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"Truth always wins. The lie sooner or later evaporates and the truth remains."¹

(Boris El'tsin, *Midnight Diaries*, 2000)

This paper was originally presented at an October 2004 seminar held at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC. The seminar was hosted by Professor Bruce Parrott, at the time Director of Russian and Eurasian Studies at SAIS. The essay was subsequently revised to take into consideration comments made by the seminar's two discussants, Professor Peter Reddaway of George Washington University and Donald N. Jensen, Director of Communications at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in Washington (and currently Senior Fellow, Center for Transatlantic Relations, Voice of America). In March of 2005, the paper was posted on the SAIS web-site (sais-jhu.edu). Eventually the paper was retired from the jhu.edu web-site.²

By the current year, 2011, it had become clear that an updated and revised version of the paper was needed, one which would take into consideration significant new information which has come to light since 2005. I am most grateful to Fernando Orlandi of the Centro Studi sulla Storia dell'Europa Orientale in Levico Terme, Italy, whose acquaintance I first made a decade ago, who kindly offered to publish this new version of my essay and to post it on his Center's web-site.

¹ Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), p. 296. Russian original: *Prezidentskii marafon: Razmyshleniya, vospominaniya, vpechatleniya* (Moscow: AST, 2000). The author would like to thank Robert Otto for his generous bibliographical assistance and for his highly useful comments on the original 2004 draft of this essay.

² In an email message dated May 5, 2008, Professor Parrott generously gave me permission to publish an updated version of my paper.

The goal of this essay is to focus on the short but extraordinarily charged period of time between 12 May 1999—when Evgenii Primakov was abruptly fired as Russian prime minister by Boris El'tsin—and 9 August 1999 when Primakov's successor, Sergei Stepashin, was likewise cashiered by the Russian president. Before we move on to an examination of this period, however, it behooves us briefly to consider several key developments that occurred earlier on in El'tsin's reign: the decision to invade Chechnya taken during the late fall of 1994; El'tsin's March 1996 decision, which he later reversed, to cancel or postpone Russian elections and to ban the Russian Communist Party; and, finally, several major developments occurring in March of 1999. In addition to briefly examining these three periods, this essay will also touch upon several theoretical issues that are germane to our topic.

Launching a "Short Victorious War"

During the period September-October 1994, a surge in the influence of hard-liners within the Russian leadership became apparent. The new prominence of "hawks" ("the party of war") at the top of Russian state increased the likelihood of a conflict with secessionist Chechnya. The leading members of this militant group at the top were: General Aleksandr Korzhakov, head of the Russian Presidential Security Service; Oleg Soskovets, Russian first deputy prime minister, and Nikolai Egorov, Russian minister for nationalities and regional affairs. Like all of El'tsin's advisors at the time, these "hawks" were fixated on the fact that "presidential elections were now only two years away and Boris El'tsin's popularity was below ten percent."³

It was believed by El'tsin's hawkish advisors that a surefire way to boost his ratings so that he would be reelected in mid-1996 would be to provoke and win a "short victorious war," such as the United States had recently accomplished in Haiti. On 30 November 1996, the late Sergei Yushenkov, then chairman of the parliamentary Defense Committee, telephoned Oleg Lobov, the secretary of El'tsin's Russian Security Council. "Lobov told him that there would be no state of emergency. But then he added that, yes, there would be a war. On the telephone [Yushenkov related] Lobov used the phrase that: 'It is not only a question of the integrity of Russia. We need a small victorious war to raise the president's ratings.'"⁴

As can be seen, neither El'tsin nor his hawkish advisors in late 1994 had any apparent qualms about launching a war aimed in part at raising the president's popularity ratings. Nor, it seemed clear, did they have any reservations about violating the Russian Constitution. The presidential decree authorizing the invasion of Chechnya (No. 2137c), issued on 30 November 1994, was a secret (i.e., unconstitutional) one. On 11 December, the day of the invasion, it was supplanted by another secret and thus also

³ Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: A Small Victorious War* (London: Pan, 1997), p. 144. On this group, see also: John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 203-209.

⁴ Gall and de Waal, *Chechnya*, p. 161.

unconstitutional presidential decree (no. 2169c).⁵ A “short victorious war” had begun.

A Decision Is Taken to Ban the 1996 Russian Presidential Elections

Unfortunately for El'tsin and his advisors, the 1994 invasion of Chechnya did not produce the desired result; rather the conflict developed into a bloody quagmire that contributed significantly to a deterioration of the political situation in Russia. In March of 1996, it looked to the ailing El'tsin and to his entourage as if the Russian presidency could be captured that summer by forces unsympathetic to them or their financial interests. Korzhakov and other hawks around El'tsin pointed out that his popularity ratings were in the low single digits and consequently urged him to cancel the 1996 elections. El'tsin initially agreed with their reasoning. “I had to take a radical step,” he confided in his memoirs, “I told my staff to prepare the documents. Decrees were written to ban the Communist Party, dissolve the Duma and postpone the Presidential elections. These formulas contained the verdict: I had not been able to manage the crisis within the framework of the current constitution.”⁶

In this instance, too, we see that El'tsin was perfectly willing to violate the “El'tsin Constitution” of 1993 in order to remain in power. Strong opposition to this unconstitutional action on the part of Interior Minister Anatolii Kulikov, backed by defense minister Pavel Grachev, and supported by a key El'tsin advisor, Anatolii Chubais, ultimately convinced the Russian president to reverse his decision.⁷ Once he had agreed to hold the elections, however, El'tsin continued to consider the option of postponing them for two years. At a closed meeting held on 23 March 1996, a majority of his advisors urged such a course. “‘Boris Nikolaevich,’ they said, ‘you’re not canceling the elections; you’re just postponing them for two years, so you can’t be accused of violating democratic principles.’”⁸ Eventually moderate advisors and leading oligarchs such as Boris Berezovskii convinced El'tsin that he could indeed be reelected if the right “technologies” were applied. Korzhakov and Soskovets lost out in a power play and were then sacked.

In Trouble Again

By the spring of 1999, El'tsin and his entourage found themselves once again in what they perceived to be a highly threatening situation. It seemed likely that the forces mobilized by Moscow mayor Yurii Luzhkov (soon to be joined by former prime minister Primakov) would be able to make major gains during the parliamentary elections of December 1999 and then prove able to take the Russian presidency in June of 2000. The specter emerged that El'tsin might have to turn over power to an individual (Luzhkov or Primakov)

⁵ Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, p. 208.

⁶ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, p. 24.

⁷ For General Kulikov's account of what he said and did, see, “Anatolii Kulikov: ‘Ya v avantyrakh ne uchastvuyu,’” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 July 1999.

⁸ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, pp. 25-26.

who was not his chosen political heir. Such a scenario, as we shall see, was unacceptable both to El'tsin and to his close advisors.

In their study *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy*, Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul have commented: "In March of 1996 Boris El'tsin... was on the verge of canceling the vote... There was no reprise [of this] in 1999 or 2000. El'tsin and Putin abided by the letter of the Constitution and seem never to have contemplated doing otherwise."⁹ On this point, the authors, as we shall see, were wide of the mark. They seem, to put the problem in a nutshell, not to have closely scrutinized developments occurring during the period March-August 1999, focusing instead on the period extending from October 1999-March 2000.

Some Theoretical Considerations

El'tsin's Russia in 1999 was suffering from many of the same political deficiencies and ailments that had afflicted it in 1994, when a decision had been taken to invade Chechnya, and in 1996, when El'tsin had initially decided to cancel or to postpone the presidential elections. To sum up the key points made by Michael McFaul in his book *Russia's Unfinished Revolution*: Russia under El'tsin represented an unconsolidated and sluggishly developing proto-democracy which lacked key institutions (for example, an independent judiciary) of a Western-style liberal democracy. By the spring of 1999, Russia found itself once again in a "balanced" situation, always dangerous in that country, in which the El'tsin group, the Communist Party with its powerful parliamentary faction, and the ascendant Luzhkov-Primakov forces were all contesting fiercely for power. There had taken place no pacting among these battling groups. The Communists in the Duma were moving ahead with an effort to impeach the Russian president. "Ambiguous calculations about power," McFaul concluded, "constitute a major cause of conflict [in Russia]."¹⁰

One other factor needs to be noted here: The fierce political struggle which had broken out was also an economic one. The Communists were seeking to reverse the process of capitalism in Russia, while the Luzhkov-Primakov group were interested in stripping certain oligarchs and bureaucrats in El'tsin's entourage—Roman Abramovich, Boris Berezovskii, Aleksandr Voloshin—of their wealth and, optimally, also in incarcerating them in prison. As McFaul and others have underscored, when an economic struggle becomes intertwined with a political one, then the chances of a successful transition to liberal democracy are greatly reduced.¹¹

⁹ Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p. 17.

¹⁰ Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), p 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

A Conspiracy to Destabilize Russia and to Cancel or Postpone the Elections

As Peter Reddaway has underscored, the modus operandi of El'tsin and his entourage led more or less ineluctably to the growth of various conspiracies. "Part of this process," Reddaway noted, "was the growing non-accountability of the regime and the taking of most real decision-making out of the public sphere and into the privacy of the bath-houses and tennis courts used by El'tsin, his confidant Aleksandr Korzhakov, and their cronies. The increasingly secretive method of government that this group developed involved the manipulation of parties, social groups, and public opinion, both through the media and through a wide range of deceptions and dirty tricks during election campaigns and in other contexts. Inevitably, therefore, conspiracies of various degrees of complexity became common, especially in Russia's 'court politics.'"¹²

Elsewhere Reddaway has emphasized that modern Russian political life cannot be understood without reference to "political technology," which represents an extreme form of political consultancy involving manipulation of individuals and large-scale deception. Since, Reddaway explained, at the core of any "political technologist's" plan, there lies a conspiracy, any good analyst of Russian politics needs to be a conspiracy theorist as well. Conspiracy theorists, he noted, are usually mocked in countries with transparent political systems. But a system becomes more prone to conspiracies if the ruler remains in power for a long time and controls large parts of its wealth. Russia and Iran, he observed, would be two examples of present-day countries with conspiratorial politics.¹³

The conspiratorial nature of Russian politics, Reddaway added, presents a challenge to the normal research methods of political science, since quantification cannot be applied to the analysis. As a result, scholars of contemporary Russia have to study minute documents and to determine which Russian analyst is close to the regime. The study of Russia's politics, Reddaway concluded, requires "the resurrection of Kremlinological methods with which to understand the various manipulations and conspiracies."¹⁴

Leaving Room for Contingency

In discussing conspiracy, it is also necessary, as Donald Jensen has pointed out, to leave room for contingency.¹⁵ Conspiracies often do not produce the effects desired by the conspirators. One key contingent effect triggered by the conspiracies discussed in this article occurred in early to mid August 1999, the chronological terminus of this paper: ethnic Avars living in mountain Dagestan reacted highly unfavorably to the incursion spearheaded

¹² From a written comment made by Reddaway on this manuscript in December 2004.

¹³ From comments made by Reddaway serving as one of the two discussants of this paper at a seminar chaired by Professor Bruce Parrott and held at SAIS on 8 October 2003.

¹⁴ From Reddaway's written comment of December 2004 on this paper.

¹⁵ From comments made by Donald Jensen while serving as a discussant of this paper at a SAIS seminar on 8 October 2004.

by Dagestani “wahhabis” under the titular leadership of field commanders Shamil’ Basaev and Khattab. The Avars sided decisively with the Russian government against the wahhabis. This result had apparently not been foreseen by the leaders of the incursion.

The Problem of Sources

I have already noted Peter Reddaway’s assertion that the nature of the phenomena being studied in this paper requires a partial resurrection of Kremlinological analysis. In seeking to determine what actually took place and why it occurred, I have been required to cast as broad a net as possible. To take one example, in analyzing the background to the early August 1999 incursion into Dagestan, I cite, *inter alia*, the findings of a Russian investigative weekly; the work of a Russian journalist reporting for RFE-RL; the words of the former commander of the MVD troops in Russia; the eyewitness recollections of a deputy minister of internal affairs of Dagestan; the findings of veterans of the Russian special forces; the views of a retired Russian military colonel; and the eyewitness reporting of a journalist writing for *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Casting a broad net and then carefully sifting through the information collected—always bearing in mind that Russia is in no sense a law-based state—can lead a researcher in the direction of unearthing the truth.

With this background in mind, let us then begin focusing closely on the period from May through August of 1999 when the “Storm in Moscow” scenario was first bruited and then, in part, put into effect.

Two Western Journalists Issue Warnings

It was two well-connected Western correspondents who were the first to publicize the fact that a radical, bold and lawless group had managed to achieve political supremacy in the Kremlin. On 6 June 1999, the Moscow correspondent for the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, Jan Blomgren, reported that one option being seriously contemplated by this group was “terror bombings in Moscow which could be blamed on the Chechens.”¹⁶ Ten days later, Giulietto Chiesa, the long-serving chief correspondent for the Moscow bureau of the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*, commented at length on several recent bombing incidents in Russia in an article entitled “There Are Also Different Kinds of Terrorists,” in the 16 June 1999 issue of the weekly *Literaturnaya gazeta*.¹⁷ (In a book published later that year, Chiesa revealed that he had written the article after he had “received information concerning the preparation of a series of terrorist acts in Russia which had the goal of canceling the future elections.”¹⁸ For this reason, he noted, he had felt

¹⁶ On Blomgren’s article, see Patrick Cockburn, “Russia ‘planned Chechen war before bombings,’” *The Independent*, 29 January 2000.

¹⁷ Dzhul’etto K’eza [Giulietto Chiesa], “Terroristy tozhe raznye,” *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 16 June 1999.

¹⁸ Dzhul’etto K’eza, *Russkaya ruletka: chto sluchitsya v mire, esli Rossiya raspadetsya* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo ‘Prava cheloveka,’ 2000), pp. 206-207. The Russian edition was

compelled to write the article for *Literaturnaya gazeta* containing "a somewhat veiled warning."¹⁹)

One has to distinguish, Chiesa emphasized in his *Literaturnaya gazeta* piece, between "small terrorism," or, in Italian Mafiosi terminology, "a settling of accounts" and a completely different kind of terrorism, which can be termed "state terrorism." The explosion of a bomb in Vladikavkaz, North Osetiya, on 19 March 1999, which killed a reported seventy persons, Chiesa asserted, was a likely example of state terrorism. "That criminal act," he pointed out, "was conceived and carried out not simply by a group of criminals. As a rule the question here concerns broad-scale and multiple actions, the goal of which is to sow panic and fear among citizens."

"Actions of this type," Chiesa went on to stress, "have a very powerful political and organizational base. Often, terrorist acts that stem from a 'strategy of building up tension,' are the work of a secret service, both foreign but also national... Terrorism of this type (it is sometimes called 'state terrorism' since it involves simultaneously both state interests and structures acting in the secret labyrinths of contemporary states) is a comparatively new phenomenon... With a high degree of certitude, one can say that the explosions of bombs killing innocent people are always planned by people with political minds. They are not fanatics, rather they are killers pursuing political goals. One should look around and try to understand who is interested in destabilizing the situation in a country. It could be foreigners... but it could also be 'our own people' trying to frighten the country..."

The 19 March 1999 bombing of a market in Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Osetiya, referred to by Chiesa as a likely act example of "state terrorism," was, it should be noted, the second largest terrorist attack to occur in Russia since the beginning of the *perestroika* period, following a November 1996 bombing in the Dagestani city of Kaspiisk. One Western observer has commented: "At first glance, the most likely catalyst [for the Vladikavkaz bombing] is the Osetian-Ingush conflict... [That] conflict, however, has never included such random acts of terror as the Vladikavkaz terror... A more likely version involves the trouble in neighboring Chechnya... [MVD] chairman [Sergei] Stepashin indirectly confirmed that he suspects a Chechen connection to the bombing... [T]he Russian authorities have drastically tightened security along the Chechen-Russian border, in what amounts to a de facto blockade. Moscow also continues to threaten sanctions against Chechnya."²⁰ It will be noted that both Blomgren's and Chiesa's warnings

translated from the Italian original: Giulietto Chiesa, *Roulette russa* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 1999).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

²⁰ *Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC), 22 March 1999. On 16 May 1999, three more explosions took place at a military housing complex on the outskirts of Vladikavkaz. Officers of the 58th army based in Vladikavkaz were arrested with dozens of kilograms of explosives in their possession. *Izvestiya* (29 June) reported that there were indications that the arrested Russian officers belonged to the GRU (military intelligence). Following these blasts, Sergei Stepashin, now the Russian prime minister, promised to take "exhaustive measures" to end terrorism originating in Chechnya. (*Monitor*, 30 June 1999)

concerning future terror bombings were issued roughly three months before the actual Moscow terror bombings of September 1999.

Of greater public significance than these two warnings by foreigners was one issued by a Russian journalist, Aleksandr Zhilin, under the heading "Storm in Moscow" [*Burya v Moskve*] in the 22 July 1999 issue of the newspaper *Moskovskaya pravda*. "From trustworthy sources in the Kremlin," Zhilin wrote, "the following has become known. The Administration of the President has drafted and adopted (individual points have been reported to El'tsin) a broad plan for discrediting [the mayor of Moscow Yurii] Luzhkov with the aid of provocations, intended to destabilize the socio-psychological situation in Moscow. In circles close to Tat'yana D'yachenko [El'tsin's younger daughter], the given plan is being referred to as 'Storm in Moscow.'"²¹

"As is confirmed by our sources," Zhilin went on, "the city awaits great shocks. The conducting of loud terrorist acts (or attempts at terrorist acts) is being planned in relation to a number of government establishments: the buildings of the FSB, MVD, Council of Federation, Moscow City Court, Moscow Arbitration Court, and a number of editorial boards of anti-Luzhkov publications. Also foreseen is the kidnapping of a number of well-known people and average citizens by 'Chechen rebels' who with great pomp will then be 'freed' and brought to Moscow by Mr. [Vladimir] Rushailo [the newly appointed head of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs]."

Actions employing the use of force, Zhilin continued, in summarizing the leaked document, "will be conducted against structures and businessmen supporting Luzhkov." In addition, "a separate program has been worked out directed at setting organized crime groups in Moscow against one another and provoking a war among them." Relations with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation would also intentionally be aggravated. All of these measures, taken together, would implant in Muscovites, Zhilin concluded, "a conviction that Luzhkov had lost control over the situation in the city."

In a subsequent article, Zhilin revealed that the "Storm in Moscow" document he had cited in his earlier piece had been dated 29 June 1999 and that a copy of it had come into his possession on 2 July. "Since the information contained in that document was very serious and had ramifications for the safety of Muscovites," he recalled, "I passed a copy of it to the deputy premier of Moscow, Sergei Yastrzhembskii. I also showed the document to my colleagues from TV. Everyone said that this could not be true... Today I understand that those journalists who rejected even the theoretical possibility of the existence of a plan of destabilization in Moscow, one that included terrorist acts, were reasoning like normal, decent people. They could not understand in their minds how, for the sake of some political goals, someone could commit such barbaric acts."²²

One of the editors of the supplement to *Moskovskaya Pravda* in which Zhilin had published his "Storm in Moscow" piece subsequently identified Sergei

²¹ Aleksandr Zhilin, "Burya v Moskve," *Moskovskaya pravda*, 22 July 1999.

²² Aleksandr Zhilin, Grigorii Vanin, "Burya v Moskve. Sushchestvuet li sekretnyi plan destabilizatsii obstanovki v stolitse," *Novaya gazeta*, 18 November 1999.

Zverev, a deputy head of the Russian Presidential Administration, as the likely source for the leaked document.²³ It might also be noted that Sergei Yastrzhembskii, the then deputy premier of Moscow, to whom Zhilin had passed a copy of the document, had previously worked as El'tsin's press secretary and as a deputy head of the Presidential Administration from August 1996-September 1998.²⁴ His loyalties appeared to be unclear. In January of 2000, he returned to the Kremlin as an assistant to then acting president Putin.²⁵ The authors of the volume *The El'tsin Epoch* have identified Yastrzhembskii as "a person prepared to play according to the rules of the [El'tsin] 'Family.'"²⁶

As Aleksandr Zhilin has underscored, the information aired in his 22 July article—a month and a half before the Moscow terror bombings—was largely ignored, because what he was claiming appeared to be unthinkable: namely, that a radical group ensconced at the very top of the Russian state would actively seek to implement measures aimed at massively destabilizing both the nation's capital and Russia as a whole.

The Membership of "The Family"

Contemporary historians are wont to begin their discussion of the El'tsin "Family" by citing the opinion of a retired commander of the Russian Border-guards, General Nikolai Bordyuzha, who in early 1999 was serving both as secretary of the Russian Security Council and as head of the Russian Presidential Administration. Some observers believe that El'tsin had, at least briefly, considered making the *silovik* Bordyuzha his political successor.

On 19 March 1999, Bordyuzha took a telephone call from President El'tsin that he had the wit to tape. Later he gave a copy of this tape to his political ally, former Russian prime minister Evgenii Primakov, for publication in the latter's book of memoirs, *Eight Months Plus...*²⁷ In the beginning of the conversation, El'tsin informed Bordyuzha that he had decided to separate Bordyuzha's two posts and was asking him to remain in the capacity of secretary of the Security Council. El'tsin then asked Bordyuzha for his opinion of the proposed change. "Thank you, Boris Nikolaevich, for the proposal," Bordyuzha replied, "but I am forced to refuse it. If you have no objections, I will present to you my arguments."

"First," Bordyuzha emphasized, "the decision is not yours, but it was imposed on you by your daughter—[Tat'yana] D'yachenko—at the recommendation of a group of people. The reason for this consists not in the mistakenness of combining the two posts but in the fact that I initiated the removal of [Boris] Berezovskii from the post of executive secretary of the CIS and declined to

²³ Erik Kotlyar, "Mrakobesie (pod maskoi demokratii,)" *Moskovskaya pravda*, 15 September 1999. Zhilin and Vanin in their *Novaya gazeta* piece also cited Zverev as the likely leaker.

²⁴ "General ot informatsii," *Kommersant*, 21 January 2000.

²⁵ Brian Whitmore, "Old PR Man for New Mess," *The Moscow Times*, 22 January 2000.

²⁶ *Epokha El'tsina, Ocherki politicheskoi istorii* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), p. 775.

²⁷ Evgenii Primakov, *Vosem' mesyatshev plyus...* (Moscow: "Mysl'" 2001), pp. 204-205.

take part in the campaign to discredit Primakov and his government. That campaign was organized by D'yachenko, Abramovich, Yumashev and Mamut, with the blessing of Berezovskii. Second, to remain at work in the Kremlin would mean taking part in carrying out those decisions which are imposed on you by D'yachenko, Yumashev, Abramovich, Berezovskii and Voloshin, and many of them often bear an anti-state character or contradict the interests of the state, and I do not want to participate in them... Having worked in the Kremlin, I have come to understand that the country is not ruled by the president but in the name of the president by a small group of unconscientious people, that it is ruled in their interests and not those of the state."

El'tsin then let slip, "I had not expected that they had accumulated such strength," after which he inquired concerning the conditions under which Bordyuzha would consent to stay on in both of his posts. Bordyuzha replied: "Boris Nikolaevich, I am prepared [to stay on] but on one condition: from the Kremlin there must today be removed your daughter—D'yachenko—Yumashev and Voloshin, and free entry must be prohibited to Abramovich, Mamut, and Berezovskii. In that case, I will continue to work." At 8:00 p.m. on the same day, El'tsin issued a decree removing Bordyuzha from both of his posts. Aleksandr Voloshin was named head of the Presidential Administration, while Vladimir Putin, the then head of the FSB, also became secretary of the Security Council.

That Bordyuzha's harsh words to El'tsin referred to a really existing group has been confirmed by numerous knowledgeable Russians including other senior figures who worked directly with El'tsin, such as the authors of the volume *The El'tsin Epoch*. The group has been described—in a way that cannot be completely documented but fits with many pieces of information from a variety of sources—by a leading Russian political scientist, Liliya Shevtsova: "In the spring of 1999," she wrote, "El'tsin seemed to be considering leaving the political arena prematurely... As El'tsin faded, he relied even more on the people around him, most of all on his younger daughter Tat'yana, then in her mid-thirties... In actual fact, in the last years of El'tsin's second term, Tat'yana became the virtual ruler of the country... El'tsin's last team, the one that prepared the Successor Project, was selected by his daughter and her intimate friends... In the late 1990's, Russia entered the era of the political Family: rule by the president's daughter and chums of hers undistinguished by experience, brains or talent."²⁸

"The names of Tanya's major associates," Shevtsova continued, "Valentin Yumashev, Aleksandr Voloshin, Roman Abramovich—meant nothing to anyone. Only Berezovskii, Tanya's adviser, the leading intriguer of the tsar's court, was known, and only because he liked being in the spotlight. In the later years of the El'tsin administration, Berezovskii was crowded out by younger people whom he had introduced to Tat'yana... like Abramovich and Voloshin... [T]hey lost all sense of limits. They began discrediting potential opponents and economic rivals... [T]he Family was driven mainly by greed...

²⁸ Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003), pp. 25-27.

From their position deep inside the Kremlin, this corrupt cooperative of friends and business comrades-in-arms created a giant vacuum to suck money out of Russia and into their own pockets."²⁹ It is worthwhile underscoring Shevtsova's key assertion that Berezovskii had by mid-1999 been "crowded out" by representatives of a younger generation whom he had himself introduced to the president's daughter.

Writing in the 1 June 1999 issue of *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, a publication owned by Boris Berezovskii, the newspaper's chief editor, Vitalii Tret'yakov, distinguished three significant political clusters in the country: "The oligarchic group of [Yurii] Luzhkov," "the group of [Evgenii] Primakov," and "the group of, as it is now called, Abramovich—Berezovskii—D'yachenko—Yumashev—Voloshin, or the Family. The first two [groups] de facto united and were able in essence to shake the might of the Family... The Luzhkov-Primakov group [also] concluded an unannounced temporary tactical union with the communists for the sake of limiting the power of the Family."³⁰ The ousting of Primakov as prime minister in May of 1999, however, Tret'yakov added with satisfaction, had permitted the Family "to restore the legitimacy of El'tsin (the source of its influence)," and "to destroy the anti-El'tsin (anti-Family) forces."

Three Berezovskii Proteges: Yumashev, Voloshin, and Abramovich

Valentin Yumashev had been appointed head of the Russian Presidential Administration in March of 1997 at the age of thirty-nine. A journalist by training, he had by that time ghostwritten two volumes of El'tsin's memoirs. It has been noted that he was "a good friend of El'tsin's daughter Tat'yana D'yachenko and has close links to [then] Security Council Deputy Secretary Boris Berezovskii. Since 1991, Yumashev has held senior posts at the magazine *Ogonek*, which is partly financed by Berezovskii's Logovaz empire."³¹ In December of 1998, El'tsin abruptly removed Yumashev from the post of head of the presidential administration, perhaps because he had been supporting Viktor Chernomyrdin as El'tsin's successor, but Yumashev continued to remain a close advisor to the Russian president, largely due to his ties to Tat'yana D'yachenko.³² In memoirs published in the year 2000, El'tsin termed D'yachenko and Yumashev, plus Aleksandr Voloshin, "the inner circle."³³ (In January of 2002, it was reported in the media that Yumashev and D'yachenko had gotten married.³⁴)

Journalist Elena Tregubova has reported that Yumashev began attempting to foist on her as early as September of 1998 a version that the country was on the edge of disaster: "The fact is," Yumashev warned her, "that we have received secret information from the special services that the country finds

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

³⁰ Vitalii Tret'yakov, "Chto dal'she," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 1 June 1999.

³¹ *OMRI Daily Digest*, 12 March 1997. See also "Yumashev—sovsem ne Chubais," *Kommersant*, 12 March 1997.

³² *Monitor*, 7 December 1998.

³³ Yeltsin. *Midnight Diaries*, p. 112.

³⁴ "Tat'yana D'yachenko stala Yumashevoi," *Argumenty i fakty*, 23 January 2002.

itself on the eve of mass rebellions, in essence on the verge of revolution... Believe me, the information concerns... secret reports that have been made to the president!"³⁵ This, of course, sounds like advanced advertising for the "Storm in Moscow" scenario. "Yumashev," Tregubova adds, "could not have imagined that a mere three months later the existence of such 'secret information' would be categorically denied in a confidential chat with me by the future president of Russia Putin, heading at that period of crisis the chief special service of the country."

Liliya Shevtsova has noted in her book *Putin's Russia* that both Aleksandr Voloshin and Roman Abramovich were figures "with a strange, even dubious, past, implicated in shady dealings."³⁶ In profiling Voloshin, the publication *Sovershenno sekretno* wrote in August of 1999: "Aleksandr Stal'evich Voloshin was born on 3 March 1956 in the city of Moscow. He graduated from the Moscow Institute of Transport Engineers in 1978... From 1986 through 1992, he worked in the market department of the All-Union Scientific-Research Institute of Market Conditions (VNIKI). At that time, as a civil servant, he began to provide information assistance to various organizations in exporting motor vehicles. On a commercial basis, of course. This is where Aleksandr Stal'evich became acquainted with Boris Abramovich Berezovskii, the head of the automobile alliance AVVA, and subsequently became his close business partner."³⁷

"After getting close to Berezovsky," the account continued, "the career of the former engineer's assistant took off like a supersonic jet—in November 1997 Voloshin was appointed assistant for economic questions to presidential administration head Yumashev. On 12 September 1998, he became deputy head of the Kremlin administration and soon held the post of head of this department. His dream had come true—he joined the principal Family of Russia with the rights of one of the leaders. Despite being employed in state and other posts, Aleksandr Voloshin did not forget about commerce either and participated in highly varied and at times highly questionable projects."

El'tsin's daughter Tat'yana D'yachenko-Yumasheva paid the following effusive tribute to Voloshin in a December 2009 blog: "I believe that Sasha is a brilliant politician. Perhaps the strongest of those with whom I had the fortune to work. He is bold, firm, decent [*poryadochnyi*] and insanely hard-working."³⁸

As early as May of 1999, the newspaper *Kommersant* was reporting that "the real powers pulling El'tsin's strings and practically determining cabinet assignments are Sibneft' head Roman Abramovich and business magnate

³⁵ Elena Tregubova, *Baiki kremlevskogo diggera* (Moscow: Ad Marginem, 2003), pp. 98-99.

³⁶ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, p. 27.

³⁷ Oleg Lur'e, "Kak zakalyalsya Stal'evich," *Sovershenno sekretno*, August 1999. English translation in *Johnson's Russia List* (JRL), no. 3499, 14 September 1999. For a useful detailed discussion of Voloshin's business and political career, see Aleksei Makarkin, "Lichnyi politicheskii defolt. Voloshin: politik-innovator," Politcom.ru, December 2001.

³⁸ "Bol'shaya medveditsya: Doch' prezidenta," *Medved'*, December 2009, no. 12. URL: http://medved.magazine.ru?mode=article_view&sid=49&id=260

Boris Berezovskii, with Abramovich in the lead position, not Berezovskii.”³⁹ The newspaper *Moskovskii komsomolets* made the same point, reporting in early June that Abramovich was “the personal friend of Tat’yana Borisovna D’yachenko, Valentin Yumashev, and Boris Berezovskii, and at his age of 33 *he manages without any self-publicity the financial flows of the presidential ‘family.’* [My italics] He is its treasurer... He is alleged to have regularly paid for the vacations of Yumashev and D’yachenko at Swiss alpine ski resorts...”

“Today,” the account went on, “rumor ascribes to Roman Abramovich the role of principal and most aggressive ideologue of the ‘family.’ He is alleged to be the author of the idea of a ban on the CPRF and the dissolution of the State Duma. The idea of Lenin’s reburial with the subsequent commitment to Moscow of troops to put down spontaneous revolts is attributed to him.”⁴⁰

Concerning Abramovich, El’tsin’s daughter, Tat’yana, wrote the following in a December 2009 blog: “He and I are friends. He is an intelligent, very interesting, striking individual. He is an unusually decent [*poryadochnyi*] and faithful person.”⁴¹

Four Other Key Family Associates

In addition to the figures mentioned by General Bordyuzha and Liliya Shevtsova, several other individuals have been seen by commentators as belonging, though in perhaps a less direct sense, to the Family. In his book *The Metamorphosis of Russia*, Georges Sokoloff argues that Anatolii Chubais, a former head of El’tsin’s Russian presidential administration and, at the time, director of the state electricity monopoly, EES, should be considered a de facto member of the Family, since he was “present at all crucial decisions.”⁴² In the Russian version of his memoirs, El’tsin directly names Chubais as a Family member.⁴³ Berezovskii and Abramovich are not so named. This reflects the fact that El’tsin met rarely with the latter two, but, by contrast, frequently with Chubais. Thus El’tsin’s perception of the Family’s membership differed somewhat from that of political observers.

Boris Berezovskii—A Fountainhead of Ideas for the El’tsin Family

In the case of Boris Berezovskii, all of his real but beginning-to-dwindle political influence was obtained through the intercession of D’yachenko and Yumashev. As Berezovskii stipulated in August of 1999: “I am indeed in contact with Tat’yana D’yachenko. I saw her ten days ago. But my last

³⁹ *RFE/RL Newsline*, 27 May 1999.

⁴⁰ Leonid Krutakov, “Man Without a Face Abramovich Emerges from the Shadows: Roman Abramovich Has Taken Control of the Russian Budget,” *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 2 June 1999. Translation in JRL, no. 3324, 4 June 1999.

⁴¹ From an interview with *Medved’* magazine: “Bol’shaya medveditsa: Doch’ prezidenta,” *Medved’*, December 2009, no. 12. URL: http://medved-magazine.ru?mode=article_view&sid=49&id=260

⁴² Georges Sokoloff, *Metamorphose de la Russie, 1984-2004* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), pp. 549-552.

⁴³ El’tsin, *Prezidentskii marafon*, p. 258.

meeting with Boris El'tsin goes back to July 1998... I myself am convinced that Boris El'tsin does not like me."⁴⁴ El'tsin made roughly the same point during an interview: "As an entrepreneur Berezovskii was rather successful but as a politician he was not. He was nothing outstanding. Contrary to rumors, I was never in close contact with him. He did not visit me at home, and we did not sit at one table."⁴⁵

In the course of a December 2009 blog, Tat'yana D'yachenko-Yumasheva had the following to say about Berezovskii's influence on her father: "The last time Papa met with him was in 1998, when Boris Abramovich was an official, the executive secretary of the CIS. They had no [subsequent] telephone conversations." She then added indignantly: "Of course there are also the stories told by [the journalist Aleksandr] Khinshtein and those like him that Boris Abramovich would come up to a naïve little fool, the daughter of the president, and whisper something in her ear, and that she would then jump up to convince her Papa to do what the bloodsucker-oligarchs demanded of her. I will not argue with people who believe in such fables."⁴⁶

Contrary to what Yumasheva-D'yachenko has asserted here, it appears that Berezovskii may well have exerted a kind of a quasi-hypnotic hold over her. The journal *Profil'* reported in mid-September of 1999: "Boris Berezovskii in the beginning of September tried several times to seriously speak with Tat'yana D'yachenko, but the daughter of the president, under pressure from her mother, avoided communications with the recent favorite."⁴⁷ Naina El'tsina apparently felt required to directly prohibit her daughter from holding further meetings with the oligarch.

Asked in July 2000 by a well-known investigative journalist, Evgeniya Al'bats, "What power did you have there [i.e., in the Family]?" Berezovskii responded: "A purely ideological and ideational [influence]. That is, I indeed believe that I can rather well sense what is happening, advance logical conclusions, and, on that basis, predict the development of events... But with regard to cadres, here I make a great many mistakes. When I begin to give advice—place this person here or that person there—they already know that there is no need to listen to me."⁴⁸

A deputy head of El'tsin's presidential administration during this period, Igor' Shabdurasulov, has essentially backed up what Berezovskii asserts. After confirming numerous reports that it was Berezovskii who came up with the idea for the "Unity" [*Edinstvo*] political party that throttled the Primakov-Luzhkov coalition in the December 1999 parliamentary elections, Shabdurasulov added: "The fact that he [Berezovskii] was practically the sole person who at the beginning lobbied that idea is a fact. But, at the stage of the realization of the project, he stood a long way from it: he did not occupy

⁴⁴ Agathe Duparc, "Berezovsky Interviewed on Putin, Luzhkov," *Le Monde*, 12 August 1999. English translation in JRL, no. 3439, 14 August 1999.

⁴⁵ Lyudmila Telen', *Pokolenie Putina: Portrety-interv'yu* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2004), p. 180.

⁴⁶ Tat'yana Yumasheva, "Otvety na voprosy," 26 December 2009. URL: <http://t-yumasheva.livejournal.com./3892.html>

⁴⁷ Inessa Slavutinskaya, "Glavnyi geroi: Izgnanie iz raya," *Profil'*, 13 September 1999.

⁴⁸ Evgeniya Al'bats, "Boris Berezovskii," *Izvestiya*, 29 July 2000.

himself with it, did not supervise it. At the stage of the election campaign itself some creative ideas came from him but... not at the level of maps, plans, schemas, or the approval or rejection of certain decisions."⁴⁹ During the course of the same interview, Shabdurasulov recalled that in July and August of 1999 those involved in discussions concerning the creation of a new political party had been "Valentin Yumashev, Boris Berezovskii, Aleksandr Voloshin, and, in part, Vladislav Surkov."

El'tsin's daughter, Tat'yana, made roughly the same point in a February 2010 blog: "Berezovskii often rushed about with new, frequently extravagant ideas. Sometimes his ideas were not at all senseless but rather useful [here she cited his plan to create the 'Unity' party]... He was good for a fountain gush [*fontirovanie*] of ideas, but was unsuited for daily, routine work."⁵⁰

One El'tsin ally who took an exceedingly dim view of Berezovskii's role as a fountainhead of idea for the El'tsin Family was Anatolii Chubais. Toward the end of 1999, he commented in an interview: "I believe that in his ability to generate ideas Berezovskii is No. 1 in the Russian state. There are about 7-10 such persons [in Russia]. He generates ideas superbly. His weakness is that he is incapable of evaluating [those ideas]. Many of his ideas are not only unsuccessful but are *monstrously dangerous* [My italics] for the country as a whole."⁵¹

More on the periphery than Berezovskii, but still squarely within the Family orbit, were two influential Russian power ministers, Sergei Stepashin (head of the MVD) and Vladimir Putin. As Pierre Lorrain has pointed out: "Paradoxically, the arrival of Primakov in office [as prime minister] had the effect of according a great political importance to Stepashin and Putin. As we have known for a long time, the power ministers, responsible for the structures of coercion, are dependent on the president and not on the head of government. These two men remained in their posts preparing the return of the El'tsin team. During the entire winter of 1999, they had been on 'the front line,' fighting Primakov's wishes on who should be appointed to various positions..."⁵²

Vladimir Putin—A Humble but Efficient Servant of the El'tsin Family

If Berezovskii served as a fountainhead of at times useful ideas for the Family, it was another infinitely less flamboyant individual who methodically went about getting things done—even the most onerous tasks—on behalf of the Russian president and his close entourage. In so doing, he manifested an aptitude for intrigue and self-advancement that far exceeded that of the

⁴⁹ See Mikhail Vinogradov, "Edinstvo protivopolozhnosti," an addendum to: Mikhail Vinogradov, Vladimir Rudakov, "Kto byli osnovateli dvizheniya 'Edinstva,' iz kotorogo vyroslo partiya 'Edinaya Rossiya'?" *Profil*, 5 October 2009.

⁵⁰ Tat'yana Yumasheva, "Berezovskii. Chast' tret'ya, poslednyaya," *livejournal.com*, 6 February 2010. URL: <http://t-yumasheva.livejournal.com/13320.html#cutid1>

⁵¹ "My vyplevem! Beseda Vladislava Starkova s Anatoliiem Chubaisom," *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 50, 1999.

⁵² Pierre Lorrain, *La Mystérieuse ascension de Vladimir Poutine* (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 2000), p. 406.

volatile, capricious and frequently unpredictable oligarch Berezovskii. Putin had first come to El'tsin's attention in May of 1998 when he had been named first deputy chief of the presidential staff for the regions. Appreciating Putin's concise, informative reports, El'tsin chose to elevate him, two months later, on 25 July 1998, to the post of director of the Russian secret police, the FSB. Putin's background in Russian intelligence and his unblinking loyalty to El'tsin and the Family were apparently factors behind this decision.

Not only was Putin a consistently loyal servant of the Russian president, but he reportedly also performed any and all tasks required by El'tsin's daughter Tat'yana. Taking issue with certain points made in one of D'yachenko-Yumasheva's blogs, journalist Evgeniya Al'bats riposted: "You [Tat'yana] are offended by my account of a session of the Presidential Administration during 1998-1999, by my recalling the fact that Vladimir Putin did not express his own opinion without first consulting with you?" "No, Tat'yana Borisovna," Al'bats continued, "That is not my invention—that is a direct quotation from a deputy head of the administration of Boris El'tsin." Al'bats also took issue with Tat'yana's denial that she and other officials in the Presidential Administration had habitually addressed Putin at this time as "Vova" (a nickname appropriate for youths and teenagers but not adults). "Literally everyone," Al'bats noted, "called Vladimir Putin 'Vova'—his colleagues in Piter [Petersburg], the former employees of the directorate for control of the Presidential Administration [where Putin had previously worked]... and even his subordinates in the FSB."⁵³

Speaking volumes in Putin's favor, in D'yachenko-Yumasheva's view, was the fact that Evgenii Primakov during the time that he was prime minister openly disliked the FSB director and sought his removal. As she wrote in a March 2010 blog: "Primakov very quickly came strongly to dislike the director of the FSB, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin." She went on to recall that Primakov had "unexpectedly asked that he [Putin] organize eavesdropping on the leader of the 'Yabloko' party, Grigorii Yavlinskii. Vladimir Vladimirovich was strongly surprised. And he said that it was inadmissible... To drag the FSB into political shadowing [Putin said] would be incorrect, harmful, and, the main thing, illegal." At his next meeting with El'tsin, D'yachenko-Yumasheva wrote, Putin "reported his position to Papa, repeating that he considered it inadmissible to eavesdrop on Yavlinskii. Papa heard him out, became indignant, and said that Putin had been right."⁵⁴ One needs of course to be agnostic about whether or not this incident actually occurred and, if it did, whether Putin embellished his account.

According to D'yachenko-Yumasheva, El'tsin's comment did not end the conflict between Primakov and the FSB director: "But Evgenii Maksimovich did not quiet down. A couple of months later he sharply placed before Papa the question of removing Putin from the post of director of the FSB. The

⁵³ Evgeniya Al'bats, "K 10-letiyu ukhoda v otstavku pervogo prezidenta Rossii Borisa El'tsina," newtimes.ru, 18 January 2010. The appropriate nickname for an adult named Vladimir is, of course, Volodya.

⁵⁴ Tat'yana Yumasheva, "Kak Primakov pytalsya uvolit' Putina," livejournal.com, 15 March 2010. URL: <http://t-yumasheva.livejournal.com/9015.html#cutid1>

reason—the utter defeat of professional cadres in the FSB... Papa then summoned Putin and received his explanations. It emerged that the picture that the premier had painted little corresponded to reality.⁵⁵ If this account is accurate, it suggests that El'tsin was more than prepared to accept Putin's word over Primakov's.

In these incidents, Putin's cunning and his unusual gift for intrigue can be seen at work. He was able, it appears, rather easily to outplay the experienced state bureaucrat Primakov in a short but fierce struggle for the president's support.

In addition to performing useful strategic services for El'tsin and for his daughter Tat'yana, Putin also succeeded in skilfully buttering up Berezovskii and other leading luminaries belonging to the Family. Thus at a time when Berezovskii was being threatened with arrest for alleged criminal activities, Putin unexpectedly showed up at the oligarch's birthday party in an apparent move to signal sympathy and support. During the course of an August 2009 interview, Evgeniya Al'bats asked the fugitive businessman: "Putin openly demonstrated support for you when Primakov was seeking to hunt you down? Is that true?"

Berezovskii responded without equivocation: "Yes, that is true. He came to my place on my birthday, although I had not invited him, and in response to my question why he had done that, taking into consideration my relations with the premier [Primakov], he answered: 'I did it on purpose.'" "There was a moment," Berezovskii recalled, "when Primakov wanted to remove him [Putin] and put his own man in place as director of the FSB, and Putin conducted himself very courageously."

"Courageously," Al'bats asked, "In what sense?" "In the sense," Berezovskii replied, "that he did not give into pressure from Primakov. Primakov possessed enormous power [at the time], and he [Putin] entered [intentionally] into a conflict with him."⁵⁶

Of significant benefit to Berezovskii, Abramovich and their oligarch allies were also several key restructurings that Putin had carried out once he had been named director of the FSB. As Berezovskii's persistent nemesis, the journalist Aleksandr Khinshtein—a gifted investigative reporter albeit one openly sympathetic to the Luzhkov-Primakov coalition—wrote in April of 1999: "Several days ago, at the order of the director of the FSB Vladimir Putin, two vitally important structures were liquidated—the [FSB] Directorate [Upravlenie] of Economic Counter-Intelligence (UEK) and the Directorate for Counter-Intelligence Protection of Strategic Sites (UKROSO). Six new directorates were created in their place." "It was precisely UEK and UKROSO," Khinshtein pointed out, "that had carried out the operational support of criminal cases ('Aeroflot', 'Atoll' etc.)." At the head of UEK and UKROSO, Khinshtein observed, stood "*chekisty* of the old formation, persons

⁵⁵ Ibid. Yumasheva responded to criticisms of this posting in a second blog: "Pro Primakova i Putina. Nekotorye poyasneniya," livejournal.com, 18 March 2010. URL: <http://t-yumasheva.livejournal.com/19418.html>

⁵⁶ Evgeniya Al'bats, "Bylo ponyatno: kogo ni posadi v kreslo prem'er-ministra—on i pobedit," newtimes.ru, 17 August 2009

not accustomed to vacillating with the course of the dollar. Both Aleksei Pushkarenko (the head of UEK) and Igor' Dedyukhin (the head of UKROSO) have for a long time irritated director Putin and his deputy and successor [General] Nikolai Patrushev... They also understandably irritated Berezovskii, D'yachenko, Voloshin and Yumashev."⁵⁷

In the same article, Khinshtein noted that analogous personnel changes had recently been carried out in the MVD: "A week ago the head of the Investigations Committee of the MVD Igor' Kozhevnikov was removed from his post. The reason was the same: the Investigations Committee was conducting a majority of the explosive criminal cases. And already this week, the commander of the [MVD] Internal Troops Pavel Maslov has resigned... According to rumor, Maslov refused to elaborate a plan for the introduction of Emergency Rule into the country..." In similar fashion, Khinshtein wrote, the Deputy Procurator General for Investigations, Mikhail Katyshev, "has fallen out of favor, something which is not surprising. A majority of the criminal cases (against Berezovskii [etc.]...) had been opened by him."

The principal goal of this essay, as has been noted, is to focus on the charged period of time between 12 May 1999—when Evgenii Primakov was abruptly fired as Russian prime minister by El'tsin—and 9 August 1999, when Primakov's successor, Sergei Stepashin, was likewise cashiered by the Russian president, to be replaced by Vladimir Putin. Before we pass on to a close examination of this period, however, it is incumbent upon us briefly to consider several other key developments, which, like General Bordyuzha's removal, occurred in March of 1999.

Preparing for War

On 5 March, a group of armed Chechens wearing masks brazenly seized General Gennadii Shpigun, the plenipotentiary representative of the Russian MVD in Chechnya, as he was about to board a plane at Severnyi airport in Groznyi. Shpigun's kidnapping served as a pivotal justification for the beginning of planning for a second war in Chechnya. (Roughly a year later, the murdered Shpigun's remains were discovered in Chechnya.⁵⁸) At the beginning of the year 2000, "Former Interior Minister and Premier Sergei Stepashin told Interfax on 27 January that preparations for a new military operation in Chechnya began in March 1999, shortly after the abduction in Groznyi of [Shpigun]..."⁵⁹ We shall examine the question of what groups were responsible for Shpigun's kidnapping later on in this essay.

At the end of March 1999, a meeting was held of the Russian power ministers—MVD chairman Stepashin, Defense Minister Igor' Sergeev, head of

⁵⁷ Aleksandr Khinshtein, "Okhota na ved'm," MK.ru, 10 April 1999. On the removal of these two officials, see too: Yurii Kochergin, Leonid Krutakov, "Operatsiya vzorovannyi mir," MK.ru, 24 September 1999. On the abolishing of UKROSO, see: "Ocherednaya reorganizatsiya proizvedena v strukture Federal'noi Sluzhby RF," RIA Novosti, 2 April 1999.

⁵⁸ "Sudmedeksperty opoznali Shpiguna," Gazeta.ru, 13 June 2000.

⁵⁹ *RFE-RL Newslines*, 28 January 2000.

the General Staff of the Armed Forces Anatolii Kvashnin, and FSB director Vladimir Putin—which adopted a plan of intervention in Chechnya that would result in the creation of a sanitary cordon around the republic; the creation of a zone of occupation that would extend to the Terek River in northern Chechnya; and also the taking under control of Chechnya’s border with Georgia. “In April, this plan received the approval of the Security Council, which Putin had just taken command of.”⁶⁰ El’tsin had named Putin secretary of the Security Council on 29 March.

While El’tsin had to have officially approved this plan—the Security Council was an advisory body to him—it is known that Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov had strong objections to it. Primakov, citing budgetary exigencies “which prevented the diverting of a single kopeck [to a new military operation],” also underlined the fact that the Georgian authorities were not giving permission to Russian forces to cross Georgian territory in order to take control of the border with Chechnya.⁶¹ Primakov’s fierce objections seem to have prevented an implementation of this plan until after his removal in mid-May.

The Sacking of Primakov

It was the ousting of Primakov, following in the wake of the removal of General Bordyuzha two months previously, which cleared the way for the unfettered rule of the radical group referred to in the Russian media as the Family. On 2 June, the newspaper *Nezavisimaya gazeta* reported that on the previous day “a group of people close to the president—Tat’yana D’yachenko, Aleksandr Voloshin, Vladimir Putin, Dzhakhan Pollyeva and Gleb Pavlovskii—discussed their strategy for the future in connection with the new situation which had been created following the formation of the government of Sergei Stepashin.”⁶² This meeting was reportedly devoted to exploring ways in which maximum pressure could be put on two television channels perceived as insufficiently loyal to El’tsin and his entourage.

In an investigative article entitled “The Six Days’ War,” the newspaper *Kommersant-Vlast’* sought to elucidate the reasons for Primakov’s removal and for the appointment of Stepashin as his successor. “[T]he condition of El’tsin’s health unexpectedly worsened,” the weekly reported, “There appeared to be a danger that in the heat of conflict with the Duma El’tsin for objective reasons might once again have to cease being involved in affairs. This danger required the El’tsin team to force matters. As the sources of

⁶⁰ Lorrain, *La Mystérieuse ascension*, p. 418, footnote 2. Lorrain writes that “personal sources” provided him with this information.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 418. In footnote three on this page, Lorrain cites a “conversation with Primakov” as his source for this information. In his previous capacity as head of the SVR, Primakov had argued against the first invasion of Chechnya at a 29 November 1994 meeting of the Security Council. On this, see John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 208.

⁶² Nikolai Ul’yanov, “To li sensatsiya, to li provokatsiya,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2 June 1999.

Kommersant-Vlast' maintain, in adopting the decision there took part—directly or indirectly—the following persons: Tat'yana D'yachenko, Valentin Yumashev (by telephone from abroad), Boris Berezovskii (by telephone, and through his allies in El'tsin's entourage), Roman Abramovich, Aleksandr Voloshin, Anatolii Chubais, and Vladimir Gusinskii. The names of others, if they exist, are not being cited."⁶³

By 8 May, the account continued, the contest for the premiership had narrowed down to two candidates, MVD minister Stepashin and Nikolai Aksenenko, minister of transportation. Oligarchs Boris Berezovskii and Roman Abramovich were said to be strongly backing Aksenenko, but Anatolii Chubais was reported to be vigorously opposed. "He believes that naming Aksenenko would overly strengthen the position of Boris Berezovskii," the account noted. The two front-runners remained neck and neck for several days: "Two draft decrees were prepared: one concerning the naming of acting premier Nikolai Aksenenko, and the second, concerning the naming of acting premier Sergei Stepashin." On the evening of 11 May, however, "a meeting was held in the Kremlin which took a decision to name Stepashin acting premier." It is known that Chubais played the key role in gaining Stepashin's appointment.

On 12 May, *Kommersant-Vlast'* wrote, Primakov arrived at the Kremlin for a prearranged meeting with the president. "El'tsin informs the premier of his removal—the decree, he says, has already been signed. Primakov expresses his disagreement with the decision. The president embraces the premier. Thirty minutes after that the president receives Sergei Stepashin and informs him of his decision to name him acting prime minister... After that, in telephone conversations with Gennadii Seleznev [speaker of the Duma] and Egor Stroev [speaker of the Council of the Federation], Boris El'tsin pronounces another name of a candidate for premier—Nikolai Aksenenko. In the Kremlin this mistake is explained by the fact that El'tsin's memory betrayed him." (In his memoirs, El'tsin confides that he was playing a crude joke on the two houses of parliament.⁶⁴)

Two days later, the State Duma held its long-awaited vote on the impeachment of President El'tsin. As the authors of the volume *The Putin Epoch* observed: "The removal of Primakov confused all the cards of the Duma members." On all points of the impeachment indictment, the deputies failed to gain the necessary 300 votes. (The closest they came was on the point of indictment titled "On unleashing the [first] war in Chechnya," where there were 283 votes for, 43 against, and four spoiled ballots. Those favoring impeachment of El'tsin had fallen a mere seventeen votes short.) "The result of the vote," the authors of *The Putin Epoch* observe, "was a decisive victory for the Presidential Administration... The nomination of Sergei Stepashin for the post of chairman of the government was conditioned by the fact that he turned out to be 'in the right place at the right time.'... As far as one can

⁶³ Igor' Klochkov, "Shestidnevnyaya voyna," *Kommersant-Vlast'*, 18 May 1999. It is doubtful that Gusinskii, who was already at this time perceived as an opponent of the Kremlin, would have been involved in this decision.

⁶⁴ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, p. 287.

judge, El'tsin had had been more impressed with Nikolai Aksenenko. However, Aksenenko's candidacy elicited revulsion on the part of other groups of the pro-presidential coalition (first of all, Anatolii Chubais). It also became obvious that a conflict-free acceptance of Aksenenko by the Duma would not occur: he was immediately perceived by the deputies not as a 'big businessman' close to them in spirit but as a creature of the 'Family.'⁶⁵

Preparations for Emergency Rule

But what if the State Duma had passed even a single article of impeachment? On 5 July 1999, a leading pro-democracy publication, *Novaya gazeta* published the text of a draft presidential decree which had come into the possession of one of its editors, Duma deputy Yurii Shchekochikhin. "In connection with the aggravation of the political and criminal situation," the draft decree read, and also given the existence of "mass disturbances accompanied by violence threatening the life and security of citizens and the normal activity of state institutions," Emergency Rule was to be instituted throughout Russia from 13 May until an unspecified date in July.⁶⁶ Sergei Stepashin was to be named head of the Temporary Administration to administer the country during this period, while retired general Aleksandr Lebed' (a protégé of Berezovskii), the governor of Krasnoyarsk krai, was to become Stepashin's deputy. During the period that Emergency Rule was in effect, "The conducting of gatherings, meetings, street processions and demonstrations and other mass measures" would be prohibited, while "a special regime of entry and exit and also a special order for the movement of citizens" would be instituted. All firearms and ammunition would be seized from citizens while all "illegal armed formations" would be disbanded.

That the El'tsin Family were prepared to proceed with the imposition of Emergency Rule throughout Russia, Yurii Shchekochikhin noted, was demonstrated, inter alia, by the fact that, "According to our sources, A.I. Lebed' was summoned to Moscow on the 11th [of May] in the evening and left Moscow on the 13th."⁶⁷ The threat of authoritarian rule had been narrowly averted, but its shadow would remain suspended over Russia in the months to come.

The most likely explanation of this whole episode is that El'tsin and his entourage feared that Primakov might in some way resist his dismissal and try to mobilize political forces to support him. However, once Primakov had meekly accepted his dismissal, Lebed' could safely be sent back to Krasnoyarsk, because now the Kremlin was confident that impeachment would fail the next day.

⁶⁵ Valerii Fedorov and Avtandil Tsaladze, *Epokha Putina: Tainy i zagadki "kremlevskogo dvora"* (Moscow: Algoritim, 2003), pp. 77-79.

⁶⁶ "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii o vvedenii chrezvychainogo polozheniya na territorii..." *Novaya gazeta*, 5 July 1999.

⁶⁷ Yurii Shchekochikhin, "Nado perenosit' prezidenta, a ne vybory," *Novaya gazeta*, 5 July 1999. Shchekochikhin died on 2 July 2003, perhaps as the result of intentional poisoning. On this see ten articles appearing in the 1 July 2004 issue of *Novaya gazeta*.

Union State Project

Another plan which the El'tsin Family had been considering before and during this period was the so-called "Union State Project" or "Milosevic variant." A pro-El'tsin Duma deputy, Nikolai Gonchar, proposed that a popular referendum be conducted on the subject of introducing the post of a popularly elected president of a new Union State which would include both the Russian Federation and Belarus'. According to Gonchar's plan, it was proposed to conduct two referendums—a consultative one ("Do you support the reunification of Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus' into a single state, in which the head of state and the organs of legislative power are popularly elected?") and one ratifying the new union treaty.⁶⁸ Under Gonchar's plan, it was proposed that presidential elections in Russia should be postponed until the resolution of the fate of the Union State.

The central problem with this scheme was that the then State Duma "did not intend to adopt decisions leaving the president a hope of becoming the head of this Union. Therefore the problem of forming a Duma fully loyal to the president and his family emerged as the top priority."⁶⁹ In addition, the Russian political establishment feared that "as a result of realizing the integration idea A. Lukashenka [the president of Belarus'] would sooner or later emerge on the Russian political scene."⁷⁰ Finally, El'tsin's rapidly declining health served to render this "Milosevic-style" alternative less feasible as a long-term solution to the Family's problems.

El'tsin Loses Confidence in Stepashin

In his intermittently candid memoirs—written with the assistance of a professional journalist and leading member of the Family, Valentin Yumashev—Boris El'tsin observed: "Early summer in Moscow is usually dead. The streets empty out... The Duma is out on recess... Early summer 1999 was no exception. It was clear that people were fed up with politics. The crisis that had been dragging on since September [1998] was thoroughly exhausting for all classes of people." The appointment of Stepashin as premier, El'tsin recalled, seemed at the beginning to be a success: "[W]ith his slightly naïve optimism, he created the very atmosphere everyone yearned for. He gave the public a little breather."⁷¹

Less than three months later, however, El'tsin had ousted Stepashin, replacing him with another power minister, Vladimir Putin. What happened to dampen the president's apparent initial satisfaction with his premier? The key issue, as El'tsin stressed in his memoirs, was the perceived growing threat of the Primakov-Luzhkov forces. "[A] new movement," he remembered, "began to rumble around Evgenii Primakov. After Primakov's departure... [his] rating

⁶⁸ Vagif Guseinov, *Ot El'tsina k...?: Voina kompromatov, iyul'-dekabr' 1999* (Moscow: Olma-press, 2000), p. 60.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷¹ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, pp. 289-290.

rose from 20 percent in May to 30 percent in June. Analysts began to talk about how the former prime minister could definitely run in the Duma elections as the head of a new movement. Then, if he won, Primakov could run for president."⁷²

"The movement that summoned Primakov," El'tsin went on, "was growing rapidly. Its formal and informal head was the mayor of Moscow, Yuriy Mikhailovich Luzhkov. The party was called Fatherland, and Luzhkov spent a great deal of his resources on it. Luzhkov traveled around the country, meeting personally with regional leaders... [G]overnors quickly came under the banner of the mayor of Moscow... Its ideological and political mouthpiece was the 'third channel,' the new TV network, also funded by Luzhkov."⁷³

But why was this necessarily a bad thing? El'tsin attempted to educate his reader: "The ideology of Fatherland was centrism. Its adherents were centrists. What was so bad about that? Compared with the fractured democratic forces that had lost the parliamentary elections to the Communists again and again, one could only welcome both this party and its ideology. Right?" "Wrong," he angrily answered his own question. "I understand that it is perfectly fair, even important, to criticize a political opponent, especially during the campaign period... But when politicians don't criticize a person but instead deliberately create a national enemy, they are not adhering to normal campaign procedures. Instead, they are practicing Soviet propaganda... 'The El'tsin regime has sold the motherland to foreign capital,' the Luzhkov media would blare... A real mafia-like family, a real gangster clan has formed around the president."⁷⁴

It is difficult to overstate the significance of such passages in El'tsin's memoirs. They show that the Russian president did not have the slightest comprehension of how a Western-style democracy functions. For a political grouping seeking to come to power in a democracy it is, of course, normal to attack the policies and practices of an outgoing president. El'tsin is also being disingenuous in certain of his comments. His own backers, such as Boris Berezovskii, controlled far more significant media outlets than Luzhkov's anemic 'TV Three.' Even the more influential NTV, controlled by Vladimir Gusinskii, which El'tsin also violently assailed in his book ("NTV was talking about my so-called Family—myself, Tan'ya, Voloshin, and Yumashev. All of these people were accused of everything under the sun..."⁷⁵), clearly is exaggerated as a political threat. It was the communists and various radical groupings who were accusing El'tsin of most of the "crimes" he cites in his book, not the "centrists" Luzhkov and Primakov.

In a December 2009 interview with the magazine *Medved'*, El'tsin's daughter Tat'yana recalled this difficult period with a revulsion mirroring that of her father: "Everything was offensive. An enormous well-equipped propaganda machine was working against Papa. NTV, the Moscow television channels, newspapers, magazines... Their aim was a simple one: to win the elections in

⁷² Ibid., p. 290.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 290-291.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 295.

the year 2000... When it became clear that Papa did not support the Primakov-Luzhkov tandem, the people were inundated with stories about the Family, about stolen billions, credit cards, castles in Germany and France, houses in London, and so on."⁷⁶

What becomes clear from a reading of El'tsin's memoirs (and from Tat'yana's blog) is that the Russian president was more than prepared to elevate his own personal security and well-being, as well as those of his close relatives and their cronies, above any considerations of legality or constitutionalism. Given this psychology of the Russian president, one can understand why he might choose to approve individual points of the "Storm in Moscow" scenario.

By July of 1999, El'tsin confided in his memoirs, he had already largely lost confidence in Stepashin: "But how to stop them [Luzhkov and Primakov]? Everything would be decided not by the summer of 2000 but by the fall of 1999. Only a matter of weeks was left... In July I repeatedly talked to Sergei Stepashin about this situation. I asked what he thought and why the governors were joining Luzhkov, whom they'd previously disliked... Stepashin kept insisting that he was the most faithful and dedicated member of the presidential team... But as soon as the conversation came around to the main political problem, he would immediately grow somber. 'I assure you everything will work out in the fall, Boris Nikolaevich,' he would say."⁷⁷

"But what would work out?" El'tsin exploded, "It was clear to me that the final round of a pitched political battle was approaching... Stepashin was able to reconcile some people for a time, but he wasn't going to become a political leader, a fighter, or a real ideological opponent to Luzhkov and Primakov in the Duma elections. A new political party had to be created, and the prime minister had to be changed. I was prepared for battle."⁷⁸

"By the end of June [1999] and the beginning of July," the authors of *The Putin Epoch* wrote, "the 'Family' became disillusioned with the possibilities of their own state proteges and went over to the carrying out of a radical scenario of political actions, which involved the suppressing of those mass media not under their control (for example, the holding 'Media-Most' [of Gusinski]), the political isolation of Yurii Luzhkov, and the change of the leadership of 'Gazprom.' As the course of the 'Family' became more harsh, the Presidential Administration saw all the more clearly its disagreements with Stepashin, who, not without the support of Chubais, was inclined toward a 'soft' variant."⁷⁹

"The cautious position of Stepashin," the authors of *The Putin Epoch* contended, "was conditioned by his consciously chosen tactic of maneuvering between the conflicting groups and also by his doubts over the effectiveness of the confrontation strategy chosen by the Presidential Administration, as well as by his growing non-acceptance of the activity of a number of highly-placed 'Family' bureaucrats... However, the choice of Stepashin on behalf of

⁷⁶ "Bol'shaya medveditsa: Doch' prezidenta," *Medved'*, no. 12, December 2009. URL: http://medved-magazine.ru?mode=article_view&id=49&id=260

⁷⁷ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, p. 294.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 294-295.

⁷⁹ *Epokha Putina*, pp. 81-83.

the tactic of maneuvering cost him his career: instead of being an arbiter, he would have had to become a 'shooter.'"⁸⁰

Another emerging problem for the Family, as journalist Aleksandr Zhilin pointed out in August of 1999, was the growing popularity of the new prime minister: "His [Stepashin's] rating began to rise sharply... Stepashin, like Primakov, began to achieve something. Two or three weeks more and he would have acquired solid political weight... In addition, according to our sources, Sergei Stepashin categorically rejected any adventurous plans of the Kremlin connected with the canceling of elections, the fabrication of pseudo-*kompromat* against Luzhkov, etc. He insisted that in the situation which had been created it was necessary to emerge without shocks fraught with civil war."⁸¹

"That is why," Zhilin concluded his analysis, "the 'Family' decided to hurry up with concluding the formation of its own clan and its own executive power. In the event that Boris El'tsin's psycho-physical condition worsened, the obligations of the family would be carried out by the head of government, Vladimir Putin, a member of the 'Family'; Aksenenko, one of the financiers of the 'family', would head the Cabinet of Ministers; the MVD would be directed by a person of Berezovskii's; and the FSB, by a person of Putin's. The Procurator General would become a person of Berezovskii and the 'Family.' The army was not taken into account, since it was not planned to involve it in 'measures for introducing order in the country.'"⁸²

Unleashing a "Storm in Moscow"

Following upon the heels of Primakov's dismissal, the El'tsin Family launched a series of sharp attacks on Mayor Luzhkov of Moscow, to which the mayor responded with spirited counter-attacks. Duma faction leader Vladimir Zhirinovskii, who had been known to float trial balloons for the Kremlin, suggested in a letter to El'tsin that he "liquidate the post of mayor of Moscow and replace it with the post of a member of the federal government—the minister for Moscow affairs."⁸³ On 4 June, when Luzhkov returned from holiday, former Russian prime minister Sergei Kirienko, an ally of the Family, announced his intention to stand for election as mayor of Moscow. Kirienko said that his primary aim in so doing was to expose the myth of an "economic miracle" in Moscow.⁸⁴ Luzhkov responded to these attacks by accusing the Presidential Administration under Aleksandr Voloshin of seeking a confrontation with him. Luzhkov declared that El'tsin's "administration and

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 83-87.

⁸¹ Aleksandr Zhilin, "Opasnye igry v kremlevskikh zastenkakh," *Moskovskaya pravda*, 25 August 1999.

⁸² Ibid. Mikhail Kas'yanov, another Family protégé, and not Aksenenko, became prime minister.

⁸³ Interfax, 19 May 1999.

⁸⁴ Elena Dikun, "Kremlin Out to Get Moscow's Mayor," *Prism*, 16 July 1999.

his circle foster a growing desire to crush [me] and consider [me] a chief enemy."⁸⁵

On 8 June, Luzhkov sought to offer El'tsin an olive branch, proposing that "all retiring presidents be given permanent membership in the Federation Council."⁸⁶ It was pointed out at the time that, as a senator, El'tsin would be immune from criminal prosecution. Luzhkov then called directly for El'tsin's resignation, stating, "If a man is sick he must have the bravery and courage to make a decision [to step down]." He noted that the Russian Constitution mandated that if a president is permanently unable to perform his duties then he must step down.⁸⁷

One Western commentator observed that Luzhkov's offer manifestly did not extend to the members of the El'tsin Family: "Cut a deal with Luzhkov and Primakov? This works for El'tsin, and perhaps his daughter and image advisor Tat'yana D'yachnko... But Luzhkov and Primakov have shown no inclination to offer such sweet terms to Berezovskii and Voloshin."⁸⁸ In August of 1999, a leading supporter of the Luzhkov-Primakov coalition, Georgii Boos, was reported to have threatened El'tsin with a "Romanian scenario"—Nicolae Ceausescu had, of course, been executed together with his wife in a courtyard in 1989 after losing power. This report, which appeared in the Berezovskii-owned newspaper *Nezavisimaya gazeta* and was then repeated over the Berezovskii-controlled ORT television channel, could have been a largely invented one. Boos subsequently maintained that he had been misquoted and told reporters that the Fatherland-All Russia coalition in fact favored legislation guaranteeing El'tsin's security after he left office.⁸⁹

Putin's FSB Investigates Luzhkov's Wife

In July, in a ratcheting up of the attack, the Kremlin turned its fire on Luzhkov's wife, businesswoman Elena Baturina, head of the firm "Inteko." The FSB, headed by close Family ally Vladimir Putin, served as the battering ram for this attack. In an interview with NTV's "Itogi" program, Luzhkov claimed that he had become a target "not just for Berezovskii but also for the Presidential Administration." The FSB, he stressed, had now become directly involved in the campaign against him. "Unfortunately," Luzhkov lamented, "the FSB now works for the Kremlin and not the country."⁹⁰

The FSB of Vladimir region, Luzhkov pointed out, had opened a case against a large number of companies that were being charged with laundering money and then transferring the cash to Switzerland. Baturina's firm "Inteko" was one of companies being investigated. Luzhkov claimed that his wife's firm

⁸⁵ *Monitor*, 7 June 1999.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Valentina Korchagina, "Moscow Renews Call for El'tsin to Quit," *The Moscow Times*, 12 June 1999.

⁸⁸ Matt Bivens, "Can Kremlin Cope with New Bloc?" *The Moscow Times*, 6 August 1999.

⁸⁹ See Brian Whitmore, "Scandals could make El'tsin afraid to leave," *The Moscow Times*, 1 September 1999.

⁹⁰ "Itogi" program, NTV, 18 July 1999. English translation in JRL, no. 3399, 19 July 1999.

had never undertaken activities in Vladimir. He said in the afore-mentioned NTV interview that he had documentary proof that the Vladimir FSB had added the name of his wife's firm to the list of those companies being investigated on direct orders from the central FSB in Moscow, whose obvious goal was to find something criminal in his wife's business. "My wife's telephone and my children's telephone as well [are being tapped]," Luzhkov complained, adding, "I would not be surprised if they get at my children, the youngest of whom are five and seven."⁹¹

Luzhkov's spirited and emotional counter-attack, which was publicized over NTV, forced the Family and its point man Putin temporarily to back off. On 29 July, the official news agency ITAR-TASS reported: "A Russian Deputy Prosecutor General said investigators had no claims to Elena Baturina..."⁹²

In September 1999, Baturina told the newspaper *Moskovskii komsomlets* that Nikolai Patrushev, the director of the FSB (and one of Putin's right-hand men), had invited her to come see him. She related what was said during their conversation: "He tried to convince me that the case [against 'Inteko'] was not one ordered up from above, not political. I permitted myself not to agree with him... Patrushev one more time offered to personally check everything out and, if the information was not conformed, to offer me official apologies in the name of the FSB."⁹³

In addition to seeking to destroy Luzhkov and his wife, the Family during the spring and early summer of 1999 also attempted to crush two television channels seen as being pro-Luzhkov: NTV and "TV-Center." At a meeting of D'yachenko, Voloshin, Putin, Gleb Pavlovskii and several others on 1 June, as has been noted previously, the participants discussed possible punitive steps to be taken against these two channels. The revoking of their licenses to broadcast was one of the options discussed.⁹⁴

The Family also appears to have sought to intimidate all perceived opponents. There was a bomb threat at the offices of the Moscow Arbitration Court. "A little earlier there were explosions near the offices of Iosif Kobzon and Valerii Kazantsev, who are openly on the mayor's side... Explosions and gunfire are heard everyday in the capital."⁹⁵ An attempt was made to involve the Justice Ministry, headed by Pavel Krasheninnikov, in the struggle against the Family's political opponents. On 29 June El'tsin publicly tongue-lashed Krasheninnikov "for the fact that he had not undertaken radical measures against the Communist Party."⁹⁶ At the Second All-Russian Conference of the FSB, held at the end of June, El'tsin charged the assembled officers to monitor the election process and instructed them not to admit into the Duma "criminals and swindlers."⁹⁷ Presumably this order meant that they should

⁹¹ *Monitor*, 23 July 1999.

⁹² ITAR-TASS, 29 July 1999.

⁹³ Elena Egorova, "Elena Baturina," MK.ru, 21 September 1999.

⁹⁴ Nikolai Ul'yanov, "To li sensatsiya, to li provokatsiya," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2 June 1999.

⁹⁵ Zhilin and Vanin in *Novaya gazeta*, 20 November 1999.

⁹⁶ Guseinov, *Ot El'tsina k...?*, p. 14.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

find ways of disqualifying some of the Family's opponents—a task that was later fulfilled in certain cases.

Putin Helps Neutralize El'tsin's Enemies

One key service rendered by close Family ally Vladimir Putin during the spring and summer of 1999 was to contain and attempt once and for all to remove from office the pesky General Procurator of Russia Yurii Skuratov. On 17 March, in a stinging blow to El'tsin and the Family, the Federation Council had voted against Skuratov's removal from office by a vote of 146 to six. In February, Skuratov had been allegedly filmed having sex with two call girls, and this footage had then been shown on Russian State Television (RTR) on 17 March. On 2 April, Putin had announced publicly that the prostitutes had been paid for by individuals being investigated by the General Procuracy, thereby suggesting that an attempt at corruption or blackmail had occurred.⁹⁸ Unlike the fastidious Stepashin, Putin was completely prepared to publicly authenticate these videotapes.⁹⁹ When Skuratov was at one point lying in the hospital, "Putin," he recalls, "came several times to me and, opening up, said to me that the Family was satisfied with my conduct. He said that they wanted to name me ambassador to Finland, to send me, so to speak, into honorable exile. 'I won't go,' I said firmly... In this situation contacts with Putin were important for me because they were also contacts with Tat'yana... She herself did not enter into contact [with me] but for that purpose chose Putin."¹⁰⁰

Commenting on Putin's close ties to the El'tsin Family, Liliya Shevtsova has observed: "Putin confirmed his capacity for loyalty in the spring of 1999, when he defended El'tsin during his conflict with then-prosecutor general Yuri Skuratov... Putin burned his bridges, taking El'tsin's side at a time when even El'tsin's staunchest supporters were distancing themselves from the Kremlin... The ruling Family saw that Putin could be trusted, that one could rely on him... He had been created by the people around El'tsin; naturally they expected gratitude and allegiance from him."¹⁰¹

The Role of Spinmeister Gleb Pavlovskii

The leading Kremlin "political technologist" of this period, Gleb Pavlovskii, also served as a key associate of the El'tsin Family. "Gleb Pavlovskii," one prominent pro-democracy journalist, Andrei Piontkovskii, wrote in November 2000, "is the Kremlin's guru and political technologies specialist, the ideologue and designer of the whole Putin project including the [second] Chechen war... He has read more books than hundreds of Korzhakovs and Putins put together... He is a character stepped out of Dostoevskii, one of the

⁹⁸ Lorrain, *La Mystérieuse ascension*, pp. 406-407.

⁹⁹ "Vladimir Putin: Pervye otsenki issledovaniya kasset s komprometiruyushchimi Yuriya Skuratova videozapismyami pokazali, chto oni—podlinnye," RIA Novosti, 2 April 1999.

¹⁰⁰ Yurii Skuratov, *Variants drakona* (Moscow: Detektiv-Press, 2000), p. 235.

¹⁰¹ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, p. 33. For El'tsin's emotional comments on the Skuratov affair, see *Midnight Diaries*, pp. 221-236.

'Devils' of our time."¹⁰² Pavlovskii was born in Odessa in 1951 and attended university in Ukraine. In the 1970's he became a political dissident and was arrested by the KGB in 1982. He was broken in prison and then abjectly repented of his dissident activities. Subsequently emerging as a specialist in political disinformation and in political provocations, Pavlovskii became a valued reelection campaign advisor to El'tsin and his entourage in 1996. In 1999, he helped spearhead the Family's vicious campaign directed against Mayor Luzhkov, reportedly setting up a website containing compromising material on the mayor, and predicting in July of 1999 that Luzhkov would make a "weak and cruel" president.¹⁰³

Unlike Boris Berezovskii, who was a prodigious generator of ideas but was generally rather inept at implementing them, Pavlovskii, also a fountainhead of schemes, was able to foresee practical ways to put his ideas into effect. It was Pavlovskii and not the distrusted Berezovskii who was reportedly often included in weekly meetings of the El'tsin Family group. If Berezovskii is credited with coming up with the idea of the "Unity" political party, Pavlovskii, for his part, has claimed, with reason, to be the principal author of the "Putin Project" which resulted in an unknown former secret police operative being elected Russian president in March of 2000.¹⁰⁴ While the process of implementation of this project lies largely outside the scope of this paper, it should be noted that journalist Aleksandr Budberg reported in early July of 1999 that Pavlovskii had proposed "to the leadership of the Presidential Administration—Voloshin, D'yachenko, Yumashev" that El'tsin step down from power in December 1999, three months early, and hand over power "ahead of time" [*dosrochno*] to an anointed successor.¹⁰⁵

"Every Friday," journalist Mikhail Rostovskii reported in July of 1999, "the entire political leadership of the presidential apparatus gathers in one of the halls of the first wing of the El'tsin palace. There also appear in that place two 'secret counselors' of the Kremlin: sociologist Aleksandr Oslon and one of the most scandalous individuals on the Russian political scene—Gleb Pavlovskii." "According to some [Kremlin] courtiers," Rostovskii added, "both Tat'yana Borisovna and Yumashev look upon the ex-joiner Pavlovskii as a guru."¹⁰⁶

It will be recalled that Anatolii Chubais had in an interview cautioned that certain of Berezovskii's ideas could potentially be "monstrously dangerous." Rostovskii in his article saw significant danger in certain of Pavlovskii's ideas: "There can be no argument," he wrote, "that Pavlovskii is a very talented

¹⁰² Andrei Piontkovski, "Season of Discontent," *The Russia Journal*, 20 November 2000.

¹⁰³ See "Profile: Gleb Pavlovskii," *RFE/RL Russian Political Weekly*, 12 March 2001. See also Anatolii Kostyukov and Lev Segal, "Igry provokatorov," *Obshchaya gazeta*, 4 December 1997.

¹⁰⁴ Pavlovskii boasted of this achievement in interviews with two foreign correspondents. See: Paul Quinn-Judge, "No Tears for Boris," *Time.com*, 2 January 2000, and Martha Orth, "Russia's Dark Master," *Vanity Fair*, October 2000. URL: <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2000/10/putin200010?print>

¹⁰⁵ Aleksandr Budberg, "Administratsiya khochet ubrat' El'tsina dosrochno," *MK.ru*, 6 July 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Mikhail Rostovskii, "Kremlevskie 'otmorozki,'" *MK.ru*, 6 July 1999.

political technologist who looks at a situation from an unusual point of view. The problem is only the fact that all of the conceptions of Gleb Olegovich are penetrated by the idea of *harsh confrontation*. [My italics] And by the fact that, in common opinion, Pavlovskii lives in his own world which has little in common with reality."

During the course of a July 1999 interview with the newspaper *Novaya gazeta*, Pavlovskii hinted in rather elliptical fashion at a violent solution for Russia's political stalemate. "[Aleksandr] Korzhakov's Chechnya [i.e., the launching by El'tsin of the 1994-1996 war]," he remarked, "was unquestionably thought up as a blood-letting [*krovopuskanie*] for the strengthening of power." "El'tsin, like Stalin," Pavlovskii continued his reflections, "is the chieftain [*vozhd'*] of a revolution. But in order for the Stalinist model in Russia to work, blood has to be shed. The regime must select a victim and then triumphantly destroy it." El'tsin, Pavlovskii commented ambiguously "did not want and could not do that."

Pavlovskii then proceeded to confide: "I previously studied Russian newspapers from the summer of 1914 containing the most detailed descriptions of German bestial acts. Although today it is more or less well known that the beginning of the war was a vegetarian one, people had not yet become beasts, there were no bestial acts at all. But then in the [Russian] civil war all those bestial acts of Russians against Russians made themselves known in reality. That is, all of that sat in people and was being projected by them onto the enemy. People wanted to do that which they ascribed to their enemy."¹⁰⁷ Could Pavlovskii have been contemplating in such passages the unleashing of a second "bestial" war against Chechnya?

Fomenting Hatred against Chechens

In early July of 1999, David Filipov, a journalist working for the *Boston Globe*, reported that on 5 July "helicopter gunships and artillery had launched raids against a large group of gunmen in Chechnya. The attack followed a pledge by Russia's top police official [Vladimir Rushailo] to bring order in the Caucasus region." Filipov also noted that "the dark theory held by many observers" in Moscow was that "the Kremlin plans to foment violence in the Caucasus to create an excuse for canceling upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections."¹⁰⁸ He added that a document justifying the declaring of a state of emergency in the Caucasus had been made public by "a prominent liberal [Duma] legislator," Yurii Shchekochikhin.

The 6 July issue of the Berezovskii-owned *Nezavisimaya gazeta* published the text of this document under the heading "Concerning the Position of Ethnic Russians in the Russian Republic."¹⁰⁹ "According to data from various sources over the past years (from 1991 to 1999)," the report maintained, "on the

¹⁰⁷ "Iz pervykh ust. Gleb Pavlovskii," *Novaya gazeta*, 9 July 1999.

¹⁰⁸ David Filipov, "Russia raids Chechnya as war tensions return," *Boston Globe*, 6 July 1999.

¹⁰⁹ "Dokument: O polozhenii russkikh v Chechenskoii Respublike," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 July 1999.

territory of Chechnya there have been killed (not counting those who perished during military actions) more than 21,000 [ethnic] Russians, more than 100,000 apartments and homes have been seized which belonged to the 'non-titular' inhabitants of Chechnya (including the Ingush) and more than 46,000 persons have been turned into slaves or used in forced labor... Only during the period from 1991 through December of 1994 (that is, before the introduction of federal troops), Chechnya was abandoned by more than 200,000 [ethnic] Russians." The report referred pointedly to "ethnic terror against Russians" and "the policy of genocide [against Russians] which has been conducted by the Chechen leaders since 1991." A more incendiary document, based on flagrantly exaggerated statistics, could scarcely be imagined. The purpose of this document appeared to be to help to provoke a second Russo-Chechen war.

Preparing a Second Chechen War

The leaks to Western journalists Blomgren and Chiesa in June of 1999 had concerned, it will be recalled, the use of state-sponsored terrorism to achieve the Family's political goals in Russia. No-one had seemingly worked harder to destabilize Russia at this juncture than the so-called "godfather" of the El'tsin Family, Boris Berezovskii. While the oligarch was presumably pleased to have two dangerous antagonists, Evgenii Primakov and Nikolai Bordyuzha, removed, and another deadly foe, Procurator General Skuratov, largely neutralized, he had failed in his most ambitious aim of having a protégé, Nikolai Aksenenko, made prime minister. Instead another serious rival of Berezovskii's, Anatolii Chubais, had succeeded in gaining El'tsin's approval of the candidacy of Sergei Stepashin. On the plus side, however, yet another apparent Berezovskii client, Vladimir Rushailo, had been made head of the MVD, replacing Stepashin.

Berezovskii seems to have understood as early as May of 1999 that Stepashin enjoyed only the most lukewarm approval on the part of El'tsin and even less than that on the part of El'tsin's powerful daughter, Tat'yana, with whom he, Berezovskii, was in regular contact.

"Berezovskii saw the world through the prism of his personal interests," financier George Soros, who had made the oligarch's acquaintance in 1996, has commented. "He had no difficulty in subordinating the fate of Russia to his own. He genuinely believed that he and the oligarchs had bought the government by paying for El'tsin's reelection [in 1996]... Berezovskii and El'tsin's Family were looking for a way to perpetuate the immunity they enjoyed under the El'tsin administration... Berezovskii's situation turned desperate when the scandal broke over the laundering of Russian illegal money in U.S. banks in 1999, for he realized that he could no longer find refuge in the West. One way or the other he had to find a successor to El'tsin who would protect him. That is when the plan to promote Putin's candidacy was hatched."¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ George Soros, *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), pp. 260-261.

Clandestine Meetings in Sotogrande

One locale where Berezovskii and Putin were reportedly able to get together in order to discuss issues of mutual concern was at the oligarch's exclusive beach resort in southern Spain. "Vladimir Putin," *La Razón*, a conservative Spanish newspaper, alleged in mid-June of 2000, "made frequent visits [in 1999] to Boris Berezovskii's villa on the Spanish coast, slipping into Spain discreetly and without a visa... Putin's visits were discovered accidentally by Spanish police who were spying on a suspected Russian mafia boss who lived next door... The visits stopped after Putin was appointed prime minister in August..."¹¹¹ The article in *La Razón* appeared on the occasion of Putin's first official visit to Spain. A piece published in *The Times* of London alleged: "The [Spanish] police discovered that Mr. Putin had flown to Gibraltar and sailed into Spain on a private yacht without revealing his presence on Spanish soil, as the law requires. Their investigations revealed that Mr. Putin had visited the resort up to five times during the year."¹¹²

Berezovskii has confirmed that he met abroad with Putin in 1999 but has asserted that the two met in Biarritz in southeastern France, where Putin was supposedly on vacation. "El'tsin was concerned with the problem of choosing a successor," Berezovskii recalled, "I spoke on that theme with Tat'yana, Voloshin and Yumashev... I thought that the successor to Boris could be Putin... In the summer of 1999, I saw Volodya [Putin] in Biarritz. We argued for a long time, and I came to a decision. I spoke with El'tsin about Volodya's candidacy, but I knew that the way would be open only if Yumashev carried out the assigned task."¹¹³ On another occasion, Berezovskii claimed that "the man he met in Biarritz, at the beginning of August, was... Vladimir Putin in person, several days before his nomination to the post of prime minister."¹¹⁴

Given Putin's close ties at this time to both Tat'yana D'yachenko and Aleksandr Voloshin, he presumably did not stand in need of Berezovskii's intercession with the leading luminaries of the El'tsin Family. Having already de facto been provisionally chosen as El'tsin's successor by these individuals, what Putin did need to accomplish during his alleged meetings abroad with Berezovskii was to ensure that the oligarch would not use the potent weapon of his television station ORT against him in the coming months. In addition, the inner circle of the Family strongly required Berezovskii's participation, because they needed his multiple and extensive connections in the North Caucasus, especially with extremists among the Chechen separatists. Berezovskii, for his part, was at this juncture prepared to accept Putin as

¹¹¹ For the *La Razón* article, see "Los viajes secretos de Putin a Sotogrande," *La Razón*, 13 June 2000, pp. 16-17. For a summary of this article, see Anna Badkhen, "Tycoon's Villa Used as Putin's Getaway," *St. Petersburg Times*, sptimes.ru, 27 June 2000.

¹¹² Giles Tremlett, "President's secret holidays in Spain," *The Times*, 15 June 2000.

¹¹³ Carlo Bonini and Giuseppe D'Avanzo, "Putin, le bugie sul KGB," *La Repubblica*, 11 July 2001, posted in Russian translation ("Putin, lozh' o KGB") on Inosmi.ru, 13 July 2001.

¹¹⁴ François Bonnet, "Moscou aurait voulu et provoqué la guerre en Tchétchénie," *Le Monde*, 26 January 2000.

prime minister for the limited purpose of discrediting the Primakov/Luzhkov tandem which he feared and detested.

Berezovskii's statements to the press about his meetings abroad with Putin should be treated with caution. Beginning with the dismissal of Chernomyrdin in 1998, Berezovskii had developed the habit of making it sound as if he were in on certain things when he in fact was not. Also, Berezovskii's allegations were all made later, after he had broken with Putin and was working hard to discredit him in the eyes of Russians and the world.

The Kidnapping of General Shpigun

As has been noted, the brazen kidnapping of MVD General Gennadii Shpigun in March of 1999 at the 'Severnyi' Airport in Grozny served to push the Russian leadership in the direction of a new invasion of Chechnya. This was merely the latest in a series of gaudy kidnappings that had been occurring in Chechnya since the end of the first war in August of 1996. In early 2002, a pro-Kremlin website reported: "Today, 24 January, the director of the FSB, Nikolai Patrushev, announced that he possesses information about the participation of entrepreneur Boris Berezovskii in the financing of illegal armed formations and their leaders... It is also not excluded [Patrushev said] that Berezovskii had a relationship to the well-known kidnapping of the General of the MVD Shpigun..."¹¹⁵

There appears to be abundant evidence that Berezovskii had long been providing extremist elements among the Chechen separatists with millions of dollars in funds. Former MVD chairman and Russian deputy premier Anatolii Kulikov, subsequently an elected Duma deputy, told the weekly *Argumenty i fakty* in 2002: "I have received a great deal of evidence that Berezovskii was funding Chechen separatists. He did it under the flag of the Security Council, which had enormous powers under Boris El'tsin. The Security Council was headed by Ivan Rybkin and Boris Berezovskii at that time... On April 28, 1997, I was informed that Berezovskii's envoy Badri Patarkatsishvili had arrived at the Ingushetian airport of Sleptsovsk. He gave Shamil' Basaev \$10 million—in the presence of Ingushetian President Ruslan Aushev and Vice-president B[oris] Agapov... On [April 30]... I told [El'tsin] about Berezovskii's transfer of money to Basaev. In Moscow I wrote a letter to the Procurator General... Once I met Berezovskii... I asked him immediately why he had delivered money to the Chechen bandits. He was at a loss for words... Then I told him about Patarkatsishvili's visit to Sleptsovsk. He admitted that he had transferred some money to Chechnya, but that it was allegedly only \$1 million."¹¹⁶ In a subsequent statement, however, Berezovskii stipulated that "he gave \$2 million to Chechen leader Shamil' Basaev, but reiterated that

¹¹⁵ Aleksandr Orlov, "Imenno Berezovskii pridumal sistemu torgovli lyud'mi," *Strana.ru*, 25 January 2002.

¹¹⁶ "How Berezovsky Funded Separatists," *Argumenty i fakty*, 20 March 2002. English translation posted at *Ichkeria.org*, 21 March 2002.

both men were government officials at the time and the money was earmarked for reconstruction work."¹¹⁷

A former Chechen separatist activist Adam Beibulatov confirmed to the Russian government newspaper *Rossiiskaya gazeta*: "The ransoming of prisoners and the making of business on it began after the Khasavyurt Accords [of August 1996]. The basic 'service' in beginning this business belongs to Berezovskii... I personally knew Berezovskii, inasmuch as from the Chechen side I carried out the exchange of prisoners of war. At Berezovskii's word from places of imprisonment were released not only rebels but also criminals. There was an enormous financial fund to pay the ransoms... Berezovskii paid \$2.8 million for a well-known kidnapped man. In so doing, he neglected neither himself nor the kidnapped persons... Honestly speaking, for [Berezovskii] it was not so much business as a political game. He liked to have everything submitted to him and for that he needed a lot of power. The exchange of hostages afforded him enormous political dividends."¹¹⁸

Another intermediary, retired major Vyacheslav Izmailov, has recalled, "The author of these lines, beginning in 1996, was required to occupy himself with the freeing of hostages, together with the Commission of the President of Russia on Prisoners of War, Those Interned and Persons Disappeared without Trace, with the support and assistance of the General Procuracy and officers of the MVD and FSB of Russia... In March of 1998... with the final assistance of Berezovskii were liberated the heads of the FSB of Ingushetiya... No less than a million U.S. dollars was paid for the employees of the FSB Gribov and Lebedinskii, who had been kidnapped in 1997, and the money was transferred to the bandits precisely by officers of the FSB."¹¹⁹ In 2002, Berezovskii boasted that, using his contacts with the separatists, he had "freed sixty-four persons who were hostages [of the rebels]."¹²⁰

A number of Russian press commentators have emphasized that Berezovskii's contacts with and the paying of enormous ransoms to extremist elements among the separatists was fully known to and approved of by the Russian power ministries. "Vladimir Putin," journalist Valerii Yakov has written, "director of the FSB at the time, was friendly with Berezovskii then. Being what he was, Putin must have known about all (all!) the oligarch's contacts with the Chechens. These contacts did not worry the chekist Putin, the policeman Rushailo, or prime minister Stepashin back then. The businessman is an enemy now, and those contacts are labeled criminal..."¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Natalia Yefimova, "Berezovsky: I gave Cash to the Chechen rebels," *The Moscow Times*, 1 February 2002.

¹¹⁸ "Ispoved' smertnika o Basaevе, Maskhadovе i Berezovskom," *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 5 July 2002.

¹¹⁹ Vyacheslav Izmailov, "Den'gi banditam platil ne tol'ko Berezovskii," *Novaya gazeta*, 31 January 2002.

¹²⁰ "Boris Berezovskii svodit schety s prezidentom Putinyem," Deutsche Welle, posted in Russian translation on Insomi.ru, 1 February 2002.

¹²¹ Valerii Yakov, "The Regime Ducks the Question," *Novye izvestiya*, 7 March 2002. Translation in JRL, no. 6120, 7 March 2002.

As the moderate separatist leader of Chechnya, Aslan Maskhadov, put it to the late human rights activist Viktor Popkov in early 2001, "All of these ordered kidnappings of major bureaucrats—Vlasov, Shpigun—were a preparation for war!... I believe that the war in Dagestan was provoked by Moscow and the leadership of Russia... It was a direct act of collusion, collusion of the El'tsin administration, of the financial oligarchy, of Berezovskii, and of the military who shamefully lost that [first] war. Well, of course not without the participation of our near-sighted, radically inclined people. I do not deny it."¹²²

As for the specific instance of the kidnapping of General Shpigun, retired major Izmailov has observed: "[T]he organizer of the kidnapping [of Shpigun] was the late bandit Bakuev, who was connected with Arbi Baraev... All of the reasonably well-known bandits—Arbi Baraev, the Akhmadov brothers—always cited (again, through intermediaries) Bakuev as the 'owner' of Shpigun... The former leadership of the MVD [under Vladimir Rushailo] limited, if it did not reduce to nothing, the actions of the ethnic department of GUBOP [an elite unit of the regular police] to liberate General Shpigun... The fate of Shpigun did not interest the leadership of the MVD headed by Rushailo..."¹²³

The notorious Chechen wahhabi leader singled out by Izmailov, Arbi Baraev, was reported to have close ties to the Russian power ministries. Baraev "moved freely about the [Chechen] republic showing at federal checkpoints the documents of an officer of the Russian MVD."¹²⁴ "On the windshield of Baraev's vehicle," journalist Anna Politkovskaya noted, "there was a pass, regularly renewed, which stated that the driver was free 'to go everywhere'—the most cherished and respected pass in the Combined Group of [Russian] Forces."¹²⁵ Arbi Baraev also had reported shadowy ties both to the FSB and the GRU.¹²⁶

Why were both Berezovskii and the Russian special services engaged in de facto supporting the extremists? "To the extent that Berezovskii represented the interests of the El'tsin regime in Chechnya," the late Paul Klebnikov has written, "the Kremlin had been undermining the moderates, supporting the extremists financially and politically... At best, it was a misguided policy... The worst-case scenario is that the Berezovskii strategy with the Chechen

¹²² "Aslan Maskhadov: Ya pytalsya predotvratit' etu voinu," *Novaya gazeta*, 27 April 2001. See also Sophie Shihab, "Tchéchénie: un entretien avec Aslan Maskhadov," *Le Monde*, 17 September 1999.

¹²³ Vyacheslav Izmailov, "Kto pokhitil generala Shpiguna," *Novaya gazeta*, 18 March 2002.

¹²⁴ Sanobar Shermatova, "Glavnyi rabototorgovets," *Moskovskie novosti*, 29 October 2002.

¹²⁵ In *Novaya gazeta*, 28 June 2001. Politkovskaya was, of course, assassinated in Moscow in October 2006.

¹²⁶ Sanobar Shermatova, "Tainaya voina spetssluzhb," *Moskovskie novosti*, 8 August 2000.

warlords was a deliberate attempt to fan the flames of war."¹²⁷ "There are interviews given by Berezovskii that show that already from 1997 onward," French philosopher André Glucksmann—who visited Chechnya and Dagestan in the year 2000—has noted, "he foresaw the usefulness of a large-scale war in Chechnya for the 2000 election campaign."¹²⁸

Journalist Sophie Shihab of *Le Monde* has reported that in September 1999 a young French businessman close to Berezovskii contacted her newspaper over the telephone and said: "I will no longer have anything to do with him [Berezovskii]. He must think that in unleashing chaos he will be able to install his own man firmly in power. And in the process to seize new pieces of the Russian cake, including the Caspian. It is for that reason that he organized the invasion of Dagestan by the Chechens."¹²⁹

Transcripts Published of Berezovskii's Alleged Phone Conversations with Radical Separatist Leaders

During September of 1999, the Russian press published transcripts of a number of alleged phone conversations conducted by Berezovskii with Movladi Udugov, Kazbek Makhachev and other radical Chechen separatist leaders. Although the reported conversations took place in a kind of primitive code, it seemed to press commentators that Berezovskii had been negotiating a price for an incursion by the rebels into Dagestan.¹³⁰

Berezovskii heatedly denounced the published tapes as falsehoods and threatened to sue the newspaper *Moskovskii komsomolets*, one of the papers that had published the transcripts.¹³¹ He also assailed the NTV television channel, controlled by Luzhkov ally Vladimir Gusinskii, for broadcasting tapes on 15 September of "alleged phone conversations between Berezovskii and [extremist] Chechen leaders."¹³² Journalist Aleksandr Khinshtein has reported: "At the present moment in FAPSI [roughly the Russian equivalent of the US NSA] there is taking place a harsh internal investigation—concerning the leaking of tapes containing eavesdropping on confidential conversations. Supposedly a loss of eight cassettes has been discovered."¹³³

On 22 September, Khinshtein published a detailed analysis of Berezovskii's phone conversations with radical Chechen leaders. "[Berezovskii] is trying hard," he wrote, "to clear himself of accusations of a deal with the Chechens.

¹²⁷ Paul Klebnikov, *Godfather of the Kremlin: Boris Berezovsky and the Looting of Russia* (New York: Harcourt, 2000), pp. 300-302. Klebnikov, as is well known, was gunned down in Moscow on 9 July 2004.

¹²⁸ Galina Ackerman, "Conversation with André Glucksmann," JRL, no. 4397, 12 July 2000.

¹²⁹ Sophie Shihab, "Qui a commis les attentats de 1999," *Le Monde*, 16 November 2002.

¹³⁰ See: "BAB-Boeviki: 'Berezovskii slushaet,'" MK.ru, 14 September 1999; Sergei Mikhalych, "Obstoyatel'tva. Kavkazskii torg. Chtoby poluchit' Nobelevskuyu premiyu mira, Berezovskii oplatil voinu?" *Novaya gazeta*, 20 September 1999; and Mikhail Shevelev, "Samizdat. Pravdu ne skroesh'," *Moskovskie novosti*, 28 September 1999.

¹³¹ Evgenii Krutikov, "Chechnya teryaet pokrovitelei," *Izvestiya*, 17 September 1999.

¹³² Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Foreign Media Note*, 16 September 1999.

¹³³ Aleksandr Khinshtein, "Otkroveniia bol'nogo cheloveka," MK.ru, 17 September 1999.

He says that he did not conduct any telephone conversations with Udugov and Makhashev, that all of this is a provocation organized by *Moskovskii komsomolets* at the command of Luzhkov..."¹³⁴

"In the middle of June [1999]," Khinshtein went on, "Movladi Udugov conducted telephone negotiations with Berezovskii and exchanged fax communications with him. Udugov counted on receiving a large sum of money from the oligarch... On the 30th of July, an authorized representative of Berezovskii named Badri [Patarkatashvili] met with Kazbek Makhashev in Nal'chik [Kabardino-Balkariya]. The Chechens hoped that Boris Abramovich would provide them with material support. However that did not happen. Badri brought with him only a financial document for the receipt of a much smaller sum (something like \$150,000). The next day an agitated Udugov telephoned Boris Abramovich [the text of the alleged wiretap is then provided]..."

"What did we understand from this conversation?," Khinshtein asked. He then listed his conclusions: "1) Boris Abramovich had promised to provide the Chechens with \$2.5 million dollars. Or at least \$700,000-\$800,000. 2) Boris Abramovich did not carry out his promise... 3) Boris Abramovich did not kill hope. 'The theme is not closed,' he soothed [his interlocutor]... You will ask: Why did he need to sponsor the Chechens?... [Because] Boris Abramovich is not interested in stability. Boris Abramovich needs Emergency Rule..."

Aleksandr Gol'dfarb Comes to Berezovskii's Defense

In 2009, a close ally of Berezovskii, a resident of the United States, Aleksandr Gol'dfarb, in effect admitted what the oligarch had earlier heatedly denied: "In two words," Gol'dfarb wrote, "in the spring of 1999, on the threshold of the autumn elections, there was achieved a secret agreement [*dogovorennost'*] between Basaev and Udugov, on the one hand, and the Kremlin top leadership, on the other, for a short victorious (for Russia) war in the Caucasus." Gol'dfarb's source for this information was clearly Berezovskii.

And Gol'dfarb's account then continued: "Udugov to achieve this end even flew to Moscow. It was proposed that in response to the provocations of the wahhabis in Dagestan Russia would begin limited military actions which would be crowned by the return of the Upper Terek [*Nadterechnyi*] district of Chechnya. As a result, the Maskhadov regime in Grozny would fall, and his place would be taken by Basaev and Udugov." Following these developments, the account went on, Basaev and Udugov "would repudiate the idea of separatism and remain within the Russian Federation in exchange for full freedom of action and the de facto introduction of the Sharia..." Berezovskii, Gol'dfarb frankly admitted, "knew about this plan and even discussed it with Udugov and the then premier Stepashin, but he opposed it. The main

¹³⁴ Aleksandr Khinshtein, "Berezovaya kasha," MK.ru, 22 September 1999.

adherents of the plan were Stepashin and Putin, who, in the capacity of secretary of the Security Council answered at that time for Chechnya."¹³⁵

Andrei Piontkovskii Skewers Two Berezovskii Apologists

In the year 2000 and then, again, in 2009, a leading liberal Russian political analyst, Andrei Piontkovskii, a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, sought to make short work of two outspoken Berezovskii apologists. In the year 2000 article, entitled "The Doomed City," Piontkovskii assailed an article that had been written by the chief editor of the Berezovskii-owned *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, Vitalii Tret'yakov, who had attempted in a piece published on 12 October 1999, to defend a plan to ignite a new war in Chechnya.¹³⁶ "It is perfectly clear," Tret'yakov had been prepared to admit, "that the Chechens were lured into Dagestan and allowed to get involved there so as to have a legal pretext to restore federal authority in the republic and begin the active phase of the fight against terrorists gathered in Chechnya. This was clearly an operation planned by the Russian secret services (don't confuse it with the [September] apartment block bombings) and was approved at the very top."¹³⁷

Tret'yakov's admissions served as a source of scandal for Piontkovskii: "Let's look at this text," he wrote, "invaluable for historians, psychiatrists and lawyers in the way it opens a little window onto the sickly conscience of Russia's 'political elite.'" "Tret'yakov," Piontkovskii went on, "doesn't clothe his words in journalistic speculation. He writes about the secret services organizing Shamil Basaev's raid as indisputable fact, something obvious to well-informed readers... Thus the 'Russian political elite' takes it as a fact that Basaev's attack, which led to the deaths of hundreds of Russian soldiers and Dagestani civilians and left dozens of villages in ruins, was approved by the secret services and 'approved at the very top.'" "But if this is the case," Piontkovskii summed up his argument, "then in what way are the president and prime minister, who approved the operation, the oligarch who actively participated in it, and the editor who proudly wrote about it any different [from] the international murderers Basaev and Khattab?"

Aleksandr Gol'dfarb's 2009 "revelations" elicited a similar venomous reaction from Piontkovskii: "Gol'dfarb," he began, "clumsily trying to shield Berezovskii, as Tret'yakov did before him, talks about too much... Through the lips of Gol'dfarb, Berezovskii admits, finally, that about which ten years ago Tret'yakov innocently let us know. On the threshold of the elections, Stepashin, Putin and Berezovskii discussed with the international terrorist Basaev a plan for a campaign by the latter into Dagestan. That plan was carried out and, as a result, there perished hundreds of Russian soldiers and

¹³⁵ Aleksandr Gol'dfarb, "Teoriya i praktika bol'shogo vzryva," grani.ru, 29 September 2009. Gol'dfarb elaborated upon this version in two subsequent articles: "Proklyatie Frankenshteina," grani.ru, 9 October 2009 and "Latynina o teraktakh: vse ne tak," grani.ru, 5 April 2010.

¹³⁶ Andrei Piontkovsky, "The Doomed City," *The Russia Journal*, 3-9 April 2000.

¹³⁷ Vitalii Tret'yakov, "Goniteli sem'i i annibaly 'Otechestva,'" *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 12 October 1999.

hundreds of peaceful Dagestanis and a bloodbath was unleashed in which tens of thousands of people have perished... This was a crime no less large-scale and repugnant than the bombings of the apartment houses which followed after [in September], no matter who committed them."¹³⁸

Candid Admissions by Former Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin

During the period separating his ouster as prime minister in August of 1999 and the election of Putin as Russian president in March of 2000, the former *silovik* Sergei Stepashin made a number of striking admissions concerning the planning of the top Russian leadership to launch a new war in Chechnya. One motive behind his granting of a series of candid interviews could have been irritation that Putin and Russian military "hawks," led by the chief of the Russian General Staff, Anatolii Kvashnin, had in September brusquely jettisoned his original plan to take only the northern tier of Chechnya (up to the Terek River) deciding instead to occupy the entire republic.

In a February 2000 interview with the German periodical *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Stepashin made the following admissions:

Journalist: When did the preparations for the second war begin?

Stepashin: In March 1999 after the abduction of General Shpigun it became clear to us that Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov was not capable of fighting terrorism independently... We decided to close the border, create a sanitary cordon around Chechnya—like the Berlin wall. We bolstered the MVD divisions in the border regions.

Journalist: But an invasion of Chechnya was not on the table?

Stepashin: Yes [it was]. *In the summer, in July [1999], we decided to seize territory [in Chechnya] north of the Terek.* [My italics] Since Tsarist times this was Russian territory, populated mostly by Cossacks... We hoped that the [Slavic] population that had abandoned this territory would return. We planned to use this territory to stage special operations into Chechnya to capture Basaev and other gang leaders. The Terek was supposed to become a natural frontier.

Journalist: Does this mean that Russian forces would have entered Chechnya even if there had been no attack on Dagestan and no acts of terrorism in Moscow?

Stepashin: Yes.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Andrei Piontkovskii, "Taina zachatiya," grani.ru, 2 October 2009. An attempt was made by the regime to charge Piontkovskii with political "extremism" in mid-2007. See: Alan Cullison, "Kremlin Cracks Down on Party of Putin Critic," *Wall Street Journal*, 1 June 2007.

¹³⁹ "The Generals Wanted a Revanche," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 21 February 2000. English translation in: Miriam Lansky, *War of the Russian Succession: Russia and Chechnya, 1996-1999*, vol. 1, pp. 244-245. (Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Boston University, 2003).

It should be underscored here that Stepashin candidly admitted that an invasion of Chechnya had been planned and authorized by himself, and, implicitly, by Vladimir Putin and other Russian *siloviki*, presumably with President El'tsin's consent, *before* the incursions by rebels into Dagestan in August and September of 1999 had occurred. This strikes one as an extraordinarily significant admission. (It should also be noted that Stepashin was probably not being entirely candid about March 1999 representing the point of inception of plans for an invasion. He, Putin and other *siloviki* had likely discussed such plans before then.)

Stepashin made roughly the same admissions to Michael Gordon of *The New York Times* in an interview published in the newspaper's 1 February 2000 issue. "Work on the plan [of an invasion]," Gordon summed up Stepashin's revelations "began in March [1999] when Mr. Stepashin was interior minister and continued after he was appointed prime minister in May. The goals were modest: sealing Chechnya's frontiers and establishing a buffer around the republic." "In July [1999]," Gordon continued, "the plan was broadened to include the seizure of the top third of Chechnya, down to the Terek River... Commando raids would be conducted throughout Chechnya to ferret out rebel leaders. But there would not be any ground operations south of the river and certainly no heavy street fighting in Grozny. 'The idea was to conduct special operations to destroy the bandits, employing the kind of tactics the Israelis use,' Mr. Stepashin recalled. It was not just a planning exercise, he said, but an actual decision on strategy."¹⁴⁰

In an earlier interview, published in September 1999, Stepashin had addressed the question of Berezovskii's negotiations with radical Chechen leaders (i.e., opponents of separatist president Aslan Maskhadov), such as the ideologue Movladi Udugov, in the run-up to the August incursion into Dagestan. What, the journalist asked Stepashin, did he think of the publication in the Russian press of alleged wiretaps of conversations between Berezovskii and the extremists?

Stepashin: By their voices they are very similar [i.e., to the voices of Berezovskii, Udugov and other Chechen radical leaders]. *In principle such negotiations were possible, and, as far as I know, they were conducted.* [My italics] I am aware of Berezovskii's ideology on that account: when he was executive secretary of the CIS he and I discussed these themes more than once. His ideology was this: everything can be bought. It is senseless to make war with Chechnya because we are a weak state. In Berezovskii's opinion it was necessary to buy the Chechens. After all he wanted to construct in Chechnya a filial of [his car company] Avtovaz...¹⁴¹

The journalist then asked Stepashin whether Berezovskii's negotiations with the radical Chechen leaders had been aimed at igniting a conflict "so that the Kremlin's candidate, Vladimir Putin, could demonstratively extinguish the conflict"? In response, Stepashin advanced an intriguing alternative version: "As for the version of a conspiracy, [one needs to realize that] having

¹⁴⁰ Michal R. Gordon, "A Look at how the Kremlin Slid into the Chechen War," *nytimes.com*, 1 February 2000.

¹⁴¹ Mark Deich, "Portret bez intrigi," *MK.ru*, 18 September 1999.

provoked a war, it is difficult in that region to quickly gain a victory... It is another matter [altogether] that *certain agreements were possible, in order to destabilize the situation and to bring it under Emergency Rule.* [My italics] Now that is a version."

What Stepashin appeared to be saying here was that Berezovskii and his allies (including Stepashin himself) were seeking at the time to provoke a limited conflict, one which would permit the El'tsin regime to declare Emergency Rule in Russia and thus to postpone the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for December 1999 and March 2000. Once again, this strikes one as a key admission.

During an August 2009 interview with Evgeniya Al'bats, Berezovskii drew a similar picture to that provided by Stepashin but sought to shift the onus for igniting the conflict onto the *siloviki* and Boris El'tsin:

Al'bats: The raid of Basaev into Dagestan and as a result the second Chechen war: some Russian mass media have written that it was you who financed the operation of Basaev?

Berezovskii: That was an absolutely professional operation of the FSB, without any doubts. Stepashin at the time was prime minister, and I related to him my conversation with a number of Chechen leaders, who were planning an action in August of 1999. To my surprise, Stepashin said: 'Don't get upset. We know everything.'

Al'bats: That is, the operation 'Successor' had already unfolded, the scenario of a short victorious war?

Berezovskii: Absolutely.

Al'bats: Did the *chekisty* carry out the operation in Dagestan with the permission of the Kremlin?

Berezovskii: They 100% received permission from the Kremlin.

Al'bats: Did El'tsin know about it?

Berezovskii: He knew it 100%! Of course!¹⁴²

In my view, Berezovskii was here telling a portion of the truth about the direct involvement of Russian *siloviki* in preparing the August incursion into Dagestan but, as was his custom, he was also seeking to misinform his interlocutor concerning his own weighty contribution to the operation.

¹⁴² Evgeniya Al'bats, "V noyabre 2000 goda Boris Berezovskii, togda odin iz samykh vliyatel'nykh lyudei strany, govoril 'Putin—eto tot chelovek pri kotorom ya ne mogu zhit'," *newtimes.ru*, 17 August 2009.

Akhmed Zakaev on the Key Role of Isa Umarov

In a 2009 interview, a Chechen journalist, Musa Muradov, who writes for the newspaper *Kommersant*, asked former Chechen separatist foreign minister Akhmed Zakaev, who was living in London, who had been the principal agent of the FSB among the rebels that assaulted Dagestan in August 1999. Was it, he asked, Movladi Udugov? "No," Zakaev replied, "I think it is another person—Isa Umarov, i.e., the older brother or step-brother, I don't know which, of Movladi Udugov. That Umarov, everyone knows, was the organizer and inspirer of the assault on Dagestan in August 1999, after which the second war began. Everyone knows that the assault was organized precisely by him. But the strange thing is that not one Russian force structure or special service has ever made any mention of Isa Umarov... Today he lives peacefully in Istanbul."¹⁴³

Voloshin's Intervention—A Meeting in the South of France

On the day following the initial incursion of rebel forces into the Dagestani highlands in early August of 1999, the investigative weekly *Versiya* published a report claiming that the head of the Russian presidential administration, Aleksandr Voloshin, had met secretly with the most wanted man in Russia, Shamil' Basaev, through the good offices of a retired officer in the GRU, Anton Surikov, at a villa belonging to international arms merchant Adnan Khashoggi located between Nice and Monaco.¹⁴⁴ A source in French intelligence was credited by *Versiya* with supplying this information. The article stirred major interest in the Russian media, but at the time documentary confirmation was lacking.

By July of 2000, *Versiya*, in an effort of persistent journalistic digging, had unearthed what it regarded as the full story of what had occurred, with an acknowledged assist from French and Israeli intelligence. "The meeting [of Voloshin and Basaev]," the weekly related, "which supposedly took place at the dacha of the international arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi in the small town of Beaulieu near Nice, occurred on 4 July 1999. Sources in the French special services had earlier communicated that information, in particular a certain professor of political science, a specialist in issues of Russian defense, security and organized crime. He is well known for his contract work for French government establishments, including French counter-intelligence."¹⁴⁵

The investigative weekly then went on to summarize what it had learned from French and Israeli intelligence, as well as from its own journalistic digging: "A luxurious villa in the French city of Beaulieu, located between Nice and the principality of Monaco. This villa, according to the French special services, belongs to the international arms dealer Adnan Khashoggi. He is an

¹⁴³ Musa Muradov, "Segodnya Moskva nakhoditsya pod Chechnei, *Kommersant-Vlast'*, no. 42, 26 October 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Andrei Batumskii, "Sgovor," *Versiya*, 3 August 1999.

¹⁴⁵ Petr Pryanishnikov, "Voloshin i Basaev na lazurnom beregu: foto na pamyat'," *Versiya*, 4 July 2000.

Arab from Saudi Arabia, a billionaire with a complicated reputation. According to the French special services, and also to the French press, in June of 1999 there took up residence at the villa a Venezuelan banker named Alfonso Davidovich. In the Latin American press, he is said to be responsible for laundering the funds of the Columbian left insurrection organization FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), which carries out an armed struggle with the official authorities, supported by the narcotics business.”

“It soon emerged,” *Versiya* continued, “that a very frequent visitor to Davidovich was a certain French businessman of Israeli-Soviet origin, a native of Sukhumi [Abkhaziya], 53-year-old Yakov Kosman. Soon Kosman brought with him six persons who arrived via Austria carrying Turkish passports. In one of the passports the French [authorities] identified a certain Tsveiba, who is accused by the Tbilisi authorities of having committed genocide during the Georgia-Abkhaz conflict.” All of the visitors settled into the villa for a three weeks’ stay.

“Soon,” the account continued, “the special services succeeded in establishing that Kosman and Tsveiba went to the Nice airport, where they met two men who had arrived from Paris. Judging from their documents, one of those who arrived was Sultan Sosnaliev, who in the years of the Georgian-Abkhaz war served as the minister of defense of Abkhaziya.¹⁴⁶ Second there emerged from the airport one more native of Sukhumi—Anton Surikov. According to rumors, during the years of the war in Abkhaziya, he was subordinated to Sosnaliev and was responsible for questions of the organization of sabotage and was friendly with field commander Shamil’ Basaev, who at that time headed the Chechen battalion.”

The next arrival came by sea: “According to the precise information of the French and the Israelis, on 3 July at the port of Beaulieu a private English yacht ‘Magiya’ [Magic] arrived from Malta. From it to the shore came two passengers. If one is to believe the passport information, one of the ‘Englishmen’ was a certain Turk, in the past an advisor to the Islamicist premier of Turkey, [Necmettin] Erbakan, a rather influential figure in the wahhabi circles of Turkey, the Middle East and the Caucasus.¹⁴⁷ From sources in the Russian special services we learned that Mekhmet is also a close friend of the not unknown Khattab.”

“The second person,” the account went on, “to the surprise of the intelligence officers, was the Chechen field commander Shamil’ Basaev. The French were surprised and intensified their observation. And not in vain. On the fourth of July, late in the evening, to the Nice Airport on a private plane belonging to one of the Russian oil companies there arrived a man—balding and with a small beard and a biting look who was externally similar to the head of the Kremlin administration. He was in a conservative suit, carrying a briefcase and without any guard. He was met by the same Abkhazians and by Surikov. All of them sat in a Rolls Royce and sped off to the villa at Beaulieu.”

¹⁴⁶ On Sosnaliev as Abkhaziya’s defense minister, see *RFE-RL Newswire*, 2 November 1993.

¹⁴⁷ On Erbakan, see Shireen T. Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p. 365.

"All night long at the villa," the recitation concluded, "something was taking place. The watchfulness of the guard at the villa was elevated and a strong magnetic ray spread out onto the territory around it so that mobile telephones in a radius of several meters did not work. In the morning, the same Rolls Royce sped to the airport, and the man similar to Voloshin flew to Moscow. In a day's time all of the villa's residents had left... By accident or not, but after a time, in August, there occurred the incursion of the band of Shamil' Basaev into Dagestan."

Those who set up this meeting, journalist Boris Kagarlitskii, who has made a study of this episode has noted, made one key mistake: "The security was so thorough that people in the surroundings started to have problems with their cellular phones. But the members of the meeting did not know about one of the details of the security system. It blocked the hearing on the outside, but it provided perfect hearing from the inside."¹⁴⁸ French intelligence was able to listen in on everything that transpired at the secret meeting.

It seems clear, to sum up, that an extremely complex secret operation had been mounted on French soil in order to bring the two "principals," Voloshin and Basaev, together. The "Sukhumi" or "Abkhaz" connection was obviously critical here. Many of the participants in the meeting (including Basaev and Surikov) had been well acquainted and had fought on the same side during the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in the early 1990's.

"During the course of the Abkhaz war," the weekly *Profil'* reported in November 2000, "Basaev carried out not a few tasks which, as they maintained at the time in Tbilisi, were posed de facto by the Russian General Staff... In Abkhaziya, almost not leaving there, was present the then deputy minister of defense of Russia, Colonel General Georgii Kondrat'ev... [H]e frequently visited the units of the Abkhaz army and the Chechen battalions. Russian intelligence officers... admitted that they had occasion to carry out 'joint work' with the people of Basaev."¹⁴⁹ A retired officer in the Russian special forces maintains: "Shamil' Basaev still during the time of the Abkhaz-Georgian war had close contacts with the GRU. In any case, his battalion of spetsnaz were prepared in heavy weaponry and military equipment by officers of the 345th paratroop regiment, then based in Abkhaziya, and in tactics and mine-sabotage and other special disciplines by specialists of the GRU. As is now understood, we know how to prepare people."¹⁵⁰

In the early 1990's, Anton Surikov, then a lieutenant colonel with the GRU, using the pseudonym "Mansur," commanded a detachment of special forces in Abkhaziya. "I indeed met with Basaev more than once," he told the web-site Stringer, "I am certain that he did a great deal for the victory of Abkhaziya in the post of deputy defense minister."¹⁵¹ Journalist Boris

¹⁴⁸ Boris Kagarlitskii, "S terroristami ne razgovarivaem. No pomogaem?" *Novaya gazeta*, 24 January 2000. English translation in JRL, no. 4083, 1 February 2000.

¹⁴⁹ Vladimir Urban et al., "Glavnyi geroi. Vnimanie, snimayu," *Profil'*, 27 November 2000.

¹⁵⁰ Sergei Kozlov et al., *Spetsnaz GRU* (Moscow: Russkaya Panorama, 2000), pp. 554-555.

¹⁵¹ Maksim Kalashnikov, "Chelovek, kotoryi verboval Basaeva," Stringer-news.com, 10 July 2002. Stringer contends that it is likely that Basaev was officially recruited by the

Kagarlitskii has reported that Surikov traveled from Moscow to Paris on 23 June 1999 on an Aeroflot flight and returned back from Nice on 21 July, a month later.¹⁵² Kagarlitskii also noted: "During Primakov's time, Surikov worked on the staff of the government of the Russian Federation. Despite this fact, he also developed regular work relations with Voloshin's people." It seems therefore quite likely that Surikov and Voloshin were personally acquainted.

What did the two principals, Voloshin and Basaev, have to talk about? "Voloshin," Kagarlitskii writes, "was concerned about the situation in Russia and the succession of power problem. Luzhkov seemed to be a threat, and his alliance with Primakov was already a decided matter. They had to be stopped, and there was only one way to stop them. The political situation and the rules of the game had to be completely changed. In order to do this a conflict with an external enemy was needed." And what did Basaev want? "Basaev," Kagarlitskii continues, "was interested in power in Chechnya, not Russia. With the regular development of events the influence of the legal president, Maskhadov, was growing. A small war or crisis would change it... But the real war had to remain small, otherwise Chechnya would need something like a real and big army, and Maskhadov would be in charge of it. In other words, a small war, a border conflict, a big performance with fireworks... They generally agreed on the plan... Months after maneuvers, marches and countermarches, attacks and special operations, both sides will announce themselves as the winners. The Russians triumphantly get rid of Chechens on their territory, and Chechens will not let the enemy in the middle of Chechnya, and they will sign a declaration of peace. Basaev will be rewarded for his merits."

French Intelligence Confirms Kagarlitskii's Account

I need to report here that a representative of one of the French intelligence organizations, whose identity is known to me, subsequently confirmed to an experienced Western academic that French intelligence does indeed possess evidence that coincides roughly with what Boris Kagarlitskii wrote.

Even a small-scale war is, of course, not cheap. In March of 2002 Interfax reported that, through his long-time business partner Badri Patarkatashvili, Berezovskii had "supplied Chechen figures Kazbek Makhashev and Movladi Udugov with money to purchase the raid against Dagestan. According to witnesses, Berezovskii contributed 30 million rubles for the purpose."¹⁵³ This

GRU during the period August-October 1992. Surikov, it should be noted, died in November 2009: "Skonchalsya Anton Surikov, postoyannyi avtor i chlen redaktsionnogo soveta FORUMa,"forum.msk.ru, 24 November 2009.

¹⁵² Boris Kagarlitskii, "S terroristami ne razgovarivaem. No pomogaem?" *Novaya gazeta*, 24 January 2000. English translation in JRL, no. 4083, 1 February 2000. As Kagarlitskii pointed out, unexpected developments—such as the fierce resistance of the Dagestani populace to the invaders and the desire of Russian military "hawks" to re-ignite a war with Chechnya—essentially derailed the original plan.

¹⁵³ "Berezovsky Sponsored Dagestan Raid, Top Policeman's Abduction—Prosecutors," Interfax, 5 March 2002. A well-known journalist for RFE-RL, Andrei Babitskii, who

payment, amounting to more than \$1 million, if it occurred, may have been only one of several intended to underwrite a "short victorious war" in Dagestan.

Facilitating the Invasion

In the two years, and especially in the several months leading up to the incursion of the Basaev-Khattab forces into Dagestan in early August of 1999, there occurred a number of warnings. In October of 1999, Nikolai Kovalev, Putin's predecessor as director of the FSB (he was removed from his post in July 1998) recalled: "As for Dagestan, we [i.e., the FSB] repeatedly wrote in our analytical reports to the president and the government concerning the plans of the rebels, about how events would develop in Dagestan. The scenario was known to us—the entry of an armed group into one or another village, its seizure, then answering artillery fire and the use of aviation [by the federal forces], and an attempt by the bandits to draw the population... onto their side... In connection with the plans of the bandits, appropriate instructions were given to the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It is another question how those instructions were carried out..."¹⁵⁴

"That the rebels would be coming into Dagestan," the deputy minister of internal affairs of Dagestan, Major General Magomed Omarov, recalled in mid-2003, "was known by everyone several months before the events. That there would be a war in August was spoken of as early as the spring [of 1999]—beginning with operational workers from the power structures and ending with women at the bazaars." "The information, naturally, was passed on to the center," he remembered, "but why the necessary reaction did not take place is a question not to be addressed to me."¹⁵⁵

Omarov also noted that "three months [before the incursions] the troops were withdrawn from the Dagestan-Chechen border, troops which had stood there for a long time." "There are many other questions," Omarov added, "the main one of which is: why were the rebels let in without hindrance and why were they allowed to leave freely." Retired army colonel Viktor Baranets reported in September 1999 that, "The administration of the FSB of Dagestan had over the course of the past three years more than 2,000 times informed Moscow about the growing activity of Chechen emissaries in the republic."¹⁵⁶

This information has been confirmed by a number of other sources: "Operational information came to the FSB, the MVD, and to the government of the republic as early as February 1999," one press report affirmed,

frequently visited Chechnya during this period and was acquainted with a number of leading separatists, has written that he can confirm that Berezovskii did indeed speak by telephone with both Basaev and Movladi Udugov at this juncture. See Andrei Babitskii, "Na voine," hro.org, 2 March 2004.

¹⁵⁴ Elena Nikolaeva, "Nikolai Kovalev: Rabotayu tol'ko na gosudarstvo," MK.ru, 2 October 1999.

¹⁵⁵ Bakhtiyar Akhmedkhanov, "Voyna po obe storony gora," Vremyamn.ru, 1 August 2003.

¹⁵⁶ Viktor Baranets, "Udar," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 24 September 1999, pp. 4-5.

"Alarming reports were sent to Moscow, but no measures were taken. Still in July 1999 in Botlikh [in the Dagestani highlands] the local police were confused as to why they were removing units of a brigade of internal troops of the MVD of Russia based in Dagestan."¹⁵⁷ This central question was also of keen interest to Colonel General Vyacheslav Ovchinnikov, commander of the MVD internal troops of Russia: "[A]lready after the attack on Tsumadinskii District [in August 1999]," he has recalled, "I reported the situation to [MVD chairman Rushailo] and reminded him: 'Remember what we spoke about? Why did they remove a battalion of the Ministry of Internal Affairs from Botlikh? If it had been there, no-one would have attacked either Tsumadinskii or Botlikhskii District.'"¹⁵⁸

Retired colonel Baranets, citing the text of a "confidential document," reports that, on 5-6 June 1999, control over a section of the border 14 kilometers long in Tsumadinskii District was transferred from the Russian Border-guards, an elite unit, to the Tsumadinskii branch of the regular MVD of Dagestan. "And to the incursion," he stressed, "there remained precisely sixty days."¹⁵⁹

The authors of the volume *Spetsnaz GRU* have recalled: "The incursion of Basaev and Khattab was observed by intelligence officers of the special forces carrying out a task in that district. However the leadership, having received this information from its intelligence organ, ordered them not to enter into battle and not to hinder the movement of the rebels..."¹⁶⁰ Florian Hassel, Moscow correspondent for the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, has reported meeting, in October 1999, five Dagestani policemen who had briefly fought Basaev's troops in the mountains. "'Basaev's attack on Dagestan was apparently organized in Moscow,' said one policeman, Elgar, who watched the Chechens retreat from the village of Botlikh on September 11. 'Basaev and his people went back comfortably in broad daylight with about 100 cars and trucks and many on foot. They used the main road to Chechnya, and were not fired at by our combat helicopters. We received express orders not to attack.'"¹⁶¹ This version of events was also confirmed to journalist Bakhtiyar Akhmedkhanov by a number of eyewitnesses living in the Avar Dagestani highlands.¹⁶²

The commander of a Russian special operations team in Dagestan told a correspondent for *Time* magazine that on one scorching August day in 1999, "he had Chechen warlord Shamil' Basaev in his sights... With a simple squeeze of his finger, [he] could take out Basaev... But [he] says that he received the following order over his walkie-talkie: 'Hold your fire.'" "We just watched Basaev's long column of trucks and jeeps withdraw from Dagestan back to Chechnya under cover provided by our own helicopters," the Russian

¹⁵⁷ Fatima Alieva, "Basaevskii plan zakhvata Dagestana," *Utro.ru*, 15 November 2002.

¹⁵⁸ Boris Karpov, *Vnutrennie voiska: Kavkazskii krest—2* (Moscow: "Delovoi ekspress," 2000), p. 47.

¹⁵⁹ Viktor Baranets, "Udar," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 24 September 1999, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶⁰ Kozlov et al., *Spetsnaz GRU*, p. 556.

¹⁶¹ Robin Munro, "Book Sees Kremlin's Hand in Second Chechen War," *The Moscow Times*, 18 September 2003, p. 3.

¹⁶² *Vremyamn.ru*, 1 August 2003.

officer recalled. "We could have wiped him out then and there, but the bosses in Moscow wanted him alive."¹⁶³

Exploding Karachaevo-Cherkesiya

One might have thought that exploding Dagestan, destabilizing North Osetiya, and massively ratcheting up tensions with separatist Chechnya would have been sufficient for the militant "hawks" of the El'tsin Family and their allies in the power ministries. But, as a kind of insurance policy, it was apparently also decided to shake up yet another North Caucasus republic, Karachaevo-Cherkesiya. Berezovskii seems to have helped pave the way; he announced in July of 1999 that he intended to run for a seat in the December Duma elections. He stressed at the time that this would provide him with immunity from prosecution.¹⁶⁴ Soon Berezovskii settled on running for seat from Karachaevo-Cherkesiya, a region in which he had apparently become something of a specialist. This occurred just as the republic was in process of being massively destabilized.

As journalist Aleksandr Khinshtein has observed: "Until the middle of last year, little Karachaevo-Cherkesiya was a model of peace and stability in the Caucasus... However in 1999 it nevertheless became necessary to hold [presidential] elections... Into the second round of elections there entered two: a major vodka business man, the mayor of Cherkessk, Derev, and the retired head of [Russian] ground troops, the half-Russian, half-Karachai Vladimir Semenov. And although Semenov gained a convincing victory (more than 55%) his opponents did not accept it... The local election commission did not accept the results of the election. Semenov had to appeal to the Supreme Court... Only a miracle at that time saved Karachaevo-Cherkesiya from a civil war. In a relatively short period of time a wave of terrorist acts struck the republic. The homes of Semenov's activists were burned down. An attempt was organized on the life of the general himself... The Supreme Court of Russia recognized Vladimir Semenov as the head of Karachaevo-Cherkesiya. Semenov took up his duties. True, at a steep cost. In exchange for Semenov they had to make Berezovskii a deputy of the State Duma... More and more often in the Karachaevo-Cherkess republic this version is heard: Berezovskii wants the republic to be turned into a hotbed of destabilization so that he can each time show his necessity."¹⁶⁵

The small republic of Karachaevo-Cherkesiya came even more under public scrutiny when it was announced that the individuals responsible for the terror bombings in Moscow and Volgodonsk in September 1999 had been ethnic Karachai. "Today," one commentator wrote, "we are trying to understand: why are all the accused in the terrible terrorist acts residents of Karachaevo-Cherkesiya, although the official version of the special services... has been

¹⁶³ Yuri Zarakhovich, "Profits of Doom," *Time Europe*, 6 October 2003.

¹⁶⁴ *Monitor*, 13 July 1999.

¹⁶⁵ Aleksandr Khinshtein, "V posteli s Berezovskim: Kuda vedet Karachaevo-Cherkesiyu ee deputat," *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 5 May 2000. For a detailed account of the charged developments in Karachaevo-Cherkesiya, see Yurii Kochergin and Leonid Krutakov, "Operatsiya 'vzorvani mir,'" *MK.ru*, 24 September 1999.

that it was the hand of Chechen terrorists?"¹⁶⁶ Another journalist pointed out in early 2000 that bombings in North Osetiya could likewise have been the work of Karachai terrorists: "On 17 June [1999] three apartment houses were blown up in a military city in Vladikavkaz. Chechens were suspected of organizing the blasts. But in the Karachaevo-Cherkesiya Republic they do not exclude that it was the work of their own 'eagles'."¹⁶⁷

Vladimir Putin Is Named Acting Prime Minister

Boris El'tsin has recalled in his memoirs: "On August 4 [1999], I met with Voloshin. I wanted to ask him when we would finally resolve the issue of appointing a new prime minister... There was one essential issue: Stepashin could not be a political leader in the parliamentary and presidential elections... Putin was the man of my hopes. He was the man I trusted, to whom I could entrust the country."¹⁶⁸

On the following morning, El'tsin continues, "I met with Putin. I explained the state of affairs. A fierce battle loomed ahead. There was an election campaign. It would not be easy to keep the entire country under control. The northern Caucasus was very troubled. Some political provocations were possible in Moscow... 'I've made a decision, Vladimir Vladimirovich, and I would like to offer you the post of prime minister,' I told Putin."¹⁶⁹

"'I will work wherever you assign me,' Putin replied with military terseness. 'And in the very highest post?' Putin hesitated. I sensed for the first time he truly realized what the conversation was about. 'I had not thought about that. I don't know if I am prepared for that,' said Putin."¹⁷⁰ (Of course, since Putin was already at this time aware that he had been provisionally chosen by the Family as El'tsin's successor, the actual conversation that occurred between El'tsin and him would presumably have proceeded somewhat differently.)

Over the weekend, El'tsin remembered, Stepashin's patron, Anatolii Chubais, made a last-ditch effort to derail the appointment: "It was only later I learned that Chubais had attacked the administration and especially Putin. Apparently, he believed that I was making a decision that would lead to disastrous consequences. First Chubais met with Putin and warned him that terrible blows were awaiting him in public politics... Putin told Chubais that he was sorry but that was the president's decision. On Sunday... he [Chubais] proposed that the inner circle meet with him: Voloshin, Yumashev, and Tan'ya."¹⁷¹ Chubais later admitted that he did in fact go all out to stop the appointment: "I considered," he said in an interview, "that Stepashin the

¹⁶⁶ Orkhan Dzhemal', "Geksogenovyi sled—3," *Novaya gazeta*, 13 January 2003. See also "Prestupleniya s 'chechenskimi sledom' chasto vedut v Karachaevo-Cherkesiyu," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 17 December 2002.

¹⁶⁷ Dmitrii Nikol'skii, "Vzryvy v Moskve," *Sovershenno sekretno*, no. 4, April 2000, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶⁸ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, p. 329.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-331.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

candidate had greater chances [to be elected] than did Putin the candidate. I fought for my point of view to the end. Right up until that moment [on 9 August] when El'tsin informed Stepashin of his removal."¹⁷²

On the day that he announced Putin's appointment as acting premier, El'tsin also suggested strongly that he saw Putin as his political successor: "I am certain of him," El'tsin said. "But I want everyone who will come to the precincts in July of 2000 to cast their vote to be just as sure. I think that he has enough time to manifest himself."¹⁷³ On the same day, Putin, acting on El'tsin's orders, chaired a meeting of the Security Council.¹⁷⁴ In his memoirs, El'tsin writes: "Putin turned to me and requested absolute power to conduct the needed military operation and coordinate all power structures. I supported him without hesitation."¹⁷⁵ In his so-called autobiography, Putin conceded that he had "to a large degree" taken responsibility for the entire war effort.¹⁷⁶

On 16 August 1999, Putin was narrowly confirmed by the State Duma as chairman of the government of the Russian Federation. There were 233 votes 'for' and 84 'against' with 17 abstentions. A total of 226 votes 'for' had been needed for confirmation. If Putin had not passed this vote, then Emergency Rule could have been introduced. The Putin era had begun.

¹⁷² Telen', *Pokolenie Putina*, p. 53.

¹⁷³ Aleksei A. Mukhin, "*Osobaya papka*" *Vladimira Putina* (Moscow: Tsentr politicheskoi informatsii, 2004), p. 77.

¹⁷⁴ Valentina Korchagina, "Russia Attacks Rebel Forces," *St. Petersburg Times*, 10 August 1999.

¹⁷⁵ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, p. 336.

¹⁷⁶ *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President Vladimir Putin* (London: Hutchinson, 2000), pp. 140-141.