

THE MARXIST-LENINIST RESEARCH BUREAU Report No 7

CHECHENYA

CHECHENYA (pronounced chech-en-YA) is a republic situated on the northern flank of the Caucasus Mountains, which form the republic's southern boundary. Its area is 5,000 square miles and its population 700 thousand.



Chechnya is surrounded by the territory of the Russian Federation on all sides -- being bordered on the north by Kalmykia, on the east by Dagestan, on the south by Georgia, and on the west by North Ossetia and Ingushetia.

The climate in the north is continental and semi-arid, with cold winters and hot summers. In the foothills, temperatures are more moderate and the rainfall higher.

Agriculture is largely confined to the valleys of the Terek and Sunzha rivers.

The backbone of the economy is petroleum. Grozny is a large refining centre, while pipelines run to the Caspian and Black Seas. There are also extensive deposits of natural gas in the area.

The predominant national group consists of Chechens (58%), but there are Russian (23%) and Ingush (13%) minorities. The Chechen and Ingush languages belong to the closely related Nakh linguistic group. The majority of both Chechens and Ingush are Sunni Muslims.

The capital of Chechnya is Grozny (population: 400,000).

HISTORICAL OUTLINE -- TO 1944

Tsarist Russia annexed the territory of the Chechens in 1859. Soviet power was established in 1918, was overthrown by White forces in 1919 and re-established in 1920.

The Chechen Autonomous Province was established in November 1920. In 1934 it was merged with the Ingush Autonomous Province to form the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Province, which in 1936 was elevated to the status of an Autonomous Republic.

German troops occupied the western part of the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic in the autumn of 1942, but were halted at the approaches to Grozny. The Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic was liberated by Soviet forces in January 1943.

THE ENFORCED RESETTLEMENT -- 1944-57

In March 1944, the Chechen and Ingush peoples -- 500,000 people in all -- were forcibly resettled in Kazakhstan. The Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic was dissolved, and most of its territory transferred to a new Grozny province of Russia.

The official reason for the enforced resettlements was stated to be state security, and the peoples resettled were accused of mass treachery during the Second World War:

"During the Great Patriotic War, . . . many Chechens . . ., at the instigation of German agents, joined volunteer units organised by the Germans and, together with German troops, engaged in armed struggle against units of the Red Army; meanwhile the main mass of the population of the Checheno-Ingush . . . ASSR took no action against these betrayers of the fatherland.

In connection with this, the Chechens . . . were resettled in other regions of the USSR".

(Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR: Decree of June 25 1946, in: Robert Conquest: 'The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities: '; London; 1970; p. 47).

Alexander Dallin recounts that early in the Soviet-German war,

" . . . revolts broke out among some of the Caucasian Mountaineers. . .

. . . Most widespread in the Muslim areas, particularly among the Chechens . . ., these rebellions prepared the way for a change of regime. . . .

Faced with a concentrated German onslaught and a lack of support from the indigenous population, the Red Army retreated from Rostov to the Greater Caucasus Mountains without giving battle".

(Alexander Dallin: 'German Rule in Russia: 1941-1945: A Study of Occupation Policies'; London; 1981; p. 244, 246).

"The Germans were . . . welcomed . . . by practically the entire population of the . . . Muslim areas of the northern Caucasus".

(Robert Magidoff: 'The Kremlin vs. the People: The Story of the Cold Civil War in Stalin's Russia'; New York; 1953; p. 20).

"Although the Germans did not penetrate far into the Checheno-Ingush ASSR (south of Grozny), these two peoples appear to have made no secret of their sympathy for the Germans".

(Alexander Werth: 'Russia at War: 1941-1945'; London; 1964; p. 579-80).

"When the German armies occupied the Northern Caucasus region, many mountaineers manifested their hostility towards the Soviet regime. They attempted to use the retreat of the Red Army to free themselves from what they considered the 'Russian yoke'. Over twenty years of Soviet rule had not altered their imagined conviction that Russia's foes were their friends. . . .

In Chechenya, it would seem that Muslim opposition to the Soviet regime was never quite suppressed. . . . The mullahs, who were powerful opponents of the Soviet regime, even managed to keep alive the illegal Shariah courts. . . .

The hostile attitude of the Chechens towards the Soviet Russian regime was often manifested. . . .

The Ingush . . . showed themselves no less loyal to Islam".
(Walter Kolarz: 'Russia and her Colonies'; London; 1952; p. 185. 187).

The small nations which succumbed to mass treachery were subject to special pressures — of foreign nationalism (such as Turkish) and of reactionary Muslim mullahs. In the North Causasus, particularly important in the background to the treachery was the activity of concealed revisionist conspirators. At his treason trial in March 1938, Vladimir Ivanov admitted:

"In 1929 I was sent to the North Caucasus as the Second Secretary. Bukharin suggested to me that I should form a group of Rights in the North Caucasus. He added that the North Caucasus would play a very important part in our struggle against the Party and the Soviet power".
(Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet 'Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites'; Moscow; 1938; p. 118),

Ivanov's evidence on this point was confirmed by another defendant in the same trial -- Aleksey Rykov:

"RYKOV: The Right centre devoted special attention to the North Caucasus owing to . . . the specific character of its traditions. . . .
VYSHINSKY: To organise kulak actions, kulak insurrections?
RYKOV: Of course".
(Report of Court Proceedings . . .; ibid.;p. 165).

KHRUSHCHEV'S SECRET SPEECH (1956)

In the course of his secret speech to the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, the revisionist leader Nikita Khrushchev alleged that the enforced resettlements were carried out on the initiative of Stalin and constituted 'rude violations' of the basic principles of Marxist-Leninist national policy:

"All the more monstrous are the acts whose initiator was Stalin and which are rude violations of the basic Leninist principles of the nationality policy of the Soviet state. We refer to the mass deportations from their native places of whole nations. . . .

In March 1944 all the Chechen and Ingush people were deported and the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic was liquidated".
(Nikita S. Khrushchev: Secret Speech to 20th Congress of the CPSU (February 1956), in: Russian Institute, Columbia University 'The Anti-Stalin Campaign and International Communism: A Selection of Documents'; New York; 1956; p. 57).

But Lenin always insisted that

" . . . the interests of socialism are higher than the interests of the rights of nations to self-determination".
(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'On the History of the Question of the Unfortunate Peace' (January 1918), in: 'Selected Works', Volume 3; Moscow; 1967; p. 533).

As did Stalin:

"In addition to the right of nations to self-determination, there is also the right of the working class to consolidate its power, and the right of self-determination is subordinate to this latter right. . . .

The right of self-determination cannot and must not serve as an obstacle to the working class in exercising its right of dictatorship. The former must yield to the latter".

(Josef V. Stalin: Reply to the Discussion on the Report on National Factors in Party and State Affairs, 12th Congress of RCP (April 1923), in: 'Works', Volume 5; Moscow; 1953; p. 270).

Clearly, since there was valid reason to regard the resettlements as necessary for the security of the socialist state, they were fully in accord with Marxist-Leninist principles on the national question.

Nor were the enforced resettlements, as Khrushchev implies, contrary to Soviet law. An authoritative book on Soviet law sets out the circumstances in which groups of citizens could legally be resettled in other parts of the Soviet Union:

"Resettlement is carried out by the state organs of the USSR . . . for the purpose of realising measures connected with state security and defence of state frontiers".

(Robert Conquest: op. cit .; p. 82. citing: Semen S. Studentiev, Viktor A. Vlasov & Ivan I. Evtikhiev: 'Administrative Law of the USSR'; Moscow; 1950).

THE RESTORATION OF THE CHECHENO-INGUSH AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC (1957)

On 11 February 1957, a decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet provided for the resettlement of the Chechen and Ingush peoples on their original territory in the North Caucasus, and for the re-establishment of the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 11; p. 15,440).

Aleksandr Gorkin, the Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, stated

" . . . the repatriation of the Chechen and Ingush peoples would not be completed until 1960".

('Keesing's Contemporary Archives', Volume 11; p. 15,440).

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHECHENYA (1991)

In August 1991, the Communist Party leadership in Checheno-Ingushetia

" . . . was brought down by demonstrations . . . in the capital, Grozny".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 37; p. 38,582).

On September 1991,

" . . . President Doku Zavgayev . . . resigned"

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 37; p. 38,582).

and the Supreme Soviet was

" . . . replaced by a provisional 13-member Supreme Council".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 37; p. 38,582).

In October 1991, General Dzhakhar Dudayev

" . . . took power in a military coup",
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40.019).

the Supreme Council was dismissed

" . . . by the Chechen National Congress (CNC), an opposition body led by Gen. Dzhakhar Dudayev. It had an armed branch, the National Guard, which took over KGB headquarters and surrounded the radio and television studios".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 37; p. 38,582).

and Chechenya

" . . . declared its independence from Russia".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40,200).

On 27 October 1991, Presidential

" . . . elections were held and Dudayev was the victor, defeating nine other candidates".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 37; p. 38,582).

Neither the (now revisionist) Soviet Union nor any other state recognised Chechenya's independence, and on 8 November 1991, Soviet

" . . . President Boris Yeltsin . . . declared a state of emergency in Checheno-Ingushetia and sent in Russian troops to prevent the newly-elected Chechen-dominated government of the autonomous republic from implementing a declaration of independence".

('Collier's Encyclopedia', Volume 6; New York; 1993; p. 21).

but on 10 November 1991

" . . . about 650 (Soviet -- Ed.) Interior Ministry troops . . . were forced to withdraw . . . when surrounded by armed Chechens".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 37; p. 38,583).

and on 11 November 1991, the Soviet legislature

" . . . overturned the decree and ordered the withdrawal of the troops".

('Collier's Encyclopedia', Volume 6; New York; 1993; p. 21).

On 18 November 1991,

" . . . the post of Prime Minister was assumed by Dudayev . . . after the current incumbent resigned".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 37; p. 38,583),

In December 1991 the Soviet Union formally ceased to exist, being replaced by the 'Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS).

On 25 December 1991, President Boris Yeltsin announced

" . . . that all forces of the Russian Security and Internal Affairs

Ministry were to be withdrawn from the Caucasus".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 37; p. 38,655).

In March 1992, Chechenya was one of two autonomous republics within what had been the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (RSFSR) which refused to sign

" . . . a federation treaty".
('Europa World Year Book, 1994', Volume 2; London; 1994; p. 2,489).

setting up the Russian Federation (RF).

In the same month,

" . . . in response to the declaration of independence by Chechenya, the Ingush inhabitants of the former Checheno-Ingushetia demanded the establishment of a separate Ingush republic within the Russian Federation. The formation of the new republic was formalised by the Russian Supreme Soviet in June (1992 -- Ed.)".
('Europa World Year Book, 1994', Volume 2; London; 1994; p. 2,489).

and later in the month the Russian imperialists secretly organised a paramilitary force. This, in alliance with the Chechenya legislature, briefly occupied the Chechen broadcasting centre which called

" . . . for Dudayev's resignation and for a referendum on Chechenya's remaining part of Russia.

The Dudayev leadership accused the Russian authorities of having manipulated the revolt, and instigated criminal investigation of the 'coup'.
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 38; p. 38,876).

On 17 April 1992, it was reported that

" . . . Dudayev and the deputy C-in-C of the CIS armed forces . . . had agreed that CIS armed forces would vacate Chechnya on a 'mutual security basis'.
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 38; p. 38,876).

In response to a demand by representatives of Ingushetia

" . . . to remain in the Russian Federation",
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 38; p. 39,202).

on 4 June 1992, the Russian legislature

" . . . passed a law . . . 'on the formation of the Ingush Republic (out of Checheno-Ingushetia) within the Russian Federation".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 38; p. 38,974).

On 8 June 1992,

" . . . Russian troops completed their withdrawal from the Chechen Republic".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 38; p. 38,975).

On 16 June 1992, Chechenya

" . . . announced the first intake of soldiers into its army".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 38; p. 38,975).

At the 4th Congress of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus held in Grozny on 3-4 October 1992, attended by some 150 delegates, Chechen President Dzhakhar Dudayev

" . . . demanded that leaders of the North Caucasus republics be pressurised to resist the deployment of Russian troops. The Congress's final statement called on the leaders of the republics to denounce the Russian Federation Treaty, to seek real independence and to establish regional security forces. The Confederation was renamed 'the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus'".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 38; p. 39,155).

By March 1993, Chechenya was

" . . . bitterly divided between supporters of its fiery president, General Dzhokhar Dudayev, and of his parliamentary supporters".
('Times', 3 March 1993; p. 2).

and the situation there

" . . . had deteriorated into armed hostilities, as opponents of the Chechen leader, Gen. Dzhokhar Dudayev, clashed with his forces. Chechenya boycotted the Russian general election and referendum of December 1993".
('Europa World Year Book, 1994', Volume 2; London; 1994; p. 2,489).

On 17 April 1993, Chechen President Dzhakhar Dudayev

" . . . issued a series of executive decrees which imposed presidential rule, disbanded the legislature, dismissed the government and instituted a midnight to dawn curfew. This move followed two days of mass demonstrations demanding the resignation of the President, government and legislators and the payment of overdue wages and student grants".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 39; p. 39,423).

On 18 April 1993, the Chechenya legislature

" . . . annulled all of the presidential decrees (except that dismissing the government, a move for which the legislature had been pressing for some time) and voted to begin impeachment proceedings against Dudayev".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 39; p. 39,423).

On 19 April 1993,

" . . . the Chechen Constitutional Court formally overturned Dudayev's decrees on presidential rule and the dissolution of the legislature".
('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 39; p. 39,423).

On June 3-4 1993, armed clashes occurred in Grozny

" . . . after forces loyal to President Dzhakhar Dudayev launched a

heavily armed assault to expel opposition demonstrators from official buildings in the city centre which they had occupied since April. . . . The assault appeared to be a pre-emptive strike against a referendum called by the opposition for June 5, in which voters would have been asked whether they preferred rule by the President or by parliament". ('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 39; p. 39,522).

On 7 December 1993, a Russian presidential aide, Vyacheslav Kostikov disclosed

" . . . that Yeltsin had ordered troops to close the border of the southern . . . republic of Chechenya . . . and to secure the strategically important rail link crossing the republic. . . .

Chechen leader Dzhakhar Dudayev responded by asserting that this amounted to a declaration of war".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 39; p. 39,783).

On 27 May 1994, an attempt was made on Dudayev's life, and

" . . . the Chechen Foreign Ministry claimed on May 30 that Russian 'special services' . . . were responsible for the attack".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40.019).

On 20 July 1994,

" . . . a Chechen official, Movladi Udugov, accused Russia . . . of supporting opposition rebels".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40,109).

On 29 July 1994,

" . . . the Russian government . . . threatened to order Russian military intervention if the lives of Russians were threatened".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40,109).

On 4 September 1994, the former Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov announced

" . . . that he was forming a para-military group to overthrow the Dudayev regime".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40.200).

and

" . . . admitted on Sept. 10 that his force was supplied by the Russian military".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40.200).

On 29 September 1994,

" . . . Khasbulatov issued an ultimatum to Dudayev, . . . ordering him to resign by Sept. 30 or face an all-out attack on Grozny".

('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40.200).

On 8 October 1994,

" . . . Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai emphasised . . . 'that Chechenya was part of Russian territory' and added that the use of force to quell unrest in Chechenya was possible". ('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40.251).

On 12 October 1994,

" . . . Chechen President Dzhohkar Dudayev imposed martial law in Chechenya, . . . warning that 'the Chechen Republic was threatened as never before with the loss of its independence'". ('Keesing's Record of World Events', Volume 40; p. 40.251).

One of the factors which made it difficult for the Russian imperialists to accept the demand of the Chechen people for independence was the importance of Chechenya to Russia's oil industry:

"Chechenya is a vital staging post in Russia's main oil pipeline system. Just outside the war-torn capital of Grozny is the junction of two major pipelines. One transports crude oil from the huge offshore oilfields in Baku, Azerbaijan, while another takes it to Novorossisk on the Black Sea. . . .

The hostilities could damage Russia's hopes of attracting Western investment to its capital-starved oil industry.

The project most at risk is the British Petroleum-led consortium which earlier this year signed a £5.3 billion contract to develop Azerbaijan's offshore oil reserves. . . .

Any escalation of hostilities would inevitably damage the way in which Russia is perceived by the international investment community". ('Guardian', 16 December 1994; p. 9).

In November 1994, therefore,

" . . . Moscow began to finance and supply weapons to anti-Dudayev Chechen groups. . . .

A series of attacks on Grozny by these groups . . . culminated in failure on November 25 when a powerful assault by the opposition was beaten into retreat by Gen. Dudayev's forces, and a number of Russian mercenaries were taken prisoner.

It was this fiasco that led Russia to start massing troops on Chechenya's borders for a forceful restoration of Moscow's authority". ('Guardian', 12 December 1994; p. 9).

"The covert plan . . . led to the dismissal of General Evgeny Sevastianov, deputy chief of the federal counter-intelligence service". ('Guardian', 7 December 1994; p. 12).

However, the Russian parliament continued to press for negotiations with the Chechen authorities. On 7 December 1994,

" . . . the State Duma voted overwhelmingly to invite Mr. Dudayev to a closed meeting of parliament in Moscow". ('Guardian', 8 December 1994; p. 12).

THE RUSSIAN INVASION (1994)

So, on 9 December 1994, Russian President Boris Yeltsin

" . . . ordered his government . . . to take all available measures to disarm what he called 'illegal armed formations' in the breakaway republic of Chechenya",
('Guardian', 10 December 1994; p. 16).

and early on 11 December 1994,

" . . . Russian troops moved into the rebel territory of Chechenya in massive force. . . .
Hundreds of tanks, armoured personnel carriers and artillery pieces, with helicopter outriders, rumbled through the north Caucasian countryside".
('Guardian', 12 December 1994; p. 1).

So began

" . . . Russia's biggest military operation since the Afghanistan war".
('Guardian', 3 December 1994; p. 15).

Later the same day,

" . . . hundreds of protesters and politicians gathered in central Moscow, demanding that Russia halt the invasion and calling for Mr. Yeltsin's removal".
('Times', 12 December 1994; p. 1).

Despite the overwhelming superiority of the Russian forces in armament, including aircraft, they encountered stubborn resistance even before they reached the territory of Chechenya:

"On the first day of a three-pronged Russian invasion, . . . two Russian columns had been stopped in their tracks in Ingushetia to the west and Dagestan to the east before they could even cross the frontiers,
A crowd of Dagestani Chechens had made a nonsense of the Russian thrust, surrounding tanks, getting their commanders to come out and argue with them, and then taking 47 Russians captive".
('Guardian', 13 December 1994; p. 1).

"The Russian advance ran into stiffer resistance than expected from volunteers in the tiny republic of Ingushetia between North Ossetia and Chechenya. A Russian column was halted by Ingush fighters who are ethnic kin of the Chechen, as it crossed Ingush territory".
('Guardian', 12 December 1994; p. 1).

Furthermore, it was clear immediately that

" . . . Russian defence minister General Pavel Grachev . . . faces a growing revolt in the army. He suspended his deputy, General Boris Gromov".
('Guardian', 7 December 1994; p. 12).

Among the early decrees of Dudayev,

" . . . when he came to power three years ago was one giving every man the right to bear arms".
('Guardian', 12 December 1994; p. 9).

so that within Chechenya the Russian forces encountered the resistance of an armed people's militia.

Discipline among the invading Russian forces declined, even at the highest levels. On 16 December 1994, Russian General Ivan Babichev

" . . . in charge of the column of tanks bogged down for five days west of Grozny . . . said: . . . 'We're not going to send tanks against the people. . . .

If I got such an order, I would treat it as a criminal order. The military must execute only legitimate orders'. . . .

The general's defiance of orders to march on Grozny was the first clear sign of growing unease within the Russian army about its role in the area".

('Guardian', 17 December 1994; p. 9).

The invasion lost President Boris Yeltsin his last remaining support in the Russian parliament:

"The assault marks the parting of the ways between Mr. Yeltsin and his last bastion of support in parliament, the . . . 'Russia's Choice' faction of Yegor Gaidar".

('Guardian', 12 December 1994; p. 1).

On 12 December 1990,

" . . . leaders of all parliament's factions met to discuss the situation and . . . united in condemning President Boris Yeltsin".

('Guardian', 13 December 1994; p. 11).

and on 29 December 1994

". . . Yelena Bonner, . . . widow of the Nobel prize-winning dissident Andrey Sakharov, . . . resigned from Mr. Yeltsin's human rights commission in protest at the Chechen war.

A member of Mr. Yeltsin's advisory council, Boris Zolutek, also resigned in protest".

('Guardian', 30 December 1994; p. 22).

On 20 December 1994,

". . . Russia sealed its borders with the Transcaucasian republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan. . . .

The move appeared to be aimed at cutting north Caucasian fighters off from potential supplies or places of refuge".

('Guardian', 21 December 1994; p. 8).

And western governments, which had given their blessing to what they held to be 'an internal police action', began to show concern that the Russian aggression against Chechenya might lead to destabilisation of Russia:

"Western governments, including the United States and Britain publicly say that the rebellion is an internal affair, but there is growing concern that wider issues are at stake".

('Guardian', 15 December 1994; p. 11).

"Western concern is mounting that the Chechen crisis is undermining

President Boris Yeltsin as he wavers between a negotiated settlement and further military moves that could drag Russia into an unpopular guerilla war.

Britain and other European countries had hoped for a short campaign to settle the issue, but now fear that Mr. Yeltsin may be dangerously exposed to divided generals and political rivals who are exploiting a confused situation to weaken him.

Even if he does manage to depose the Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev, officials say, the Russian president would still need to instal a puppet regime and probably face a long campaign of guerilla resistance". ('Guardian', 23 December 1994; p. 8).

Faced with a parliament and public opposed to the war and a mutinous army, Yeltsin strove for a speedy victory aerial bombardment on Grozny. In the words of a 'Guardian' editorial:

"Yesterday's aerial batterings inflicted on Grozny with missiles and bombs were appallingly inhumane and without any tactical justification".

(Leading article: 'Guardian', 23 December 1994; p. 17).

The television pictures of the results of the bombings further inflamed public feeling against the war, and in a televised address on 27 December 1994, Yeltsin felt compelled to say that

" . . . he had ordered a halt to the aerial bombardment of the rebel capital, Grozny".

('Guardian', 28 December 1994; p. 20).

However, on 28 December 1994,

"Russian warplanes resumed bombing the rebel republic of Chechenya . . . less than 24 hours after President Boris Yeltsin pledged to halt aerial bombardments following scores of civilian deaths".

('Guardian', 29 December 1994; p. 20).

By the end of December 1994, it was clear that

" . . . the morale of the Russian attackers has plummeted, while the Chechens still seem prepared to die for victory".

('Guardian', 27 December 1994; p. 9).

and on 1 January 1995

" . . . Europe's biggest army suffered a devastating New Year's setback as a handful of Chechen fighters fought off a full-scale Russian assault on their capital, Grozny.

Russian forces threw tanks, armoured troop carriers and infantry into the city over the weekend, supported by a huge artillery rocket bombardment.

By yesterday, 24 hours after the fighting began, the Chechens were still in control of a large part of the city, including the square around the presidential palace. Russian forces were continuing to press home their attack, but with thousands of Chechen men ready to die for the freedom of their tiny republic, it is hard to see how they can conquer the city. . . .

The deeper they push into the city, the less they will be able to use

their advantage in heavy weaponry for fear of hitting their own men, and the more the young, scared, poorly trained conscripts President Boris Yeltsin has flung into battle will be exposed to the Chechens' guerilla skills and intimate knowledge of Grozny". ('Guardian', 2 January 1995; p. 18).

THE CHARACTER OF THE RUSSO-CHECHEN WAR (1994-95)

In his televised address of 27 December 1994, Russian President Boris Yeltsin characterised Chechenya as

" . . . a haven for criminals, a totalitarian state and a well-spring of terrorism, ethnic tension, drug trafficking, political extremism, arms smuggling, forgery and financial fraud". ('Guardian', 28 December 1994; p. 20).

This characterisation is not without elements of truth, but these are not relevant to a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the character of the Russo-Chechen war.

Marxism-Leninism distinguishes between just and unjust wars. A just war is a progressive war, one which tends to help forward the development of society. An unjust war is a reactionary war, one which tends to hold back, or to turn back, the development of society.

Thus, the character of a war depends on the social systems existing in the states involved in the war:

"Everything depends on . . . the relation of a nation which does not oppress others to one which oppresses". (Vladimir I. Lenin: Letter to Inessa Armand (December 1916), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 35; Moscow; 1966; p. 264).

Today, the principle enemy of the peoples of the world is imperialism.

However, even in the epoch of imperialism, there may be just, genuinely defensive wars:

"In the imperialist epoch there may also be 'just', 'defensive' . . . wars'. (Vladimir I. Lenin: Letter to Grigory Y. Zinoviev (August 1916), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 35; Moscow; 1966; p. 225).

"Defence of the fatherland in an imperialist epoch is impermissible . . . only in an imperialist, reactionary war". (Vladimir I. Lenin: "'Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty Bourgeois Mentality' (May 1918), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 27; Moscow; 1965; p. 331).

"Admission of 'defence of the fatherland' in a national war fully answers the requirements of Marxism". (Vladimir I. Lenin: Letter to Inessa Armand (November 1916), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 35; Moscow; 1966; p. 25).

Thus, when an imperialist state is involved in war with a non-imperialist state, the war effort of the imperialist state is reactionary and unjust because it tends to strengthen imperialism and so hold back the development of

society, while the war effort of the non-imperialist state is progressive and just because it tends to weaken imperialism and so help forward the development of society:

"In a genuinely national war, the words 'defence of the fatherland' are not a deception and we are not opposed to it. . . .

A war against imperialist. i.e., oppressing, powers by oppressed . . . nations is a genuine national war. It is possible today too".
(Vladimir I. Lenin: "A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism" (August/October 1916), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 23; Moscow; 1964; p. 31, 34).

"It would be sheer folly to repudiate 'defence of the fatherland' on the part of oppressed nations in their wars against the imperialist Great Powers".

(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution' (September 1916), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 23; Moscow; 1964; p. 80).

"The 'epoch of imperialism' . . . by no means precludes national wars on the part of, say, small . . . countries against the imperialist powers".

(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'The Junius Pamphlet' (July 1916), in: 'Collected Works', Volume 22; Moscow; 1964; p. 311).

"If tomorrow Morocco were to declare war on France, or India on Britain, or Persia or China on Russia, . . . these would be 'just' and 'defensive' wars, irrespective of who would be the first to attack".

(Vladimir I. Lenin: 'Socialism and War: The Attitude of the RSDLP towards the War' (July/August 1915). in: 'Collected Works', Volume 21; Moscow; 1964; p. 300).

SINCE CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA IS AN IMPERIALIST STATE WHILE CONTEMPORARY CHECHENYA IS A NON-IMPERIALIST STATE, THE RUSSO-CHECHEN WAR IS AN UNJUST WAR ON THE PART OF RUSSIA AND A JUST WAR ON THE PART OF CHECHENYA.

This report is published by:

THE MARXIST-LENINIST RESEARCH BUREAU,

26, Cambridge Road,

Ilford,

Essex,

IG3 8LU.

Reproduced, with acknowledgements, from the Canadian journal 'NORTHSTAR COMPASS', organ of the 'Concerned Friends of the Soviet People'.



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