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# Russian Special Forces

Issues of Loyalty,  
Corruption and the  
Fight Against Terror

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JSOU Pamphlet 05-1  
August 2005



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**JSOU Pamphlet 05-1**  
*The JSOU Press*  
*Hurlburt Field, Florida*  
*2005*



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# Foreword

**D**r. Graham Turbiville offers the reader insight about the status and capabilities of Russia's special operations forces (SOF). At a time when the US special operations planning community must take full advantage of the unique skills and regional expertise that foreign partners can provide to complement our fully committed forces, Turbiville's paper is especially helpful. Turbiville's analysis is based on open sources that suggest corruption, incompetence, and rogue elements may have rendered Russian SOF ineffective for tackling the difficult problems of countering terrorism and insurgency.

US counterterrorism strategy has benefited from the battlefield successes of combined special operations task forces that operate in overseas locations with great success. In countering various extremists who employ terror as their principal weapon, our partnerships with regional allies and friends have proven effective for both conventional and special operations forces. Indeed, even on "the dark side," where the US may employ the most secret of forces, it is often critical to have the support and participation of foreign partners. For these operations, issues of competency and trust are just as important as surprise and firepower when pulling together a combined special operations unit.

As US SOF planners consider future coalition campaigns, a key item on their checklist will need to be an assessment of the reliability of potential foreign SOF partners. Here, Dr. Turbiville's review of allegations concerning Russian SOF linkages to corruption, criminal enterprise and even "terrorism itself" indicate deep problems lurking within the Spetsnaz and other Russian security units. The article reminds planners that they will need to develop realistic expectations of performance and reliability when dealing with a number of other foreign SOF units as they pursue multinational operations.

Lt Col Michael C. McMahon  
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department





# Russian Special Forces

## Issues of Loyalty, Corruption and the Fight Against Terror

*Graham H. Turbiville, Jr.*

*Dr. Turbiville assesses Russia's faltering special operations forces and the backdrop of organizational, tactical and operational failures that has characterized their recent performance. He focuses on the relationship of these counterterrorism shortfalls to internal Russian allegations linking members of the special operations community to corruption, crime, and terrorism itself. Turbiville emphasizes that the implications of corrupt, ineffective, or rogue security forces extend beyond Russia and the region, and that continued candid appraisals of Russian counterterrorist effectiveness should influence the extent to which Russia can be regarded as a reliable partner against common security threats.*

### Introduction

**R**ussian outrage following the September 2004 hostage disaster at North Ossetia's Beslan Middle School No.1 was reflected in many ways throughout the country. The 52-hour debacle resulted in the death of some 344 civilians, including more than 170 children, in addition to unprecedented losses of elite Russian security forces and the dispatch of most Chechen/allied hostage-takers themselves. It quickly became clear, as well, that Russian authorities

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had been less than candid about the number of hostages held and the extent to which they were prepared to deal with the situation. Amid grief, calls for retaliation, and demands for reform, one of the more telling reactions in terms of hardening public perspectives appeared in a national poll taken several days after the event. Some 54% of citizens polled specifically judged the Russian security forces and the police to be corrupt and thus complicit in the failure to deal adequately with terrorism, while 44% thought that no lessons for the future would be learned from the tragedy.<sup>1</sup>

This pessimism was the consequence not just of the Beslan terrorism, but the accumulation of years of often spectacular failures by Russian special operations forces (SOF, in the apt US military acronym). A series of Russian SOF counterterrorism mishaps, misjudgments, and failures in the 1990s and continuing to the present have made the Kremlin's special operations establishment in 2005 appear much like Russia's old Mir space station—wired together, unpredictable, and subject to sudden, startling failures.

Russian police corruption, of course, has been an old, continuing story—it has been a fact of life for years and a serious impediment to providing reliable public safety and promoting any public confidence in law enforcement. Russia's well-known problems with its crumbling, troubled military establishment—and the abundant evidence of obsolescence and corruption in so many key areas—had also come to define the Armed Forces despite continuing plans for reform and modernization. Other parts of the national security infrastructure had received public and professional criticism as well.

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But Russia continued to maintain and expand a large, variegated special operations establishment which had borne the brunt of combat actions in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and other trouble spots, and was expected to serve as the nation's principal shield against terrorism in all its forms. Known since Soviet days for tough personnel, personal bravery, demanding training, and a certain rough or brutal competence that not infrequently violated international human rights norms, it was supposed that Russian special operations

forces—steeped in their world of “threats to the state” and associated with once-dreaded military and national intelligence services—could make valuable contributions to countering terrorism. The now widely perceived link between “corrupt” special forces on the one hand, and counterterrorism failures on the other, reflected the further erosion of Russia’s national security infrastructure in the eyes of both Russian citizens and international observers.

There have been other, more ambiguous, but equally unsettling dimensions of Russian SOF activity as well, that have strong internal and external political aspects. These constitute the continuing assertions from Russian media, the judicial system, and other Federal agencies and officials that past and current members of the SOF establishment have organized to pursue interests other than those publicly declared by the state or allowed under law. This includes especially the alleged intent to punish by assassination those individuals and groups that they believe have betrayed Russia. The murky nature of these alleged activities has formed a backdrop to other problems in the special units.

The implications of corrupt, ineffective, or “rogue” security forces, of course, extend beyond just Russian and the region. The reliability and attitudes of Russia’s elite military, security services, and police special forces—as well as the activities of the influential airborne and special forces veterans groups—fundamentally influence the extent to which other nations can view Russia as a reliable partner against terror. In that regard, there is value in briefly reviewing the status of the Russian special forces establishment, and the allegations linking active and retired members to corruption, crime, and “terrorism” itself. A closer look at some of these underlying, less examined circumstances of Russian SOF in 2005 may add some insight and understanding to current and future performance, and some realism to expectations about future cooperation.

## **Russian SOF Overview**

Midway into 2005, Russia is focused on evaluating and transforming its special operations forces and associated military and state intelligence capabilities. This is being carried out against a backdrop of organizational, tactical and operational failures; a few limited suc-

cesses; and many growing requirements generated by domestic and international challenges. Proposals range from modest adjustments to extremely controversial ideas like the creation of a new “Forces of Special Designation” command (Sily Spetsialnogo naznacheniya—SSN incorporating Russia’s ground, air and naval special operations units as well as the special units of the civilian security services under some concepts.<sup>2</sup> All would be equipped with new arms, transport and other technologies, and the beneficiary of additional funding.

The special forces establishment that will be the focus of any implemented reforms largely constitutes a legacy force from Soviet

### **Snapshot: Russian Counterterrorist Units and Special Operations Veteran Groups**

**Ministry of Defense:** The most prominent military counterterrorist units are found in the General Staff’s intelligence arm and within the airborne forces. It is these forces upon which Russian military SOF primarily rest.

- **Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU):** The first official Soviet mention of GRU SOF—despite earlier Western knowledge of their existence and capabilities—appeared in the late 1980s. Since that time, the brigades and other GRU detachments, teams, and units of “special designation” (spetsnaz in the Russian acronym) have become well known to those who follow Russian military activities. These military forces are very roughly comparable to US Special Forces. Originally intended for special reconnaissance, direct action, and other missions against NATO and external enemies when formed in the 1960s, they were widely employed in counter-insurgency (COIN) actions in Afghanistan and central in actions against Chechen guerrillas in roles that emphasize special combat actions against insurgents far more than the original spetsnaz model. When the USSR dissolved, at least half a dozen spetsnaz formations remained with the newly independent states and were lost to Russia. There are now a substantial number of Spetsnaz Brigades—including Navy brigade-size Spetsnaz units—in the Russian force structure. Individual units like the 15th Spetsnaz Brigade—about which more will be said—have been well-publicized and discussed in the military press. According to some Russian claims, for example, the 15th Brigade during its Afghan service was responsible for controlling an area several times the size of Chechnya.
- **Airborne Troops (VDV):** The Airborne Troops—among the most capable of Russian combat forces—have historically been associated with spetsnaz units per se, sharing many training approaches, personnel selection criteria, installations, distinctive uniform items, and some combat capabilities. However,

days. It is a substantial collection of “elite” units cutting across a number of Russian Federal organizations, with some regional and local analogs existing as well. Most were damaged by the initial unit splits accompanying the USSR breakup. Continuing disruption had been imposed by organizational shifts, the alternate shrinking and expansion of units and resources, and inadequate training due to resource constraints. Elements of virtually all Russian SOF—military, security service, and police—have served extensively in Chechnya, associated Caucasus hotspots, and other areas under circumstances that have further degraded their readiness. One consequence—a

only elements of the VDV’s current four divisions and separate combat and support units perform precisely analogous missions or are formally termed *spetsnaz*. Of note in this regard is the VDV’s 45th Separate Spetsnaz Reconnaissance Regiment—described by some as one of the most capable VDV units in the force—which will be discussed below. In Soviet times the VDV trained for large-scale airborne operations with an emphasis on both strategic and tactical mobility. Requirements in Afghanistan, Chechnya and other internal conflict areas have dictated their employment in smaller task forces and teams better suited for counter-insurgency.

#### **Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)**

- **Internal Troops (VV):** The large Internal Troops establishment is charged with guarding key infrastructure, running prisons, escorting cargos, and other tasks. Within the force structure are so-called “operational designation” divisions, organized along motorized infantry lines and capable of conducting missions from quelling ethnic unrest or riots to combat operations. Within one of these divisions—the Separate Division of Operational Designation (still informally called the Dzerzhinsky Division as in Soviet times)—one of Russia’s premier counterterrorist units is found. This regimental-size *spetsnaz* unit is called Vityaz (Knight), and it has participated in many major counter-terrorist, hostage rescue, and combat operations since its establishment in 1977. Vityaz components serve in Chechnya as well as various ethnic hotspots.
- **Militia:** As in the Soviet era, routine policing of all types is the responsibility of the Militia (as the police establishment is called). Beginning in the late 1980s, as criminal violence as well as ethnic and nationalist violence in restive republics became more serious, militarized “Militia Detachments of Special Designation” (OMON) began to be formed in larger cities and population centers. Analogous to heavily-armed SWAT units, OMON contingents were soon deployed out of area to distant hot spots and also served in Chechnya.

variety of commentators note—is the creation of organizational cultures of trained specialists into which non-state agendas and criminal enterprise has made some inroads.

While limited Soviet materials began to appear in the late 1980s acknowledging the existence of special operations forces, there is now a huge amount of new information detailing the origins, development, actions and current posture of Russian special operations forces. The numerous publications and available documents in recent years—including a substantial and growing body of Russian-language on-line materials—have expanded the knowledge base and

Not as capable as Vityaz or other elite special operations units, OMON formations perform a range of counterterrorist duties and have earned a reputation as tough and sometimes brutal.


**Federal Security Service (FSB):** The FSB, as a KGB successor organization incorporating responsibilities from several former KGB components, retains something of the authority and reputation of its antecedent organization. Charged principally with counter-intelligence, counterterrorism, economic security, and investigations and analysis, among other associated functions, the FSB controls Russia's two major counterterrorist forces, the Al'fa and Vypmel (Pennant) groups, which are part of the FSB "Special Designation Center" (Tsentral'no Spetsial'nogo Naznacheniya—TsSN). The Border Service, controlling paramilitary Border Guard units, has had special operations units for combat, counterterrorist and other missions since at least the 1980s where they were employed in cross-border operations during the Soviet-Afghan war.

- Al'fa: Probably the best known and arguably the most capable Russian counterterrorist unit, Al'fa was created in 1974 under the KGB's Seventh Main Directorate. It was one of the units that spearheaded the December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan and later played a central role in many of the Soviet Union's and Russia's political crises, counterterrorist operations, and in ethnic and nationalist hot spots. Part of the Al'fa group was lost in the dissolution of the USSR (e.g., Ukraine has its own Al'fa Group), but was rebuilt. Al'fa has been targeted against Chechen terrorism—100% of members have done duty in Chechnya—as well as being engaged in tracking down Chechen leaders and combatants. At Beslan, Al'fa lost 3 officers. Both FSB Al'fa and Vypmel members comprised the force that tracked and killed insurgent leader Aslan Maskhadov in the Chechen village of Tolstoy-Yurt in early March 2005.
- Vypmel: Founded in 1981 under the KGB's First Main Directorate, Vypmel was intended for direct action against NATO and other targets outside

included such innovations as Internet “chat rooms” where special operators exchange views on current issues. While space prohibits detailed discussion or an enumeration of all existing forces, a snapshot of the main units figuring in recent events is set out in the inset to provide some context and sense of the overall SOF establishment and to highlight those specific units so directly affected by allegations of criminality and other misconduct.

A few examples of specific special force units and supporting law enforcement—their alleged corruption, criminal linkages, questionable international activities, charges of contract murder and alleged

of the USSR. It operated in Afghanistan, and reportedly was also present in Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Mozambique and Angola. Following Vypmel’s 1993 refusal to storm the Russian “White House” Parliamentary building during the Boris Yeltsin-Parliamentary confrontation, the unit fell on hard times. After transfer to the MVD (where most officers resigned in disgust and the units went through various changes) it was eventually reconstituted using some past members and placed under the FSB as a domestic counterterrorist force. At its 20th anniversary in 2001, Vypmel had suffered only 6 fatalities. That number more than doubled at Beslan where 7 counterterrorist officers were killed, and Vypmel remains heavily engaged in Chechnya and the Caucasus.

**Special Forces Veteran’s Groups:** The proliferation of special operations organizations beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s has greatly increased the number of associated veteran’s organizations. Many have the ostensible mission of providing camaraderie, employment and family assistance, and other benefits to former members, though some have been vocal advocates for patriotic, security, and political issues. Some of the veterans’ groups initially formed had broad membership categories including veterans of Afghanistan. Others were exclusively for specific SOF affiliations (like the Association of Al’fa Group Veterans, the Vypmel Veterans Association, the Union of Vityaz Veterans, and others). A number of private security firms and services were formed by these veterans (e.g., the “VYMPEL-A” group of security companies created by former Vypmel, Al’fa, and MVD special operations personnel) and continue to hire former officers. The “Airborne and Special Forces Veteran Association” incorporates mainly military spetsnaz and VDV members. There are also a variety of veterans groups and unions which have broad membership, but include influential airborne and special operations force veterans in their composition. This include such ostensible military-patriotic organizations as the rather shadowy Tropa (Path), that attracts GRU and security service spetsnaz officers and other who have fought in various internal hot-spots. 

spetsnaz cabals—illustrate the current state of suspicions and ambiguity.

## Corruption and Criminal Links

The June 1995 Chechen hostage-taking saga at Budyenovsk marked the most visible beginning of a series of ongoing highly public counterterrorist failures. The Budyenovsk “Money-Bus-Forest-Allah is Great” scenario—as one Russian official satirically termed it—was a stunning demonstration of Russian ineffectiveness at the time.<sup>3</sup> Chechen fighters led by Shamil Basayev seized hundreds of hostages at a Russian hospital, defeated elite security force (including Al’fa’s) efforts to free them, and escaped with officially provided money and transportation, leaving behind more than a hundred dead hostages and security personnel. Six months later Chechen insurgents seized several thousand hostages at a hospital in Kizliar (Chechnya), killing 65 civilians and security personnel and escaping. The drumbeat of such hostage-taking incidents—punctuated by highly destructive terrorist bombings—continued in the Caucasus, throughout Russia, and in Moscow itself. By October 2002, about 130 deaths among some 800 hostages taken by Chechen terrorists (41 killed) at Moscow’s Dubrovka theater in a 57-hour standoff followed a familiar pattern of failed countermeasures and/or response. A determination that hostage casualties were caused principally by the gas (fentanyl) used



Chechen guerrilla chief Shamil Basayev, architect of major terrorist events including Beslan that highlighted Russian spetsnaz shortcomings and the corruption of the Russian security system.

Shield and Sword of the FSB’s elite Al’fa Counterterrorist Group, a participant in most major counterterrorist actions since 1974. Al’fa and Vypel lost 11 officers at Beslan.





by assaulting security forces added a bizarre touch of negligence and inefficiency. Three August 2004 Chechen female suicide bombings that downed two planes killing 89 people and killed another 9 people outside a Moscow subway station served as a prelude to Beslan and its outcome.

While not as great in sheer numbers, the impact of eleven Alfa and Vypmel spetsnaz fatalities at Beslan had a profound impact on the counterterrorist forces—two warrant officers, a lieutenant, five majors, two lieutenant colonels, and an eleventh officer who died later

of injuries, were losses that in terms of training and experience alone will take years to really offset. More recently—neither publicized nor officially confirmed—Russian media indicated that five FSB special operations personnel (reportedly from Vypmel) were killed and another two badly wounded in an April 2005 assault on an apartment where well-prepared Chechen fighters were located. There were a few civilian casualties, and six Chechens were also killed.<sup>4</sup>

“Sword and Shield” of the FSB’s elite Vypmel (Penant) Spetsnaz Group when briefly assigned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). Most officers resigned upon the move to the MVD, but Vypmel was later reconstituted and now constitutes a key FSB counterterrorist force.



These are the kinds of failures seen, in part, as consequence of an environment in which security services collusion with criminal organizations, involvement in business enterprises, and support for outside political or ideological agendas proliferate. The USSR’s dissolution was accompanied by burgeoning military crime of all types, with the illegal appropriation of resources, smuggling, gray and black market arms sales involving junior and the most senior officers, and even contract murder created scandal after scandal. No type of unit seemed immune and that included the Airborne Troops and special designation forces. While the truth of some changes is impossible to determine—even by Russian prosecutors—the number and variety of crimes officially reported and prosecuted over the last decade suggests that corruption

among former and serving security service and special operations personnel has been more than occasional.<sup>5</sup>

A common thread in a number of the events noted above has been the susceptibility of MVD police and investigative personnel to bribery and betrayal, including individuals from Moscow to Chechnya and the Caucasus.<sup>6</sup> Chechen fighters have been able to move easily through checkpoints with weapons and explosives and to establish weapons caches near Moscow as well as in Caucasus areas. As Shamil Basayev himself noted, reaching Budyenovsk in 1995 required some \$10,000 in police/security personnel bribes and if he'd had more money he would have gone to Moscow.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of the Dubrovka theater hostage taking, officials identified some 100 MVD personnel complicit along the route from Chechnya, including a senior officer of the Moscow Internal Affairs Main Directorate who was arrested for passing information to the Chechen fighters.<sup>8</sup> Some six weeks before the Beslan terrorism, a joint MVD-FSB investigation resulted in the arrest of several MVD officers—including a captain with direct links to organized crime—for the sale of illegal travel documents. Some of the recipients of the travel documents were alleged North Caucasus terrorists.<sup>9</sup>

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One consequence of suspected criminal linkages for the MVD and FSB has been the reluctance to recruit substantial numbers of personnel possessing the languages and ethnic expertise necessary to penetrate terrorist groups. Chechens top the list but are only one group of many. At the time of Moscow's Dubrovka theater hostage episode theater, the FSB reportedly was unable to translate intercepted terrorist telephone conversations.<sup>10</sup> This today affects the flow and quality of information as well, with information sent from reporting stations regarded as unverified and which further, often arrives too late to be acted upon in any event.

While such MVD/police corruption constitutes a serious "hole in the bottom of the bucket" for the Russian security system, problems in the special forces themselves are widely alleged as well. Links to shady business dealings—or outright criminal groups—have been a

common charge against active and former special operations personnel. As one recent commentator put it, “the Russian special forces are busy cutting business deals instead of preventing terrorist attacks, and this is naturally having an impact.”<sup>11</sup>

This view appears to be shared by at least some inside the FSB spetsnaz forces. In one of a series of letters to a Moscow newspaper in 2003, a group of Al’fa counterterrorist specialists complained about the business dealings and corrupt practices of the senior personnel and leadership in the Special Designation Center (TsSN) itself under



Logo of “Vympel-A” private security firm founded by, and composed of, former spetsnaz officers from the Vympel, Al’fa and other spetsnaz groups. They allegedly operate under the protection of the FSB “Special Designation [Spetsnaz] Center”.

der which Al’fa and Vympel fall. They pointed to a Center spetsnaz colonel—the senior specialist in sniper operations—who had accumulated a fleet of luxury vehicles, a new three-story

home, and joint ownership (with alleged criminal gang members) of a Moscow restaurant and service station. High-level FSB protection reportedly ended a prosecutor’s office investigation.

Al’fa personnel charged that FSB senior leaders have business interests and relationships which are intertwined with their official duties and which benefit from FSB sponsorships. Especially galling was the case of a former Al’fa junior officer made a fortune through the private security firm Vympel-A (see sidebar) manned by other retired Vympel and Al’fa members. More to the point, the security firm reportedly operates under the protection of the TsSN chief himself, who grants all manner of special privileges and receives funding from Vympel-A for FSB TsSN social functions. Active duty Al’fa and Vympel fighters—shortly after the disastrous storming the Dubrovka theater—were astounded to hear the Vympel-A director expounding on operational planning and execution using information he could only have gotten from the TsSN inner circle. A bottom line—“only in our country can FSB generals and prosecutors bathe with businessmen in the TsSN FSB bathhouse.”<sup>12</sup>

In an example involving a well-known military spetsnaz unit, the Airborne Troops elite 45th Separate Spetsnaz Reconnaissance Regiment (also accused in a contract murder discussed below) recently won a still-contested decision earlier this year from the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*. In one of a series of articles, an investigative reporter charged that the regiment was allowing members of the Podolsk organized crime group to train on the regimental firing range. The regiment sued on the grounds that the article had done damage to their “business reputation,” provoking continued questions and ridicule.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the merits of this case, a mid-2004 Russian investigative article addressing the linkages among elite Airborne, MVD, and GRU special operations personnel and prominent organized crime groups is another case in point, raising the specter of institutionalized relationships with organized crime. While far from a new phenomenon in Russia—OMON units and Airborne personnel were already moonlighting as private security forces in the 1990s—it is one of many indications that the practice of recruiting spetsnaz personnel had become institutionalized.<sup>14</sup> In May 2004, for example, members of Moscow’s successful and violent Orekhov organized crime group were convicted of multiple murders, mainly of other criminals. Convicted Orekhov group members included former representatives of the MVD, VDV and GRU special units (at least one of whom was a Marine spetsnaz veteran). The decisions to recruit from special forces was reportedly made during the first Chechen War (mid 1990s) and systematized to the extent that the chief Orekhov recruiter somehow enlisted the services of military draft boards (Commissariats) to find discharged soldiers with requisite service and Chechen experience.

Spillover from shady domestic business dealings to the international scene has long been a feature in the Russian arms trade in particular, and has sometimes had a special operations nexus.<sup>15</sup> Scandal-ridden Russian arms transactions from the early 1990s, often made it unclear if arms transactions were so much driven by central policy decisions as by the actions of the free-wheeling, profit-hungry Russian arms sales establishment allied with military and security service leaders, active and retired. The Russian Federation’s principal defense arms sales agency—known by the contraction

Rosoboronexport—is heir to the highly corrupt Rosvoorouzhenie, whose irregular weapons transactions in the 1990s were the focus of official Russian Government prosecution and the harshest unofficial critiques from internal Russian spokesmen. This reputation for “irregularity” has followed Rosoboronexport and associated entities,



Current President of the Russian “Airborne and Spetsnaz Veterans’ Association”, former Airborne Troops Commander, and arms trader, Colonel General Vladislav Achalov (center in suit) receives award from the Iraqi Defense Minister in March 2003 for his role in preparing Iraq to repel US aggression days before the operation began.

particularly in charges of ill-considered and wholly profit-driven sales of weaponry to rogue regimes and groups that undermine Russian security by arming terrorist sponsors, or whose goals and activities are contrary to Russia’s asserted support for a global war against terrorism.<sup>16</sup>

Former Soviet Airborne Forces commander Colonel General Vladislav Achalov—currently the president of the “Airborne and Special Forces Veteran Association”—appears to have moved easily into this

milieu.<sup>17</sup> Just days before US and Coalition operations began against Iraq in March 2003, Achalov and another Russian general officer were receiving military awards personally from the Iraqi Defense Minister in Baghdad, with the top levels of the Iraqi military leadership in attendance. Achalov had been involved in the preparation of Iraqi forces to repel a US intervention, making some 20 trips to the country in the half dozen years before the war.<sup>18</sup> The successful US campaign resulted in the rapid capture of facilities, including a Republican Guard facility near Baghdad. As Achalov’s bad luck would have it, a Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reporter imbedded with 1-15 Task Force, US 3rd Infantry Division found a July 2001 letter bearing Achalov’s signature as an arms sale representative for a Moscow-based company with post office box in Nicosia, Cyprus. The letter responded to an earlier Iraqi request, providing delivery and price information for T-72 tank gun barrels, armored personnel

carrier (BTR) engines, and .30 caliber machine guns.<sup>19</sup> Any follow-up action on the developing deal—dated long after UN weapons sanctions—is unknown publicly and may have constituted no violation. But these incidents do underscore the enduring, familiar and decidedly anti-US attitudes of some influential spokesmen for the Russian special operations community, as well as a typical link to activities and business transactions that have more than a whiff of “irregularity”.

One of the most serious continuing charges of a nexus between criminal activity and special forces, however, has been allegations of contract murder. While seriously advanced for the first time about a decade ago, consideration of the issue has intensified midway into 2005.

### **Contract Killing and the Military —Enduring Suspicions of a “Spetsnaz Cabal”**

*“...unless measures are taken to combat the functionaries and bankers who are performing criminal Western orders, Russian death squads will emerge from the ruins of the special services. They will take on the mission of physically eliminating the instigators of the destructive processes.”*

— Former KGB Major “Vladimir”, the “Feliks” group, April 1995

*“VDV spetsnaz are not ‘assassins’ as some represent it. We prepare specialists for war and not dark alleys.”*

— Colonel Pavel Popovskikh, Airborne Spetsnaz officer acquitted of a reporter’s assassination, April 2005

**T**he phenomena of “contract killings,” began to appear in Russia during the early 1990s and soon became well enough established to constitute a special category of crime. Targets for such killings ranged from rival criminal leaders to businessmen, en-

trepreneurs, financiers, and bankers whose activities brought them into confrontations with aggressive competitors or professional organized crime gangs.<sup>20</sup> In some cases serving or retired military or security force officers have been targeted as well, usually for reasons that publicly remain obscure.<sup>21</sup> The contract murder of the widely popular Moscow television personality and Ostankino State Television and Radio Company director, Vladislav Listyev, on 1 March 1995, and the subsequent killing of the vice-president of the Yugorsky Bank on 11 April 1995, defined a mid-1990s environment where the lives of prominent and obscure individuals were in daily jeopardy.<sup>22</sup>

While few of the killings were solved or successfully prosecuted, mid-1990s projections that the rate would continue to grow at a geometric pace did not develop, although recent high visibility assassinations and attempts has raised that specter again. The pool of professional contract killers has been postulated to include the numerous semi-legal professional boxing leagues, the Afghan war veterans, the OMON riot police, ex-KGB and Interior Ministry officers, among others.<sup>23</sup> Citing MVD sources in the early 1990s, a Russian journalist who for some years specialized in Russian organized crime laid out an elaborate four-tier classification system for hired assassins.<sup>24</sup> At the top of the hierarchy were so-called Alone super killers employed against the most important targets and drawn from the ranks of former GRU or KGB.<sup>25</sup> These reports—even when directly from official sources—seemed highly fanciful, though many well-documented dimensions of Russian organized crime and the past activities of security services are no less so. In any case, since contract killers were rarely caught, little definitive was known on the identities.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most serious allegations of special forces involvement in a high-visibility contract killing entered its latest phase amidst controversy in March 2005, more than a decade after it surfaced. On 17 October 1994, a Russian investigative journalist for the newspaper *Moskovskoy Komsomolets* named Dmitry Kholodov was assassinated by a bomb delivered to his editorial office. Kholodov had been writing a series of articles dealing with high level military corruption and the massive theft of state property from the Soviet Western Group of Forces in East Germany during Soviet troop withdrawals in the early 1990s. His reporting was widely regarded as innovative,

accurate, and appalling for it indicated about the corruption permeating the senior Armed Forces leadership. He had reportedly turned his attention to pending operations in Chechnya and additional military malfeasance. The bomb that killed him was concealed in a brief-

Colonel Pavel Popovskikh, Chief of Airborne Reconnaissance and founder of the 45th Airborne Spetsnaz Regiment accused of killing a Russian journalist and acquitted amid controversy in Spring 2005.



case delivered by an unidentified man and was supposed to contain documents incriminating the armed forces.

The Kholodov murder focused public and official attention on the prospect that members of the military—including the most senior members—may have been behind the reporter's death. Initially, then-Deputy Minister of Defense Matvey Burlakov and Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev—former Airborne Troops Commander—were spotlighted in this regard, owing to the harsh indictments of corruption and malfeasance

Kholodov had directed at them and Russian military criminality generally. In an extraordinary interview in October 1994, Grachev denied any personal involvement and stressed in any case that the GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate) would have done the job much more professionally.<sup>27</sup>

Gray Wolf symbol of the innovative 45th Airborne Spetsnaz Reconnaissance Regiment formed in 1994 for counter-insurgency operations in Chechnya. Regimental personnel faced criminal charges including murder.





Actually, while GRU involvement was quickly highlighted as a possibility, the then-Federal Counter-Intelligence Service (today's FSB) had determined the murderer to be a paratrooper assigned to a regiment deployed to Chechnya.<sup>28</sup> It was three and a half years, however, before arrests were made in 1998, and the detentions were astonishing for the military spetsnaz community. Those charged included the highly regarded Chief of Airborne Forces Reconnaissance and organizer of the Airborne's 45th Separate Spetsnaz Reconnaissance Regiment, Colonel Pavel Popovskikh; three officers from a 45th Regiment "special task force"; a "businessman" and former 45th spetsnaz officer; and the deputy director of the Moscow private security organization known as ROSS. They were charged with conspiring to murder Kholodov at the behest of former Airborne Forces commander and later Defense Minister Pavel Grachev. The machinations of the case—with a recanted confession by Colonel, testimony from senior serving and retired paratroopers, an initial not-guilty verdict, reinvestigation and retrial, etc. went on for some seven years. The case ended—seeming at least—in March 2005 with the acquittal of all suspects, and failed new appeals to the Military Board of the Russian Supreme Court by the Prosecutor General's Office and victim's family.

While this might be just another dreary murder mystery of a type common in Russia, the focus on personnel from the VDV generally and the 45th Spetsnaz Reconnaissance Regiment gives it a different slant. So too did the seeming quality and professionalism of the principal officer accused, Colonel Pavel Popovskikh. The 45th Regiment—striking shoulder patch emblazoned with a gray wolf superimposed on a parachute symbol including the term "special designation"—was reputed to be one of the most combat ready, well equipped, aggressive, and active units of the airborne. With a home base near Moscow, substantial elements had been employed in Chechen counterinsurgency operations from the time of the first Chechen war. In 1994, Colonel Popovskikh is credited with the creation of the 45th Spetsnaz as a "subunit of the future" designed for the type of counterinsurgent warfare for which the forces had been so unprepared in Afghanistan. With an initial strength of 800 highly qualified personnel, the unit had especially powerful reconnaissance

capabilities and innovations to include unmanned surveillance aircraft and tailored psychological warfare assets. Almost all of its officers were “prepared in the GRU spetsnaz system”.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, its clouded reputation included the allegations of organized crime links noted earlier, and also atrocities in Chechnya stemming from its guerrilla-hunting efforts. Whatever ordinary Russians may have thought of evidence presented, unit personnel pre-

### **Spetsnaz-Soldier-Scholar ... and Would-be Assassin? Colonel Vladimir Vasil’evich Kvachkov**

Despite his technical skills and experience, it is difficult to imagine a more unlikely suspect in the March 2005 attempted assassination of Anatoliy Chubays than Colonel Vladimir Kvachkov. Kvachkov had a 30-year career as an officer in the Soviet—and then Russian—Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) Spetsnaz, serving in a series of domestic and foreign special operations assignments. From every indication, including recent testimony from his colleagues, Kvachkov has been a serious, professional soldier in the old Soviet General Staff mold. He commanded various spetsnaz detachments and groupings in the 1970s, graduated from the three-year Frunze Military Academy in 1981, and in 1983 commanded a Spetsnaz grouping in Afghanistan conducting counterinsurgency operations against the Afghan Mujahedin in the Panjshir and Gazni. He was highly decorated during Afghan service, fighting a particularly notable engagement against a large Mujahedin grouping in January 1984.


Following other special operations posts in the USSR and Germany, he took over command of the famous 15th Spetsnaz Brigade in Uzbekistan (then in the Turkestan Military District). There, he led his brigade in operations against combatants in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan. It was at this time that the semi-documentary movie “Black Shark” (Chernaya Akula) dealing in part with the war in Afghanistan was filmed. It took its name from the Kamov KA-50 multi-role/special operations combat helicopter then undergoing testing. Kvachkov became something of a celebrity for his brief role in the film playing himself as the 15th Spetsnaz Brigade commander. Of note, the film also revealed the “secret” that the GRU was participating in counterdrug operations in the “Golden Crescent,” which includes the high-volume drug-producing states of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In the mid-1990s Kvachkov returned to the General Staff’s central establishment, becoming a “senior scientific associate” at the “Center for Military-Strategic Studies” (TsVSI). There—like other elements of the GRU at the time—he was heavily concerned with events in the Balkans, reportedly traveling abroad to unidentified locations. His recommendations and plan for

vailed in hotly contested court decisions leaving behind deep distrust for a most important component of the military's special operations force. Former VDV commander Achalov of Iraq fame above—who had testified in behalf of his close colleague Colonel Popovskikh—declared the trial itself a crime and one that had “cast a shadow across the entire Airborne Forces.” In the latter judgment, at least, there

action (clearly contrary to US interests in the region) were supposedly sent to the Yugoslav Ministry of Defense and Yugoslav President Milosevic. According to Russian military enthusiasts today, “the history of Europe would have taken an entirely different path” if they had been acted upon.

After military retirement—with a strong suggestion it was forced because of his advocacy of combining all Russian special operations into a single command—Kvachkov somehow managed to fight in Chechnya, winning a decoration for his work. If Russian reporting is accurate he earned it. Kvachkov reportedly was instrumental in determining the egress route likely to be taken by Shamil Basayev, other leaders, and hundreds of guerrillas in their February 2000 breakout from Grozny. He pushed for the area to be mined, an action that with subsequent artillery strikes resulted in the death of key leaders, many escaping guerrillas, and the loss of Baseyev's leg when he detonated a mine.

Kvachkov, still a focused, non-drinking professional according to his colleagues and since 1998 a published Candidate of Military Science, was preparing his doctoral dissertation defense on special operations issues and working as a civilian associate at the Center for Military-Strategic Studies. His public commentary on US operations in Afghanistan and other issues has been notable for its rational judgments on military issues. He prepared an excellent monograph on special operations available in Russian on the Internet (Spetsnaz Rossii [Russian Spetsnaz], Military Literature, 2004). It was during the period of his dissertation defense preparation—scheduled for June 2005—that he was charged with the rather ham-handed attempted murder of Chubays sparking a series of theories and highlighting linkages and related issues that have yet to be sorted out. Kvachkov was quickly fired from his position at the Center for Military-Strategic Studies, the termination back-dated to 28 February 2005 to add distance and time to their former long association. If Kvachkov—given his background—turns out to be guilty as charged it would seem to indicate a level of rage and frustration within the ranks of special operations veterans and at least some serving officers that few had imagined. It would also point to many problems ahead for Russia's troubled special operations establishment and regional counterterrorism. 

was consensus but one that did nothing to clear the ambiguity of the agendas and attitudes of Russia's special forces.<sup>30</sup>

In the meantime, Russians were bemused in Spring 2005—and no doubt further disheartened—about national counterterrorist protection, by contin-

ued assassinations, attempts, or warnings with a distinct mix of security service, big business, and politics. These included the fatal shooting of former the FSB Moscow chief, General Anatoliy Trofimov and

his wife on 10 April 2005; the 8 April discovery of a dummy bomb in the car of former FSB officer and current banker General Yuriy Zaostrovstev (now Deputy Chairman of the Vneshekonombank); and the 17 March 2005 roadside bomb detonation that nearly killed Anatoliy Chubays, the “architect” of post-Soviet privatization and now chief of the Unified Energy System (YeES) of Russia Joint Stock Company.<sup>31</sup>

The latter is most directly relevant for special operations since the principal suspect—arrested on the day of the incident—was the highly respected GRU Spetsnaz Colonel (ret.) Vladimir Kvachkov, then a senior specialist with the General Staff's Center for Military-Strategic Studies and regarded as a superb counterterrorist operator and planner (see inset). Also charged and/or under suspicion were two former “paratroopers” (allegedly GRU spetsnaz or 45th VDV Spetsnaz Regiment veterans), the son of an ultra-nationalist former Russian Press Minister, and even Kvachkov's son.<sup>32</sup> Other GRU spetsnaz officers, as well as personnel of the now-highly-suspect 45th Regiment, were also targeted by prosecutors for questioning.

The attempted assassination involved an explosive device planted along a road frequently traveled by Chubays between his dacha and Moscow. The bomb—a device with up to 1.5 kg package of TNT with

The Russian film “Black Shark” featured then-15th Spetsnaz Brigade Commander Colonel Vladimir Kvachkov in a cameo role years before he was accused of attempted political assassination. The film revealed for the first time that GRU spetsnaz were engaged in counterdrug operations in the Golden Triangle.



bolts, screws and leaving a substantial crater—was detonated with little effect as Chubays’ armor-plated BMW (and an accompanying Mitsubishi SUV carrying his bodyguards) passed it on the road. Immediately following the blast two attackers with automatic weapons sprayed Chubays’s BMW puncturing a tire and doing some other minor damage. The bodyguards braked their SUV, unloaded, and fired at the attackers who fled in a nearby vehicle. No one was injured. Colonel Kvachkov, who himself had a dacha himself nearby, was arrested within hours. Investigators supposedly found explosives in his residence, “nationalist” literature, and accumulated other evidence that reportedly suggested a “terrorist structure.” “Facts” in case have reflected the usual bizarre twists and turns associated with Russia criminal justice—while interesting, these don’t bear here except to note that Kvachkov’s defense attorney withdrew in late April after he and two of the suspect’s wives were nearly killed by a speeding Jaguar MK 10 that made an effort to hit them as he escorted them from his office.<sup>33</sup>

The successful and attempted assassinations of the mid-1990s fueled suspicions at the time about the existence of “military assassins” or even some well-organized form of military and security service “death squads.” Reporters in the mid-1990s alluded to a GRU spetsnaz base where “they allegedly train either killers or heavies to eliminate criminal high-ups against whom the law and the militia are powerless.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the public surfacing of the so-called Feliks group—reportedly formed in 1991 by former officers of the KGB and General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate—underscored an advocacy of vigilante activities in behalf of the state. According to July 1995 reporting, the Feliks group comprised at least 60 former military and state security service officers from major to colonel—under the leadership of a former general officer—who planned assassinations of officials judged to be either corrupt or “Western lackeys.”<sup>35</sup>

Early in 1995, Feliks itself had advanced strong views of Russian and regional corruption, Western connivance with criminal groups in and around the former USSR, and the need for “extreme measures” to deal with the turmoil. The Feliks group’s February release of a privately disseminated report, “International Drug Contraband and

the Former USSR,” painted a picture of an international drug trade involving many of the world’s police and security services operating for political or mercenary reasons. The Feliks report asserted deep corruption in Russian security services and law-enforcement bodies, and railed against Russian criminal politicians, officials and bankers, as well as the “private armies” some of them had assembled.<sup>36</sup>

A decade later, amidst dismal counterterrorism failures, special force disarray, the recent attempt on the life of Chubays and other assassination efforts, has refocused attention on the prospect that shadowy military and security service groupings have embarked on campaigns outside the bounds of state control. One organization that moved to the forefront was “Tropa” (Path), immediately suspected by some of links to the Chubays assault. Tropa’s reported veteran Al’fa, Vympel, and GRU spetsnaz membership among other Russian/Soviet combat veterans have self-professed strong military-patriotic views. Others have characterized Tropa’s views as ultra-nationalist and suggested that it is part of an “illegal military opposition” with a commitment to killing ideological opponents.<sup>37</sup> Similar charges have been leveled at other ostensible military-patriotic groups. The February 2005 All-Russia Officers Assembly (involving serving officers, veterans, and “free Cossack groups”), for example, resulted in the creation of the so-called “People’s Volunteer Militia” with a military style organization, hard-line military membership, and a “readiness to mobilize in the face of common danger” highlighted specifically by Beslan and Russian president Putin’s call to arms. Added to this was the overall terrorist and “foreign security service” threat, deteriorating state institutions including the armed forces, and other perceived and real societal ills.<sup>38</sup> The exact limits on what the “People’s Militia” might do remains ambiguous, but it served to underscore the links among active and reserve officers and veterans seething with anger over the decline of Russian security and over their personal and institutional hard times.

## Conclusions

Russian military “chat-rooms” designed for airborne and special operations participants convince even a casual reader that many core members of Russian SOF share a dedication and articulated

willingness to act against terrorism and perform assigned duties in ways that are comparable to similar Western forces. In the immediate wake of Beslan, for example—where 11 FSB spetsnaz were killed—long strings of messages from officers and enlisted personnel pledged “Eternal memory to the fallen heroes!”; “Eternal memory to the soldiers of Spetsnaz!”; and “Let this black day become the beginning of the awakening of Russia!” At the same time, and in the same messages, there was also “Disgrace to Authorities!!!”; “Disgrace to authorities and to generals!” and similar sentiments, indicating that at the unit level the views of spetsnaz operators and the poll responses of ordinary Russian citizens don’t differ too much on how rot within the leadership structure and state institutions undermines effectiveness and cost lives.

Ideally, the Russia special operations establishment would now be heavily engaged in developing lessons learned from past operations, refining tactics, techniques and procedures, improving the command and control of interagency special operations teams, and exploring possibilities for information sharing and interaction with foreign allies in the fight against terrorism. While there is some of this underway, Russian forces are most directly distracted and undercut by:

- demonstrable corruption within key elements of the state security system;
- allegations—some proven—of intertwined official and “business” dealings by key special operations components and spetsnaz veterans who have alleged links to organized crime groups or other profit-making agendas not compatible with state service; and
- a widening perception—real or not—that serving and veteran special operations officers may be complicit in organized “extra-judicial” punishment of designated enemies and the pursuit of other their own “state” goals.

The mix of charges, denials, trials, acquittals, shadowy deals, murders and other turmoil addressed in the article above can only be sorted out and resolved by pertinent Russian institutions who somehow find the will and wherewithal to do so. The solutions will certainly have to be internal, with mainly encouragement provided

from abroad. In the meantime, however, while terrorism in Russia and the region functions well in this environment close Russian-Western interaction and joint operations would have to be examined critically for relative advantages and risk.

In a closing note, Moscow suffered a major power outage on 23 May 2005, stopping public transportation, leaving many without electricity, and causing other disruptions. The event that produced a chorus of criticism against the chief executive officer of the Unified Energy System—and recent assassination target—Anatoliy Chubays, with calls for his resignation. While the cause has not yet been confirmed as this is written, Chubays' staff blamed the outage on an explosion and fire at a power substation. However, Chechen insurgent leader Shamil Basayev quickly claimed responsibility on a guerrilla-linked website, noting that a Mujahedin sabotage team had attacked a component of the system causing the problems.<sup>39</sup> True or not in this incidence, Basayev has forecast a "fiery summer" (*ognennoye leto*) of attacks in 2005 for Russia.<sup>40</sup> That prospect and challenge could not come at a worse time for the Russian special operations community.

### Notes

1. "Corrupt Special Forces in Russia a Problem—A Survey," Reuters, 7 September 2004. This view was reinforced in subsequent polling, e.g., The Public Opinion Foundation Database, "Special Services Against Terrorists: Views and Evaluations", 16 September 2004, received via Internet at <http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/map/analytic/presnyakova/ed043725>
2. For examples of discussion on this topic see Sergey Breslavskiy, "Spetsnaz in Need of Reform," *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 5 March 2005 as translated in FBIS CEP20050309000346; and Dmitry Safonov, "Armiya spetsialnogo naznacheniy" (Special Purpose Army), *Gazeta.ru* website, 11 March 2005.
3. There were rumors that a similar resolution was under consideration for resolving the Beslan terrorist hostage-taking before events took on a life of their own.
4. Sergey Dyupin: "Seven for Six. FSB Spetsnaz Sustains Unjustified Casualties in Grozny", *Kommersant* 17 April 2005.
5. For the spectrum on military and security service crime in the mid-1990s, see Graham H. Turbiville, Jr. "Mafia in Uniform," Foreign Military Studies Office, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 1995 (available at <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/mafia.htm>)



6. Viktor Baranets, Sergey Gerasimenko, and Mikail Falaleyev, "Not Only Force Required to Fight Bandits," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 27 October 2004.
7. Peter Baker and Susan B. Glasser, "Russian Plane Bombers Exploited Corrupt System," *Washington Post*, 18 September 2004.
8. Baranets, Sergey Gerasimenko, and Mikail Falaleyev, "Not Only Force Required." As one Western assessment echoed Russian officials, "President Vladimir Putin's failure to curb corruption in the security system, according to analysts and law enforcement veterans, has left the country vulnerable to more attacks and handicapped in its fight against the bombers and hostage takers who often slip someone a few rubles so they can operate with impunity." See Baker and Glasser, "Russian Plane Bombers."
9. RFE/RL, "Russian Interior Ministry Officials Arrested for Selling Fake Travel Documents," *RFE/RL Newline*, Vol. 8, No. 133, Part I, 15 July 2004.
10. Andrey Soldatov and Irina Boroga, "Terrorism Specialists," *Versiya*, 22 December 2003.
11. Yulia Latynina, "Better a Dead Terrorist Than Live Hostages," *Moscow Times*, 28 March 2005.
12. "Letter to Yuriy Shchekochikhin From Al'fa Group (FSB Department for Combating Terrorism) Fighters," *Novaya Gazeta*, 28 July 2003.
13. Oleg Kashin, "Basman Court Knows Regiment Indeed," *Kommersant*, 8 February 2005. A regimental spokesman claimed that the only means available for suing under the legal code was that of damage to business reputation.
14. Georgiy Rozhnov, "A War With Home Delivery," *Novaya Gazeta*, 17 June 2004.
15. For details of these transactions see Turbiville, "Mafia in Uniform."
16. Unhelpful actions—like the possible Russian sale of some 100,000 assault rifles to Venezuela reported in late March 2005—were judged to be destabilizing for the region by Secretary Defense Rumsfeld and other US officials. It was feared that these weapons would find their way to the hands of militias, guerrillas and criminal groups. Whatever the case, these issues of international relations will be decided and resolved by the national leadership in accord with US policies defines by interests and values. See John J. Lumpkin, "Rumsfeld Questions Venezuela on Rifles", *Associated Press*, 23 March 2005, received via Internet.
17. Achalov also served as a Deputy Defense Minister.
18. He followed up his advice—unproductive for Iraq as it turned out—with a series of anti-Coalition and mostly wrong predictions and commentary on the course of operations.
19. "OSCE Studies Possible Russian, Belorussian Arms Deal With Iraq," *Analisi Difesa*, No. 35/36, June-July 2003, received via Internet at <http://www.analisdifesa.it/articolo.shtm/id/3125/ver/EN>; and Ron Synovitz, "Iraq: Desert Dispatch—Republican Guard Compound

- Shows Efforts To Rebuild Military,” RFE/RL Report, 9 April 2003, received via Internet.
20. Izvestiya Analytical Center, AUBiystvo po preyskurantu@ (Murder by price list) Izvestiya, 20 October 1994. This is part three of an Izvestiya series on AUGolovnaya Rossiya” (Criminal Russia). See also in this series “Ot gorodskoy ulitsy do Kremlevskogo kabineta” (From city streets to a Kremlin office), Izvestiya, 18 October 1994 (Part I); and “Vory v zakone zanimayut oficy” (Thieves in law occupy offices), Izvestiya, 19 October 1994.
  21. Penny Morvant, “Crime Fighter Expect Increase in Contract Killing,” OMRI Daily Digest, No. 72, Part I, 11 April 1995. According to official Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) figures, there were some 65 contract killings of various types in Moscow in 1993. In the first eight months of 1994, some 50 Russian businessmen had been killed in Moscow alone. For 1994 overall, the new Federal Security Service (FSB) reported that 562 contract killings had taken place in Russia compared to 102 in 1992.
  22. Penny Morvant, “Another Businessman Killed,” OMRI Daily Digest, No. 73, Part I, 12 April 1995.
  23. Oleg Vishnyakov and Konstantin Isakov, “When the Day of the Jackal Comes,” New Times, No. 16, 1993, p. 17; ABoksery s ekipirovkoy ubi-tytsy@ (Boxers equipped for murder), Pravda, 6 January 1993.
  24. Igor Baranovsky, “Professional Killers,” Moscow News, No. 52, 31 December 1993.
  25. Ibid.
  26. Despite the lack of identification, Russian commentators emphasize the great skill required by some, the sniper assassination in particular, suggesting to them the perpetrators had intensive military or security service training and thus were “taught by the state. See Aleksandr Budberb, “Detective Story—‘Taught’ Murders,” Moskovskiy Komsomol-ets, 7 April 2005.
  27. Interview with Pavel Grachev by Nikolay Burbyga and Valeriy Yakov, “Pavel Grachev: Ya podam v otstavku, yesli pochuvstvuyu nedoveriye prezidenta” (Pavel Grachev: I will retire if I sense the president’s distrust), Izvestiya, 25 October 1995.
  28. Liz Fuller, “FSK Knows Name of Kholodov’s Killer,” OMRI Daily Digest, No. 5, 6 January 1995.
  29. Viktor Baranets, “Desantniki na ‘Tropy Voiny,’” (Paratroopers on ‘War Path’) Komsomolskaya Pravda, 23 April 2005. The existing 218th Airborne Battalion was used as the base upon which the regiment was built.
  30. Agentstvo Voyennykh Novostey, 14 March 2005.
  31. General Trofimov was affiliated with a company that refused to acknowledge the relationship in the wake of his death. Ivan Sas, “Chubays, Zaostrovtssev, Trofimov....Three sensational Murder Attempts Within a Month Attest to a Catastrophic Crime Situation in This Country,” Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 12 April 2005.

32. Baranets, "Paratroopers on 'War Path'."
33. Aleksandr Andryukhin, "Levin's Attorney Abandons," *Izvestiya*, 19 May 2005.
34. Interview with Pavel Grachev by Nikolay Burbyga and Valeriy Yakov, "Pavel Grachev: Ya podam v otstavku, yesli pochuvstvuyu nedoveriye prezidenta" (Pavel Grachev: I will retire if I sense the president's distrust), *Izvestiya*, 25 October 1995. See also a Russian article that was probably unsigned for good reason, "Who's Behind Kholodov's Assassination?" *Moscow News*, No. 43, 28 October-3 November 1994.
35. Anatoliy Baranov and Aleksandr Lyashko, "Kill Chernomyrdin!—That Is One Scenario for Operations by Secret Organization of Former Special Services Officers Who Have Adopted the Weapon of Terror" *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 7 July 1995.
36. See the monograph (with pseudonymous author) Ivan Ivankov, *Mezh-dunarodnaya kontrabanda narkotikov I byvshiy SSSR (International narcotics contraband and the former USSR)*, (Moscow: Research Group 'Feliks,' February 1995).
37. Baranets, "Paratroopers on the 'War Path'." See also Igor Simakov, "The Neo-Fascists Are Grateful to the Authorities for Supporting Their Exercises," *Novaya Gazeta*, 18 May 2005.
38. Yulia Kalina, "All Hands for the Generals. Reserve Officers Create People's Volunteer Militia," *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 24 March 2005.
39. See the Chechen account posted under Chechen news at <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/>, and a Western overview at "Basayev claims Moscow power cut," *BBC World News*, 27 May, 2005, received via Internet.
40. Ruslan Zhadaev, "Fiery Summer' of Shamil Basayev," *The Chechen Society Newspaper*, No. 10, Vol. 48, 24 May 2005, received via Internet at <http://www.chechensociety.net/>.

