three years after the notorious Khasaviurt agreements had been signed on 22 August, 1996 and military actions been stopped. It should be said that Daghestan is ethnically the most complicated region of Russia with several scores of autochthonous ethnic groups and people of other nationalities.

Political passions that were rocking the Soviet Union in the 1990s acquired special dimensions in Daghestan. Mono-ethnic rallies as a rule decided that the nation represented at them suffered more than others from injustices. These sentiments were mounted by “smart guys” who appropriated top posts in all sorts of “ethnic movements.” At the same time, huge sums of money ingeniously stolen from Moscow banks and in Grozny bought palaces and limos for the leaders of the new “ethnic movements.” Later wild privatization began; the market of false “privatization vouchers” brought even more property to the same people. This created several oligarchs who controlled money flows. Not infrequently, political figures, deputies, ethnic leaders, bankers, and bandits were the same people. They did not even try to camouflage their several hypostases.

Little by little society began to recognize the poles of power and the sources of money to the accompaniment of explosions and shooting. Here is a list of the main categories of people among whom crimes of terror are frequent: members of power structures of all levels; law enforcement structures; businessmen; functionaries of ethnic elites; leaders of family and other clans; heads of criminal groups—so-called “fish,” “oil,” “liquor,” “shuttle trade,” and other “kings.” Power and criminal groups are intertwined to the extent that investigatory structures find it hard to decide whether another murder was an act of terror or not.

Those who filled prestigious posts risked to be murdered if they refused to vacate them at the claimant’s request; deputies involved in business transactions or dubious financial deals ran a risk of murder, too. Hundreds of volumes of investigatory materials, suspended and dismissed cases that involved thousands of people (tens of them being still wanted, while others already killed under suspicious circumstances) and numerous registered terrorist acts bear witness to the situation in the republic.

The following people died during terrorist acts: deputies of the republic’s Popular Assembly, bureaucrats and prominent public figures Suleymanov, Toturbiev, Bayramov, Kammaev, Gusaev, as well

as deputies of local legislatures, heads of local administrations and their deputies, officers of the militia, officials of the public prosecutor's office and the FSS and other prominent people. The list is long. Criminal cases (Art 105 of the RF Criminal Code, terrorism) were initiated, investigation took years without visible results.

Two terrorist acts that killed not only their intended victims but also those who were caught nearby caused quite a stir.

On 20 August, 1996, a powerful explosion happened at the entrance to the five-storied building that housed several government offices, the Finance Ministry among them. A car parked nearby was the source of the blast that killed tens of civilians who had come to the building on business: 6 died on the spot; 2, later in a hospital; over 10 people were wounded. The explosion was timed to coincide with the moment when Finance Minister Gamid Gamidov who shortly before that had been elected deputy of the State Duma, arrived at the office and was talking to a woman who was obviously waiting for him. The murder of the Duma deputy brought up many questions and provided one clear answer: it was work of a professional.

Two years later, on 21 August, 1998, there was an explosion in a mosque in Makhachkala that killed three people: a deputy of the republican Popular Assembly, prominent public figure and mufti of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Daghestan Saidmuhammad-hajji Abubakarov, his brother, and his driver. Investigation revealed that 125-mm radio-controlled artillery shell was carefully concealed at the spot where the mufti parked his car.

These two murders remained unsolved despite the efforts of investigatory teams, officials from the RF General Public Prosecutor's Office, the Main Investigatory Administration of the RF Ministry of the Interior, the Main Department of the General Prosecutor's Office for the Northern Caucasus and people from the republican Ministry of the Interior and the FSS Administration for the Republic of Daghestan.

Certain terrorist acts were obviously planned in Chechnia and aimed specifically against the Russian military. I have in mind the blasts of apartment blocks in Kaspiisk and Buinaksk that killed tens and wounded hundreds. Investigation of the crime in Kaspiisk that had taken place on 16 November, 1996 produced no results. Those who blew up the house in Buinaksk on 4 September, 1999 were brought to justice, yet certain questions were left without answers.

In September 2000, as a result of a joint operation of the special services of Russia and Azerbaijan seven members of illegal armed detachments that had fought against the federal troops in Chechnia and Daghestan were brought from Baku to Makhachkala. Brothers Alisultan and Magomed Salikhov wanted after the terrorist act in Buinaksk were among them. They were living in Baku with false passports and false life stories. Under false pretexts they were invited to a neutral office where they were identified, arrested, and deported to Daghestan.

The explosion in the apartment block in Buinaksk claimed over 60 lives, 23 of them children. The crime was planned in the camp of Khattab in Serzhen-Iurt where the Salikhov brothers had acquired skills of demolition sappers. In Soviet times this place was a summer pioneer camp. By the irony of fate the camp became the base of Khattab and those who murdered children and their relatives.

It was from this camp that five tons of explosives were brought by a truck to Buinaksk; there the sacks were moved to two other trucks supplied with explosive devices. One of them was parked at house No. 3 on the Shikhsaidov (Levanevskiy) Street where the servicemen of brigade No. 136 lived; another, at a military hospital (it was defused fifteen minutes before the scheduled time).

Terrorist acts against the servicemen in Daghestan did not stop when the second war in Chechnia was seemingly completed. The largest terrorist act took place on 18 January, 2002 in Makhachkala. An exploded land mine killed seven military and wounded 11 when a truck with 30 soldiers and sergeants of brigade No. 102 of internal troops was driving past on its way back to the barracks from the bath-house. Militiamen and people from the public prosecutor's office are also intended victims: in three months of 2001-2002 five special militia vehicles and two cars of the public prosecutor's office were blown up. People on foot are not safe either: militiamen are killed in the streets, when driving in cars or just outside their offices.

This is a challenge—there is no doubt about it. Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Daghestan Lieutenant-General of Militia Magomedtagirov announced that the republic was prepared to face the challenge and that it announced a war on terror. In fact, the war had been going on with variable results. So far, the authorities have not yet achieved a decisive turn in their favor, while many of those who head the law enforcement bodies feel powerless in the face of unbridled terror.

The phenomenon “terror Daghestanian style” betrayed itself in the attempts at murdering Mayor of Makhachkala Said Amirov and other officials. The series of terrorist acts designed to kill Amirov was predated by an event described in legal parlance as massive unrest.

On 21 May, 1998 a large number of cars, most of them foreign makes, arrived in Makhachkala from Chechnia. The bearded people who rode in them (some of whom looked familiar) brought machineguns, submachine guns, grenade launchers, and ammunition.

The cars were stopped in one of the streets leading to the palace of Duma deputy Nadir Khachilaev. The bearded people responded with submachine gun fire. Two militiamen were killed on the spot; six were wounded, while the bearded people took refuge in the palace and organized all-round defenses.

The republic’s head Magomedali Magomedov, Chairman of the State Council of Daghestan, was away in Moscow, the second and third in command and the heads of power-wielding structures spent a sleepless night in an effort to work out a plan of action. While they were thinking, a crowd of sellers from the nearby wholesale market (controlled by the same deputy Khachilaev) gathered around the palace. As Chairman of the Council of Muslims of Russia Khachilaev could count on support from the faithful. Indeed, with every passing hour the number of bearded people in white skullcaps at the palace was increasing. Several hours later the unruly mob occupied the building that housed the State Council and the Cabinet of Ministers; they plundered it and destroyed everything in sight. After reaching the roof, they threw down the state banner of Russia and the republican banner and hoisted a green flag.

This patchy assembly of claimants to state posts that included well-known criminals and radicals wielding Islamic slogans could not go further than that: the mayor of Makhachkala robbed them of victory.

Had the building of the city administration across the road of the already captured government offices been taken, power in the capital of Daghestan could have been toppled down with unpredictable results. The Grozny variant could have been applied there too—at least armed support from Ichkeria was already moving toward Makhachkala.

Being fully aware of this the mayor organized defenses of his building and called on the defenders to fight to the last. The extremists had to beat retreat.

This triggered another series of attempts on his life; the mayor has survived about fifteen of them: the administrative building was shelled; there were several blasts while the mayor drove along the streets. The worst happened on 4 September, 1998: a car full of explosives burst in Parkhomenko Street killing nearly 20 and wounding over 100; tens of private houses and flats were destroyed or damaged. The latest terrorist act happened on 15 September, 2004 when an antitank guided missile exploded in one of the streets. It was intended for one of the government buildings in Lenin Square or for the mayor’s office. In 2002 Makhachkala was second among the best-kept cities of Russia; in 2003 it was the first and was awarded a first-degree diploma and a large sum of money from the federal budget.

A careful analysis of the recent terrorist acts in Daghestan shows that certain forces used terror as a means of redistribution of power and property. This is easily explained by the methods by which property was obtained in post-Soviet times. Criminal methods created a criminal symbiosis of power and money. This situation is not unique in Russia. Religious radicalism supported by the example of Ichkeria and its influence is another factor of terrorism in Daghestan. This explains why many of the terrorist acts were aimed at the Russian servicemen.

Terror and False Islam

I have already written that terror in Daghestan is rooted in terrorism in Ichkeria. This is explained by the fact that there are numerous supporters of the pseudo-Islamic extremist teaching that is called

Wahhabism in the Northern Caucasus. This is a fundamentalist radical movement whose adepts are scattered across countries and continents. In the wake of 9/11 they came under the scrutiny of the world powers' counter-terrorist efforts. These measures might affect public awareness to the extent when anti-terrorist struggle develops into anti-Islamic hysterics. To a great extent this is explained by widespread ignorance of Islam among the populations of Europe, America and other continents.

The man-in-the-street knows two key words: yashmak and violence. In actual fact, Islam has nothing to do with violence. The faithful cannot kill himself and cannot murder others. Islam is alien to terrorism. In his interview to the second channel of Russian TV Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Cyril pointed out that the terrorists exploited sham Muslim slogans that had nothing to do with true Islam to justify their crimes.

C o n c l u s i o n s

Neither in Russia nor in the Northern Caucasus terrorism has any long-term prospects. On the one hand, it is born by social stratification of global dimensions, on the other, by the clash of varied forces in the strategically important Caucasian region. To a great extent this rivalry is heated up by the desire of certain forces in other countries to gain control over the "golden" oil pipeline between the Caspian and the Black seas. They tried to exploit the situation in Chechnia aggravated by the lack of a consistent Caucasian policy of the Yeltsin government that came too close to serving the Moscow-Grozny oil mafia.

The present leaders of our country are strengthening the state institutions and fighting corruption. Coupled with the measures designed to improve the social situation this will bring positive results and will, finally, do away with the social evil called terrorism.