

Covcas Bulletin

Conflits et Droits de l'Homme au Caucase
Conflicts & Human Rights in the Caucasus

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Covcas Bulletin is the monthly and bilingual (English/French) publication of Covcas Center for Conflict Resolution and Human Rights.

Its purpose is to alert the international community about early warning news on Human Rights in the Caucasus region.

All financial contributions would be appreciated to help spread information on Human Rights. Covcas Bulletin is available by electronic mail. Please see details on the last page.

NOTE DE L'EDITEUR

Covcas Bulletin est la publication mensuelle et bilingue (Anglais/Français) du Centre Covcas pour la Résolution des conflits et les Droits de l'Homme.

Sa mission est de porter à l'attention de la Communauté Internationale les informations de pré-alerte sur les Droits de l'Homme au Caucase.

Votre participation financière nous permettra de poursuivre l'action de diffusion des informations. Voir modalités en dernière page de ce numéro.

SUMMARY NOTES

In the beginning of the year, many large-scale raids and combing operations - "mopping up operations" according to the Russian military command - took place in the East and the South of Chechnya, where groups of Chechen rebels supposedly fell back. Argun, Gudermes, Tsotsin-yurt, Shali, Starye Atagi as well as villages located in the districts of Achkhoi-Martan and Urus-Martan were targeted. The Russian soldiers, sometimes under the influence of alcohol, abused Chechen civilians: plunder, physical violence, even arbitrary executions. People were arbitrarily arrested, sometimes they went missing and their mutilated bodies were found later. According to the Glasnost foundation, mopping up operations in the village of Tsotsin-Yurt resulted in the murder of approximately 200 inhabitants. False testimonies as well as ransoms were required from families in exchange for the delivery of relatives' bodies. Other NGOs reported lower figures but nevertheless claimed there were Human Rig!

hts violations during these operations.

Amnesty International mentions a number of deaths and the prolonged arbitrary detention in extreme conditions of about 100 men, a dozen of whom are reported missing. The Memorial group stated "rough and massive violations of human rights and Russian legislative norms". Exasperated by the violence of the Russian servicemen, hundreds of inhabitants of the city of Argun demonstrated, demanding the end of the operations. Similar demonstrations took place in Novye Atagi, Starye

Atagi, Shali, Tsotsan-Yurt and the surrounding villages.

In the village of Shali, armed confrontation opposed Russian soldiers to Chechen policemen who were trying to protect the population. The presidential secretary for Human Rights in Chechnya, Vladimir Kalamanov recognized that an "enormous number of violations of the legal norms" took place during these military operations. Furthermore, he indicated that 42 servicemen had been condemned for abuse committed against civilians.

Many observers denounced the non-application of judgments pronounced against soldiers, and the frequent absence of investigation into the crimes committed by the army in Chechnya. In a recent report, Amnesty International emphasized the "impunity" enjoyed by the Russian army in Chechnya. The Council of Europe also raised this point in recent statements. An investigation commission was however set up to examine the events that occurred during the operations.

Breaking the common front for the international fight against terrorism, American State department spokesman Robert Boucher denounced the violations of Human Rights committed by the Russian army during the interventions in Argun and Tsotsin-Yurt, evoking the massacre of 80 Chechen civilians in the beginning of January. R. Butcher also expressed concern about the follow-up of the negotiations between the presidential envoy in charge of the Southern districts, V. Kazantsev, and the representative of the Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov, Akhmed Zakaiev. His concern was not shared by Russian armed forces chief general, Anatoly Kvashnin, who firmly dismissed the possibility of conducting peace negotiations with the nationalist leaders, indicating that modalities of

the rebels' disarmament were the only negotiable subject. This comment was confirmed by Nikolai Britvin, the deputy presidential representative for the Southern districts, who indicated that the previous negotiations ! were broken.

Russian Foreign Secretary Igor Ivanov nevertheless asserted that dialogue with the representatives of the Chechen civil society interested in a peaceful solution for the conflict had never stopped. Akhmed Zakaiev, the representative of rebel president Aslan Maskhadov, asserted he was still in touch with Russian official representatives. Zakaiev described the consultative council set up in Chechnya by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) as a supplementary element to slow down progress towards a peaceful ending of the conflict. The PACE initiatives also upset representatives of the federalist side: the consultative president of the council of the Chechen republic, Shaid Djamaldayev, denounced the Council of Europe's policy in Chechnya, that he described as biased in favor of the separatists, allowing, according to him, the CE to exert political pressure on Russia, by ignoring the propositions of the Chechen officials for a pacific settlement of the conflict.

The American position was not limited to the previous statements on the necessity of peace negotiations: a meeting between representatives of the American state department and the foreign minister of the rebel government, Ilyas Akhmadov, took place. Similar contacts also took place in Paris and London. This was a possible sign of a coordinated interest of the West in Chechnya but caused official protest in Moscow.

In Paris, president Putin compared the war in Chechnya with the American campaign against terrorism and drew a parallel between the Chechen independent movement and the European separatist spheres. "Europe could be plunged into chaos if these people [the separatists] received further support", declared the Russian president. His view was not shared by the French president Jacques Chirac, who pointed out that the Chechen conflict could not be reduced to its terrorist aspect. President Chirac hastened his

Russian counterpart to resume peace negotiations. Putin declared that Russia was not involved in military operations but in local operations. Nevertheless, the Russian president later declared: "we have the right to use military means (...) if judicial means prove to be ineffective". He also asserted that all the officials and servicemen convicted of crimes in Chechnya would be prosecuted.

According to him, about twenty Russian soldiers already have been prosecuted. The presidential delegate for Human Rights, Vladimir Kalamonov, put forward the vague figure of "thousands of cases" of Human Rights violations by the Russian army in Chechnya. He claimed that harsh sentences had been pronounced in numerous cases. The president of the United Nations High Committee for refugees, Ruud Lubbers, also called on the Russian government to initiate peace negotiations with the Chechen political leaders, in particular with Aslan Maskhadov, who, according to him, is "certainly not a terrorist". The Kremlin spokesman for Chechnya, Serguei Yastrzhembsky, answered this statement by announcing that a criminal case had been opened against Maskhadov...

Several officials were victims of attacks: the president of the chamber of agriculture of Vedeno district was murdered, the general prosecutor of Chechnya's car was blown up, the Chechen deputy Prime Minister and the Chechen government deputy president Ali Alavdinov were victims of gun-attacks, whereas the Vice Minister of emergency situations was gunned down, allegedly accidentally, by Russian soldiers. Besides, according to Glasnost, a powerful bomb was discovered in a primary school in Grozny.

Despite the declarations of the official media and the Russian politicians such as the Russian president's plenipotentiary representative for the southern districts, Murat Zyazikov, for whom the situation is "complex but fully controlled by federal authorities" and shows "encouraging signs", the atmosphere remains extremely tense in Chechnya, where military operations and terrorist actions still claim lives.

RESUMES

Dès le début de la nouvelle année, de multiples opérations de bouclage et de raffles de grande envergure - pudiquement désignées par le commandement militaire russe sous le terme d'opération de nettoyage - ont eu lieu dans l'Est et le Sud de la Tchétchénie, où des groupes de rebelles tchéchènes se seraient repliés. Les localités d'Argun de Gudermes, Tsotsin-yurt, Shali, Starye Atagi ainsi que des villages situés dans les districts de Achkoi-Martan et Urus-Martan ont ainsi été le théâtre d'un scénario devenu répétitif. Les militaires russes, agissant parfois selon certains témoins en état d'ébriété, se sont livrés à des exactions sur des populations civiles : fouilles à domicile, pillages, violences physiques sur les habitants pouvant aller jusqu'à l'exécution sommaire, détentions arbitraires et disparitions de personnes dont le cadavre est retrouvé les jours suivant dans les environs, portant parfois des traces de mutilation. Selon la fondation Glasnost, les opérations de ratissage dans la localité de Tsotsin-Yurt se seraient soldées par le meurtre de près de 200 habitants. De faux témoignages ainsi que des rançons auraient été exigées des familles pour la remise des corps. D'autres ONG rapportent des chiffres moins élevés mais témoignent cependant de la réalité de la violation des Droits de l'Homme au cours des dernières opérations. Amnesty international fait ainsi mention d'un nombre imprécisé de morts et de la détention arbitraire prolongée dans des conditions extrêmes d'une centaine d'homme dont une dizaine sont portés disparus. Le groupe Memorial a fait état de "violations massives des Droits de l'Homme et des Lois de la fédération de Russie".

Excédés par les violences des militaires russes, quelques centaines d'habitants de la ville d'Argun ont manifesté pour exiger l'arrêt des opérations, de même que dans les localités de Novye Atagi et Starye Atagi, Shali, Tsotsan-Yurt et des villages environnants. Dans le village de Shali, des affrontements armés ont opposé des militaires russes à des policiers tchéchènes tentant de protéger la population. Le secrétaire présidentiel aux Droits de

l'Homme en Tchétchénie Vladimir Kalamanov a reconnu qu'un "nombre énorme de violations des normes légales" ont eu lieu au cours d'opérations militaires récentes. Il a de plus indiqué que 42 militaires auraient été condamnés pour des délits commis à l'encontre de civils. Notons que de nombreux observateurs dénoncent la non application des décisions de justice prononcées contre les militaires, et qui plus est l'absence fréquente d'enquête sur les crimes commis par l'armée en Tchétchénie. Amnesty International mettait ainsi l'accent dans un de ses récents rapports sur "l'impunité" dont jouit l'armée russe en Tchétchénie, ce que le Conseil de l'Europe relevait aussi dans une de ces récentes déclarations. Une commission d'enquête a cependant été mise en place pour examiner les faits qui se sont produits lors des opérations militaires sur les villages de Novye Atagi et Starye Atagi entre le 28 Janvier et le 5 Février.

Ouvrant une brèche dans le front de l'union sacrée pour la lutte internationale contre le terrorisme, le porte-parole du département américain Robert Boucher a dénoncé les violations des Droits de l'Homme commis par l'armée russe lors des interventions sur Argun et Tsotsin-Yurt, évoquant le chiffre de 80 civils tchétchènes massacrés début Janvier. R. Boucher a aussi exprimé des inquiétudes quant à la suite donnée par les autorités russes aux pourparlers entre le chargé d'affaire présidentiel pour les districts méridionaux, V. Kazantsev, et le représentant du président Tchétchéne Aslan Maskhadov, Akhmed Zakaiev. Préoccupations qui sont loin d'être celles du général en chef des forces armées russes, le général Anatoly Kvashnin, qui a fermement écarté la possibilité de conduire des négociations de paix avec les leaders indépendantistes, indiquant que les seuls pourparlers de paix envisageables ne peuvent concerner que les modalités du désarmement des rebelles. Propos confirmés par Nikolai Britvin, le vice-représentant présidentiel pour les districts méridionaux, indiquant que les pourparlers précédents ont été rompus. Le ministre russe des affaires étrangères Igor Ivanov a néanmoins affirmé que le dialogue n'a jamais cessé avec les représentants de la société civile tchétchéne intéressés à une solution pacifique du conflit.

Akhmed Zakaiev, le représentant du président rebelle Aslan Maskhadov a quant à lui affirmé toujours être en contact avec des représentants officiels russes. Zakaiev a par ailleurs décrit le conseil consultatif mis en place en Tchétchénie sous l'impulsion de l'Assemblée Parlementaire du Conseil de L'Europe (PACE) comme un moyen supplémentaire de ralentir la progression vers une solution pacifique du conflit. Les initiatives du PACE font aussi des mécontents dans le camp des fédéralistes: le président du conseil consultatif de la république tchétchéne, Shaid Djamaaldayev, a dénoncé la politique du Conseil de l'Europe (CE) en Tchétchénie, qu'il estime être biaisée en faveur des séparatistes, permettant selon lui au CE d'exercer une pression politique sur la Russie, en ignorant les propositions des officiels tchétchènes pour un règlement pacifique du conflit. la prise de position américaine ne s'est pas limitée aux précédentes déclarations sur la nécessité de pourparlers de paix: une rencontre a eu lieu entre des représentants du département d'Etat américain et le ministre des affaires étrangères du gouvernement rebelle, Ilyas Akhmadov. Signe possible d'un intérêt concerté des occidentaux pour la Tchétchénie, des contacts similaires ont aussi eu lieu à Paris et à Londres, provoquant des protestations officielles de Moscou.

En visite à Paris, le président Poutine a comparé la guerre en Tchétchénie à la campagne américaine contre le terrorisme et a dressé un parallèle entre le mouvement indépendantiste tchétchéne et les mouvances séparatistes européennes. "L'Europe pourrait être plongée dans le chaos si ces gens [les séparatistes] recevaient un soutien prolongé." a déclaré le président russe. Point de vue que le président français Jacques Chirac a tenu à tempérer, rappelant que le conflit tchétchéne ne pouvait être réduit seulement à son aspect terroriste, et pressant son homologue russe de reprendre les pourparlers de paix. Démentant l'implication de la Russie dans des opérations militaires, évoquant de simples opérations locales, Poutine déclarait néanmoins plus tard: "Nous avons le droit d'employer des moyens militaires (...) si les moyens juridiques se révèlent inefficaces."

Le président russe affirmait par ailleurs que tous les officiels et militaires convaincus de crimes en Tchétchénie seraient poursuivis en justice. Selon lui, une vingtaine de soldats russes auraient déjà été jugés. Le délégué présidentiel pour les Droits de l'Homme, Vladimir Kalamanov, a pour sa part avancé le chiffre imprécis de "milliers d'affaires" concernant les violations des Droits de l'Homme par l'armée russe en Tchétchénie, affirmant que des sentences sévères ont été prononcées dans de nombreux cas. Le président de la commission des nations-Unies aux réfugiés, Ruud Lubbers, a lui aussi appelé le gouvernement russe à entamer des négociations de paix avec les leaders politiques tchétchènes, et notamment avec Aslan Maskhadov, qui n'est selon lui "certainement pas un terroriste". Le porte-parole du Kremlin pour la Tchétchénie, Serguei Yastrzhembsky, répondu à cet appel en annonçant qu'une enquête criminelle a été ouverte à son sujet...

Plusieurs officiels ont été victimes d'attentats: meurtre du président de la chambre d'agriculture de Védono, attentat à la bombe contre la voiture du procureur général de Tchétchénie, attaque armée sur le vice-premier ministre tchétchéne et sur le vice président du gouvernement tchétchéne, Ali Alavdinov, tandis que le vice-ministre des situations d'urgence était abattu prétendument accidentellement par des militaires russes. Par ailleurs, selon Glasnost, une bombe de forte puissance a été détectée dans une école secondaire de Grozny. Le climat reste donc extrêmement tendu en Tchétchénie, où les opérations militaires et les actions terroristes demeurent toujours aussi meurtrières, en dépit des déclarations des médias officiels et des politiques russes, tel le représentant présidentiel plénipotentiaire pour les provinces méridionales, Murat Zyazikov pour lequel la situation, "complexe mais totalement contrôlée par les autorités fédérales", montre "des signes encourageants".

**DEVELOPPING EVENTS /
REVUE DE PRESSE**

**SPECIAL
CHECHNYA /
SPECIAL
TCHETCHENIE**

01/01/02 - Russian forces fight rebels in Chechen village - AP WorldStream

Rebels attacked the headquarters of the Russian Federal Security Service in the Chechen capital Grozny early Tuesday, firing grenades and automatic weapons, but caused no casualties, the agency said.(...)

Russian officials have repeatedly contended that the rebels are fractured and on the verge of defeat, but the insurgents bloody and torment Russian forces with near-daily small attacks, including in the capital.

Also Tuesday, Russian forces fought for a fourth day with rebels in the village of Tsotsin-Yurt, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) southeast of Grozny, ITAR-Tass cited the FSB as saying.

The report said 73 rebels have been eliminated in the fighting and that Russian casualties were more than 10, including two Interior Ministry soldiers killed.(...)

01/02/02 - Russians kill 10 Chechen civilians, say rebels - Reuters World Report

(...)The www.kavkaz.org Internet site said six women and a one-year-old child were among 10 people killed by grenades fired by Russian soldiers overnight in the village of Tsatsan-Yurt.

The rebels appeared to be referring to the settlement of Tsotsin-Yurt, situated some 20 km (12 miles) southeast of the regional capital Grozny.(...)

The rebels reported other clashes around the province, including in Grozny.(...)

Troops conducting house-to-house searches in the village and in three others nearby had arrested dozens of suspects, RTR [Russian television reports] added.(...)

01/03/02 - No Chechens among captive Talibs - The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

"The New York Times" correspondent reports there are no Chechens among the captive Talib gunmen. She mentioned some Muslims from different Russian regions but nothing about the Chechens. Pro Kremlin mass media were reporting about captive Chechen-Talibs in Dec hinting that Chechnya is an enclave of Al Qaeda. Now Russian journalists will have to do their best to find new Chechens among the talibs. The only thing left is to find out what Russian regions those mentioned captive Muslims are from.

Another evidence of arbitrariness

Unidentified persons in military uniform without identification signs broke into the Ismailovs house on Kirov street in Gehi village at night Dec 30. They raped a mistress of the house in the presence of her 30 years old son. After that the house was blown up.

01/03/02 - Situation in Chechnya-roundup - COMTEX Newswire

(...) Itar-Tass was told on Thursday at the Headquarters of the Federal Group of Forces in the Northern Caucasus that the heaviest blows were dealt on bandit positions in the highlands of Nozhai-Yurt and Vedeno districts of the republic.

As a result, two extremist strong points, comprising several buildings, dugouts, and observation posts, were wiped out.(...)

Itar-Tass was told at the Republican Military Commandant's Office on Thursday that more than 100 kilometres of railway tracks were checked by sappers in Chechnya during the past twenty-four hours. More than twenty explosive devices were rendered harmless.(...)

01/03/02 - Six days of clashes in Chechen village lead to 40 d... - AP WorldStream

Six days of clashes between Russian forces and rebel groups in an eastern Chechen village have resulted in at least 40 deaths, including 10 civilians killed after getting caught in the cross fire, an official said Thursday.(...)

Russian forces on Thursday fought for a sixth day with rebels in the

village of Tsotsin-Yurt, about 25 kilometers (15 miles) southeast of Grozny.(...)

Reports coming out of the region have varied widely, as federal forces continue to press their stranglehold on Tsotsin-Yurt and the village of Geldegen and the eastern town of Kurchaloi in Kurchaloi district. The operation began after a special Federal Security Services' unit came under rebel fire in Tsotsin-Yurt, the official said.

Local residents who managed to escape from the villages have been settled in the nearby village, Mesker-Yurt, the official said.

Other residents have been rounded up by federal forces on suspicion of aiding the rebels.(...)

01/04/02 - Chechen President extends his term in office - RFE/RL

Aslan Maskhadov has issued a decree extending by one year his five-year presidential term that was due to expire on 27 January 2002, according to "Kommersant-Daily" on 27 December.

Maskhadov explained that at the beginning of the current war in Chechnya the State Defense Committee banned all elections and referendums for its duration. Russian presidential aide Sergei Yastrzhembskii commented in Moscow the same day that as a result of Maskhadov's decision, the Chechen president's legitimacy "has now dropped to a level below zero." Maskhadov has also reportedly issued decrees stripping Vakha Arsanov of the post of Chechen vice president and demoting field commander Ruslan Gelaev for tactical errors during the retreat from Grozny in February 2000. Arsanov has the reputation of an Islamic radical and is believed to be implicated in kidnappings for ransom.

01/04/02 - The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

According to Glasnost correspondents, about 200 corpses of peaceful residents have been found in Tsotsan Yurt village. None of them was identified as a rebel, but relatives are not allowed to take the bodies for burial unless they sign a testimony the killed person belonged to Chechen rebels. Beside this testimony, the military authorities also require the ransom of 1,000 rubles.(...)

Department Of State On Chechen Conflict

Commenting the New York Times article, claiming that no Chechen nationals have been found among the captured taliban fighters, the US State Department Spokesman Richard Bowcher said yesterday that there was a certain link between the terrorist organization Al Queda and Chechen separatists. He said the USA were maintaining contacts with Russia on the progress of anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan, at the same time reiterating the US position that the conflict in Chechnya should be solved by political means.

Itar-Tass Russia and CIS news digest of January 4

Federal troops launched a mopping up operation in the Chechen town of Argun on Friday, Itar-Tass was told by officers of the local Commandant's Office. This is being done, because some of the bandits, who got away from the recent operation of federal troops in Kurchaloi district, were able to sneak into this third largest town of the republic. (...) There are several tanks standing in the central square of the town. However, no shooting is being heard there. The special operation in Kurchaloi district is all but completed. It lasted from the end of December. As a result, about 100 bandits, including Arab mercenaries, were killed during the fighting. The command of the federal force in the Northern Caucasus has denied press reports claiming losses amongst servicemen in a special operation in Argun.(...)

01/07/02 – Renewed fighting in Argun - RFE/RL

Russian forces claim to have detained a total of 38 people during a special operation that got underway on 3 January in the town of Argun, east of Grozny, to round up Chechen fighters who escaped from a battle last week in the village of Tsotan- Yurt, Russian agencies reported. The town has been surrounded and roads leading from it to Grozny, Shali, and Gudermes have been blocked.

Russian military spokesmen denied on 4 January either using artillery during the operation in Argun or incurring any casualties. Argun was the scene of a similar operation last month in which up to 60 civilians

were detained and Russian troops indulged in looting.

01/07/02 – Chechen Minister killed by friendly fire - RFE/RL

Chechen Deputy Emergency Situations Minister Ruslan Yunusov died in Grozny hospital on 4 January after Russian servicemen opened fire on a suspicious vehicle he was trying to prevent from leaving the ministry's parking lot, Russian agencies reported. Two Russian contract servicemen have been arrested in connection with the killing.

01/08/02 – Administration official and his family executed – The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

The head of agricultural department of Vedeno district administration was killed on the night of Jan.7 in his house in Dyshne-Vedeno village when six masked men burst in his home and opened fire, killing also the man's elderly father and his 10-year-old son.

01/08/02 – Chechen prosecutor-General's bodyguards injured by car bomb - RFE/RL

Six police officers assigned to protect Chechnya's prosecutor-general, Vsevolod Chernov, were hospitalized with concussions on 7 January after the automobile in which they were traveling hit a remote-controlled mine in Grozny.

01/08/02 - Chechens Protest Russian Security - AP Online

Hundreds of protesters in Chechnya's third-largest city on Tuesday demanded Russian forces end a security sweep that has kept residents trapped in the town for two days.(...)

About 300 people took part in a protest urging an end to the security sweep, the official said. Chechen residents and human rights organizations have often accused Russian forces of arbitrarily rounding up men and teen-age boys during so-called mopping-up operations and abusing them.

Chechnya's chief prosecutor, Vsevolod Chernov, said Tuesday that the troops did not commit violations during their sweep of Argun, and claimed that 12 rebels had been killed in the operation.(...)

01/09/02 - Russia hails Turkey's wish to study extradition demand - COMTEX Newswire

Russia acclaims Turkey's wish to examine a demand on an arrest and extradition of main ideologist of Chechen extremism Movladi Udugov, the Russian president's assistant Sergei Yastrzhembsky told reporters on Wednesday. "The fact that it was Turkey that addressed Russia, deserves support and approval," he emphasised.

Yastrzhembsky noted that the Russian Prosecutor-General's Office issued a decision on March 20, 2000 on instituting a criminal case against Udugov under Article 279 of the Russian Criminal Code (mutiny). He was accused of masterminding an attack by Chechen gunmen on the Novolaksky district in neighbouring Dagestan.

"We have forwarded an appropriate notification to Turkish authorities 18 months ago," Yastrzhembsky continued. Small secret, he added, that Chechen chieftains felt themselves comfortably in Turkey in the past.(...)

01/09/02 - Chechen NGOs Appeal To World Public – The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

Chechen public organizations have appealed to the world and European organizations, drawing their attention to the deaths of the peaceful civilians in the course of mop up and punitive operations. Despite the world public's change of mood toward the liberation wars, the activists of Chechen NGOs express hope that the atrocities perpetrated by the federal troops in Chechnya will be denounced by the world public.

The full text of the appeal is on <http://www.glasnostonline.org/rus/article.php?sid=1401>

01/10/02 - Russian general says no break in Chechen talks - Reuters World ReportThursday

Russia's top general on Thursday ruled out meeting Chechnya's main separatist leaders for peace talks, a day after Moscow announced the results of one its bloodiest crackdowns in the secessionist province for a year. Two months after a Kremlin envoy and a rebel representative met in Moscow in November -- the first acknowledged talks between the two sides since

their latest conflict flared more than two years ago -- Armed Forces chief of staff General Anatoly Kvashnin said Russia was ready to talk with anyone except the key leaders. "On the one hand, we hold talks with bandits, so that they surrender to justice rather than continue to resist desperately," Kvashnin said in remarks broadcast on state-run ORT television. In other comments, Itar-Tass quoted Kvashnin as saying authorities were also in touch with rank and file rebels, "people who are lost, who have been deceived and who are helping top militants.

But in the Itar-Tass remarks he ruled out "the possibility of carrying out negotiations with (separatist Chechen leader) Aslan Maskhadov, (top field commander) Shamil Basayev and (a warlord Moscow describes only as the Jordanian-born) Khattab."

Russian officials say any talks with rebels can only concern the terms of them renouncing their armed struggle, and dismiss talk of granting the province formal independence.(...)

01/10/02 – Russian military sums up results of Argun operation - RFE/RL

Life is reportedly "returning to normal" in the Chechen town of Argun following a six-day operation to locate and detain Chechen militants, Reuters and ITAR-TASS reported on 9 January. Chechen Prosecutor-General Vsevolod Chernov said a total of 187 residents of the town were investigated, of whom 27 were taken into custody and two identified as "members of illegal bandit formations," according to Interfax. It is not clear whether the other 25 have been released. Also on 9 January, Colonel General Gennadii Troshev, commander of the North Caucasus Military District, named Colonel Viktor Smirnov military commandant in Argun. The previous commandant, Colonel Nikolai Sidorenko, was dismissed last month for negligence in allowing Chechen militants to enter the town and investigators are deciding whether disciplinary charges should be brought against him.

01/11/02 – U.S Slams Russian brutality in Chechnya - RFE/RL

Speaking at a press briefing in Washington on 10 January, U.S. State Department spokesman

Richard Boucher expressed concern that Russian troops resorted to "overwhelming force against civilian targets" and committed human rights violations during recent fighting in the village of Tsotan-Yurt and the town of Argun, Reuters reported. "Die Welt" on 11 January quoted Chechen human rights activists as saying that drunken Russian soldiers massacred at least 80 Chechen civilians during the fighting in Tsotan-Yurt in early January, which was the fiercest in several months. Boucher also expressed concern that Moscow has not followed up on initial talks last November between presidential envoy to the Southern federal district Viktor Kazantsev and Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov's representative Akhmed Zakaev .

01/11/02 – The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

Seven young men and a woman were killed yesterday during a mop up operation in Argun city. The operation was finished late in the evening when the military lifted the blockade of the city. According to the residents of Tsotsan Yurt village the federal troops have kept a three-month baby lying on the snow until its mother found 4,000 rubles (\$130) to pay for the child.

Shelters For Returning Refugees Opened

According to the head of the construction department in Chechen cabinet, Madina Muskhadjieva, two shelters have been opened in Gudermes city for the refugees and displaced persons. The local builders have managed to restore two former hostels where the Chechen refugees, returning from neighboring Ingushetia, are to be housed. The refugees are to enjoy all amenities, like electricity, gas and heating.

01/11/02 - AP US & World

Russian helicopters rocketed rebel camps in breakaway Chechnya's southeast and closed off roads to a southern district's capital to allow troops to root out militants, officials said Friday.

Seven Russian servicemen were killed and 19 wounded in rebel attacks and clashes over the past 24 hours, an official in the pro-Moscow Chechen administration said. Four

rebels were killed, he said on condition of anonymity.

A road leading to Shali has been blocked since Thursday and more than 150 people across Chechnya have been detained on suspicion of participation in rebel activities, the official said. Russian forces also used artillery in the Shali district on Thursday, he said.

Searches for suspects, known as mopping-up operations, continued in the southern Shelkovsky district and in several villages in the Achkhoy-Martan and Urus-Martan districts, the official said.(...)

The operation in Shali "is of a targeted nature," the officials said, but so far the number of detainees hasn't been disclosed.(...)

01/11/02 –Chechen administration head says he will run for President - RFE/RL

Meeting with journalists in Grozny on 10 January, Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov announced that he will run for president of Chechnya when elections take place, ITAR-TASS reported. No date for that ballot has yet been scheduled. Kadyrov told ITAR-TASS on 23 November that it must be preceded by the end of hostilities and the return of all Chechen displaced persons to their homes.

01/12/02 - Chechen refugees left without bread - COMTEX Newswire

Thousands of Chechen refugees who found shelter in the neighboring province of Ingushetia have been left without bread, possibly deepening the crisis there.

A local bakery halted bread supplies to refugee camps because of the bills that have not been paid for months by Russia's Nationalities and Migration Policy Ministry, RTR television network reported Saturday.(...)

01/14/02 - PACE envoy sees positive changes in Grozny - COMTEX Newswire

The head of the PACE commission on migration and refugees, Tadeusz lwinski, said the Chechen capital of Grozny has become a relatively calm city in the last two years.

He told journalists in Grozny on Monday that the mood of those living in tent cities has also changed

considerably. When he had talked with them two years ago, there had been a lot of hostility towards authorities, whereas now they were almost ready to go back, he said.

Iwinski is in Chechnya to check on the return of refugees to their homes.

Chechen Prime Minister Stanislav Ilyasov told him in the presence of the press that the resettlement of refugees to hostels specially restored for them will begin in the very near future. "Several weeks from now, no one will be living in tents in Chechnya.

Everybody will have been moved to appropriate housing", he said.

According to Ilyasov, the population of Chechnya has grown by more than 200,000 in the last two years to almost 800,000.

01/15/02 - Interior Ministry Gives Details Of Prevented ... - COMTEX Newswire

The Interior Ministry of Russia reported details of the prevention of the largest terrorist act in the territory of Chechnya, which could result in the death of several thousand people and an ecological disaster. A representative of the Press Service of the Interior Ministry's Department of Fighting Organized Crime in the North Caucasus told RBC that on December 11, 2001 rebels planned to destroy the railway terminal Chervlyonaya-Uzlovaya, as well as two nearby villages. They set a number of explosive devices to blow up 10,000 tons of oil and 700 tons of fuel stored at the railway station.(...)

01/15/02 - Putin in Paris rebuffs criticism on Chechnya - Reuters World Report

President Vladimir Putin dismissed criticism over Russia's war in the breakaway region of Chechnya on Tuesday, saying during a visit to Paris it was comparable to the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan.

At a news conference after an informal meeting, President Jacques Chirac urged Putin to restart peace talks with Chechen rebels and insisted the Chechen conflict "could not be reduced solely to its terrorist aspect."(...)

01/15/02 - Russia freezes contacts with Chechen President - RFE/RL

The Russian leadership is not currently in contact with representatives of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, Nikolai Britvin, who is the deputy presidential representative to the South Russia federal district, told ITAR-TASS on 14 January. Britvin said that earlier contacts proved "ineffective," and that the terms proposed by Maskhadov's representatives were "unacceptable to Russia." He did not elaborate. Presidential representative to the Southern federal district Viktor Kazantsev met in Moscow last November with Maskhadov's envoy, Akhmed Zakaev, but reportedly failed to identify a mutually acceptable approach to ending the war.

01/15/02 - Russian military claims to inflict heavy losses on Chechens... - RFE/RL

Federal forces in Chechnya killed over 1,000 Chechen fighters, including 30 field commanders, in search-and-destroy operations over the past 2 1/2 months, Interfax reported on 14 January, quoting the commander of the combined federal forces, Lieutenant General Vladimir Moltenskoï. A Russian military spokesman at the Khankala base near Grozny said the same day that 24 Chechen fighters were killed last week alone.

... But will not withdraw further troops

No further Russian troops will be withdrawn from Chechnya this year, Colonel General Gennadii Troshev, commander of the North Caucasus Military District, told journalists in Grozny on 14 January, ITAR-TASS reported. At the same time, Troshev said it is planned to end the "antiterrorist" operation in Chechnya by May 2002. Speaking in Moscow on 10 January, Russian armed forces Chief of General Staff General Anatolii Kvashnin claimed that no large bands of Chechen fighters remain, only "insignificant pockets of resistance."

01/15/02 - Russian Delegation Meets Pentagon - AP Online

A Russian military delegation held daylong talks with top Pentagon

officials Tuesday on cooperating against terror threats and creating a new overall U.S.-Russian military relationship.(...)

For its part, the Bush administration has restated its accusation that the Russians are violating human rights and using inappropriate force to quash a rebellion in the Russian region Chechnya.

Russia also is coming under State Department criticism for a crackdown on independent media.(...)

01/16/02 - Refugee situation in Ingushetia improves - COMTEX Newswire

The situation in compounds for forcibly resettled people in Ingushetia and Chechnya has recently changed for the better, Russian Deputy Interior Minister Gen. Vladimir Vasilyev told journalists on Wednesday. Gen.Vasilyev, who has recently visited refugee compounds with OSCE representatives, said that in the settlement of Znamenskoye the people living in a refugee compound are planning to return to their homes. Both Russian and OSCE representatives who visited these places could see that the situation was improving there. "No more shortages of food and medications, although the conditions in compounds ought to have been better," Vasilyev said. Nonetheless, "the people are dressed, fed, a school and a medical centre are open there," Vasilyev added.(...)

01/16/02 - Argun residents demand end to special operations... RFE/RL

Some 500 residents of the Chechen town of Argun staged a demonstration there on 15 January to demand that the Russian military discontinue special operations in urban areas to identify and detain Chechen fighters, Interfax reported. Argun has been subjected to five such operations in the past six months (...), and speakers at the protest rally claimed that a further such search is scheduled for 23 February. Also on 15 January, residents of the village of Tsotan-Yurt, where drunken Russian troops reportedly killed dozens of civilians during a special operation in early January, staged a similar protest in Grozny. But those protests are unlikely to achieve their objective,

given that Chechen Prime Minister Stanislav Ilyasov argued on 13 January that it is essential to continue special operations to identify and detain Chechen fighters.

01/16/02 - Police changes tactics in Chechnya - COMTEX Newswire

Russian police are changing tactics in Chechnya, First Deputy Interior Minister Vladimir Vasiliev told reporters Wednesday.

The police is dropping the practice of massive mop-up operations to focus on targeted special operations with the mandatory participation of local authorities, the official said.

Vasiliev said all inspections and checks were already held only with the participation of the head of the district, region or town, the military prosecutor, mufti (religious leader), and if need be, local elders.

"In the course of such checks and inspections the activity of law enforcement agencies is under continuous control," Vasiliev said. On the whole, the situation in Chechnya has been changing for the better.

Courts and the prosecutors' offices have started doing their job, and bureaus of the presidential human rights commissioner Vladimir Kalamonov have been opened in all districts, the official said, adding that the staff of local police departments, until recently brought from other regions of Russia to serve rotating shifts, were being replaced by permanent personnel, resident locally.

01/16/02 - Russian President threatens all officials for crimes committed in Chechnya ... RFE/RL

On 16 January during his official visit to Paris, President Vladimir Putin said that in Russia, "all officials, including servicemen, will be prosecuted if it is proved that they have committed crimes in Chechnya," Russian news agencies reported. Putin added that more than 20 servicemen have already been prosecuted in Chechnya, and made it clear that Russia has never denied any humanitarian organization a chance to work on Chechen territory, RIA-Novosti added the same day. (...) Speaking of the ongoing military operations in the region, Putin emphasized that "we [Russians] have the right to apply any military means to this regime if juridical ones prove to be

ineffective," RIA-Novosti continued. Putin also made a parallel with other separatist movements in Turkey and Europe, and said Europe could be "plunged into chaos if these people [separatists] receive further support," international news agencies reported.

... And denies any military operations underway in Chechnya

In an interview on 15 January with the Polish newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" and the TVP TV channel, President Putin said the Russian armed forces are not engaged in any military activity in Chechnya, only "local operations," Interfax reported. At the same time, Putin said, a political dialogue is being conducted with those members of the population who are willing to participate in such talks. Only through such a dialogue, Putin continued, can a "final solution" be found to the Chechen crisis. Putin characterized the forces in Chechnya that oppose Moscow as "a deadly mixture of international terrorists and separatists."

01/16/02 - Ingushetia wants Chechen refugees to return home - COMTEX Newswire

Ingushetia is interested in a speedy return of Chechen refugees to their homes but it will never force them to do so, Acting Ingush President Akhmet Malgasov told U.N.

High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers on Wednesday. (...)

He also noted that "Ingushetia gives priority to the accommodation of those who have decided to stay in the republic".

Partly, this is done with the help of the federal programme of the development of Russia's southern regions. About 50 million roubles have already been allocated to this end.

According to Malgasov, "about 39,000 Chechen refugees have decided to stay in the republic for good". Five settlements will be built for them.

The Russian president's first deputy representative to the Southern Federal District, Alexander Korobeinikov, said that "the problem of refugees can be solved by restoring constitutional order in Chechnya as soon as possible".(...)

01/16/02 - Aslakhonov says population would accept a settlement signed by Maskhadov - RFE/RL

Aslanbek Aslakhonov, who represents Chechnya in the Russian State Duma, told journalists in Moscow on 16 January that support within Chechnya for an end to the fighting is increasing.

Russian agencies reported. He said that talks could be held with Maskhadov provided the latter unequivocally condemns Basaev and his lieutenant, Movladi Udugov, but at the same time acknowledged that Maskhadov has no influence over either Basaev or small groups of fighters whose sole occupation, according to Aslakhonov, is to terrorize both the civilian population and the Russian military. Aslakhonov nonetheless predicted that the Chechen population would support any peace agreement Maskhadov signed because it would mean an end to the ongoing "sweeps" by Russian forces searching for Chechen fighters, in which civilians are frequently targeted. Dozens of Chechen civilians have been killed in such sweeps in the village of Tsotan-Yurt and the town of Argun since the beginning of this year.

01/16/02 - Russian Federation / Chechen Republic - Amnesty International

Shaikh-Akhmed Magomadov (m), aged 25 Akhmed Ezerpashaevich Baisultanov (m), aged 39 Khanpash Ezerpashaevich Baisultanov (m), aged 33 Suleyman Ezerpashaevich Baisultanov (m), aged 28 Salamu Maziev (m), aged 41 Khamzat Israilov (m), aged 32 Malika Ustrakhanova (f) Abbas Magomadov (m), aged 19 Khamzat Israilov Shamil Mandyzhadziev (m), aged 46 Hundreds of other Chechen civilians.

The 10 civilians named above "disappeared" after they were taken into custody by Russian forces during a raid on the village of Tsotsyn-Yurt, in the Kurchaloy district of Chechnya. Russian soldiers reportedly killed several villagers during the raid, and tortured others. Those in custody are in grave danger of being tortured or killed.

Tsotsyn-Yurt is about 40km east of the capital, Grozny. On 29 December Russian soldiers

cordoned the village off with armoured cars. On 30 December at 3am a group of soldiers entered the village, reportedly under the control of a Major-General, searching for Chechen fighters who had supposedly sought shelter in the village. They rounded up a large group of males aged between 14 and 60, some possibly younger. The soldiers apparently took them to the outskirts of the village, stripped them and beat them. The soldiers reportedly tried to cut off the ear of one of these men, named Magomadov, and cut another man's fingers off. They held around 100 men for at least two days, forcing them to sleep outdoors in freezing temperatures.

The soldiers let most of the men go on 1 January. Many had reportedly been so severely beaten that they could not walk. They apparently took a number of the men away with them, including the first seven people named above :

they have not been seen since.(...)

Shaikh-Akhmed Magomadov's brother, Abbas, went to the Temporary Department of Internal Affairs (VOVD) in Kurchaloy on 4 January to find out where his brother was. He was taken into custody, and has not been seen since.

On 7 January, villagers found three bodies, badly disfigured by explosives, and identified one of them as 23-year-old Alkhazur Saidselimov, who had been one of the men taken away after the raid.

During the raid, soldiers had reportedly approached the house of 70-year-old Leche Idrisov, where two Chechen fighters had hidden, using two men, Musa Ismailov and Idris Zakriev, as human shields. In the ensuing gunfight both men were severely wounded. Russian soldiers reportedly then shot both men dead and took their bodies away. A relative of Leche Idrisov, Khamzat Israilov, was also severely wounded in the exchange; Russian soldiers took him away and he has since "disappeared". The bodies of Musa Ismailov and Idris Zakriev were found on 3 January: they had allegedly been severely mutilated with knives, and had their ears and noses cut off.

Soldiers were said to have beaten and tortured Idris Khadaev (23) in his courtyard, who later died from his injuries; the son of the Tsakaev family also reportedly died as a result of torture.

An Amnesty International representative has gathered first-hand accounts of villagers being tortured and killed during earlier raids on Tsotsyn-Yurt.

On 8 October Russian soldiers severely beat a number of villagers. When a group of villagers tried to intervene, soldiers fired a rifle grenade at point-blank range, injuring two women. On 6 November soldiers raided Shamil Mandykhadzhiyev's house, shooting him in both legs and beating his wife and 16-year-old son with rifle butts. Shamil was taken to hospital, but Russian forces took him into custody there and his whereabouts are now unknown.

01/17/02 - Nearly 7,000 Crimes Registered in Chechnya in 2001 - COMTEX Newswire

A total of 6,888 crimes were registered in Chechnya in 2001, Interfax quoted Chechen Prosecutor Vsevolod Chernov as saying on Thursday.

Chernov said in the Chechen capital of Grozny that many of the crimes were felonies: murders, abductions, armed robberies and crimes related to illegal arms trading and drug trafficking.

In 2001, 772 murders were recorded in Chechnya, up 59.2 percent from 2000, said the prosecutor.

Law enforcement bodies there also recorded 279 abductions and 316 armed robberies, up 61 percent and 236.2 percent respectively from 2000.

01/17/02 - Deputy chairman of Chechen govt survives armed attack - COMTEX Newswire

Deputy Chairman of the Chechen government Ali Alavdinov has been attacked in Chechnya, Itar-Tass was told by Chechen government Chairman Stanislav Ilyasov on Thursday.

The incident occurred in the settlement of Mesker -Yurt in the Shali region of Chechnya on Wednesday night, Ilyasov said. Gunmen opened fire at two cars carrying Ali Alavdinov and his guards. Alavdinov has survived the armed attack (...).

Last week, similar attacks had been made on two Chechen senior officials - the minister for economic development and trade and head of

the administration of the Shali region, Ilyasov said.

According to preliminary investigation, the attacks have been made by a criminal gang involving Chechen and Russian bandits.

01/17/02 - Russia, humanitarian agencies actively cooperate ...- COMTEX Newswire

Russia's minister in charge of social and economic restoration in Chechnya said on Thursday that Russia was actively cooperating with different international humanitarian agencies with an aim to restore peaceful life in Chechnya.

The minister, Vladimir Yelagin, told U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers that the Russian government was facing three main tasks - to ensure safety in Chechnya, restore housing and provide "conditions for people to earn their living". Yelagin said several models of "Chechnya's joining the Russian economic space" would be developed shortly.

With that in view, he stressed that earlier, the restive republic "was practically out of Russia's economic legislation, which made privatisation or other economic reforms impossible".

01/17/01 - Situation with human rights in Chechnya stable - envoy - COMTEX Newswire

Russian president's envoy for human rights in Chechnya said on Thursday that he saw the situation with human rights there as stable, stressing that household complains prevail now over complains lodged against military.

The official, Vladimir Kalamonov, admitted that "episodes of violation of human rights do exist, but they are not left out of consideration." Kalamonov told the Echo of Moscow radio station that all operations by federal troops in Chechen settlements were carried out in the presence of officials from the prosecutor's office as well as other officials.

He said "thousands of cases" concerning abuse of Chechens' rights by military have been tried in court and "severe sentences" have been passed on many of them. Kalamonov stressed that household complains have been of late prevailing over complains lodged against military.

01/17/02 - AP US & World

(...)Amnesty International circulated an appeal Thursday listing 10 men who had disappeared after being detained by Russian troops in an operation in late December. The men were among scores detained during fighting in Tsotsin-Yurt. Amnesty appealed to Russian authorities to investigate the whereabouts of the missing men.

The Russian government's human rights envoy for Chechnya, Vladimir Kalamonov, said Thursday that federal forces will now be required to post public lists of all detainees. But he insisted that no serious violations had been reported to him in recent operations.(...)

01/18/02 - Turkish PM evasive about extradition of Chechen ... - COMTEX Newswire

Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit did not confirm Ankara's readiness to meet Russia's demand to extradite chief ideologist of Chechen separatists Movladi Udugov if the latter is in the territory of his country.

Requested by Tass to say whether the Turkish government is ready to render Russian authorities assistance in struggle against terrorism in Chechnya and to extradite Udugov, Ecevit said: "Various countries... abide by contradictory positions with respect to struggle against terrorism... I don't want to call names, but even some democratic West European states abide by contradictory positions on this point."

The question to the Turkish leader, now on a visit to the United States, was put at a news conference in the Washington National Press Club on Thursday.

It is interesting that making his introductory speech, the Turkish head of government pointed to "the absolute need to do away with 'double standards' in struggle against terrorism".(...)

The Turkish Justice Ministry requested Udugov's extradition file only early this January, which was appraised by Moscow as a positive signal. Turkish Justice Minister Hikmet Sami Turk reported at that time that the question on Udugov's extradition to Russia can be examined after receiving all appropriate documents from Moscow.

01/18/02 - U.N. refugee chief calls on Russians to negotiate w... - AP WorldStream

The United Nations' chief of refugee affairs called Friday on the Russian government to open peace negotiations with Chechen political leaders including the elected president and rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov, whom Moscow calls a terrorist.

"Maskhadov is certainly not a terrorist," the U.N. high commissioner for refugees, Ruud Lubbers, told a news conference.

"He hasn't always been able to stop certain acts of violence. If I speak about Chechens going all the way forward, excluding foreign elements and excluding new acts of violence, I think Maskhadov has to be a key person in that."(...)

The top Kremlin spokesman on Chechnya, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, rejected Lubbers' proposal.

"First, of course, I'd like to thank the high commissioner of the United Nations for his special opinion. It is also interesting to hear the views of people who've even gone to Chechnya for a few hours and form their views of what's happening there," he said sarcastically.

"A criminal case has been started against Mr. Maskhadov and Russian prosecutors proceed from that fact."

Lubbers, who visited Chechen refugee camps in Ingushetia this week, urged Russian officials to intensify efforts to encourage the displaced to return home. In particular, he called for increasing the number of Chechen police officers and reducing the number of military posts and roadblocks, where Chechen civilians complain of frequent detentions and shakedowns for bribes.

"This process of a gradual reduction of the federal troops, confining them to a limited place, and the increase of the Chechen police being effective more and more all over the country is a key point to restore confidence," Lubbers said.

He also called for Russian officials to consult with U.N.

security officers on the prospects for the UNHCR to establish a presence in Chechnya, alluding to problems with security and receiving permission from officials. Russian officials have on occasion stopped foreign officials from visiting Chechnya, citing the danger of terrorist attacks, and few non-

governmental organizations are operating there.(...)

In the neighboring region of Dagestan, five soldiers were killed and five injured Friday evening when a remote-control mine was set off when they drove by in the capital Makhachkala, said Magomet Abdullayev, duty officer in the Interior Ministry in Dagestan.(...) Officials estimate about 3,500 soldiers have been killed and more than 11,000 wounded since Moscow sent troops back into Chechnya in 1999. The respected Soldiers' Mothers of Russia group estimates the figures are 2-2.5 times higher.

01/21/02 - Prosecutors in Chechnya opened 212 criminal cases i... - AP WorldStream

Prosecutors in breakaway Chechnya opened 212 criminal cases into reports of missing people in the past year (...).

"In some cases, the disappearance of people can be connected to special operations conducted by federal units," Chechnya's top prosecutor Vsevolod Chernov was quoted as saying by Interfax news agency. But he cautioned that the investigations were still under way and "sufficient legally substantiated evidence" was necessary to prove a connection.

Chernov added that prosecutors were investigating involvement by "rebel groups and criminal groups" in some disappearances, according to Interfax.

Residents and human rights groups have repeatedly urged investigation of the disappearances of Chechen men rounded up in so-called mopping up operations in the small southern republic.

Residents say troops routinely torture and abuse detainees.

Russian officials deny widespread abuses and insist that the operations, in which Chechen towns are barricaded so troops can conduct house-to-house sweeps for suspected rebels, are an effort to keep order and protect residents.

After a new spate of international criticism last week, the Russian government's human rights envoy for Chechnya, Vladimir, said federal forces would now be required to post public

lists of all detainees and must show their identification papers before searching homes. But he insisted that no serious violations had been reported to him.(...)

Also Monday, several dozen special forces troops swept through the Chechen capital, Grozny, to check residents' identity papers, Interfax reported. The troops checked every apartment in all of the capital's multistory buildings, knocking down or blowing up doors if no one answered.(...)

01/21/02 - Failure to protect or punish: human rights violations and impunity in Chechnya - Amnesty international

Russian forces in Chechnya continue to commit grave breaches of international humanitarian law and to violate human rights, largely with impunity. Some of the worst human rights violations are conducted during raids by Russian forces - in Russian, zachistki, literally Aclean-up - on villages and other populated areas: civilians are subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, including rape, and ill-treatment. Looting and arson of private property are also commonly reported during these raids. Other civilians are subjected to disappearance; last seen in Russian military custody, some of these persons are extrajudicially executed, some of these victims' bodies have been found in dumping sites or mass graves, bearing the signs of torture and violent death.

The conflict has settled into a war of attrition, whereby Chechen forces launch hit and run attacks on Russian military vehicles and checkpoints. Ethnic Chechens working in the pro-Moscow administration are also targeted by fighters resulting in dozens of fatalities and serious injuries. The emergence of these farmer-by-day, fighter-by-night tactics by the Chechen side has undoubtedly contributed to acts of reprisal and human rights violations committed by Russian forces against the civilian population. Commonly, a detainee is freed by the authorities upon payment of a monetary bribe or the production of several machine-gun rifles by one of his or her relatives.

The climate of impunity among the perpetrators of these abuses continues to flourish. Investigations into allegations of extrajudicial execution, torture, ill-treatment, and looting or destruction of private property are infrequent, inadequate and rarely lead to prosecutions.

Despite compelling evidence from the victim or witnesses as to the identity of the individual perpetrator or the unit responsible, these investigations are often closed, due to the authorities apparent inability(...). The Amnesty International is not aware of any measures taken by the authorities to engender trust and a cooperative relationship between law enforcement agencies and the civilian population. (...)

01/22/02 - Prominent human rights group accuses Russian forces... - AP WorldStream

(...) The so-called "mopping-up exercise" in Tsotsin-Yurt between Dec. 30 and Jan. 3 resulted in "rough and massive violations of human rights and Russian legislative norms," the Moscow-based Memorial organization said in a report.(...)

Russian troops swept into Tsotsin-Yurt before the New Year, barricaded the village and began a house-to-house search for rebels. The operation lasted four days and Memorial said that by the time the Russian troops concluded the sweep, three villagers were dead, at least six were missing, 100 had been detained and dozens had been subjected to torture and beatings.

Men were dragged out of their homes, had their heads covered and were taken away to filtration sites, where they said they were subjected to further rough treatment, the rights group said.

Women were ordered to hand over money, jewelry and all valuable possessions as troops looted village homes. Some were threatened with rape, Memorial said.

It said the Sulikhadzhiyev family was told they had only two choices - "Money or I shoot," soldiers screamed at them.(...)

Memorial called on Russian forces to stop the mopping-up exercises, fully investigate all allegations of abuses and prosecute the suspects.

"People have no security," said Natalia Ektemirova, a resident of the Chechen capital Grozny and a member of Memorial. "They don't feel safe in their homes, in the courtyards, in their villages." (...)

01/22/02 - Over 200,000 Refugees Return to Chechnya in 2001 - COMTEX Newswire

Over 200,000 refugees, including

ethnic Russians, returned to Chechnya in 2001, leader of the Chechen administration Akhmad Kadyrov announced here Tuesday following talks with President Vladimir Putin.

(...)The government also paid all wage arrears to workers at state enterprises and to pensioners, he said.

He also guaranteed that all people now living in tents would move into houses in the first quarter of this year.(...)He declared that a thermal energy station, whose construction will cost 1 billion rubles (33 million U.S. dollars), was to be launched in Chechnya's third largest town of Argun on Wednesday.(...)

As to the anti-terror operation in the republic, Ilyasov cited military forecast as saying that it would not last for more than half a year.

The duration of the operation depends on "various factors," he said, and "all issues should be dealt with as a package of measures -- struggle against the remaining bandits, the return of refugees, the creation of additional jobs, and the restoration of housing."(...)

01/23/02 - Plans to restore Chechnya have been 80 percent ... - COMTEX Newswire

The federal programme of the restoration of the Chechen Republic has been 80 percent fulfilled. An adviser to the chairman of the Chechen government, Alexei Vasin, told Itar-Tass on Wednesday that the unfulfilled part of the plan includes a project in a field of education and healthcare. He noted that the failure is due to a number of problems related to the extra budgetary sources of financing.(...) Vasin stressed that, according to estimates, the value of the housing stock destroyed in the course of fighting in Chechnya exceeded 18 billion roubles. In this connection, he said, the procedure and the amounts to be paid in compensation for the destroyed property have already been determined.(...)

According to him, "the government has set a task to restore in the Chechen Republic not only what existed prior to the 1990s but also to create conditions for the republic's integration in the legal and economic space of the country's regions. Vasin noted that questions relating to the social protection of the local inhabitants were resolved last year. Wages were paid in full to public sector employees, pensions

and allowances for children are paid every month. New jobs are being created. At present Chechnya has a population of about 850 thousand people. Among them 150 thousands are in employment. Allowances are received by about 390 thousand children and pensions by 175 thousand people.

Vasin stressed that the republic of Chechnya has already created the main social and economic conditions for the return of the refugees (...).

01/23/02 - Chechen envoy outlines proposals for peace talks - RFE/RL

At a press conference in London on 22 January, Zakaev outlined President Maskhadov's proposals for peace talks, Chechenpress reported the following day. They are that Moscow recognize Maskhadov as Chechnya's legitimate president; that Maskhadov and Putin decree the creation of working groups to promote a cessation of hostilities; an immediate halt to "mopping up" operations by Russian troops; and the beginning of talks on a cessation of hostilities and the repatriation of displaced persons.

01/23/02 - Putin assesses positively activity to restore Chechnya - COMTEX Newswire

(...) Russian Minister and Deputy Chairman of the Commission to restore Chechnya Vladimir Yelagin told journalists on Wednesday [that] "The president assesses positively the activity of the federal and intra-republic structures aimed at the restoring Chechnya. During the course of our conversation, he voiced no critical remarks intended for the Chechen government," Yelagin said.

According to him, during his meeting with the president, "the main priorities were pointed out in the restoration of Chechen infrastructure in 2002." Yelagin said, "the republic's infrastructure will be fully restored within 3 or 4 years, and I have in mind transport, energy, and financial infrastructures." (...)

In Argun, Chechnya, the reconstruction began on Wednesday of the Republic's argest heat and power-generating station. The station had been badly damaged in the course of fighting. "It will be the biggest construction project in Chechnya in 2002,"

chairman of the government of the Republic of Chechnya Stanislav Ilyasov told journalists.(...)

At present Chechnya has a population of about 850 thousand people. Among them 150 thousands are in employment. Allowances are received by about 390 thousand children, and pensions - by 175 thousand people.(...)

01/23/02 - Chechnya Tape Raises Questions, The Moscow Times - AP WorldSources Online

A videotape obtained in Afghanistan by U.S. newspaper Newsday shows footage of Osama bin Laden and Khattab, and the Kremlin spokesman on the Chechnya war said Tuesday that this should prove to the world that al-Qaida is financing the Chechen rebels. Analysts, however, said there is no way to know whether the tape is genuine, and it is unlikely to lessen Western criticism of Russia's conduct in Chechnya.(...)

The videotape shows footage of bin Laden and Khattab, an Arab who is among the leading commanders of Chechen rebels, but the Newsday report indicated that the two men are never shown together.(...) According to the newspaper account, the video opens with an episode set in an al-Qaida camp in the Afghan mountains, where bin Laden talks to his followers about their duty to fight the infidels. He does not mention Chechnya or Russia.

(...) This one tape, which could easily have been produced by any interested party, cannot serve as proof of a link between al-Qaida and the Chechen rebels, said Ivan Safranchuk, director of the Moscow branch of the Washington-based Center for Defense Information.(...) "It is not important whether the tape was made up or not," said Dmitry Trenin of the Moscow Carnegie Center. "It cannot change the critical position of the West, which knows that international terrorism is only a small element of the Chechen resistance, which also comprises homegrown terrorism, separatism, banditry and, most of all, the exasperation of the suffering people in Chechnya." (...)

"It is impossible to successfully fight al-Qaida in Afghanistan and at the same time actually encourage its action in Chechnya, calling for negotiations with those who deny a connection between Chechen rebels and this organization,"

Yastrzhembsky's office was quoted by Interfax as saying.

01/23/02 - Protecting Chechen Oil - The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

According to police reports, its units in charge of protection of Chechen oil facilities have for the past time seized over 450 tons of illegally produced oil and 30 tons of petro-products; about 300 make-shift oil processing installations have been destroyed, 65 vehicles have been detained for illegal transportation of petro-products and 43 criminal investigations started.(...)

01/23/02 - Council of Europe assembly calls for permanent huma... - AP WorldStream

The Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly on Wednesday called for Russia to allow it to set up a permanent office to observe the human rights situation in Chechnya.(...)

It called on the Russian government to "ensure a long term Council of Europe presence" by setting up an office in the region to "improve the humanitarian situation."

If approved by the Council's 43 member nations, the office would be jointly run by the Council and the European Union, officials said.(...)

"Progress made so far in the sphere of human rights has been slow and far from satisfactory," the assembly said. "A sense of impunity still exists."

The assembly did commend Russian President Vladimir Putin for initiating peace talks with Chechen leaders, but again reiterated that talks should not hinge on any conditions.

The assembly was also critical of Chechen rebels and called on them to stop their attacks on both military and civilian targets and to implement a ceasefire.

The Council has had a team of monitors in the region since June 2000, but wants to be able to convert that into a permanent office. (...)

01/23/02 - Russia's Ivanov and OSCE discuss Chechnya, terror - Reuters World Report

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov met his Portuguese counterpart, the chairman of the

Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), on Wednesday for talks on Chechnya and anti-terror efforts.(...)

"It is not necessary to start to re-establish dialogue because this was never broken off with representatives of Chechen society that are interested in seeking a peaceful solution," Ivanov said.

The Russian foreign minister added that he backed greater coordination between the OSCE and other international organisations in an anti-terror campaign.(...)

01/24/02 - Russia blasts U.S. "unfriendly step" on Chechnya - Reuters World Report

Russian (...) Foreign Ministry said it had been surprised by the Washington meeting on Wednesday between a State Department official and Ilyas Akhmadov, "foreign minister" of Chechnya's separatist leaders.

"...Such contacts, no matter what the justification, cannot be seen as anything other than an unfriendly step towards Russia, contradicting the spirit of cooperation and partnership of both countries in acting against international terrorism," a ministry statement said.(...)

Russia used almost identical language in a protest to Britain earlier this week over a London meeting between a Foreign Office official and a representative of rebel Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov.

01/25/02 - Chechen leader meets with U.S. officials - AP WorldStream

U.S. diplomats met with a Chechen separatist leader [Ilyas Akhmadov, the Chechen separatists' chief diplomat] as part of a continuing American effort to encourage a peaceful settlement over the Russian republic, the State Department said Thursday.

(...) "We recognize Russia's sovereignty over Chechnya," Boucher said. He added that Akhmadov was received "as an individual with particular insights into the Chechen conflict." He said it was one of many contacts the State Department has had in its pursuit of a peaceful settlement.

01/25/02 - Aid group says Chechen refugees living in 'intolera...' - AP WorldStream

Humanitarian aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres on Friday expressed concern over the situation of Chechen refugees in camps in Ingushetia, describing their cramped housing and overall living conditions as "intolerable."(...)

"The main problems are housing and the cold," said Loick Barriquand, in charge of the aid group's program on Chechnya and Ingushetia. "There isn't enough space and people are forced to look for refuge in caves."(...)

01/25/02 - Russian officials accuse Berezovsky of involvement ... - AP WorldStream

Russian officials on Friday alleged that tycoon Boris Berezovsky channeled money to Chechen rebels and called for a broad investigation into the financial backers of the separatists. The top spokesman for the Federal Security Service, Alexander Zdanovich, repeated that the agency has documents linking Berezovsky to rebel groups and could pursue his extradition. The agency has released no details. (...)

01/25/02 - Chechen President's envoy says contacts with Kremlin continue - RFE/RL

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov's envoy, Akhmed Zakaev, told Reuters on 24 January that contacts are continuing between himself and Russian representatives, but that no further meetings between himself and presidential envoy to the Southern federal district Viktor Kazantsev are currently planned. The two met in Moscow last November for inconclusive talks on conditions for ending the war. Zakaev affirmed that the Chechen side is still "ready for talks without preconditions." In an address to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg on 23 January, Zakaev dismissed as "one more way of dragging out a peaceful solution to the Russian-Chechen conflict" the Consultative Council created in Chechnya under the auspices of PACE.

01/26/02 - Russian forces detain Chechens suspected of rebel ties - AP WorldStream

Russian forces rounded up more than 70 people during a hunt for suspected rebels in the Urus-Martan district of Chechnya while Russian aircraft bombed alleged rebel bases in the south, an official said Saturday.(...)

01/27/02 - Envoy of Chechen gunmen received at French ministries - COMTEX Newswire

Envoy of leader of Chechen separatists Aslan Maskhadov -- Akhmed Zakayev was received on Friday at the French Foreign Ministry and the National Education Ministry. The press service of the French Foreign Ministry confirmed this development to Tass on Sunday.

Zakayev met deputy director of the continental Europe department of the Foreign Ministry and French Education Minister Jack Lang, the Foreign Ministry spokesman reported.

According to the spokesman, the Paris meetings with Zakayev "help to assess better possibilities for continuing a political dialogue (on the Chechen problem) to which France calls".

"We again confirm our commitment to a search for a political settlement of the Chechen conflict with respect for the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. We denounce any terrorist acts as well as violence against civil population," he added.(...)

Itar-Tass news digest of January 27

A Mi-8 helicopter of the Russian Interior Ministry crashed on Sunday at 11:30 near the village of Shelkovskaya in the Nadterechnaya district, Chechnya. A duty officer of the chief department of the Interior Ministry for Chechnya reported that all 11 people aboard the copter, including three crew members, died. They include Deputy Interior Minister and chief of the main department of the Russian Interior Ministry for the Southern Federal District Mikhail Radchenko and deputy commander-in-chief of Russian Interior Troops Davydov. (...).

01/28/02 - AP US & World

A Kremlin spokesman warned the U.S.-funded Radio Liberty on Monday that officials will closely monitor its coverage of the war in Chechnya and may take away its license if they see a pro-rebel bias.

In an interview with the daily Gazeta published Monday, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, President Vladimir Putin's top spokesman for Chechnya, said the government has a "guarded" attitude toward Radio Liberty's plan to broadcast in the Chechen language because of its past coverage of Chechnya, which he said was biased and had justified separatist actions.(...)

"If we see that it contains calls for inciting religious, national ethnic strife and justification or propaganda of terrorism.

... we will act in line with the law," he said. The law calls for a warning first, and "after a second violation, the annulment of its broadcasting license in Russia and the closure of its bureau," Yastrzhembsky said.(...)Most of Russia's media toe the Kremlin's line on Chechnya, where Russian forces are fighting rebels, and refrain from reporting abuses against civilians documented by human rights groups. Radio Liberty's broadcasts in Chechen would bring uncensored news about the conflict to the Chechens, who have virtually no access to independent print media. (...)

01/29/02 - Reuters World Report

Russia said on Tuesday it had protested to France over a Paris meeting between senior French officials and a representative of rebel Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov.

The Foreign Ministry statement was Moscow's third sharply-worded reply to such meetings by Western countries during the past week. Moscow last week denounced meetings between Chechen envoys and officials in London and Washington.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said French Ambassador Claude Blanchemaison was called in and told that Paris' decision to receive rebel envoy Akhmed Zakayev "contradicted the spirit of cooperation and partnership between our countries." According to the ministry, Zakayev was received by Education

Minister Jack Lang and senior Quai d'Orsay officials.

"In Moscow the question was asked -- who sanctioned a meeting with the representative of Chechen extremists who have proven, direct links with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda?" the statement said.(...)

01/29/02 - Situation in Chechnya shows encouraging signs - ... COMTEX Newswire

Newly appointed deputy plenipotentiary representative of the Russian President in the Southern Federal District, Murat Zyazikov, said Tuesday the situation in Chechnya was "complex yet fully controlled by the federal authorities and showing some encouraging signs". As he addressed reporters after his appointment, Zyazikov said his main task was to assist early peace and social accord in that part of Russia. He believes that his knowledge of the Caucasian peoples' lore and customs "could help work out practical measures to stabilize the situation in the region".

Zyazikov said social and economic problems were moving center stage in Chechnya. "We will have to take radical steps to untangle the problem of forced resettlers, some of whom still live in camps in Ingushetia," he said, adding that those people would return to their homes, if they were guaranteed security and given jobs.(...)He also pointed to a new phenomenon in the life of North-Caucasian Moslems. "The mullahs and the elders have lost their historical leadership in the past years.

The empty niche that appeared was rapidly filled by the adepts of radical Islamic sects, which are totally alien to the mountainous peoples of the Caucasus," Zyazikov said.

The scope of his tasks will be specified in more detail by Viktor Kazantsev, the Russian President's plenipotentiary representative in the Southern Federal District and his immediate boss, Zyazikov indicated. "I will contribute all that I can to restoring peace in Northern Caucasus. I grew up there and I want to be useful to my people," he said.

Murat Zyazikov, 44, belongs to the Ingush nationality. In 1980, he graduated from the university of the former Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic. Four years later, he finished the KGB school in Minsk and became the Soviet intelligence service officer.

Zyazikov has occupied various positions at the anti-terrorist department and regional branch of the FSB in Ingushetia since the early 1990's. Prior to his appointment General Kazantsev's deputy, he was deputy chief of the FSB branch in the Astrakhan region.(...)

01/30/02 - Chechen Premier wants Russian military to join government - RFE/RL

Speaking on local television on the evening of 28 January, Chechen Prime Minister Stanislav Ilyasov proposed that those Russian military commanders in charge of the ongoing "antiterrorist" operation in Chechnya should be included in the Chechen government, ITAR-TASS reported. He said that his government will continue to experience "problems" in discharging its duties without the "support" of the Russian military. Several Russian journalists have claimed that Russian generals are engaged in illicit commercial activities in Chechnya, including the theft of oil and strategic metals, and for that reason have no interest in ending the war

Itar-Tass CIS and Russia news digest of February 2

Russian Minister for Chechnya Vladimir Yelagin said reconstruction work in Chechnya is being done by organisations created in the republic. "This was our condition that builders should not be brought over from Moscow, Stavropol or other places as before, but that everything must be done. By local staff, especially since jobs are so necessary in Chechnya today", he said(...)

Chechen Prime Minister Stanislav Ilyasov said that it is too early to hold presidential elections in the republic. Speaking at a press conference on Saturday, Ilyasov said that "it is too early to think about elections. It is necessary to rebuild the republic first". He noted that in order to hold elections the republic must have a constitution but it exists "only in blueprints".

02/04/02 – Envoy says Chechen President remains in Charge - RFE/RL

In an interview with "Obshchaya gazeta" No. 5, Aslan Maskhadov's envoy Akhmed Zakaev affirmed that contrary to repeated Russian media statements, Maskhadov "controls more of Chechnya and more in Chechnya" than does Russian President Putin, although Maskhadov's control does not extend to those Chechens who have laid down their arms and quit the resistance. Zakaev reaffirmed that "Chechens want only one thing: sovereignty as a guarantee of security for the people." For that reason, he said, political dialogue is essential. Zakaev also said that the Chechen fighters have no shortage of either Russian weaponry and ammunition or of money, as funds sent to Grozny for reconstruction are channeled to the resistance by members of the pro-Moscow Chechen government.

02/05/02 – Villagers protest new Chechen « sweep » - RFE/RL

Some 100 residents of the villages of Starye and Novye Atagi picketed the government building in Grozny on 4 February to protest a new search action launched in those villages by Russian troops the previous week, Interfax reported. "Dozens" of Chechen civilians have reportedly been detained during the search action, including nine representatives of the Grozny municipal police department. Russian First Deputy Interior Minister Vladimir Vasilev said last month that the ministry's troops would not conduct any further large-scale random "sweeps" of Chechen villages.

Itar-Tass news digest of February 5

Over 200,000 refugees returned to Chechnya in 2001, Chairman of the Chechen Government Stanislav Ilyasov told the press on Tuesday. About 800,000 people live in Chechnya now, Ilyasov said with the reference to a preliminary information. He said he would have a precise figure after the population census in the year end. Meanwhile, Chechen Minister for Civil Defense and Emergencies Ruslan Avtayev has told Itar-Tass that 162,000 refugees remain in regions adjoining Chechnya, among them Ingushetia,

North Ossetia, Dagestan and the Stavropol territory. 32,000 refugees are accommodated in six camps in Ingushetia, he said.

Itar-Tass news digest of February 6

Chechen law enforcement agencies have instituted criminal proceedings in connection with an attempt on the life on Vice-Prime Minister Ali Alautdinov on Wednesday. His company car was blown up in the morning at the entrance to Grozny. Alautdinov was not hurt and is now in his office. (...) 62, is in charge of the agro-industrial complex. During the first Chechen war he headed the Legislative Chamber of the People's Assembly of the Chechen Republic. The attempt on his life is not the first one this year. On January 16, his company car came under automatic fire when he was travelling to his native village of Mesker-Yurt.

02/06/02 - Security sweeps in Chechen villages continue despite... - AP WorldStream

Russian troops hunted for rebels suspected of hiding in two Chechen villages for a ninth straight day Wednesday, despite calls for an immediate end to the security sweeps amid accusations of human rights violations by soldiers. Federal troops also expanded the so-called mopping-up operations beyond Starye Atagi and Novye Atagi, south of the capital Grozny, to include other Chechen villages and the separatist republic's second-largest city, Gudermes. An official with the pro-Moscow Chechen administration said three men detained in Gudermes were found carrying guns, grenades and radical Islamic literature. A suspected rebel was also killed when troops attempted to detain him, the official said on condition of anonymity.

About 300 Chechens who managed to evade the cordons around the villages of Starye Atagi and Novye Atagi protested Wednesday outside the Chechen prosecutor's office in Grozny. They demanded an immediate end to the sweeps and the release of all villagers detained by federal forces.

Villagers have accused Russian troops of robbing houses, beating and arbitrarily detaining local men, stripping young women of their clothes and harassing residents. A special commission set up by

Chechnya's pro-Moscow leader, Akhmad Kadyrov, began investigating the allegations Wednesday, according to Russian media reports.(...)

02/06/02 – Commision begins investigating Chechen « sweep » - RFE/RL

During a meeting in Grozny on 4 February between members of the Chechen leadership and residents of the villages of Starye and Novye Atagi, agreement was reached on forming a Chechen government commission that on 5 February began investigating complaints that Russian troops engaged in brutality against the civilian population during a search in both villages for Chechen militants that began on 28 January, Chechenpress and Interfax reported. That action reportedly ended late on 5 February, by which time both villages had run out of food supplies and medications. The whereabouts of 24 people, including nine Chechen police officers, detained by Russian troops during the search is still unknown.

02/07/02 - AP WorldStream

(...) In the last 24 hours, federal outposts came under rebel fire 12 times, killing two troops and wounding another four, according to an official in the pro-Moscow Chechen administration. (...)

Russian jets pounded suspected rebel targets in the Vedensky district, while artillery shelled four Chechen districts.

Russian forces also conducted security sweeps in the southern Chechen town of Shali and in some of Grozny's districts. In the last 24 hours, about 70 people have been detained, the administration official said.(...)

Putin's human rights envoy to Chechnya (...) Vladimir Kalamanov said Thursday that nearly a dozen criminal cases had been opened against soldiers who participated in a sweep of Bachi-Yurt.

"If military and police operations are held this way in the future, the end result will be extremely negative," Kalamanov was quoted as saying by Interfax news agency. "Why do people disappear in virtually every operation? They are not phantoms. They are Russian citizens and local residents. ... When people disappear into nothingness, I cannot accept any justifications."(...)

02/07/02 - New Chance for Kremlin - The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

The recent report by the Daily Telegraph that the captured Bin Laden's cook Gadji Akram told his captors that Bin Laden had gone to Chechnya was welcomed by Moscow as its new chance to justify its actions in Chechnya. In Chechnya this report was received with a burst of laughter. If the FSB really succeeds in falsifying the fact of Bin Laden's visit to Chechnya, the West may ignore the ongoing massacre there.

02/08/02 - Chechen police, Russian military clash in shali... - RFE/RL

Several local Chechen police and Russian servicemen were wounded in an exchange of fire on 8 February in the town of Shali southeast of Grozny, where Russian servicemen under the personal direction of commander of the combined Russian forces Lieutenant General Vladimir Moltenski are conducting an ongoing search for Chechen fighters, Chechenpress reported on 8 February. The Chechen police were attempting to wrest from the Russian troops, many of whom were drunk, property they had stolen during the search from "dozens" of Chechen households.

02/08/02 - Russia-Chechnya - AP US & World

(...)An official with the Moscow-appointed civilian administration for Chechnya said Friday that seven Russian servicemen were killed and 11 wounded in clashes, ambushes and land-mine explosions in the previous 24 hours.

During the same period, more than 100 people were detained on suspicion of ties to rebels, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Russia troops conducted security sweeps in the southern town of Shali and nearby villages for a third straight day Friday.

International human rights groups have documented looting, beatings, torture and killings of civilians during the security raids, but Russian officials claim abuses are rare and culprits are punished.

Putin's human rights envoy Vladimir Kalamonov said Friday that 42 servicemen had been convicted of abuses against civilians in

Chechnya during the last two years, Interfax reported.(...)

02/08/02 - Peace March As Means Of Political Settlement - The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

Chechen refugees are preparing a peace march before the next session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which will pass through Helsinki-Tallinn - Tartu - Riga - Vilnius - Warsaw - Krakow - Wroclaw - Prague - Munich - Brussels - Paris - Strasbourg. The march is being organized by the International Joint Committee of refugees from Chechnya, which is seeking a political dialogue between the Kremlin and Chechen rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov and an end to the genocide of the Chechen people. The plan of the march is yet to be discussed at a seminar to be held Feb.25 in Tbilisi. According to Shirvani Gunaev, chairman of the organizing committee, the initiative is supported by all 193,000 Chechen refugees living in tent camps in Ingushetia republic and Pankiski gorge in Georgia.

The political settlement plan proposed by the committee seems a bit naive. The committee suggests Poland and Czechoslovakia play an intermediary role in the process. These countries, especially Poland, have shown sympathy to the Chechen rebel movement as far back as WW I, when a Chechen Information Center, headed by Mansur Yakhimchik, was opened in Krakow. Understandably, such proposals are likely to provoke anger from the Russians.

02/08/02 - Russian Human Rights commissioner condemns violations - RFE/RL

In an interview with "Rossiiskaya gazeta" summarized on 7 February by Interfax, presidential Commissioner for Human Rights in Chechnya Vladimir Kalamonov admitted that "an enormous number" of violations of the law occurred during what he termed "the last three operations" conducted by Russian troops in Chechnya. On 6 February, ITAR-TASS quoted Kalamonov as saying that he could not confirm reports of such violations during the search operation in Novye and Starye Atagi that ended that same day.

02/11/02 - Some bin Laden's men are now in Pankisi Gorge of ... - COMTEX Newswire

According to the information we possess, there are now several dozens of mojaheds in the Caucasian region, who had fled from Afghanistan, U.S. Acting Ambassador to Georgia Philip Remmler stated here on Monday.

We know that several mojaheds have found refuge in the Pankisi Gorge and are in contact with Arab terrorist Khattab in Chechnya, who, in turn, has contacts with Osama bin Laden, the American diplomat stressed. In his opinion, the Pankisi Gorge is a menace to Georgia, because it is the country's main seat of crime.(...)

02/11/02 - Chechen civilians again protest Russian security sweep - RFE/RL

Some 400 residents of the towns of Starye and Novye Atagi, Shali, and Germenchuk gathered on 9 February outside the republican Prosecutor's Office in Grozny to demand the release of persons detained by Russian troops during search operations in those towns over the past two weeks, AP reported on 10 February. Also on 9 February, FSB spokesman Aleksandr Zdanovich said Shali was targeted because Chechen fighters have recently been using the town as a base from which to launch terrorist attacks on local officials, Interfax reported. Zdanovich said the Shali search has yielded an underground laboratory for the manufacture of bombs and detonators.

02/11/02 - Chechen President discusses military strategy - RFE/RL

Aslan Maskhadov convened a meeting of the Military Council in southern Chechnya last week to discuss with field commanders his proposed plan of military action for the spring and summer of this year, Chechenpress reported on 8 February. Maskhadov expressed confidence that successful implementation of the measures outlined will result in the withdrawal of all Russian troops from Chechnya by the end of 2002.

02/11/02 - Russian military threatens to strip journalist of credentials in Chechnya - RFE/RL

"Novaya Gazeta" journalist Anna Politkovskaya is in danger of losing her press accreditation to work in Chechnya, RIA- Novosti reported on 11 February, citing the operational headquarters of the Russian military in Chechnya. Politkovskaya arrived in the Shatoi Raion in southern Chechnya on 9 February, whereupon she was detained by Russian military officials for violating the rules under which she has press accreditation to work in that area, ntvru.com reported on 11 February. The next day, she went off in an unknown direction without the permission of military commanders. Politkovskaya was detained almost a year ago by Russian military officials for traveling in Chechnya without required documents. In October of 2001 she fled to the West because of threats she received in connection with an article she wrote suggesting that a helicopter full of senior Russian military officials was shot down by a Russian serviceman. Politkovskaya's recently published book, "A Dirty War" (Harvill Press: 2001), was critical of Russian military officials' conduct in Chechnya.

02/11/02 - The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

Gekala, Prigorodnow, and Chechen Aul villages were sealed off yesterday by federal troops after they completed their mop-up operation in Novye Atagi. The local residents didn't expect their villages to be flooded with so much armor. All this happened during the nighttime. The exact number of detainees is not yet known, but one thing is certain: it's a lot! (...) Our correspondent had to by-pass this place, via Chernorechie and Alkhazurovo, because the federal troops stopped all passing cars and detained people. According to local residents, the federal troops have been conducting indiscriminate artillery shelling of the villages since 4 a.m. There have been casualties, but the exact number of killed and wounded is not yet known. (...) Grozny city center was also sealed off on Feb.10.

Itar-Tass news digest of February 12

The federal forces operating in Chechnya have been carrying out a special operation in the settlements of Gikalo, Prigorodnoye and Chechen Aul located 7-12 kilometers to the south of Grozny for the second day. During the operation the troops detained a few tens of people for violation of passport rules And on suspicion of being tied with illegal armed formations.

02/12/02 - Sabotage Act Prevented - The independent Information Centre Glasnost

A serious sabotage act was prevented yesterday in Urus Martan when a powerful explosive device, placed in a school bag, was found under a staircase landing of #2 secondary school. Demining experts had to evacuate the school because the device was too dangerous to move. The school, where 1800 students study, was seriously damaged as a result of the blast.

02/12/02 - Farm director and eight Russian troops killed in Chechnya... - AP WorldStream

Unidentified gunmen broke into the house of a farm director in breakaway Chechnya and killed her, while eight Russian servicemen were killed in the latest round of rebel attacks, an official with the Moscow-appointed Chechen administration said Tuesday.(...) In a customary response, Russian heavy artillery kept up a barrage on suspected rebel hideouts in forested mountain foothills, while federal forces launched a sweep for rebels in the southern villages of Gikalo and Chechen-Aul, detaining at least 100 people on suspicion of having rebel ties, the official said.(...)

Itar-Tass Russia and CIS news digest of February 14

Eleven self-made explosive devices were defused in Grozny over the past 24 hours, journalists learnt at the press center of the United Group of troops in the North Caucasus. Six people were detained on suspicion of being involved in bandit formations. Nine illegal mini-refineries were destroyed.

02/14/02 - Russians, Georgians discuss repatriation of Chechen... - AP WorldStream

A Russian delegation headed to Georgia on Thursday to discuss the repatriation of refugees to Chechnya, and a Chechen refugee representative close to the separatists said refugees would not return before peace talks with the rebels.

More than 7,500 people who have fled the war in Chechnya are living in Georgia, the only foreign country that borders the breakaway republic in Russia. Russian officials have claimed repeatedly that rebels have hidden among the refugees in the border region and used Georgia as a conduit for fighters and supplies.

The leader of the Chechen Diaspora in Georgia, Khizri Aldamov, said that the refugees in Georgia were unlikely to go voluntarily.

"Let the Russians first end the war, sit down to the negotiating table with the legally elected president and government of Chechnya," Aldamov told The Associated Press, referring to Chechen President and rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov. "Then, I assure you, all the Chechens will go home."

The Russian delegation, headed by Deputy Emergency Situations Minister Yuri Brazhnikov, intended to set a timetable for the repatriations, which are to be voluntary.(...)

02/15/02 - Council of Europe applying double standards to ... - COMTEX Newswire

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is not interested in the normalisation of the situation in the Chechen Republic. "The Council of Europe and, in particular, its co-Chairman Lord Judd are pursuing a policy of double standards," Chairman of the Consultative Council of the Chechen Republic Shaid Djamaldayev stated on Grozny television on Thursday evening.

He said that the latest meeting of the Council of Europe at Strasbourg showed that "for the PACE leadership Chechnya is merely an instrument to exert political pressure on Russia". "The Council of Europe", he noted, "heeds only one side, representing the separatists. The positive proposals of the official Chechen authorities, aimed at settling the conflict, are simply ignored."

According to Djamaldayev, the delegation of the Chechen Republic moved during the Strasbourg meeting to set up an international military tribunal to look into the crimes committed in Chechnya in order to "bring to trial both criminals clad in army uniforms and Chechen bandits". The leadership of the Council of Europe turned down this proposal. Such things, Djamaldayev believes, prove the European Council's obvious unwillingness to restore law and order in Chechnya.

02/15/02 – Chechens protest artillery bombardment by Russian troops - RFE/RL

Residents of the village of Tsotan-Yurt south of Grozny prevented Russian troops from entering the village on 13 and 14 February, AP reported. The villagers were protesting the deaths of two civilians, one of them a woman, during artillery bombardment of the village on 12 February. Drunken Russian troops are reported to have killed dozens of civilians in Tsotan-Yurt during a security sweep in the village in early January.

Itar-Tass news digest of Friday, February 15

Federal troops wiped out an armed gang of 17 gunmen and notorious field commander Khizir Khachukaev over the past 24 hours in one of the biggest villages in Chechen mountain spurs -- Starye Atagi, Grozny countryside district, Tass learnt from military sources on Friday. They do not preclude a chance that it was Khachukayev and his gunmen that killed manager of the Predgornny State Farm Manzhan Dzhanbekova early this week.(...)

Itar-Tass news digest of February 15

A special operation of federal forces in the villages of Gikalo, Prigorodnoye and Chechen-Aul which lasted three days, has been completed. The blockade has been fully lifted from the area of the special operation (...). Several dozens of people were detained during the special operation in those villages on a suspicion of being members of armed gangs. Some of them were released when their identities were established. Others are now being investigated. According to law enforcement bodies, they did not

record any facts of violating rights of civil population by troops. Local villagers did not lodge any complaints against illegal actions by federal forces.

02/17/02 - Russia-Chechnya - AP US & World

Russian forces extended their blockade of a Chechen town into a third day Saturday, officials said. The military operation in Starye Atagi, a town south of Grozny, the capital, was launched Thursday to search for suspected rebels believed hiding in the town. Since the operation began, there were two protracted gun battles between federal forces and militants. Sherip Alikhadzhiyev, head of the area's local administration, told Interfax news agency that federal forces were refusing to let anyone leave the town.(...)

02/19/02 - Chechen displaced persons in Ingushetia receive ID ... - COMTEX Newswire

As many as 105 Chechen displaced persons, living in Ingushetia, received domestic passports of the Russian Federation on Tuesday, Tass learnt from deputy chief of the passport and visa service of the Russian Interior Ministry for the Chechen Republic Bislan Lorsanov.(...)

Many residents of tent camps have no documents at all and cannot pass numerous checkpoints in Chechnya. The situation is changing now: people receive new Russian documents and can return to their homeland without any difficulties.

02/19/02 – The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

The residents of Bachi-Yurt, Mesker-Yurt, Kurchaloi villages have been coming to Tsotsan-Yurt village in bus-loads since Feb.18 to support the protest rally there which began six days ago. The number of its participants has risen to 5,000. The protesters express fear that the federal servicemen will get even with them for their resistance.

Over 20 peaceful civilians were killed yesterday in Starye Atagi during a mop-up operation there. In the opinion of human rights activists from Ingush branch of "Memorial", the developments in Starye Atagi is the federal troops' revenge for the protests in Tsotsan Yurt.

02/19/02 - US Congressmen Takes Notes on FSB "Anti-Terrorism" Practices – The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

According to Associated Press reports, US congressmen think it useful to adopt Russia's tactics in fighting terrorism. Such is the opinion of Congressman James Sexton, who headed the congressional delegation to Moscow. The aim of their visit is to examine the tactics of the Russian secret services in fighting international terrorism in Chechnya. According to the republican congressman from New Jersey, this experience is crucial for America bearing in mind Al Qaeda's links with Chechnya, the place where its fighters have allegedly found refuge. The FSB must have shared their experience with Congressman Sexton. Now he knows that if there's a deficit of terrorists, they can kill a peaceful civilian, dress him in battle fatigues, put a copy of the Koran on his body as well as a couple of green bands and shoot it on a video, the way they did in Tsotsan-Yurt and Argun.

Itar-Tass news digest of February 19

Federal forces destroyed 56 gunmen who offered armed resistance over the past three days of special operations which are underway in Chechnya. Another 216 people were detained on a suspicion of being members of armed gangs, Tass learnt on Tuesday from a spokesman of the regional headquarters on the counter-terrorist operation in the North Caucasus. Eight search operations are now in progress in Chechnya: in Grozny as well as in the Vedeno, Grozny (countryside), Gudermes, Achkhoy-Martan, Naurskaya, Urus-Martan, Shali and Shelkovskaya districts of the republic. According to the spokesman, "local population renders considerable support to actions by federal forces, conducting special operations". "This is attributed to the fact that Chechen citizens are tired of arbitrary actions, perpetrated by gunmen in towns and villages," he emphasised.

02/21/02 - Chechen protests against Russian «sweeps» gather momentum - RFE/RL

Residents of the Chechen villages of Novye and Starye Atagi are converging by foot or bus on the village of Tsofan-Yurt, whose residents have embarked on an open-ended protest against the brutality shown by Russian troops during two recent search operations, Chechenpress reported on 21 February. Starye and Novye Atagi were similarly subjected to such searches, even though local administration head Musa Dakaev told "Kommersant-Daily" on 15 February that Novye Atagi is "one of most peaceful villages in Chechnya."

Itar-Tass news digest of February 21

An attempt against head of the administration of the Shali district Sherip Alikhadzhiyev was averted on Thursday. An explosive device was planted in his working study. President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree, instructing the Russian cabinet to adopt a budget for Chechnya, Chairman of the Chechen Government Stanislav Ilyasov told a press conference here on Thursday. "This is an important step to back up the republic, which had no budget of its own for the past ten years," he added. Ilyasov noted that the adoption of a Chechen budget "will allow us to accumulate the taxes, which are collected in the republic, on our own accounts and to use this money ourselves to restore and develop the Chechen economy."

02/23/02 -Chechnya security tight on deportation anniversary - Reuters World Report

Russian forces stepped up security checks in separatist Chechnya on Saturday in an apparent bid to preempt violence linked to the anniversary of mass deportations by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin. A rebel Internet site reported separately that the brother of Chechnya's separatist president, Aslan Maskhadov, had been killed in fighting in a mountainous area of the mainly Muslim region on Russia's southern fringe. (...)

02/26/02 - U.S.-backed Chechen radio broadcasts in doubt - Reuters World Report

U.S.-funded broadcasts in Chechen, which are due to begin this week and would certainly offend the Kremlin, appeared to be in doubt on Monday as the State Department said it was discussing their future with Congress.

The Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty programming was mandated by Congress to start by Thursday. But a Senate source said Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had written to the board of governors who oversee such broadcasting in December, asking them to hold off pending consultations with lawmakers. (...) Prominent commentator Fred Hiatt, writing in the Washington Post Monday, accused the Bush administration of kow-towing to Russian President Vladimir Putin on the issue.

He said Putin's spokesman had threatened Radio Liberty's license to operate in Moscow because of the planned Chechen broadcasts, and wrote that the Bush administration should be expected to stand up to such threats.

(...) A senior State Department official, asked if the administration was seeking to avoid offending Russia, a key ally in the war on terrorism, replied that Washington was anxious to avoid distracting the Kremlin from seeking dialogue with Chechen separatists. (...)

Itar-Tass Russia and CIS news digest of February 26

More than 5,000 Chechen families have received food aid from the Chechen government over the past three days. The charity action, in which republic's ministries and departments have taken part, was timed to the Muslim holiday Kurban Bayram (Feast of the Sacrifice) and the Fatherland Defender's Day, the press service of the Chechen administration reported. (...)

02/28/02 - Russia-Chechnya-Rights - AP US & World

Khadisht Vitaeva says she last saw her husband alive, lying face down on the ground after Russian soldiers dragged him from their home in Chechnya.

Daud Vitaev's body was later found in a mass grave, and his killing by Russian troops in the town of

Alkhan-Kala is one of six documented in a new report released Wednesday by the New York-based Human Rights Watch.

The organization accused Russian troops of committing arbitrary detentions, torture and extrajudicial executions during a series of security sweeps in the region in late June and early July. (...)

In Moscow, meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin told his security council that Chechnya was largely stabilized and that rebel groups had been significantly weakened, Russian news agencies reported.

Yet the killing of at least five soldiers and policemen over the previous 24 hours underlined the determination of insurgents to continue efforts to bloody and demoralize Russian forces. (...)

Putin admitted that much needs to be done to end the fighting in Chechnya. "There remain the tasks of neutralizing the leaders of the rebel groups, of closing the channels for weapons and financing, and also the crossing of foreign mercenaries into the territory of Chechnya," Putin said, according to the news agency Interfax.

On Wednesday, Chechnya's pro-Moscow prime minister, Stanislav Ilyasov condemned the practice, saying "the civilian population suffers" during the sweeps, the Interfax news agency reported.

Despite repeated government pledges to end the practice, the sweeps have continued. Promises to investigate abuses and punish the soldiers responsible largely have proved empty, Human Rights Watch said. "There needs to be real accountability, so that soldiers realize that if they kill or torture or make someone disappear, they are likely to be punished," said Diederik Lohman, director of the Moscow office of Human Rights Watch. (...) The group called on the Russian government to establish an independent commission to investigate abuses and to regularly report to the public on the number of soldiers arrested and charged for security-related crimes. (...)

02/28/02 - Appeal Of Chechen Refugees In Georgia - The Independent Information Centre Glasnost

The public activity of Chechen refugees has increased dramatically not just in Ingushetia but in Pankiski gorge as well. The refugees have

not just begun fighting for food and medical supplies, but reacting to developments on the international arena.

On Feb.26 the International Joint Chechen Refugees Committee, based in Georgia, held a meeting in Duisi village of Akhmetski district on the imminent arrival of US Special Forces in Georgia. At the same time the refugees expressed their concern over chronic shortage of food and blamed the UNHCR office in Akhmetski district and its head, Tour Berrence. For six months the refugee camps have been left without sugar, salt and tea, getting only beans instead. The refugees adopted a special appeal containing a list of demands, including media coverage of their situation, the possible move to a third country because of the military threat from Russia, and others.(...)

DOCUMENTS

02/26/02 – The Christian Monitor - COMTEX

The next flash point in the global war on terrorism could be the Pankisi Gorge, a lawless area in Georgia that abuts rebel Chechnya. In this remote pass, US and Russian officials say Al Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan - possibly even Osama bin Laden - have taken refuge.

Early this month, the US charge d'affaires in Georgia, Philip Remler, told a local newspaper that dozens of Arab terrorists "connected with bin Laden" are holed up among some 7,000 Chechen refugees in the gorge. In the past week, there has been talk of a joint Georgian-Russian military action in the gorge.

For the Kremlin, Mr. Remler's comments are clear evidence that the United States has finally accepted Russia's long-standing claim that the Chechen rebellion, which spills over into neighboring Caucasus republics, is not just a local independence movement, but has become a full-blown subsidiary of the global Islamic terror network headed by Mr. bin Laden.(...)

According to Russian security officials, there are between 600 and 1,500 hard-core foreign fighters still in Chechnya, funded and armed by Al Qaeda and other groups through the same shadowy channels that prepared the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States. Before Russian forces invaded and occupied

Chechnya in 1999, there were 15 terror-training camps in Chechnya, using the same instructors and textbooks that US forces have found in Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, the Russian officials say.

"We are talking about an international network that shares the same sources of funding, political support, weapons, training, and ideology, operating in Chechnya, Afghanistan, and many other places," says Sergei Ignatchenko, deputy chief spokesman of Russia's FSB security service, the domestic successor of the Soviet KGB, which oversees Moscow's counterinsurgency operation in Chechnya.

"These are not nationalists or independence-seekers. They are disciplined international terrorists, united by a single aim: to seize power and bring in a new world order based on sharia [Islamic] law."

Critics say the Kremlin is exaggerating the extent of cooperation between Chechen rebels and outside militant forces - and is also ignoring Moscow's own role in destabilizing Chechnya in the mid-1990s.

Chechnya, a culturally Muslim republic of about 1 million in the oil-rich North Caucasus, declared independence as the USSR was breaking up in 1991. Russian troops invaded in 1994, and the subsequent 20-month war killed an estimated 80,000 people and destroyed most of the republic's infrastructure. Russian forces withdrew in 1996, after being defeated by Chechen irregulars.

Just before the war's end, Russian special forces assassinated the father of Chechen independence, Dzhokar Dudayev, with a special missile that homed in on his satellite phone. "Dudayev was a secular nationalist, and the Chechen independence movement had no Islamic dimension at all," says Alexander Iskanderyan, director of the independent Center for Caucasian Studies in Moscow.

"The penetration of outside money and (Islamic) ideology occurred later, and to some extent was an inevitable consequence of Chechnya's deterioration. But the Chechen rebellion remains, at its heart, a secessionist struggle. It therefore needs a political solution, not a military one."

Some other Russian experts argue that, whatever the wrongs of the past, the situation in Chechnya and adjoining regions has now become a

threat to global security that must be firmly dealt with. "We warned the West for years that a new kind of terrorism was brewing in Central Asia and Chechnya and preparing to strike out at the world," says Grigory Bondarevsky, a top Russian expert and government adviser on Islamic movements. "They are well-funded, highly disciplined, and under tight central control. Borders mean nothing to them. It took the tragedy of Sept.11 to make the Americans understand what we were talking about."

Mr. Ignatchenko declines to discuss the 200-year history of Russian-Chechen warfare. But he insists that after Russian troops were forced to withdraw in 1996, the little republic spiraled into lawlessness.

Chechen warlords, including the Arab-born al-Khattab, began to integrate their private armies with the global Islamic terror network, according to the FSB. In the summer of 1999 forces under al-Khattab and another leader, Shamil Basayev, invaded the neighboring Russian republic of Dagestan. That same year a wave of terror bombings killed 300 Russians, and in October 1999 Russia again invaded Chechnya. The FSB asserts that the 1999 bombings were the work of the same people who plotted the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks in the US - though this has not been proven.

Though Chechnya is now almost entirely occupied, the war continues to kill about a dozen Russian soldiers weekly, and nearly a quarter of a million Chechen civilians remain refugees in neighboring areas - including the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia. The FSB says that there are 2,000 armed men in the gorge, most of them probably Chechens.

While Western governments still criticize Moscow for alleged human rights violations in the 28-month-old war with Chechnya, emphasis since Sept. 11 has been on cooperation with Russia in the global antiterror campaign. Among items Ignatchenko is willing to share with journalists is a tape recording of recently intercepted satellite phone conversations - in Arabic - between al-Khattab and Chechen rebel operatives working in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. A Russian-language transcript provided by the FSB shows al-Khattab concerned with moving funds from unidentified sources into

Chechnya, acquiring better radio equipment for his forces, and evacuating wounded fighters for medical treatment in Saudi Arabia. The transcript also reveals al-Khattab's fears about using his satellite phone - an understandable concern, given Mr. Dudayev's fate.

The FSB also asserts that "hundreds" of battle-hardened Chechens served with Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, as instructors in the terror training camps and as fighters. "Chechens were in great demand because they are some of the best experts in mine warfare," says Ignatchenko.

Though Washington has so far refused to identify by nationality the 254 Taliban and Al Qaeda prisoners captured by US forces in Afghanistan and now held in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, Ignatchenko says they include "several" Chechens. Some, he says, have discarded their Russian passports and are masquerading as Afghans.

US-Russian cooperation since Sept. 11 could become strained, however, over Moscow's claims of a Chechen-terrorist domino effect in Georgia. Russian military chief of staff Anatoly Kvashnin, said last week that "Russia and Georgia should destroy this terrorist center in the Pankisi Gorge together."

FSB chief Nikolai Patrushev went to Georgia last week for talks.

But Georgia, a country whose independence is precarious beside its powerful Russian neighbor, fears any Moscow-led military operation on its territory.

Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze has asked Washington to step up American security assistance to his country. In his statements to the Georgian newspaper, Remler indicated that the US may provide such aid and help creation of an antiterrorism force within the Georgian Defense Ministry.

The idea of increased US influence in Georgia has already brought a flurry of angry denunciations from Russian officials.

"Chechnya is at the heart of a very complex geopolitical knot," says Sergei Arutyunov, a Caucasus specialist at the Institute of Ethnology in Moscow. "The presence of outside terrorists is one of the complications, but it does not justify foolish simplifications," he says. "There must be negotiations and a political process in Chechnya

before the terrorists can be isolated and removed.

And this cannot happen as long as the Kremlin believes that more military operations are the only way."

Last week Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said of the Pankisi Gorge:

"On the one hand it is, of course, sovereign Georgia's business. On the other, must we really sit and wait to see how tensions mount there and how this region is turning into a mini-Chechnya or mini-Afghanistan?"

02/27/02 - Americans in Caucasus. Possible consequences

The agitation about American commandos landing in Georgia is gaining more momentum. The Pankissi Gorge problem, that is being staged and blown out of proportion by Russian special services, has long ago acquired the outlines of some mysterious myth. After Kremlin understood that Russia will never be able to change the course of Russian-Chechen war, the rumor was set off that Al-Qaeda camps exist in the Pankissi Gorge. The goal was to obtain the approval from the West to start an open war with Georgia, if they let Russian troops in to exterminate peaceful Kistinian Chechens, the indigenous inhabitants of the Pankissi Gorge, as well as Chechen refugees. When various provocations of special services, even open bombings of Georgian territories, did not lead to the desired result, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov then put everything at stake and stated that Osama ben Laden himself is hiding in the Pankissi Gorge. The absurdity of such a statement was taken by Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze with a sense of humor when Mr. Shevardnadze advised Mr. Ivanov to look for Ben Laden in the house belonging to his own mother. Russian politicians have probably never thought that Russia's actions in the early 1990-s in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia will turn into a disastrous boomerang. The seizure of Abkhazia by the forces of Russian regular army, establishing of pro-Russian regime in Tskhinvali, which is up until now holding on Russian bayonets, and the coup-d'etats and the assassination of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, orchestrated by Russian special services, are still

fresh in the memories of Georgians. Shevi, who is now getting old but still has the strong willpower, once said to that very Mr. Ivanov (who in turn was urgently advising him to «punish his Chechens, who are assisting the rebels fighting just over the pass»), - «and where were you when Georgia and Azerbaijan were asking not to let Russian regular army compounds into Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia and Karabakh? You were denying the presence of Russian troops in those regions of Caucasus and you were saying that you could not prohibit the volunteers to assist Armenians, Abkhazians and Ossetians. So, neither can we prohibit Chechens to help their relatives, bleeding on the other side of the Caucasus mountain range»... After The Washington Post published the report on Wednesday about the US assisting Georgia, a real panic started out in Russia. Even though according to the reports from Georgian defense office, they are talking about the arrival of just several dozens of American advisers, Russian mass media are choking with comments that are now fluctuating from moderate amplitude to hysteria. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stated that «the fact of the American military appearing in Georgia may complicate the already complicated situation in the region». Apparently, the wave of Russian anti-Americanism brought some confusion to the White House, and Secretary of State Colin Powell considered it necessary to call Foreign Minister Ivanov on the telephone in order to dispel Moscow's fears concerning the intentions of the US to train Georgian armed forces. Reuters reported about this referring to «the high-ranking official in the Department of State». «They were talking about the situation in Georgia», - said the US foreign-policy official who wished not to reveal his identity. «Ivanov was talking about Russia's reaction. Powell was talking about how they were going to train the troops. He said it was within Russian interests and they will keep them in touch», - the agency's correspondent writes. At the same time, the Bush administration asked the Congress to postpone the realization of the Radio Liberty broadcasting in Chechen language, trying to calm Moscow down with minor signs of attention. Meanwhile, the representative of the

US forces in Europe confirmed that 10 military helicopters were sent to Georgia. Earlier some US mass media, referring to military sources in Washington, reported that up to 200 soldiers from special forces may be dispatched to Georgia. Their task was to prepare Georgian troops for conducting so-called 'counter-terrorist operations'. And American and Georgian officials stressed that the US experts will not take part in any military operations whatsoever on Georgian territory. "We are not talking about the joint operation with another country. We will only use our own troops", - Georgian Deputy Minister of National Security Irakly Alasania stated during his speech on the national television. But, regardless of such statements, the concern about the Americans deployed in Georgia is still remaining. Various opinions and versions are being expressed. Some analysts, Russian analysts for the most part, believe that some plot is taking place between the US and Russia to divide Georgia. They also claim that Kremlin has got a good beneficial deal out of it. The majority of Georgian territory is allegedly supposed to fall under the sphere of American influence, maybe it will even be dismembered. But in exchange Russia will get a carte-blanche in Abkhazia and Northern Ossetia, and will possibly join them to the Russian territory. And besides that, the US will close their eyes to the war in Chechnya. By the way, during the session of the Security Council Putin already started to make full-scale plans of «developing democracy» in Chechnya. The basic conditions for solving the peaceful tasks have allegedly been created, and after the constitution of the republic has been passed, democratic electoral procedures must be reestablished. «What Russkies and Americans were negotiating about does not really matter already. Even if Russia acquires territorial expansions, the losses will be much higher. If up until recently the former Soviet republics were acting as a sort of buffer states, or as a strip of "a no man's land" historically and traditionally oriented towards Russia, then now, since the Americans have arrived in the Central Asia and Caucasus, we now border with the US area of influence. Here we must specify that our Southern regions are now bordering with the American zone, and those regions are inhabited with people

not always friendly to Russians. If Russia could do nothing about it before, then now there is a choice. Will Russia maintain its territorial integrity after the doubtful deal with the Americans, if the deal really took place?» - The Agency of Russian Information writes on that issue. Some analysts are connecting the event to the forthcoming crash of Putin. For instance, as the «Zavtra»(Tomorrow) newspaper writes, according to the data coming from Washington, in the process of recent contacts with M.Kasyanov, the American government officials along with the Russian Premier were developing eight "main topics" according to which Russia must undergo a modification in case of him coming to power. Among them the following issues were on the agenda: the issues of constitutional organization of the state (the confederalization with granting great authorities to the subjects of the Russian Federation, and the return of the governors to the Federation Council); internationalization of all conflicts along the perimeter of Russian borders (involving the arrival of NATO forces in Pridnestrovie - the Dnester river region, the deployment of French troops in Nagorno-Karabakh and Turkish troops in Abkhazia); the full submission of Russian military programs to the US interests, including breaking current contracts on supplying weapons to the third-world countries; the polarization of relations with India and China; the introduction of the currency board system that will tie Russian rouble to the US dollar; the full sovereignty of Chechnya; returning Southern Kuril Islands to Japan and involvement of Russian troops in the invasion of Afghanistan. According to this newspaper, the consolidation of the anti-Putin block is under way. The representatives of the «Family»(i.e. the Yeltsins) and Chubais' group (who bid on M.Kasyanov's candidacy) are in the center of that block, since «he people are not yet ready to accept Chubais» as the President. The important factor of such a choice is that Kasyanov will not only «be given a green light» by the US political elite, but he had also acquired another degree of initiation in Canada, because he has been connected with them ever since he held a job in Gosplan (The State Planning Administration). A.Mamut and R.Abramovich were put in charge of the coordination of

informational and political pressure on Kremlin. At the present time there are two plans for actions: short-term plan, when Putin is supposed to resign in the end of this spring or in the beginning of this summer, and more latent and long-term plan, that is supposed to be activated in August. Both plans are considering the worsening of the socioeconomic situation (price increase, including utility prices and «the tariffs of natural resources' monopolies») and the drop of trust in Putin by the population. If it is really possible, then because of the prevailing imperial thought in Russian society, the arrival of American troops to Georgia may only speed up that process - the process of Putin's fall. Jean Tekei, «Kavkaz Center»

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