

WARID: Russia (Chechen Republic of Ichkeria) 1994-1996

STARDATE: 26 November 1994

ENDDATE: 31 August 1996

Related cases: Georgia (Abkhazia) 1992-1993

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Conflict overview

The First Chechen War was a conflict between Russia and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. In the context of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) – in which ethnic Chechens constituted the majority – declared full independence. In June 1992, the Chechen-Ingush ASSR split into the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and the Republic of Ingushetia. While Ingushetia became a federal subject of the newly proclaimed Russian Federation, Chechnya continued its fight for independence.

The conflict was characterized by inner-Chechen tensions: one side comprised separatist leader and Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev – elected in October 1991 but not acknowledged by Moscow – along with his government and supporters. He was opposed by various Chechen clans as well as by communist institutions of the (former) Soviet Republic. This included the Supreme Soviet of Chechnya – which continued to be appointed and sustained by Russian President Boris Yeltsin after the Chechen's declaration of independence – and later several other councils and administrations that were newly established by Moscow. Hence, the Russian government was a party to the conflict from the very beginning. In 1992, Chechnya did not sign the Federation Treaty with the Russian Federation, thereby insisting on its independence. Tensions intensified and by 1993, Dudayev as well as the Russian-backed opposition had armed groups at their disposal. By the end of 1994, the conflict further escalated: on 26 November, in a covert Russian operation, the opposition movement in Chechnya attacked the capital Grozny and, on 11 December, Russian troops officially became active in Chechnya.¹ In the wake of the Russian operations, many former opponents joined Dudayev's forces, making them stronger than Russia had expected. A war that lasted nearly two years followed. After several unsuccessful ceasefires, the war ended on

¹ In contrast to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, major parts of the literature (e.g. Clodfelter 2002: 606) consider 11 December 1994 as war's commencement date.

31 August 1996 with the signing of the Khasavyurt Joint Declaration (1996), a ceasefire agreement.² The Moscow Peace Treaty (1997) that was signed by President Yeltsin and the new Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov followed on 12 May 1997 [**WARDUR=21; WARENDUC=2; WARENDOS=2**].

According to estimates by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), about 5,000 people died in the conflict [**FATALUC=5000**].³ Other sources provide much higher estimates, ranging from 3,000 to 120,000 deaths (Freedom House 1998; Souleimanov 2007: 125). Most of the case-specific literature provides a number of about 50,000 fatalities [**FATALOS=50000**].⁴ In 1989, 1.08 million people lived in the territory that later became the Chechen Republic.⁵ In the following years, 150,000 (Cornell 2001: 212), or even as many as 200,000, ethnic Russians⁶ left the territory. Thus, the pre-war population can be estimated at about 900,000 [**PREWARPO=900000**]. Consequently, the war's intensity, based on the UCDP figures, amounts to 0.56% of the pre-war population [**INTENSUC=0.56**]. Applying the higher estimate, this number stands at 5.56% [**INTENSOC=5.56**].

The military balance at the end of war

Due to the inner-Chechen split *before* the war, the Russian-backed opposition is considered as being on the side of Russia, even though they were ethnically Chechen. The Russian attack consolidated Dudayev's position as the leader of the Chechen movement when many former Chechens from the opposition joined his movement. Hence, though still heterogeneous, the various Chechen groups are considered as one party to the conflict *during* the war being that they were all unified in their position against Russia and sought independence (Bischof 1995; Wagner 2000: 150).

Although Cheterian (2008: 217) speaks of an "eventual Russian defeat" (2008: 217) we see no evidence for an actual military victory of the Chechen forces over the Russian army. The First Chechen War ended with a ceasefire agreement and with the withdrawal of the Russian troops resulting from a large-scale attack launched by Chechen forces on Grozny in August 1996 who surrounded Russian troops located there. This offensive led to severe casualties on the Russian side and fostered the need for a negotiated settlement (Gall/De Waal 1997: 331-

2 Bischof 1995; Cornell 2001; Dunlop 1998; Eichinger 2006; German 2003; Grobe-Hagel 2001; Wagensohn 2000; Wagner 2000; Janeczko 2012.

3 http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=132®ionSelect=9-Eastern_Europe (14 Mar 2014).

4 Cornell 2001: 229; Gall/De Waal 1998: 360; Zürcher 2009: 100.

5 <http://www.ethno-kavkaz.narod.ru/rnchechenia.html> (18 Feb 2015).

6 <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/yrusfail/yrusfail.htm> (18 Feb 2015).

363; Souleimanov 2007: 118-119). This success, however, did not mean that the Chechen rebels won a full-fledged military victory [**VICTORY=0**].

According to Cunningham et al. (2009), the Chechen rebels controlled territory during the war [**REBTERR=1**]. The case-specific literature provides differing information on how much territory was controlled by Dudayev and how much by the opposition. Authors such as Eichinger (2006) state that, despite Moscow's attempts to gain influence in Chechnya through the opposition, it had not been in control since the early 1990s. Bischof (1995), however, explains that, in some areas of the region, various Russian-backed opposition groups were in total control of the area. Moreover, while the literature unambiguously describes that the mountainous parts of the region were continuously under control by the secessionists (Grobe-Hagel 2001: 123; Wagner 2000: 44), the Russians controlled the plains and all major population centers (Evangelista 2002: 40). On 6 August 1996, some 1,500 Chechen fighters stormed Grozny and managed to trap the nearly 12,000 Russian troops stationed there (Evangelista 2002: 44). While the so-called 'Third Battle for Grozny' was decisive for the start of peace negotiations at the end of August, it did not lead to important territorial gains for the rebels. Thus, the Russian forces still controlled the larger part of Chechnya by the end of the war [**MORETERR= -1**].

Cunningham et al. (2009) consider the fighting capacity of the Chechen secessionists as 'moderate' [**REBFIGHT=0**]. The case-specific literature supports this coding. Although the Russian forces clearly outnumbered the Chechens in terms of troops and equipment, they were not prepared for this kind of asymmetrical warfare. The Chechen fighters were well trained and highly motivated and also received massive support from other Caucasus regions (Cheterian 2008: 173-178; Cornell 2001: 230-231; Olikier 2001: 5-22).

Despite the assessment that mid-1995 that Russia evidently would be unable to defeat Chechen forces in the mountain region (Grobe-Hagel 2001: 125), the Russian forces were apparently able to continue fighting. At the beginning of 1996, Russia adopted a new strategy that was better suited at countering the Chechens' guerrilla-like tactics and even started a new offensive in July. Likewise, the Chechen forces started new maneuvers towards the end of the war – such as the offensive on Grozny [**CONFIGHT=0**].⁷

Chechen leader Dudayev was killed in a Russian missile attack on 21 April 1996 (German 2003: 145). Dudayev had been on the phone with a Russian member of parliament, attempting to arrange negotiations when the Russian forces located the satellite signal and targeted him. No Russian leaders were killed by Chechen forces [**LEADER= -1**].

7 Grobe-Hagel 2001.

In total, there was a slight imbalance in favor of Russia's government [**WARBAL=-0.17**].

The military balance in the post-war period

For the post-war period, there is no information on the percentage of Chechens in the Russian military or police. However, considering the small size of Chechnya and the fact that, during the war, many Chechen fighters who had originally been on Russia's side joined Dudayev's forces, it appears highly unlikely that there were at least 3,000 Chechen soldiers or policemen in the Russian forces after the war [**STATEFOR 1996-1999=-1**].

Hence, the Russian armed forces themselves can be seen as a separate force for the Russian Government. Moreover, it had paramilitary forces at its disposal such as the Frontier Forces and the Federal Security Service (IISS 1996-1999). During the post-war period, Chechnya became a failed state ruled by clan conflicts and warlord rivalries (Cheterian 2008: 341-346; Evangelista 2002: 47-51; German 2001: 147-149). Nevertheless, in times of external threat, these competing groups united, as witnessed in the Second Chechen War (Souleimanov 2007: 127). When assessing the struggle with Russia's government, it would seem legitimate to generally speak of a separate Chechen force (cf. Gall/De Waal 1998: 368). Thus, both former warring parties had separate armed forces at their disposal [**SEPFORCE 1996-1999=0**].

Due to the guerilla-like strategy of the Chechen rebel forces, their size as well as equipment can hardly be determined. Thus, a comparison with the Russian forces is not possible [**ARMS 1996-1999=n.d.; TROOPS 1996-1999=n.d.**].

Concerning the question of territorial control, Russian forces withdrew from Chechnya and left its control to the separatist forces, as determined in the Khasavyurt Joint Declaration (1996). Nevertheless, they controlled the rest of Russia [**TERRCON 1996-1999=0; TERRWIN 1996-1999=1**].⁸

In terms of strategic importance, Chechnya partially consists of mountainous terrain, which served as a retreat and trafficking area for war supplies (Zürcher 2009: 114). Since both sides controlled strategically important territory, we do not consider one side to have been more or less vulnerable on their territory than its opponent [**VULNERAB 1996-1999=0**].

After the end of the war in 1996, there were no peacekeeping missions sent to Chechnya [**PEACKEEP 1996-1999=n.r.**].⁹

8 Russia, Chechnya sign peace deal, CNN, 12 May 1997, online edition; <http://www.worldaffairsboard.com/europe-russia/1965-analysis-chechnya.html> (6 Mar 2014).

9 Fortna 2008: 30.

Russia is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The remaining four members did not announce a willingness to ally with one side in the case of a renewed civil war [**P5ALLY 1996-1999=n.r.**].

To summarize, there was a post-war military balance between Russia’s government and the former Chechen rebels [**POSTBAL 1996-1999=0**]. The combined score of the military balance at the end of the war and during the post-war period does not indicate a large advantage for any of the former warring parties [**BALANCE 1996-1999= -0.08**].

Economy

According to World Bank data, the population in Russia decreased by 1.43 million people in the post-war years from 1996 to 1999. In the same period, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita almost halved from 2,651 USD to 1,339 USD.

Table 1: GDP per capita in the post-war Russian Federation in current USD¹⁰

<i>Year</i>	<i>Population (total)</i>	<i>GDP per capita</i>
1996	147,739,000	2651
1997	147,304,000	2749
1998	146,899,000	1844
1999	146,309,000	1339

The scale of compromise after the war

After Dudayew’s death in April 1996, Zelimkhan Abdumuslimovich Yandarbiyev – up to that point, the serving Vice President and secessionist – became Acting President (Wagner 2000: 131). On 27 January and 15 February 1997, presidential and parliamentary elections took place. Aslan Maskhadov – Prime Minister until that point – won the presidential elections with 59% of the votes, while his Party of National Independence nearly obtained an absolute majority of mandates in the Chechen parliament; Mashkadov assumed the post as head of government that included other pro-secessionist parties (Lukin 2007). Until the beginning of the Second Chechen War, pro-Russian groups had no say in Chechnya’s government [**GOVERN 1996-1999=1**].

As the Russian Government had no direct influence and there were no veto mechanisms established in the Chechen constitution (1992), all political decisions in Chechnya were made by the former rebels [**VETO 1996-1999=1; VETOSAT 1996-1999=n.r.**].

Freedom House consistently rated political rights in Russia between 1996 and 1999 with a ‘3’ or a ‘4’, implying that the elections can be considered basically free and fair.¹¹ Unfortunately,

10 <http://api.worldbank.org/v2/en/country/rus?downloadformat=excel> (6 Mar 2014).

it did not begin assessing the situation in Chechnya prior to 1998. For that year, it rated political rights with a '6', the second-worst rating possible; for 1999, Freedom House assigned the worst rating ('7').¹² As mentioned, Chechen presidential and parliamentary elections took place in 1997. Oleg Lukin (2007) described the elections in 1997 as follows: “one of the special features of this election campaign was the fact that it was impossible even for moderate politicians of a pro-Russian orientation to take part in them” **[ELECT 1996-1999=1]**.¹³

As described above, the maximum demand of the Chechen movement was the independence of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria from the Russian Federation. Chechnya failed to achieve this goal as its independence was not recognized in the Khasavyurt Joint Declaration. Instead, Chechnya's status was “to be determined [...] by 31 December 2001” (Khasavyurt Joint Declaration 1996: Principle 1). As such, Chechnya remained part of the Russian Federation. However, given Chechnya's de facto independence after the war (Wagner 2000: 148), neither side was able to fully enforce its aims **[EXBORDER 1996-1999=0]**.

Demands regarding the allocation of competences, the economic order and support for specific groups were all subordinate to the demand for independence as a sovereign nation **[INBORDER 1996-1999=n.r.; COMPETEN 1996-1999=n.r.; SPECPRO 1996-1999=n.r.; ECONOMY 1996-1999=n.r.; ISSUE 1996-1999=n.r.; ISSUE2 1996-1999=n.r.]**.

The war destroyed Chechnya's infrastructure and economy (Souleimanov 2007: 127-128). As a result, reconstruction and reparation became one of the most pressing issues in the post-war period. Chechnya wanted Russia to compensate it for the humanitarian suffering and destruction during the war, which Russia acknowledged in the Russian-Chechen Agreement (1996: art. 1.4). While the Chechen side demanded 260 billion USD, Russia pledged around 120 million USD in subsidies. Russia used the prospect for reparation payments as a bargaining tool that was conditioned on Chechnya's political status (Cornell 2001: 241-243). Although Chechnya did receive federal aid in form of energy, social assistance and government salaries (Tishkov 2001: 36), Russia did not pay war reparations **[NEWCON 1996-1999= -1]**.

A related issue was the disagreement over oil tariffs. Chechnya demanded transit payments from Russian oil pipelines. In the end, an oil deal was never reached. Every time an

11 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Country%20Ratings%20and%20Status%2C%201973-2014%20%28FINAL%29.xls> (20 Mar 2014).

12 <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Individual%20Territory%20Ratings%20and%20Status%2C%201973-2015%20%28final%29.xls> (13 Mar 2015).

13 In contrast, a mission from the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe assessed the elections as “free and fair”: The Moscow Times, 31 Jan 1997, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/1997/1/article/osce-head-reports-chechnyas-elections-fair/312590.html> (1 Apr 2015).

agreement was nearly reached, the radical Chechen opposition undermined efforts through kidnappings or violent attacks [NEWCON2 1996-1999=n.r.].¹⁴

The only quasi-compromise was postponing the ultimate answer on the question of independence. Considering the de facto independence, we assess that the Chechen demands prevailed [BENEFIT 1996-1999=1; BENEFIT2 1996-1999=n.r.].

In sum, the average score for all codes indicate that the post-civil war order was more to the advantage of the former rebels [COMPROM 1996-1999=0.5]. Nevertheless, Chechnya fulfilled the criteria of a failed state.

Stability of peace

In July and August 1999, Chechen militias clashed with Russian troops on the Chechnya-Dagestan border and invaded neighboring Dagestan.¹⁵ The UCDP considers these incidents as the beginning of the Second Chechen War.¹⁶ After apartment block bombings, Russian President Yeltsin ordered an anti-terror operation in Chechnya on 23 September 1999. According to the case literature, this marks the beginning of the new war [SAMEWAR=1; DATESAME=23 Sep 1999].¹⁷ Until the end of September 1999, we count 37 months of peace [PEACMON1=37]. In contrast to the UCDP, we do not separate the armed conflicts between Russia and Chechnya and between Russia and the Caucasus Emirate [ANYWAR=1; DATEANY= 23 Sep 1999; PEACMON2=37].

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14 Evangelista 2002: 52-56.

15 Chechnya profile - Timeline, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18190473> (1 Apr 2015).

16 UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2014a, 1946 – 2013: Cell P1932, http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/124/124920_1ucdparmedconflict4-2014a.xlsx (1 Apr 2015).

17 Hughes 2001: 15.

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