

Russia (Chechnya) (1994 -)



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Chechnya is a small region on the southern edge of Russia in the Caucasus. Chechens, who are Muslim, were treated brutally by Stalin and other Soviet leaders. In 1989, while the Soviet Union was disintegrating, Chechnya tried to declare itself a Former Soviet Republic. For the next two years, an organization of all political parties in Chechnya attempted cooperative negotiations with the Russian government to achieve status similar to the Ukraine or Latvia. But in 1991 the negotiations broke down and Russia threatened to use force if Chechnya claimed independence.

Later that year, Russia tried to quell protests in Chechnya, but on several occasions the Russian military was rebuffed. For the next two years (1992-1994), there were no more overt military clashes. Russia secretly supported the small Chechen pro-unity movement while the independent Chechen government tried to establish itself. The government struggled with political infighting and corruption, never achieving a firm hold. In 1994, Russia decided to send its own military to subdue Chechnya.

Chechen independence fighters faced one of the largest and best-equipped military forces in the world. They chose to use urban guerilla tactics against Russia's tanks and automatic weapons. Though after only six months of fighting, Russia occupied all the large towns in Chechnya, Chechen fighters used the time to regroup, and then fought their occupiers from within. When Russia gained the upper hand, Chechen's captured hostages in Russian cities and forced Russia to negotiate with OSCE supervision.

In late 1995, the first agreement was signed, guaranteeing complete withdrawal of all Russian troops from Chechnya and delaying the decision regarding independence until 2001. In January 1996, the OSCE moderated "free and fair" elections in Chechnya. However, in December 1999, Russia reinvaded Chechnya, blaming Chechen separatists for hostage-takings in Russia. In 2000, Russia installed a puppet government in Chechnya and declared the end of active hostilities. A referendum on a new constitution for the republic suggested that Chechnya be part of the Russian federation. Human Rights groups criticized Russia for proceeding with the referendum before peace had been established. Rebel attacks continued unabated even after the referendum.

Thousands of civilians have been killed in the Russian government's attempt to control Chechnya. An additional quarter of a million people have been displaced. Russian forces have arbitrarily detained and tortured people, prosecuting few soldiers for abuses and amnestying most who are found guilty. Chechen fighters, for their part, have continued using hostage takings and suicide bombings as major tactics.

There have been few serious efforts at peace negotiations throughout the conflict. During the first phase, Russian and Chechen delegations met on a few occasions. In the second phase of the conflict, Russia refused to recognize 'President' Maskhadov's authority and therefore all efforts at peace negotiations at official and unofficial levels have been ineffective. As of now, Russia maintains a certain control over the Chechnya territory while rebels continue to be active. The war shows no sign of ending soon.

Print Resources

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Knezyz, Stasys and Romanas Sedlickas. *The War in Chechnya*. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press. 1999.

Lieven, Anatol. *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1998.

Smith, Sebastian, *Allah's Mountains : The Battle for Chechnya*. I.B. Tauris and Co., 2001.

Online Resources

Human Rights Watch. *Chechnya Campaign*.
<http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/russia/chechnya/>

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. *Crisis in Chechnya*.
<http://www.rferl.org/nca/special/chechnya/>

The Guardian Unlimited. *Chechnya Special Report*.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/chechnya/0,2759,180787,00.html>

Crimes of War Project
<http://www.crimesofwar.org/onnews/news-chechnya.html>

Timeline

1989 - First Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus formed; protests of Russian Government in Chechnya

1990 - Gorbachev declares autonomous republics within Russia subject to USSR; Chechen National Congress (CNC) seeks independent status

1991 - Negotiations with Russia for independence; Dudayev declares Supreme Soviet illegitimate and assumes all powers; ispolkom declares Common National Congress of Chechen People (OKChN) with Dudayev chair; Yeltsin elected president of Russia; Coup against Gorbachev; Russian troops repelled from Chechnya

1992 - Chechen economy suffers from Russian blockade; high government corruption; Russia supplies opposition within Chechnya

1994 - Russian buses hijacked by Chechens; opposition storms Grozny with Russian troops and fails; Yeltsin declares state of emergency; Russia invades Chechnya

1995 - All towns fall to Russia; Basayev takes 2,000 hostages in Russian hospital; OSCE team begins moderating talks; Chechens attack Russian army; Zavgayev wins dubious presidential elections by 93%

1996 - Chechens take hostages; Dudayev killed by Russian rocket and Yandarbiyev becomes president; Yandarbiyev begins talks with Moscow; Yeltsin reelected president of Russia; Russia attacks Chechens; agreement reached to hold elections and put off independence until 2001

1997 - OSCE moderates "free and fair" elections and Maskhadov elected president

1999 - Chechen militants invade the Russian constituent republic of Dagestan. Putin sends Russian troops back to Chechnya.

2000 - Putin is elected president.

2002 - Chechen rebels engage in major hostage-taking operations and suicide bombing.

2003 - Russia hails Chechen referendum vote in favor Chechnya being a part of the Russian Federation. Rebel attacks continue at high intensity.

2004 - Putin wins second term as president in a landslide victory. Moscow-backed Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov killed in a bomb blast in Grozny.

2005 - In February Chechen separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov declares ceasefire and proposes peace talks. Next month, he is reported killed in operation by Russian forces.