

## **EIR**Feature

# **Economic 'reforms' provoked Russia's Chechnya crisis**

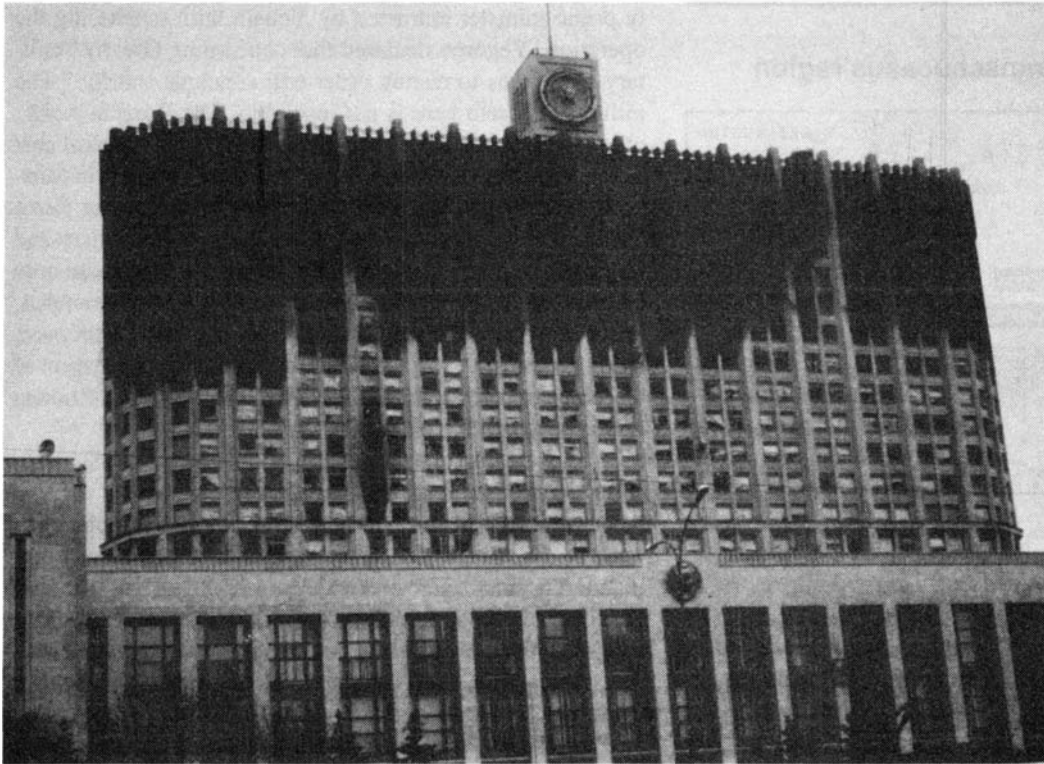
by Konstantin George

Russian President Boris Yeltsin's Dec. 27 televised address made it clear that there will be no early end to the Russian military intervention into Chechnya that began on Sunday, Dec. 11. Yeltsin announced an escalation of the Russian offensive, with a stated goal of seizing the Chechen capital of Grozny. "In several locations, units of the [Russian] Armed Forces have annihilated concentrations of illegal armed formations, together with [their] heavy military equipment. The activities of these gangs putting up resistance will be cruelly suppressed also in the future," Yeltsin said. He added that, "in the immediate future," Grozny would be cleared of "criminal elements."

Yeltsin delivered a justification for the intervention that dispelled any doubt concerning his intention to crush Chechen separatism, no matter what the costs or consequences. He declared that "no territory has the right" to leave the Russian Federation, and that the military intervention was necessary for the "preservation of the integrity of the Russian Federation." He characterized the Chechen separatist regime of Gen. Dzhokhar Dudayev as "illegitimate" and based on a president who came to power through "elections in violation of the Russian Constitution." Under Dudayev, Chechnya had become "a center of criminals, and all extremist and nationalist forces." He said that now, with the "first phase of the settlement of the Chechnya crisis" over and with its borders sealed, arms, drugs, and other contraband can no longer be smuggled into Russia.

Yeltsin opened the door to possible future Russian "punitive" missions against non-Russian former Soviet republics. He called the Chechen rebels "bandits," who are "helped by mercenaries from the Baltic countries and Azerbaijan."

As large sections of the Russian military know and have warned, there will be no quick victory for Russia in Chechnya. The Chechens will conduct a protracted guerrilla struggle from their mountain strongholds against the Russian Army. Chechen President Dudayev has said this, and the Chechens, who have a tradition of decades-long armed resistance to Czarist Russia in the 19th century, are armed



*The Russian Parliament in October 1994, after Boris Yeltsin's troops opened fire on the parliamentarians sequestered there. Today, the opposition to Yeltsin is growing; many people fear that the military intervention in Chechnya will be a disaster, and still more people are fed up with the "reforms" that have wrecked the nation's economy.*

and, as the fierce resistance they have offered to date shows, ready to heed the call.

Further, the war in Chechnya is already triggering a pattern of revolt among the other Muslim peoples, such as the Dagestanis and Ingush, who inhabit the mountainous part of the Russian North Caucasus region (see **Figure 1**). In short, Russia is on the verge of a protracted regional war.

The Russian military is acutely aware of this danger. In a little-noticed development on the same day as Yeltsin's address, the Russian Defense Ministry announced that heavy troop and tank reinforcements were being sent to beef up Russian forces in the North Caucasus regions such as Dagestan and Ingushetia, in anticipation of armed resistance there.

Informally, the conflict has already been internationalized. On Dec. 27, Russian Radio reported the capture by Russian troops of two Jordanian mercenaries in Chechnya, and the daily *Izvestia* reported that "Islamic" mercenaries from Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan were involved in the recent fighting there. *Izvestia* added that Chechnya had become a center for "Islamic" extremist organizations such as the Gray Wolves, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Later on Dec. 27, in a provocative reply to Yeltsin, Dudayev appealed on Turkish TV for Turkey to supply arms to the Chechens, including aircraft, saying, "give me the aircraft and I'll bomb Moscow." While that prospect can be ruled out, the spread of the war throughout the Caucasus is imminent.

### **Moscow backlash**

However, the significance of the conflict in Chechnya lies not in the Caucasus, but in Moscow. The failure of a quick military solution will have immense ramifications for the Russian government and that part of the military command around Defense Minister Pavel Grachov most closely allied to Yeltsin. A backlash against a "second Afghanistan" could threaten the position of Yeltsin himself. More importantly, this will merge with the rage that has been building in Russia over the past year, against the fact that Russia has made itself a colony of the International Monetary Fund, implementing for three years IMF policies that have demolished the economy and the population's standard of living.

The Russian situation was recently assessed by American statesman Lyndon LaRouche. "The fact is that the reform policy which Margaret Thatcher and George Bush imposed upon eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union, Russia, Ukraine, and so forth, has proven its complete idiocy and incompetence, and has brought about a collapse which is leading to, in some cases, the return of communist parties as a tendency in Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere, but toward a really violent reaction in Russia itself," LaRouche said.

"So, while the Chechnya development is significant—the blowback against the regime is significant, the danger of a protracted guerrilla war in that region is significant, another Caucasian war—the essential thing is that the reforms, the policies which were imposed on eastern Europe by Margaret Thatcher, George Bush, and the free trade fanatics, are blow-

FIGURE 1  
**Chechnya and the Transcaucasus region**



ing up in the face of the world, and can lead to a dangerous strategic situation, unless we get it under control.”

### The Caucasus war

Even before Christmas, indications had appeared that the Russian military intervention into Chechnya was triggering a war throughout the Caucasus. Chechnya is bordered on the west and east by two regions of Russia, Ingushetia and Dagestan, respectively, whose indigenous populations are Muslim. Both of these regions are being used as staging areas for Russian forces entering Chechnya. In both cases, crowds of Ingush and Dagestani women have assembled at the border crossings to form a human blockade against advancing Russian armored columns. These actions, along with armed resistance by Chechen forces, and snow and fog winter weather conditions, have combined to throw the Russian forces behind their timetable. The Russians have been forced to accept these delays, because any massacre of Ingush or Dagestani women would trigger mass armed resistance in these regions as well.

The result has been the failure to achieve even what was envisaged as the first phase of the Russian military operation: the encirclement of the Chechen capital of Grozny by the evening of Dec. 13. As of Dec. 28, this still had not been effected. The second phase of the operation was supposed to be the seizure of Grozny.

This was indicated by Yeltsin in his address, and in a statement issued the same day by Nikolai Yegorov, the depu-

ty prime minister entrusted by Yeltsin with overseeing the operation. Yegorov declared that concerning Grozny “military operations to restore order will conclude shortly.” The military problem here is not insoluble. The Russian Army, objectively speaking, could take Grozny. The political cost of the operation, however, would be immense back in Moscow. Grozny could only be taken after overcoming fierce Chechen resistance, necessitating heavy use of artillery and air bombardment to smash that resistance. Grozny can only be taken at a high cost of Russian Army dead and wounded, and that alone will cause huge political turmoil. Moreover, storming the city, where the Russian minority population of Chechnya is concentrated, will produce very high Russian civilian casualties.

### The power struggle in Moscow

The war in Chechnya has triggered an open, raging policy fight in the Russian government and in the military command. The first open split in the government was seen on Dec. 14, on the issue of storming Grozny. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yegorov, who is also minister for nationalities, said in a TV interview that Grozny would soon be encircled, and only the capitulation of the Dudayev forces in the city could prevent a bloodbath, thus echoing the declaration of Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev a day earlier, that Russia would use all force necessary to crush Chechnya. On the same day, Yegorov was contradicted by Valeri Grishin, a member of the staff of Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, who declared that Grozny will not be stormed because, “after all,” it is “a densely populated Russian city.”

Most crucial is the fight raging in the military command. On the military intervention, Defense Minister Grachov is opposed by the General Staff, including its leader Gen. Mikhail Kolesnikov, and many other senior commanders. This opposition first became public when Deputy Defense Minister Gen. Boris Gromov took the unprecedented act of addressing the state Duma a few days before the intervention began, to warn against any invasion, as this would lead to a situation in the region “worse than Afghanistan.”

Gromov spoke as an unofficial point man for higher military figures, namely, the leadership of the General Staff. Otherwise, he could not have escaped such utterances unpublicized.

Then, on Dec. 22, all hell broke loose, when Itar-Tass news agency reported that Grachov had fired one of his deputy defense ministers, Gen. Col. Georgi Kondratyev, and the three ranking officers of the North Caucasus Military District—district commander Gen. Col. Aleksei Mityukhin; his first deputy, General Shirindin; and his Chief of Staff, General Potapov. The Defense Ministry at first tried to deny the Tass story, but later issued a weak denial that amounted to a confirmation, saying that the story “for now cannot be confirmed.” The other major development was the resignation of Gen. Col. Eduard Vorobyov as deputy commander-

in-chief of Russian Ground Forces, in protest against being named by Grachov to command the operations in Chechnya. The resignation as such was confirmed by Sergei Yushenkov, the chairman of the Duma Defense Committee, who himself is an ardent opponent of the military intervention. However, Yushenkov could not say whether Grachov had accepted the resignation, and as of the morning of Dec. 28 there was no word from Grachov on the matter.

How deep the split at the highest levels of the Defense Ministry is, was revealed on Dec. 26, when Tass reported that Yeltsin, acting in accordance with Grachov, had drafted decrees to fire three deputy defense ministers—General Konratyev, General Gromov, and General Mironov. These decrees now require a Yeltsin signature to take effect.

The opposition in the military extends into the elite Russian Airborne Forces. There was already on record the case of Gen. Maj. Ivan Babichev, who was either removed or threatened with removal from command of one of the prongs advancing into Chechnya, after he halted the advance, explicitly saying he would never give the order to fire on civilians, and to avoid doing so, would refuse to advance. Prior to his assignment to command a motorized rifle division in Chechnya, Babichev had commanded the elite Airborne Division based at Pskov. His transfer from Pskov to Chechnya attests to the fact that he was in opposition to Grachov before the war in Chechnya began. Finally, according to an account in the newspaper *Sevodnya*, General Chindarov, the deputy commander of Russian Airborne Forces, has come out in opposition to the intervention in Chechnya.

This public opposition and, in military terms, insubordination, is unprecedented in Russia, and shows that a massive a power struggle is raging in Moscow.

### **The approaching storm**

Another center of resistance to the Russian military intervention is the Russian Duma. The Duma reaction to date has been tempered by the fact that they do not want to give Yeltsin any pretext to dissolve the parliament, in a replay of the assault on Parliament in October 1993. The forces in the Duma want to topple the present corrupt regime, but want to do so, if at all possible, through the orderly political process of elections, and thus avoid having any attempt to oust the present regime taking a violent turn.

This consideration was elaborated by LaRouche. "Unless the Russian people are confident that the presidential and other elections which are scheduled for a couple of years from now, or less than that, actually come off as scheduled, the sense of frustration could produce very explosive results in the near term," he said. If the Duma is not dissolved and the election process adhered to, "then it is likely that one can channel the frustration against the reform into those political channels of orderly selection of government, into the parliamentary process." Should Yeltsin dissolve the Duma or postpone elections, under whatever pretext, "that could create a

very dangerous situation."

Acting with full knowledge of this, the Duma passed a resolution by an overwhelming vote of 289-4, which termed the conduct of the President and government in the Chechnya conflict "unsatisfactory." However, it distinctly avoided any harsher language. The President and government were called on to exhaust "all available existing means" for a "political and legal" solution to the conflict. The resolution endorsed sealing off Chechnya's borders to prevent armed units and weapons from reaching Chechnya.

The Duma continued with this tactic on Dec. 23, approv-

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ing in the first reading (which is non-binding) the government's draft 1995 budget. By doing so, a showdown over the budget was postponed until mid-January when the Duma reconvenes after the recess for New Year's and the Russian Christmas.

The political wars in Moscow will not cool down as a result. The Duma's Dec. 14 resolution contained a clause which calls for changing the "Yeltsin" Constitution to ensure in the future parliament control over any acts of the Executive. In order to take legal effect, such a change in the Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of both the Duma and the upper house, the Federation Council.

Yeltsin has sensed that a massive reaction against the Chechnya operation and, more importantly, against the totality of disastrous and criminal "reform" policies, is about to break out. He is attempting to limit the political carnage to the government, and to save his own position. Right before the military move into Chechnya, he conveniently entered a clinic, allegedly for nose surgery, and was not heard from till he reappeared on Dec. 26 to conduct a meeting of the Russian Security Council, thus allowing underlings to become the objects of attack—a transparent and risky maneuver. The backlash against the destruction of Russia by a regime that submitted to evil, British-centered foreign interests has just begun.