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Chechnya Conflict: Recent Developments

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ABSTRACT

This report examines military airstrikes and ground operations that Russia launched against its Chechnya region in late September 1999. It provides background information on earlier Chechen guerrilla attacks on the neighboring Dagestan region of Russia and on the unsolved terrorist bombing of several apartment buildings in Russia. Current problems of governance in Chechnya are discussed, as well as Chechnya's response to the Russian offensive. The concerns of the United States and other Western governments about the conflict are examined. A map is included. This product may be updated. Related products include CRS Issue Brief 92089, *Russia*, updated regularly; and CRS Reports 95-207, *Russian Conflict in Chechnya*; 95-338, *Beyond Chechnya: Some Options*; 96-193, *Chechnya Conflict: Recent Developments*; and 96-974, *Russia: Chechnya at Peace?* This report supercedes CRS Report RS20358, *Chechnya Conflict*.

Chechnya Conflict: Recent Developments

Summary

Russia began military airstrikes and a ground campaign in Chechnya in late September 1999 after Chechen guerrillas had attacked the neighboring Dagestan region of Russia and had been accused of bombing several apartment buildings in Moscow and elsewhere, killing hundreds. Chechnya's President Aslan Maskhadov denied that his government was involved in this violence, but he appeared to have scant authority over many guerrillas. Russian fighting in Chechnya has resulted in thousands of casualties on both sides, including Chechen civilians, and the vast majority of Chechnya's half-million population has been displaced from their homes.

The U.S. Administration has been increasingly concerned about the escalating reports of human rights abuses by Russian forces in Chechnya but, as Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott stated in a major speech in October 1999, wants to continue a policy of engagement with Russia. He supported Russia's efforts to combat terrorism and separatism but added that these efforts should not set back democratization or result in human rights abuses. The State Department in November stressed that Russia's behavior "is not in keeping" with the Geneva Convention and commitments made to the Organization for Security and Cooperation In Europe (OSCE). Russian Prime Minister (now President-elect) Vladimir Putin dismissed this criticism, and asserted that combating "international terrorism" in Chechnya required more than "a policeman with a gun." President Clinton in December warned that Russia's ongoing human rights abuses in Chechnya would "intensify extremism" within Russia and "diminish its own standing in the world." Evidence of abuses includes reports of summary executions of civilians by Russian forces and other human rights abuses. The United States supported a resolution passed by the U.N. Human Rights Commission on April 25, 2000, calling for Russia to open peace talks and facilitate an impartial investigation of alleged atrocities.

U.S. policymakers are concerned that the Chechnya conflict will aggravate political and economic instability in Russia and further divert Russian government attention from nonproliferation and other bilateral cooperation. Growing support for hardline views in Russia seems to threaten U.S. efforts to integrate Russia into the community of democracies. By increasing its arms in the North Caucasus, Russia has failed to comply with the adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, though Russia at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in November 1999 pledged eventual compliance. While instability in the North Caucasus makes a Russian-proposed Caspian oil pipeline through the North Caucasus appear less feasible and a U.S.-backed plan for a pipeline to Turkey appear more feasible, widening regional instability also could harm this plan. Continuing instability in Chechnya likewise provides a training ground for worldwide terrorism that threatens U.S. interests. Legislative action includes Senate approval in February 2000 of S.Res. 262 (Wellstone), calling on Russia to cease fighting, open peace talks, and investigate reported atrocities by its troops. Senator Jesse Helms in March 2000, introduced S.Res.269, strongly urging the Administration to move beyond demarches to "take tangible steps to demonstrate to [Russia] that the United States strongly condemns its conduct in Chechnya and its unwillingness to find a just political solution."

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Chechnya Conflict: Recent Developments

Background

Separatism in Russia's southern Chechnya region led Russia's then-President Boris Yeltsin to launch unsuccessful military and police operations in 1994-1996, which resulted in up to 80,000 or more casualties on both sides. Peace accords envisaged that the status of the region would be determined by both sides by 2001. Chechnya elected its war hero Aslan Maskhadov as president in 1997, but he has not been able to stabilize the region. Chechnya's neighbors have suffered economic and security problems as a result of its *de facto* independence, including disruption of trade and transport through Chechnya, strains from hosting Chechen emigrants, drug and arms trafficking, and raids by Chechen criminals seeking booty or hostages to ransom. To address these problems, Russia has been building railroads and pipelines around Chechnya, and setting up checkpoints, digging trenches, and stationing troops along the border with Chechnya. (See CRS Reports 95-207, *Russian Conflict in Chechnya*; 95-338, *Beyond Chechnya: Some Options*; 96-193, *Chechnya Conflict: Recent Developments*; and 96-974, *Russia: Chechnya at Peace?*)

Renewed Conflict

Renewed Russian military and police operations in Chechnya were triggered by two major events. First, in August 1999, about 1,200 Chechen guerrillas attacked northwestern Dagestan in Russia, with the goal of ousting Russian authority from Dagestan and proclaiming wider Islamic rule in the North Caucasus. They seized many hostages and took over nearly a dozen villages. Among the main guerrilla leaders were Shamil Basayev and Habib Abdurrahman Rahman, alias Ibn al-Khattab. These guerrilla leaders had increasingly opposed Maskhadov, who had backed some conciliation with Moscow and greater law and order in Chechnya. Few



Adapted by CRS from Magellan Geographix. Used with permission.

Dagestanis supported the guerrillas and by late August, Russian troops had forced them to retreat to Chechnya. In September, up to 2,000 or more Chechen rebels launched another incursion, occupying villages in central Dagestan. Russia sent additional troops and by mid-month the guerrillas retreated again. Russia reported that about 300 of its troops were killed and 1,000 wounded in repulsing the guerrillas. Also, at the end of August and during September, bombs went off in four apartment buildings in Moscow and other Russian cities, killing nearly 300 and creating mass

panic. Chechen terrorists were immediately suspected, and Moscow rounded up 10,000 ethnic Caucasians for deportation. Reacting to the bombings, Yeltsin stated on September 13 that “terrorism has declared war on ... Russia.”

Russian officials considered three options for responding to Chechnya’s growing lawlessness and terrorism in 1999, according to former Russian Premier Sergey Stepashin. Initial policy discussions in March 1999 focused on expanding a physical buffer zone already being constructed around Chechnya.¹ In July 1999, plans shifted to occupying Chechnya’s northern lowlands. After the Dagestan incursion and the bombings in Russian cities, general air and ground operations to occupy all of Chechnya were embraced.² Russian Premier Vladimir Putin on September 28 explained that “it is clear we cannot simply drive them out of one spot and draw a line....The whole world knows that terrorists have to be destroyed at their bases.” Russian military operations have focused on using whatever force is necessary to drive the guerrillas into Chechnya’s southern mountains and defeat them. According to Russian reports, at the height of operations in early 2000, over 100,000 Russian military troops and 40,000 police were involved in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia, a sizeable increase from the reported 40,000 military and police forces involved in the 1994-1996 conflict.

Russia began concerted airstrikes on September 5 on targets just within Chechnya’s borders for the first time since the 1994-1996 conflict. The initial rationale was to turn back the second Chechen guerrilla incursion into Dagestan, but on September 23, the airstrikes were extended to the whole of Chechnya in preparation for ground operations, which began on September 30. Russian media frequently reported 100 or more air sorties per day over all unsecured areas of Chechnya, and massive use of ground-based missiles. To justify launching the

Shamil Basayev: Born 1965; Chechen; Served in Soviet Air Force fire brigade; Attended an agronomy institute 1987-1988; Became involved in criminal activity, including arms trafficking. Hijacked aircraft from Russia to Turkey 1991. Ran unsuccessfully for president of Chechnya 1991. Received guerrilla training in Russia in 1992 and in Afghanistan in 1994; Commanded volunteer troops from the North Caucasus in Georgia’s breakaway Abkhazia, 1992-1993. Led attack on Russian city of Budennovsk, 1995, taking hundreds hostage. Ran for president of Chechnya, 1997, losing to Maskhadov; served as vice-premier; resigned in 1998 to head warlord group opposing Maskhadov. Chechen sources report that he was seriously wounded during the February 2000 guerrilla retreat from Grozny.

Habib Abdurrahman Rahman (alias Ibn al-Khattab): Born circa 1961 in the Middle East (some sources say Saudi Arabia); received higher religious education. A strict follower of 18th century Sheikh Wahhab. Khattab lived in Pakistan; served in rebel actions in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Russia’s Chechnya and Dagestan. Allegedly killed scores during a raid on a Russian troop convoy in Chechnya in 1996. Headed terrorist training camps in Chechnya. Vows to expel Russia from the North Caucasus and all “occupied” Muslim lands.

¹Added Interior Ministry troops were sent to Chechen border areas in March 1999 in the wake of the kidnaping of an Interior Ministry general.

²*New York Times*, February 1, 2000, p. 6.

ferocious military campaign, Putin on September 27 stated that “we are now the victims of the aggression of international terrorism. In no way is this a civil war.” He argued that areas of Chechnya were controlled by various “bandits,” who “rustle livestock, kidnap people into slavery, [and] engage in violence and murder.” Becoming bolder, the “bandits” decided to “annex Russian territory ... from the Black Sea to the Caspian.” He also reassured Russians that “we will not put our boys under fire.... We will use all modern forces and means to destroy the terrorists.”³

After taking lowlands north of the Terek River, Russian forces by December 13 had surrounded Grozny and appeared to control areas south of Grozny, thus occupying areas where most Chechens live, and were attacking the southern highlands. Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev in December 1999 termed this southern offensive the final stage of the conflict and stated that he expected the conflict to be over in one- to three-months. The Russian government’s plans for a quick and successful end to the Chechnya conflict appeared somewhat less likely in early January 2000 when Russian forces proved unable to occupy Grozny and Chechen guerrillas launched attacks in several areas thought to be controlled by Russian troops.

In response to the seemingly bogged-down campaign, the Putin government ordered a stepped-up offensive, aimed to score major military successes in Chechnya before the presidential election, according to many observers. Sergeyev condemned pacification efforts in Chechnya as too “soft-hearted,” and announced “a new style and method of command” in cleared areas. Illustrative of the new style, Col. Gen. Vladimir Kazantsev, then-Commander of Russian Joint Forces in the North Caucasus, on January 12 ordered Russian forces to in effect consider all Chechen males aged 10-60 as potential terrorists and to detain them in filtration camps, and also to halt allowing such displaced persons to return to Chechnya. Following an international outcry, the order was supposedly repealed, but such detentions have continued. Closer coordination of Interior Ministry (police troops) pacification efforts with military operations was ensured in late January 2000 when a military commander was appointed to head the police troops.

Thousands of air sorties have been launched against targets in Chechnya. The ferocious campaign against Grozny left virtually no intact buildings. Russian official media reported about 200 air sorties in Chechnya on February 10, including heavy bombers loaded with fuel-air bombs targeting the southern mountains. In mid-February 2000, after occupying Grozny, Russia increased its air attacks against Chechnya’s southern redoubts, but also targeted many low-lying villages where some guerrillas who had escaped Grozny were hiding out. By mid-March, air operations had tapered off to around fifty per day against villages and other targets, and around twenty-thirty by May 2000.

Col. Gen. Valeriy Manilov, First Deputy Chief of the Russian Armed Forces General Staff, on February 9 announced the redeployment of about 50,000 troops to Chechnya’s southern mountains for a “final” push to defeat the guerrillas. On

³*Foreign Broadcast Information System, Central Eurasia: Daily Report (FBIS)*, September 28, 1999.

February 18, he announced that the “military phase” of the Chechnya campaign could be wrapped up “in the near future,” because virtually all strategic villages and heights had been occupied, the guerrillas had been forced into a smaller and smaller area of the southern mountains, and their morale and integration have disintegrated.⁴ The Russian government appeared to agree with this assessment, ordering Maskhadov’s arrest and naming an interim head to establish Russian civilian authority in Chechnya (see below). On February 29, Col. Gen. Gennadiy Troshev (then-Commander of the Eastern Group of Joint Forces; promoted to Commander of Russian Joint Forces in Chechnya in April) announced that his troops had occupied the “main heights” of the key Argun gorge and town of Shatoi in the southern mountains, marking what the military termed the end of its major campaign in Chechnya and the commencement of “mopping up” operations against small rebel bands, he said. The military envisions setting up a permanent 25,000-troop division in Chechnya.

Belying such reports that major fighting was over, Chechen guerrillas on March 3-4 ambushed a Russian police convoy near Grozny and a Russian paratroop force during new fighting in the Argun gorge, killing dozens, shocking Russian officers and the Russian public. The springtime growth of vegetation in Chechnya has greatly increased the vulnerability of Russian troops, resulting in further hit-and-run guerrilla attacks against convoys in late April, killing dozens. Rather than scattered bands of disorganized guerrillas, these attacks have illustrated disciplined and determined forces that are not giving up, according to some observers.⁵

Chechen Response

Maskhadov in September 1999 denied that his government was linked to the guerrilla offensive in Dagestan or to the bombings of apartment houses.⁶ He has repeatedly called for talks with Russian leaders. Maskhadov declared martial law on October 5, committing his government’s forces to battle Russia in common cause with Chechnya’s guerrilla leaders. In early November 1999, he sent letters to the UN and President Clinton calling for backing for a cease-fire and talks. Chechen government officials and legislators have testified before the U.S. Congress and met with Members to urge U.S. influence on Russia to end the fighting. Maskhadov announced after Russia’s capture of Grozny in February 2000 that Chechen guerrillas would carry out hit-and-run attacks against Russian forces during the rest of the winter. In April, he announced a unilateral ceasefire as an overture to talks, but his apparent lack of control over all guerrillas was illustrated by ongoing attacks against Russian troops.

⁴*Interfax*, February 18, 2000.

⁵First Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Col. Gen. Valeriy Manilov, stated that the guerrillas were in their “death throes,” prompting the newspaper *Kommersant* to snidely comment that the former commander of Interior Ministry Troops in August 1999 had made an identical statement. *Kommersant* in *FBIS*, April 28, 2000. See also the Chief of the Russian Armed Forces General Staff, Gen. Anatoliy Kvashnin, in *FBIS*, April 30, 2000.

⁶Some Chechens also have alleged that Russia triggered the Dagestan incursion by attacking Muslims. John Colarusso, *The Second Russo-Chechen War as a Turning Point*, manuscript, 1999.

There have been limited contacts between the Russian government and Chechen separatist forces. One meeting took place in late December 1999 in Ingushetia between Civil Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and Maskhadov's emissary, though it was ostensibly limited to discussions about evacuating civilians from Grozny. Putin at first conditioned peace talks with Maskhadov on his foreswearing terrorism, handing over hostages and Chechen "criminals," and showing a "willingness to free [Chechnya] of bandit gangs." However, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office on February 18 called for Maskhadov's arrest for "armed rebellion," for leading the Chechen resistance to the Russian campaign.⁷ On April 21, 2000, Putin stated that he had exchanged peace plans with Maskhadov, and that if Maskhadov cooperated with Russia, he could be pardoned, but that he viewed Maskhadov as a "figurehead" who lacked control over the guerrillas.⁸

Some Chechens have accommodated or supported Russia's actions, because of war weariness or distaste for the guerrillas. The main pro-Moscow Chechen militia was headed by Beslan Gantimirov, who was released by Russia from a jail sentence for theft of funds meant for rebuilding Chechnya to head the force. Passing over Gantimirov, however, on February 17, 2000, Putin appointed pro-Moscow Chechen surgeon Khasan Musalatov as head of the interim administration in Chechnya, to serve under the authority of Russian Deputy Premier Nikolay Koshman.⁹

Humanitarian Issues

Displaced Persons. About one-half of Chechnya's 500,000 pre-war population has fled Chechnya for Ingushetia, Georgia, Dagestan, North Ossetia, and Kazakhstan, according to various estimates, and the vast majority of civilians still alive in Chechnya are displaced or face urgent humanitarian needs. At first spurning humanitarian aid offers deemed interference in its internal affairs, Russia on October 23 agreed to demands from the European Union to permit access for non-governmental aid groups to aid displaced persons outside Chechnya. Similarly, after lengthy negotiations, Russia on October 29 permitted an U.N. mission to be sent to the North Caucasus to assess needs outside Chechnya, but it rebuffed U.N. calls for peace talks. A mission from the OSCE was permitted to visit the conflict area on November 10-11 to assess needs, and reported findings at the OSCE Istanbul Summit on November 18-19.¹⁰ The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has sent dozens of convoys from its base in Stavropol, Russia, to the conflict area (and one into Grozny on February 29, where Russia has registered 21,000 remaining civilians). U.N. agencies received over \$14 million in an appeal to aid the displaced persons, and have launched another \$19.2 million appeal. The European Union (EU) has allocated \$7.3 million to help Chechen displaced persons during the winter (see also below, *U.S. and Western Concerns*).

⁷*Interfax*, February 18, 2000.

⁸*New York Times*, April 22, 2000, p. A4.

⁹Anatole Lieven on the Chechen-Ingush Border, *Out There News*, December 1999; *FBIS*, February 18, 2000.

¹⁰Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, October 26, 1999; *Reuters*, November 2, 1999; *Reuters*, November 9, 1999.

Further moves to allow humanitarian relief into Chechnya were taken by Russia in April 2000 in permitting the OSCE to re-establish a mission in Chechnya, though its freedom of movement within Chechnya may be constrained and Russia has refused its mediation offers. The International Committee of the Red Cross has also been permitted to operate within Chechnya.

Then-President Yeltsin in early December 1999 highlighted a pacification plan that included freeing areas from “gangsters” by forcing civilians to flee, killing the “gangsters,” resettling civilians in the cleared areas, fostering a pro-Moscow Chechen regime, and providing aid for infrastructure rebuilding.¹¹ Putin in November 1999 had called for displaced persons to be returned to their homes in areas under Russian control by December 25, 1999. This goal was not met. In March 2000, Russia reported that about 120,000 displaced persons had returned to Chechnya, but Ingush authorities and the UNHCR disputed this number and pointed out that many more Chechens still were leaving Chechnya than are returning because of continuing conflict and reports of “beatings, rape, and violence against returnees” by Russian forces and of violence by rebels.¹² UNHCR reported in late April 2000 that some Chechens were returning home. The Russian pacification effort to “win over” the resettled Chechens purportedly includes repairs to infrastructure and the provision of electricity, gas, and social services, but little has been accomplished.¹³

Atrocity Reports. International media reported many human rights violations during the Russian military offensive, including indiscriminate bombing, summary executions, mutilations, torture, looting, and rape. A missile strike on a market in Chechnya’s capital Grozny on October 21 killed over 100 civilians, creating some international criticism. This criticism increased following a December 6 Russian ultimatum to an estimated 35-40,000 civilian residents of Grozny that “all who do not leave will be destroyed” after December 11, although reportedly Russians were targeting anything moving (illustrated by a December 3 attack that left over forty fleeing Chechens dead).¹⁴ The U.S. Administration argued that this criticism of the ultimatum led Russia to disavow a deadline and reportedly open two escape routes subsequently used by a few of Grozny’s civilians. The murder of several dozen civilians by Russian special troops in the Chechen village of Alkhan Yurt in early December 1999 was reported by a BBC film crew and other witnesses provided testimony to human rights groups.¹⁵

The human rights organizations Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Memorial have been prominent in interviewing Chechens who witnessed or survived alleged abuses by Russian forces. According to Human Rights Watch on

¹¹On Russian military actions, see *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, December 1999, pp. 8-9.

¹²UNHCR, *Refugees Daily*, March 8, 2000.

¹³Michael R. Gordon, *New York Times*, December 10, 1999, p. 1.

¹⁴*Reuters*, December 10, 1999.

¹⁵On December 22, 1999, Human Rights Watch sent a letter to the U.N. Security Council calling for an investigation of human rights violations in Chechnya, mentioning testimony it had gathered from displaced persons about events in Alkhan Yurt. *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 1999, p. A14.

February 10, it had confirmed or reliable reports on dozens of summary executions of Chechen civilians by Russian troops, and had written to Putin to request an investigation of the “war crimes.”¹⁶ Medecins Sans Frontieres, operating in Chechnya, also argued on February 22 that Russian forces were committing “massive systematic and repeated war crimes ... we can consider such crimes as crimes against humanity.” After her trip to Chechnya, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson issued a report on April 5, 2000, that criticized the disproportionate use of force by Russia in Chechnya that resulted in heavy loss of civilian life. She stated that displaced Chechens had told her of “harrowing accounts” of “mass killings, summary executions, rape, torture, and pillage” by Russian military and police troops.

Russia has denied that its forces are involved in summary executions of civilians or other major abuses, but faced with rising international condemnation, on February 17, 2000, Putin appointed a human rights representative for Chechnya, Vladimir Kalamonov, to investigate the allegations. Human Rights Watch has warned that his mandate is primarily to forward cases to the military procuracy. Major concerns were raised by many observers about the objectivity of the military prosecutor when in March he announced that Russian military forces had committed only seven human rights abuses in and around Chechnya over the past six months, mostly thefts and raucous behavior, and that alleged atrocities were “sheer disinformation.”¹⁷

Among cases drawing international attention, on January 29, the Russian government revealed that it had detained Russian Radio Liberty reporter Andrey Babitsky, and five days later it announced that he had been turned over to unnamed Chechen guerrillas, with his approval, in exchange for several Russian soldiers they had captured. This swap raised strong objections among many in Russia and the international human rights community that it violated Russia’s obligations under the 1949 Geneva Conventions on the treatment of noncombatants.¹⁸ Released on February 29 after Putin intervened in the case, Babitskiy reported the next day that he had been held for a while at the infamous Chernokozovo filtration camp, and had experienced or witnessed abuses similar to those reported by other survivors.

Lord Judd, head of a delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) that visited Chechnya in mid-March 2000, emphasized that both Russian forces and the Chechen guerrillas had committed human rights abuses, and called on both sides to cease fire, open talks, and investigate human rights abuses.¹⁹ Human Rights Watch on January 13, 2000, also argued that the Chechen guerrillas also commit human rights violations, including by harming Chechen civilians who try to come to terms with the Russian military to preclude bombardments, by

¹⁶Human Rights Watch, February 7 and February 10, 2000. See also Dmitriy Surtsev, *AFP*, February 10, 2000

¹⁷Human Rights Watch, March 22, 2000; *FBIS*, March 13, 2000. Another case of Russian military “hooliganism” was reported by the military prosecutor in late April 2000. The gingerly treatment of Russian military actions in the report prompted the Russian newspaper *Izvestia* to question its veracity. *Izvestia*, in *FBIS*, April 28, 2000.

¹⁸Human Rights Watch, February 4, 2000.

¹⁹*Reuters*, March 13, 2000.

“endangering civilians by trying to hide in their midst,” and executing Russian prisoners of war, a war crime under the Geneva Conventions, it relates. Although it stressed that “abuses by Chechen fighters could not serve to justify [Russia’s] widespread indiscriminate shelling and bombing,” it also called for “both sides ... to take the necessary steps to limit the impact of their fighting on the civilian population, as required by the laws of war.”²⁰ Among recent cases, Chechen guerrillas in April 2000 reported that they had executed nine Russian police troops they held hostage, after a prisoner exchange failed.²¹

Combatant casualty reports have been notoriously inaccurate, with each side claiming minor losses of its troops and major losses by the other side. Col. Gen. Manilov reported on April 27, 2000, that Russian losses were 2,181, including 1,447 military and 734 police troops during the Chechnya operation. These figures include about 200 Russian troop casualties during operations in Dagestan. The Russian military has asserted that Russian forces have killed over 13,000 Chechen guerrillas, leaving at most 3,000.²² Chechen reports of casualties mirror image Russian reports. The organization Russian Soldiers’ Mothers Committee estimates that Russian losses are more than 3,000. Non-combatant casualties are unknown. Many observers criticize Russia’s official casualty reports, alleging that data exclude troops who are wounded and later die in hospital and exaggerate the number of troops “missing in action” (fate unknown).

Both sides have alleged the use by the other of poisonous gases. International organizations and governments and the Western media have not yet reported findings regarding these allegations. In the early stages of the Russian aerial bombardment of Grozny in late September 1999, the Russian military alleged that Chechen guerrillas had exploded large tanks of chlorine in Grozny, creating dangerous gas clouds that could asphyxiate civilians. The Russian military reported that another gas cloud, probably chlorine, was released by guerrillas on December 29 against Russian forces, though it instead drifted into the heart of Grozny. The Russian military alleges that Chechen guerrillas have constructed land mines and bombs out of canisters of chlorine, ammonia, fertilizer, and inflammatory liquids. Russian troops have been issued gas masks in response. Putin announced a short suspension of air attacks over Grozny on January 8, 2000, purportedly to respect Ramadan and permit civilians to escape from poisonous gases released by Chechen guerrillas. On January 13, a Russian media report used the purported threat posed to civilians by “chemical bombs” planted by guerrillas in Grozny to explain why Russian forces were going to hold off on occupying Grozny. Chechen sources maintain that the September 1999 explosions were the result of Russian air raids against chemical factories in Grozny and that Russia is using “chemical weapons” in Chechnya. In December 1999, Maskhadov sent a letter to the International Institute for the Prohibition of Chemical

²⁰Human Rights Watch, January 14, 2000. The report also noted the presence of Chechen guerrillas in Alkhan Yurt just before the December 1999 events. On February 29, 2000, the OSCE condemned the kidnaping and reported killing by guerrillas of a Russian reporter. *ITAR-TASS*, February 29, 2000. Crimes allegedly committed by guerrillas against civilians in Grozny are mentioned in the *New York Times*, February 17, 2000, p. A14.

²¹*Washington Post*, May 2, 2000.

²²*Interfax*, April 27, 2000.

Weapons in the Hague, Netherlands, alleging Russia's use of chemical weapons against Grozny on December 5-6, 1999. This allegation was denounced by Col. Gen. Manilov as a "smear" campaign against Russia's armed forces.

Implications for Russia and Chechnya

Increasing trans-border Chechen brigandage and kidnaping in the late 1990s and the Chechen incursion into Dagestan have contributed to changes in Russians' views of Chechnya, perhaps making it easier for many to suspect Chechen terrorists of being responsible for the apartment house bombings. While during the 1994-1996 conflict, most Russians supported an end to the conflict, during the recent conflict many or most have appeared to have less sympathy for Chechnya.²³ It has been easier for Russian officials to influence public opinion on Chechnya now than in 1994-1996, because Chechnya's communications facilities were destroyed early and most Russian and foreign reporters have been banned from the region. Until recently, Russian media have largely echoed official dogma that precision bombing is sparing civilians and eliminating terrorists, and that Russian military losses are minimal. After the January-February 2000 Russian campaign to occupy Grozny, however, information about significant casualties suffered by Russian troops was more widely publicized.²⁴ To head off possible rising discontent, the government beefed up its propaganda (while further restricting free reporting), stepped up the ferocity of its offensive, and even announced that many Russian troops would soon be able to leave Chechnya. Highly publicized reports of the liberation of kidnaping victims also serve to remind Russians of lawlessness in Chechnya.²⁵ Attempting to circumvent the Russian government's control over coverage from Chechnya, the Chechen government has communicated through various friendly internet sites. In March, Russian media were warned that reporting guerrilla communications violated the law, further harming freedom of the press.

Many in Russia have viewed the escalation of the Chechnya conflict as related to recent legislative and presidential elections. Some Russians (as well as Chechens) who viewed Yeltsin's government with distrust believed a rumor that he ordered the apartment house bombings and the attack on Chechnya in order to divert attention

²³According to a mid-February 2000 poll by the Russian Public Opinion and Market Center, 52% of Russians support Putin's policy in Chechnya. *Interfax*, February 23, 2000. Another poll by the Agency for Regional Political Research in mid-February indicated that 61% of Russians approved of the government's military campaign in Chechnya, and over one-half indicated that the campaign should continue despite civilian deaths. *Interfax*, February 24, 2000. Another indicator was the lack of wide public support for anti-war rallies held on February 19 and March 19 in Moscow. *FBIS*, February 22, 2000.

²⁴*The Times* (London), January 13, 2000.

²⁵One such highly publicized report was the liberation of Lt. Col. Alexander Zhukov, a Russian pilot captured in October 1999 by some Chechens when his airplane crashed. *AP*, March 20, 2000. Another publicized case involved the escape in February 2000 of some hostages who reported that prominent Russian ITAR-TASS photojournalist Vladimir Yatsina, kidnaped for ransom in July 1999 by some Chechens, had been shot when he fell ill. *FBIS*, February 29, 2000.

from corruption charges and to whip up patriotic support for the government-created Unity Inter-regional party bloc in the December 1999 State Duma election and for Putin in the March 26, 2000 presidential race.²⁶ However, this rumor did not appear to affect Putin's popularity. Putin-backed parties gained a significant number of seats in the December 1999 Duma election. The Putin government's January 2000 orders for a stepped-up military offensive and harsher pacification efforts in Chechnya mark Putin's concern that the Russian public continue to approve of his leadership in the run-up to the presidential election. In a campaign memoir, Putin presents himself as having decided in 1999, at the possible cost of his career, that he would combat the mortal threat to Russia posed by Chechen terrorists who aimed to "break up" and "Islamize" it.

While virtually all major politicians endorsed Putin's view that terrorism in Chechnya represented a threat to Russia's security and stability, some differed in support for the various options, and these differences sometimes crossed party or ideological lines. Most prominent were calls by former Premier Yevgeniy Primakov against "large-scale" ground operations in Chechnya, and by Grigoriy Yavlinskiy, head of the liberal reformist Yabloko Party, for halting ground operations and opening talks with Maskhadov. Anatoliy Chubais of the liberal reformist Union of Right-wing Forces on November 12, 1999, denounced Yavlinskiy as a "traitor." Primakov's and Yavlinskiy's presidential aspirations were harmed by the relatively poor showings of their bloc and party in the December 1999 Duma races, and their subsequent marginality in decision-making in the Duma. Primakov in February announced he would not run for the presidency. The Chechnya conflict did not become a divisive campaign issue, given the apparent success of the government's control over reporting. (See also CRS Report RS20556, *Russian President Putin*.)

If Russia is successful in soon militarily winning against the guerrillas in Chechnya, negative domestic and international repercussions of the conflict for Russia may be somewhat ameliorated, but this is less likely if the conflict drags on. Factors militating against long-term stabilization in Chechnya include Russia's weak military and police forces, the harsh geography that favors guerrilla actions, the tenacity of the guerrillas, and Russia's inability to pacify areas it occupies by rebuilding and providing meaningful social services. Analyst Benjamin Lambeth has warned that the Russians face an interminable "Northern Ireland"-type conflict.²⁷ Chechen grievances and squalor may well nurture future embittered generations. The main justification for air strikes – that they reduce Russian troop casualties – is belied by the rising casualties, and this rise may eventually heighten public opposition to the conflict among many Russians. Those who view the conflict as unlikely to be won militarily by Russia without a political settlement warn that Chechen guerrillas under siege may launch terrorist attacks throughout Russia, including political assassinations and strikes

²⁶The persistence of this rumor was demonstrated when Russia's Security Council held a press conference to provide evidence it claimed would refute "the crazy suggestion that the explosions in Moscow were staged by Moscow itself." *Reuters*, January 12, 2000.

²⁷William Odom, *Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 2000; Vice Adm. Thomas Wilson, Hearing on Worldwide Threats, Senate Intelligence Committee, February 2, 2000; Theodore Karasik, *Central Asia/Caucasus Analyst*, March 15, 2000; *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, February 14, 2000, p. 78.

against major power, communications, and other facilities. These attacks may further weaken Russia's central authority and stability, or their threat may bolster a countervailing authoritarianism.

Democratization and respect for human rights are suffering serious harm from the conflict, according to many observers. They point to government actions such as indiscriminate bombing in Chechnya, rounding up citizens in Moscow with swarthy complexions for questioning and expulsion, and statements that typify all Chechens as terrorists as worrisome developments. Efforts to restrict media access and other press freedoms in reporting on the conflict, highlighted by the Babitsky case, are alarming.²⁸ Russia's security forces are being permitted to engage in wide-scale atrocities in Chechnya under the cover of media restrictions, in this view. Public acceptance or endorsement of infringements on rights, as indicated by polls, shows a troubling erosion of democratic ideals, in this view.

According to some observers, problems of Russian civilian control over the military and police have been highlighted by the renewed conflict. In this view, fractious elements of the military general staff and other security services opposed to previous peace accords with Chechnya sought the new operation to redeem their tarnished reputations, and took advantage of the Dagestan incursions and apartment house bombings to persuade Putin (reportedly, other elements of the General Staff opposed the conflict but were overruled). Russian national security analyst Sergey Kazennov has warned that Russian politicians "are being led by the generals.... There is too much stress on military actions, and no political exit strategy has been prepared."²⁹ This view seemed underscored when Lt. Gen. Vladimir Shamanov, Commander of the 58th Army of the North Caucasian Military District and then-Commander of the Western Group of Russian Joint Forces in the North Caucasus, on November 7, 1999, stated that he would resign if ordered to halt fighting and darkly warned that such an order could lead to "civil war." He also on January 6, 2000, openly opposed Putin's call for an Orthodox "Christmas ceasefire." Possible frictions with the military may have contributed to Putin's February 2000 decree strengthening counter-intelligence work in the armed forces. Nonetheless, Putin's satisfaction with the conduct of the military campaign was indicated on February 21, when Putin awarded decorations and promotions to commanders involved in occupying Grozny. Other apparent frictions include strong opposition by the military in late April 2000 to Putin's suggestion of possibly opening peace talks with Maskhadov.³⁰

Other observers have decried efforts by Russia to set up a Chechen government-in-exile and to declare Maskhadov's government illegitimate, after long recognizing it as lawful.³¹ They argue that by foregoing talks with Maskhadov and launching

²⁸-*FBIS*, February 1, 2000.

²⁹*Christian Science Monitor*, September 28, 1999.

³⁰*New York Times*, April 22, 2000, p. A4; *FBIS*, April 24, 2000; *Reuters*, April 25, 2000.

³¹After Maskhadov's election as president in January 1997, Yeltsin sent a letter congratulating him on his win in a "democratic election," and stating that Russia would "respect that choice." *FBIS*, February 2, 1997.

ground operations, Russia forced him to join forces with the guerrillas. Other observers argue that Maskhadov has weak power in Chechnya to deliver on talks.

Russians have tried to compare the Russian air campaign in Chechnya to NATO's use of "smart bombs" in Yugoslavia and say that Russia is attempting to prevent further Chechen terrorist incursions into Dagestan or other areas. Putin has pointed to Russia's putative use of "smart bombs" in asserting that Russia "does not confuse the bandits at work in Chechnya with the Chechen people, who are also their victims." Others point out the dissimilarities of the conflicts, including that most Russian airstrikes involve "dumb" gravity bombs or missile attacks on Chechen towns that appear largely unbounded.³² NATO Commander Wesley Clark on December 9, 1999, stated that Russia is "doing in Chechnya what [Serbian President Slobodan] Milosevic tried to do in Kosovo," and that in Kosovo, NATO forces "were very inhibited in the use of air power to prevent collateral damage I see the opposite" in Russia's Chechnya campaign. A chilling analogy, in this view, has been use of the term "cleansing" by Russian officials. This de-population of Chechnya (from about 400-500,000 to less than 200,000) made it easier for Russian forces to regard and indiscriminately target remaining Chechens as terrorists or their supporters, according to these observers.

The Chechnya conflict furthers harms Russia's regional economies and human resources, and makes Russia's economic recovery more difficult. The conflict has destroyed Chechnya's infrastructure and the inflows of displaced persons and military maneuvers have further disrupted the economies of neighboring regions. Thousands of civilians suffer permanent disability. Koshman stated in late April 2000 that the government had allocated about \$260 million for the year 2000 for rebuilding in Chechnya, with most of the money currently going toward paying pensions, wages, and humanitarian aid.³³ The Russian military was granted extra budgetary resources (an extra \$800 million) this year to execute the conflict, despite Russia's budget problems, and Putin has had to call up some reserve troops. Former Russian Finance Minister Mikhail Zadornov on December 2 estimated that the conflict cost Russia about \$110-150 million per month, about 7-8% of Russia's budget, but figures as high as \$280 million per month have been mentioned.³⁴ The strain on the defense budget was indicated in December 1999 when Putin reneged on high pay rates promised to troops in Chechnya. Nonetheless, current Finance Minister Mikhail Kasyanov told the World Economic Forum in late January 2000 that the Chechnya conflict has not harmed the budget or foreign debt payments.³⁵ The conflict also harms Russia's effort to become the major transport route for Azerbaijani oil exports, since investment risks appear high.

³²*Aviation Week & Space Technology*, February 14, 2000, pp. 76-78.

³³*FBIS*, April 28, 2000.

³⁴*Aviation Week & Space Technology*, April 2000, p. 8.

³⁵*Reuters*, January 31, 2000.

The conflict strains Moscow's ties with its Islamic population.³⁶ Russian attacks in September on some villages in central Dagestan where Islamic law had been proclaimed in 1998, even though many of the residents had refused to back the guerrillas, elicited criticism from Russian Islamic groups. Twenty leaders of regions with Islamic populations and other regional heads in mid-April called for Putin to open talks with Maskhadov as the "legitimate president of Chechnya."

Russia's relations with its neighbors and others may be harmed or face reassessment. Russia demanded that Azerbaijan and Georgia cease permitting arms and mercenaries from crossing their territories to Chechnya, with both denying that they are conduits. Thousands of Chechen displaced persons have entered both countries. A Russian airstrike against a village 60 km inside Georgia on August 9 and other spillovers, and an alleged airstrike in Azerbaijan on October 1 illustrate their concerns that widening conflict may contribute to trade and transport disruptions, influxes of displaced persons, the buildup of Russian military forces in the region, and pressure from Russia for military bases and border troop deployments. In late 1999, Georgia appealed to the OSCE to send military observers to monitor its border with Chechnya, and the first four of about 20 or more planned observers began monitoring work in late January 2000. The United States backed an increase in observers in April 2000.

International opprobrium has come from much of the Islamic world, which has tended to view the Chechnya conflict as anti-Islamic, though Russia has argued that it is targeting terrorism in any guise. The Russian Defense Ministry, Interior Ministry, and Federal Security Service have alleged that fighters and financial and material aid for Chechen "terrorism" have come from groups in Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Yemen, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan.³⁷ Russian officials reportedly sent letters to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Turkey and other countries in September 1999 asking them to make sure their citizens were not supporting Chechen terrorism, eliciting denials and some criticism, though Saudi Arabia and Jordan initially appeared to ban the collection of some donations to support Chechen guerrillas, and Kuwait and Sudan shut down similar aid groups.³⁸

³⁶Marking increased concerns within Russia by its Islamic population, police on order from Russia's acting procurator general on November 9, 1999, raided the home of Sheikh Nafigulla Ashir, chairman of the ecclesiastical board of Muslims of the Asiatic part of Russia and co-chair of the Council of Muftis, which had backed the government on the Chechnya conflict. Ashir denounced the raid and allegations of his links to the apartment house bombings and to Basayev as part of a "pathological distrust of Muslims" among some in Russia, and warned that the raid might mark the beginning of repression against all Muslims (*FBIS*, November 29, 1999; *Russia Intercessory Prayer Network*, January 12, 2000). Another Chechen who initially backed the Russia campaign and headed a Moscow-created Chechen group, Malik Saydullayev, had become somewhat critical and was passed over in February 2000 when Putin named an interim administrator for Chechnya.

³⁷*FBIS*, December 1, 1999; December 2, 1999; December 9, 1999.

³⁸On the other hand, a Kuwaiti Red Crescent mission began distributing aid in Ingushetia. UNHCR from *Interfax*, March 16, 2000. Saudi Arabia has sponsored donations by its citizens to aid displaced Chechens, raising more than \$12.5 million. *Reuters*, January 23,

The Organization for the Islamic Conference (OIC) sent an Iranian-headed delegation to Moscow that on December 6, 1999, stated that Russia's campaign was "disproportionate" and should be stopped, highlighting some tensions between Russia and the Islamic world, including Iran. Iranian President Seyyed Khatami in December 1999 urged OIC members to send humanitarian aid to displaced Chechens (Iranian aid to displaced Chechens residing in Georgia began in early March 2000).³⁹ In January 2000, Iran's foreign minister told the Russian deputy foreign minister that the human suffering in Chechnya was "unacceptable" to the Muslim world and called for a ceasefire. (Iran, however, views its strategic ties with Russia, including Russian arms and nuclear technology transfers, as paramount.) Afghanistan's Taliban rulers "recognized" Chechnya as an independent country in January 2000 and pledged to help it fight Russia. Among major powers, the only unqualified support for Russia's actions has come from China.

U.S. and Western Concerns

Several international and non-governmental organizations and European countries have strongly denounced the Chechnya conflict. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan issued a statement on November 12, 1999, that Russia has gone "far beyond" its goal of eliminating terrorism in Chechnya, but more diplomatically stated on January 28, 2000, in a meeting with Putin, that Russia should avoid violence against civilians that might violate international law. In the wake of Russia's ultimatum to Grozny, the U.N., OSCE, and the Council of Europe on December 8 issued a rare joint statement calling for Russia to respect human rights in Chechnya. The OSCE Istanbul Summit in November 1999 issued a Declaration calling for a political solution to the conflict, and Russia agreed to allow OSCE Chair Knut Vollebaek to visit Chechnya. In mid-December 1999 he visited the conflict zone, reporting "horrible events" to a summit of the Group of Eight (G-8) industrial powers, where the Western foreign ministers strongly urged Russia to call a ceasefire and to permit open humanitarian aid to the region. In its Nobel Peace Prize lecture, *Medicins Sans Frontieres* in December 1999 urged Russia "to stop the bombing of defenseless civilians in Chechnya," and in January 2000 called on President Clinton to step up efforts to convince Russia to halt its "war crimes" in Chechnya.

Although an IMF decision in December 1999 to delay a tranche to Russia did not appear to rest on Russia's Chechnya campaign, outgoing IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus warned on November 27 that IMF lending in general relied on the goodwill of the international community, and that the Chechnya campaign created "a very negative image" of Russia. World Bank President James Wolfensohn on February 2, 2000, stated that the bank will "assess the human implications of the crisis in Chechnya, as well as the impact of military expenditures on overall fiscal stability

³⁸(...continued)

2000; UNHCR, *Refugees Daily*, from AP, March 6, 2000. A Putin emissary visited Saudi Arabia in early March to explain Russia's Chechnya policy and reportedly to urge Saudi officials to crack down harder on support by some Saudis for Chechen guerrillas. *Reuters*, March 5, 2000.

³⁹UNHCR, *Refugees Daily*, from ITAR-TASS, March 9, 2000.

and government spending,” in deciding on loans to Russia.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it released a loan for restructuring the coal sector in late March 2000.

Some observers have typified the European response as somewhat more forceful than the U.S. response. The EU on December 13 criticized Russia’s violations of human rights in Chechnya and announced a review of EU programs in Russia and some retargeting of aid to assist Chechen displaced persons. A rare meeting of U.S., Russian, and EU foreign ministers in early March 2000 represented a joint U.S.-European effort to press Russia to permit humanitarian aid and observers into Chechnya and to open peace talks. Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov rejected calls for peace talks with Maskhadov or to allow independent investigations of atrocity reports, but agreed that officials from the Council of Europe, the Assistance Group of the OSCE, and the International Committee of the Red Cross would be allowed to visit Chechnya to assess human rights conditions and humanitarian needs.

The strongest European actions have been taken by the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) In November 1999, PACE called on Russia to avoid human rights violations, introduce a cease-fire in Chechnya, and begin peace talks, and in January 2000 accused Russia of violating the European Human Rights Convention. Their threat to suspend Russia’s membership may have been effective in convincing Russia to agree on March 22 to permit three human rights investigators from the Council on Europe to work with Kalamonov in Chechnya. Human Rights Watch has warned, however, that the effectiveness of these monitors may be vitiated because Russia’s military prosecutor controls the disposition of abuse reports. Based on a report by Lord Judd on Russian noncompliance, on April 6, 2000, PACE suspended Russia’s voting rights and recommended a later suspension of membership.

Other strong international action was taken by the U.N. Human Rights Commission, which approved an EU- and Canadian-sponsored resolution on April 25, 2000 by a vote of 27-7, with 19 abstentions, calling for a ceasefire and peace talks with international mediation. It also called for Russia to set up an independent commission to investigate alleged atrocities. The United States eventually decided to back the resolution. This resolution was regarded by many observers as unusually bold, since in the past similar measures had been successfully blocked or watered down by Russia, China, or others. Russia’s representative to the Commission stated that the resolution gave a “false picture” of the human rights situation in Chechnya and “ignored” the threat to Russia posed by the virtual “criminal terrorist enclave,” and argued that a National Commission was already examining human rights violations in Chechnya. Votes against the resolution were cast by China, India, Cuba, Congo, Madagascar, Russia, and Sri Lanka.

The U.S. Administration has been faced with the balancing act of criticizing Russia’s actions in Chechnya while at the same time seeking to retain working relations with its new leadership. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott highlighted the Administration’s stance in a major speech on October 1, 1999. He stated that the United States supports Russia’s efforts to combat terrorism and separatism, but that these efforts should not set back its democratization or result in

⁴⁰AP, February 2, 2000.

human rights abuses. On October 28, President Clinton said that he hoped that “we will see a minimization of the casualties” in Chechnya and ultimately “a negotiated solution,” and warned Putin on November 2 that Russia’s international reputation could suffer. The State Department on November 9 stressed that Russia’s behavior “is not in keeping” with the Geneva Convention and its OSCE commitments.⁴¹ Putin on November 9 termed such criticism unfounded, and asserted that combating “international terrorism” in Chechnya required more than “a policeman with a gun.”

President Clinton on December 6, 1999, warned again Russia would pay a “heavy price” for human rights violations in Chechnya, since such abuses will “intensify extremism” within Russia and “diminish its own standing in the world.” Then-President Yeltsin on December 9 responded harshly that the United States should not interfere in Russia’s affairs because Russia possesses a nuclear arsenal, illustrating strained ties (though Putin quickly moved to reassure the United States that relations remained “friendly”). Secretary Albright has reported that she discusses Chechnya with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov “every day.”⁴² On December 17, 1999, during the G-8 Summit, she showed Ivanov an aerial photograph of blanket destruction of one Chechen town to belie Russia’s assertions of pinpoint bombings, but Ivanov rejected this evidence, although on December 27, 1999, the Russian military admitted that it was using incendiary weapons against Chechen villages. Secretary Albright stated after the G-8 summit that “I think, frankly, we have had a marginal affect on the political aspects of [the Chechnya] conflict,” or on military aspects.

Increased strains in U.S.-Russian relations were apparent in early 2000 as human rights groups reported more and more atrocities committed by Russian forces in Chechnya. The State Department on February 17 highlighted “credible reports of civilian killings and alleged misconduct” by Russian forces in Chechnya, eliciting strong denials from Russia and a rare retort from the State Department. On February 25, President Clinton responded to these growing reports by stating that “I think it is imperative for the Russians to allow the appropriate international agencies unfettered access to do the right inquiries, to find out what really went on and to deal with it in an appropriate way.” On February 29, he sent a letter to Putin calling for Russia to facilitate such a “thorough and transparent” inquiry and to allow journalists to work in the region unrestrained.

⁴¹According to international legal expert A.P.V. Rogers, the Chechnya conflict does not qualify as a police or anti-terrorist action, since heavy armor, artillery, and ground attack aircraft are being used, qualifying the action as armed conflict. Armed conflict is governed by the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocol II of 1997, which call for protecting civilians. *U.S. Newswire*, Crimes of War Project, November 30, 1999. U.S. and international experts have argued that Russia is violating Common Article 3 of the Geneva Convention, which states that “persons taking no part in hostilities ... shall be treated humanely.” They also argue that Russia is violating Article 36 commitments of the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, which states that “if recourse to force cannot be avoided in performing internal security ... use must be commensurate with the needs of enforcement. The armed forces will take due care to avoid injury to civilians.”

⁴²*Dow Jones News*, December 6, 1999; *New York Times*, December 11, 1999, p. 8; *Reuters*, December 12, 1999.

Other strains in U.S.-Russian relations were evident in mid-January 2000 when State Department officials and Members of Congress met with Chechen "foreign minister" Ilyas Akhmadov. Although the State Department emphasized that the United States "does not recognize him as the foreign minister of an independent Chechnya," Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov on January 14 condemned the meetings as implying U.S. encouragement of Chechen terrorists that were linked to bin Laden, and as complicating Russia's attempts to settle the conflict. Russian officials similarly condemned a February 14, 2000 meeting in the State Department between U.S. human rights officials and Chechnya's deputy legislative speaker.

Secretary Albright reported that in her meeting with Putin in Moscow on February 2, 2000, she did not convince him to halt the Chechnya conflict, but he agreed to think about allowing a humanitarian needs assessment team into Chechnya and allowing accredited journalists to freely cover the conflict. In meeting with Ivanov on February 4, she raised the issue of Babitsky's status. The State Department issued a statement on February 9, 2000, that "treatment of a non-combatant [Babitsky] as a hostage or prisoner of war is completely unacceptable and incompatible with Russia's" international commitments and sends "a chilling message" about press freedom in Russia.

Other recent U.S. and Western statements have been interpreted by Moscow as conciliatory. President Clinton on February 14, 2000, rejected parallels between Russia's actions in Chechnya and Serbia's actions in Kosovo, stating that "Russia had a right to take on the paramilitary forces who were practicing terrorist tactics" in Chechnya (though Russia's tactics were grievous), and that the Chechen guerrillas "bear some of the responsibility for what happened ... some of them actually wanted the Chechen civilians attacked." Russian officials interpreted this statement as support for Russia, and similarly interpreted the visit of NATO Secretary General George Robertson to Moscow in mid-February as "a tacit agreement" between NATO and Russia "to tame mutual criticism" of their respective operations in Kosovo and Chechnya.⁴³

Both the Administration and Congress have supported aid to Russia despite the Chechen conflict (as reflected in Consolidated Appropriations for FY2000, P.L. 106-113), though some in Congress have raised the issue of an aid cutoff or other measures as the conflict has dragged on. Analysts opposing sanctions or an aid cutoff argue that such moves may further fuel anti-Americanism in Russia. President Clinton on December 8, 1999, rejected applying aid sanctions against Russia, arguing that the bulk of U.S. aid is devoted to denuclearization and safeguarding nuclear materials and in fostering democratic and economic reforms, and that "I don't think our interests would be furthered by terminating" these programs. Representative Christopher Smith on February 16, 2000, raised the question of possible sanctions against Russia for its Chechnya campaign, with Secretary Albright responding that U.S. national

⁴³President Clinton, Interview, *U.S. Newswire*, February 14, 2000; *Reuters*, February 17, 2000.

security interests in broad-scale engagement with Russia should not be jeopardized by “re-creating a Russian enemy.”⁴⁴

U.S. policymakers have emphasized that U.S.-Russian cooperation in combating terrorism in Chechnya and elsewhere is an important U.S. priority. According to the State Department’s 1999 *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, al-Khattab has ties to Osama bin Laden, and U.S. officials may have shared information on bin Laden with Moscow. On December 3, 1999, Rubin noted that “we ... have had for some time a lot of worry about the links between international terrorist organizations, including Islama bin Ladin and some of the Chechen Islamic rebels We do believe there are funds and equipment and support that exists between a number of these organizations One of the reasons that in the first phase of this conflict we expressed some understanding for what Russia was doing ... was because ... Islamic rebels who could responsibly [be] called engaged in terrorist activities were attacking legitimate authority, and that those rebels did have affiliation with those kinds of people and organizations.”⁴⁵ In testimony to Congress on February 2, 2000, Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet tended to foresee lengthy Russian fighting in Chechnya to prevent the separatist region from “becom[ing] the calling card of this millennium in terms of where do terrorists go and train and act.” He warned that sympathizers from abroad were going to Chechnya to train and fight, and that they later could directly threaten U.S. interests .⁴⁶

Some of those reflecting a different view argue that Russia might be emboldened to further violate international commitments and obligations if the international community fails to hold Russia accountable for abuses in Chechnya. These observers call for various bilateral and international sanctions against Russia. Alexander Haig, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Max Kampelman on February 2, 2000, called on the United States to oppose IMF and World Bank lending to Russia as long as the conflict continues, suspend Russia from G-8 talks, lead an international humanitarian aid effort in Chechnya, and request that the U.N. investigate alleged human rights abuses in Chechnya, that Russia allow free media access to Chechnya, and that Russia work with the OSCE to reach a peace settlement. These observers warn that the West’s seeming acquiescence to Russia’s violations of its international human rights commitments may encourage Russia to disregard other commitments.⁴⁷

U.S. policymakers are concerned that the Chechnya conflict will aggravate political and economic instability in Russia and divert Russian government attention from effective arms control and nonproliferation and other bilateral cooperation. Growing support for hardline views in Russia seems to threaten U.S. efforts to integrate Russia into the community of democracies. By increasing its arms in the North Caucasus, Russia has failed to comply with the adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, though Russia at the OSCE Istanbul Summit in November

⁴⁴Secretary Albright, Testimony, House International Relations Committee, February 16, 2000.

⁴⁵State Department, Daily Press Briefing, December 3, 1999.

⁴⁶Hearing on Worldwide Threats, Senate Intelligence Committee, February 2, 2000.

⁴⁷*New York Times*, December 10, 1999, p. 35.

pledged eventual compliance. While instability in the North Caucasus makes U.S.-backed plans for a pipeline to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan appear more feasible, widening regional instability likewise could harm these plans.

The Administration's policy of engagement with Russia may face further criticism if there is extended conflict in Chechnya, and may further fuel the "who lost Russia" debate. Chairman of the House International Relations Committee Benjamin Gilman on September 14 criticized the limited impact U.S. aid and policy have had on Russia's behavior, which has included the deaths of thousands of civilians in war in Chechnya in 1994-1996 and the recent renewed warfare.⁴⁸ Senator Gordon Smith on September 30 re-opened a question raised during the 1994-1996 Chechnya conflict of whether IMF loans might free up Russian financing for renewed conflict.⁴⁹ Representative Steny Hoyer on November 3 stated that Russia had "squandered" international sympathy for its terrorism problems by targeting Chechen non-combatants. The question of what criteria the Administration uses to decide to support humanitarian intervention was raised by Representative Harold Rogers on March 1, 2000, who observed that "I don't hear anybody talking about a peacekeeping operation in Chechnya," even though humanitarian needs are present. Secretary Albright responded in part that "just because we can't be everywhere doesn't mean we should be nowhere."⁵⁰

Among legislative activity, on October 25, 1999, Representative Christopher Smith introduced H.Con.Res. 206 (approved by the House on November 16, 1999), calling for Russia to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict. In introducing the bill, he stated that Russia was justified in combating terrorism, "but not in launching a war against innocent civilians."⁵¹ Representative Marshall Sanford on November 16 supported the bill and argued that IMF lending to Russia should be cut off, since "indirectly [through U.S. support for the IMF] Americans are helping to finance these atrocities" by Russia in Chechnya.⁵² Representative Tom Lantos urged support for the bill but cautioned against U.S. disengagement from Russia, stating that "we have a tremendous range of issues on the plate" of U.S.-Russian relations.⁵³ On November 19, 1999, S.Res.223 (Helms) was approved in the Senate, similarly condemning the indiscriminate use of Russian force in Chechnya and calling for Russia to peacefully resolve the conflict.

The Russian government's treatment of Russian Radio Liberty reporter Babitsky heightened Congressional concerns about human rights abuses in Chechnya. Senators

⁴⁸News Conference on U.S.-Russia Relations, transcript, September 14, 1999.

⁴⁹Hearing on Russian Corruption, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, September 30, 1999; see also *Boston Globe*, November 20, 1999, p. A15.

⁵⁰Hearing on Chechnya, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, November 3, 1999; Hearing on FY2001 Appropriations, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and State, March 1, 2000.

⁵¹*Congressional Record*, October 25, 1999, p. E2178.

⁵²Debate on H.Con.Res. 206, *Congressional Record*, November 16, 1999, p. H12031.

⁵³*Congressional Record*, November 16, 1999, p. H12032.

Jesse Helms and Joseph Biden on January 31, 2000, sent a letter to Putin calling on him to release Babitsky. On February 9, House Members led by Representative Sam Gejdenson signed a letter to Putin terming Russia's treatment of Babitsky "incomprehensible," and calling on Putin to secure his release. On February 24, 2000, the Senate approved S.Res. 261, calling on the Russian government to secure the safe return of Babitsky to his family, and condemning its "reprehensible treatment of a civilian in a conflict zone," and its "intolerance toward a free and open press." In introducing the bipartisan resolution, Senator Jesse Helms condemned Russia's "brutal" and "indiscriminate use of force," in Chechnya and the "systematic repression of the press." He also called on the Administration to cancel any plans for a summit with Moscow until the Babitsky case is resolved. Another resolution, S.Res. 262, was introduced by Senator Wellstone and passed that same day. It called on Russia to cease military operations in Chechnya, open peace talks, allow international agencies into Chechnya and cooperate with them in investigating alleged atrocities, and allow aid groups into Chechnya. It also called on the President to promote peace talks, the international investigation of atrocity reports, and otherwise "take tangible steps to demonstrate to [Russia] that the United States strongly condemns its brutal conduct in Chechnya." Radio Liberty head Thomas Dine on March 1 credited Congressional action as key to Babitsky's release.

On March 30, 2000, Senator Wellstone introduced S.Res.280, which added to language in S.Res.262 by calling for the Administration to support societal groups in Russia working to preserve democracy and free media; to advocate the appointment of an U.N. Special Rapporteur for Chechnya; and to sponsor a resolution at the U.N. Human Rights Commission expressing serious concerns about Russia's human rights violations in Chechnya and supporting the establishment of a U.N. Commission of Inquiry to investigate possible violations of the Geneva Conventions.

Hearings have included a March 1, 2000, meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Russia's conduct in Chechnya. A major question raised during testimony was whether the United States should move beyond diplomatic efforts to register concern about Russia's massive human rights abuses in Chechnya. Rubin on March 3 — stating that he was responding to some criticism by some Members at the hearing and by some in the media that the Administration has been inactive on Chechnya — asserted that the Administration had assiduously pressed Russia diplomatically on the Babitsky case and freedom of the press in Russia and "been as clear as any government in Europe or anywhere else" in demanding accountability by Russia on the issue of human rights abuses in Chechnya. As a result of the hearing, Senator Helms on March 9 introduced S.Res.269, which called for the President to take "tangible steps to demonstrate [to Russia] that the United States strongly condemns its conduct in Chechnya and its unwillingness to find a just political solution to the conflict." Tangible measures listed include a freeze on summitry and IMF, World Bank, Eximbank, and Overseas Private Investment Corporation loans and insurance, and support for the suspension of Russia from the G-8. These sanctions should stay in place, it states, until Russia ceases fire in Chechnya, begins peace talks, allows international human rights and humanitarian organizations free access, and initiates the prosecution of human rights violators.

On April 4, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations held a *Hearing on Chechnya, Russia, and U.S. Policy and Aid Programs*. Subcommittee

Chairman Mitch McConnell stated that the Administration had sent Russia mixed signals on Chechnya, involving contradictory statements and little action, and questioning why the United States has “turn[ed] a blind eye ... to savagery against civilians in Chechnya,” comparable to ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Among actions, he called for U.S. support for international peace talks and enhanced border aid for Georgia, and stated that Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin’s refusal to pursue peace talks belied his alleged democratic credentials. Senator Patrick Leahy called for the Administration to declare that atrocities by Russian troops in Chechnya are war crimes, but also to continue to support grass-roots democratization in Russia. Talbott stated that “Chechnya casts a shadow over the entire process of Russia’s integration into the international community,” and that Putin faces the choice of repairing the damage to Russia’s international standing, or further isolating Russia.

Other Chechnya-related activity by Congress included Representative Christopher Smith’s condemnation of Russian plans to detain Chechen males aged 10-60 as inhumane.⁵⁴ Senator Paul Wellstone on February 8 sent a letter to Putin deploring the Russian military’s indiscriminate force against civilians and instances of looting, summary executions, detention, and rape, and called on Putin to allow international monitors unimpeded access to Chechnya and Ingushetia to gauge humanitarian needs. In discussing his concerns about Chechnya, Senator Wellstone also called on Putin to lift press restrictions on coverage of the Chechnya conflict, prosecute those responsible for human rights abuses, and accept third party mediation to settle the conflict peacefully.⁵⁵

Among U.S. presidential candidates, Governor George W. Bush has advocated making U.S. aid and further IMF loans to Russia conditional on a peaceful settlement of the Chechnya conflict, and has stated that U.S. relations with Russia cannot be normal until Russia settles the conflict. Vice President Gore has stressed continued engagement with Russia rather than aid sanctions, a stance termed “soft” by Bush, but has condemned Russia’s actions in Chechnya.⁵⁶

⁵⁴*Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe*, news release, January 14, 2000.

⁵⁵*Congressional Record*, February 8, 2000, p. S478; *Congressional Record*, February 9, 2000, p. S511.

⁵⁶*New York Times*, December 2, 1999, p. 26; *Capital Journal*, December 15, 1999; *Where They Stand*, *AP*, February 11, 2000; Durham debate, *Reuters*, January 5, 2000; *Washington Post*, January 5, 2000, pp. A1, A6; *Reuters*, March 2, 2000; *New York Times*, April 27, 2000, p. A10; *U.S. Newswire*, April 30, 2000.