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Institute for War and Peace Reporting, London

After Beslan: Is the Chechnya Conflict Spreading?

Transcript of a Discussion at the Frontline Club, London,
November 2, 2004

The speakers were **Valery Dzutsev**, North Caucasus editor of IWPR, **Tom de Waal**, Caucasus Editor at IWPR and **Dr Roy Allison**, head of Russia and Eurasia programme at the Royal Institute for International Affairs.

In the chair was **Mary Dejevsky** of The Independent and the evening was introduced by IWPR's Executive Editor, **Tony Borden**.

Tony Borden:

Good evening, welcome to the Frontline Club and to this discussion evening hosted by IWPR, my name is Tony Borden and I'm the Executive Director of IWPR and every other month or so I get the great pleasure of kicking off the evening and just sitting down and listening, so it's a nice task. I am allowed to do this if I do my job very precisely and shortly which is to make a brief plug and then sit down and Elsa warned me not to do it but I can't resist when we do host these evenings in the first instance to make a plug for the Frontline Club, this is not a sponsored plug but I think we all recognize not only what a convenient, pleasant and tasteful place this is but increasingly what an important place it is for us to come.

We recognize the spirit of the club and of the original frontline Documentary Group, which really was bringing frontline witness of war and suffering so horribly amongst so many of them and that's one reason why we have so many collegial discussions here putting aside so many of our professional pressures and competitions and really having an open dialogue, so in that spirit I just remind us all to come early, come often, drink a lot, spend a lot and join if you're not a member because the Frontline Club is increasingly becoming such an important resource for all of us here and we need to support it. That's my first plug.

My second plug is for my own organization, IWPR, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting is a not for profit organization that works to support local journalists in areas of crisis and conflict. We undertake training programmes, reporting projects and projects to also help build local journalistic institutions in the countries where we work. We have a range of long standing projects in the Caucasus, the Balkans, and Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iraq and new programmes starting up in southern Africa with a new focus on Zimbabwe. It's a journalists club so there are no wealthy people here who can give us support but those journalists who are here I hope you will visit our website, subscribe to our material, and perhaps participate in our training programmes. What we are about is very much strengthening local voices, the meaning of this evening is to bridge the gap between local voices, local journalists and international journalists.

Which is very much my third and final point, I really just want to give a plug to the Caucasus programme of IWPR; we live in very sorrowful times so many things happening. I don't know that this is a more tragic time than other times but somehow it's a particularly modernistic time and I think as journalists we find ourselves somehow caught in the trap of somehow being the publicist and engine of so much of the violence ongoing. I found, I think everybody has their moments in the last few years but I found the Beslan events particularly excruciating, I have young kids. Everybody else has their own moments but within that we're not pleased, not happy but gratified and satisfied that we had a long standing commitment to the Caucasus and the north Caucasus and Valery, who you'll hear from in a moment, lives 20 miles away from the school and I think Tom our Caucasus programme director had said we had a long time commitment before the crisis, we were there by definition and we were very determined to stay there long after.

And I guess that's the purpose of our Caucasus programme, to emphasise that a conflict not resolved is a conflict still at risk and unfortunately we've had such devastating proof of that, we have an excellent moderator in Mary Dejevsky from the Independent so I'll turn the mike over to her and she can introduce the rest of the panel. Thank you again so much for coming and enjoy.

Mary Dejevsky:

Thank you for coming this evening. I have to say that this is extraordinarily gratifying, because given things that are happening on the other side of the world I think that this is an excellent way for people in London to await the American election results so I think this is a terrific achievement that

everybody has come to hear about Beslan, Chechnya and the north Caucasus this evening.

The panel as you'll see is absolutely first class. We have Valery Dzutsev who is IWPR's North Caucasus coordinator, as was said he lives very close to Beslan but just as important is that he's very familiar with this extraordinarily complicated region and comes to it with absolutely first hand experience so I think what he has to say about current circumstances there will be very interesting.

Then we have Tom de Waal who I'm sure everybody knows but he is the regional head for the Institute and his book "Black Garden" which is about the Nagorny Karabakh dispute has just recently appeared in paperback. But what I would especially like to say about Tom is that he is probably one of the most expert commentators on the Chechnya situation and from my own perspective he is also one of the most objective and one of the most sophisticated, somebody who doesn't see these things in black and white but sees all the other things that are going on around and that need to be taken into account, so I for one will be extremely interested to hear what Tom has to say this evening.

And then we have Roy Allison and we're very privileged to have Roy from Chatham House, the head of the Russian programme there to talk about the Russian perspective and how this fits in with what's going on in Russia and the complex policy considerations as seen both from Moscow and from the region. So I'd like to hand over right away to Valery.

Valery Dzutsev:

Good evening everyone. As I was just saying to my colleagues, I became a frontline journalist without my own consent, I went down to Beslan expecting to see something small, something insignificant. Because the first reports suggested that there were a small number of hostages and nobody thought that things would turn out so badly at the end. But it happened as it happened and now we witnessed a lot of change after Beslan.

The first thing that was quite striking in Beslan was that the authorities seemed to be out of control and people just took power into their own hands it was to a large extent because there were many people in civilian clothes with weapons going about and at the same time for instance on the 1st September the law enforcement was comprised of conscript soldiers of the Russian Army. It was a very pitiful sight just to look at them. It was

nightmarish and at the same time grotesque, it was not real, just a nightmare. The thing that was shown by Beslan is that the local authorities as well as the federal ones both lacked popular support especially as was seen on the ground when the North Ossetian President Dzasokhov very rarely came out and talked to the people, he was simply afraid because the hostage takers were said to have demanded to talk to Dzasokhov and some other local leaders.

The parents of the children obviously wanted them to go and talk to the hostage takers and save their children. It was probably beyond their understanding that the hostage takers might just kill the political leaders and that would be all. So the main thing that Beslan showed was the instability of the situation. The crisis showed that the system just cannot cope.

After the attack reports spread that it was designed to create violence between Ossetia and Ingushetia, it was widely circulated especially in Moscow political circles, also to some extent in the Western media. In fact local observers, and I agree with them, thought that the attack was not aimed at deteriorating Ossetia and Ingushetia relations for one simple reason, if someone had wanted to do that they could have used much smaller scale operation just in a different part of the region and that would have produced a much bigger effect.

If we look at North Ossetia we can say to some extent that the region is most loyal in the North Caucasus to Moscow that's probably one of the reasons why whoever was behind the attack plotted the attack. Another widely circulated idea why it happened is that corruption is very widespread and I would agree with that it is quite evident that corruption in law enforcements, the local police and, I believe, in the security forces. I can tell you that just a few days after the Beslan hostage crisis was resolved I had a friend traveling from Ingushetia to North Ossetia she was an eye-witness to the fact that the North Ossetian police let people through without registration for north Ossetia whereas president Putin, who arrived in Beslan the day after the attack officially sealed off North Ossetia nobody was allowed to cross the border officially and at the same time a mere policeman took a few dollars and let through three or four people. It's just widespread corruption.

Mary Dejevsky:

Sorry, can I just interrupt and ask you to describe some of the atmosphere in the immediate region of Beslan now? Right at the beginning there were

a lot of rumours that the whole region was on the verge of violence and that individuals were going to be taking revenge for the children that they'd lost. And yet at least as far as the reports that are reaching us here that doesn't seem to have happened. Can you tell us something about what it feels like there now?

Valery Dzutsev:

I actually predicted at the time that there would be no widespread violence and it didn't happen. First of all many people were just engaged in running around from hospital to hospital and to morgues and it wasn't the time to take revenge. Also local customs are very strong and they defined the way to deal with situations when a person dies and that means 40 days mourning and before that is over people do not take decisive steps. And it also hard to say who to take revenge on because there is no viable, recognized result on who the hostage takers were.

Mary Dejevsky:

What's happening at the moment? Are the different ethnic groups living peacefully alongside each other have some moved out?

Valery Dzutsev:

I would say there is tension, especially in Prigorodny district, which is the place where Ossetians and Ingushettians live side by side. As far as I can see North Ossetian authorities will try and make use of the whole situation of Beslan in order to make financial gains on one hand, that is to get aid from Moscow first of all. And the other thing is to gain political concessions, that is to close the Ossetian/Ingushetian conflict of 1992.

Mary Dejevsky:

Thank you I think that's probably a good time to switch to Tom to talk about the regional and especially Chechen aspect of all of this because I think that one of the things that was so difficult to understand at the time was that abroad especially the assumption was that the Beslan siege had everything to do with Chechnya it was like a continuation of the Chechen dispute and the more you learned about it the more complicated it seemed and the less that seemed to be true. And then it came full circle and people said yes it was Chechens involved after all. So I'd be very interested in what Tom has to say.

Tom de Waal:

Thank you Mary and I should also add that the package we left out for you contains three articles, one by Valery which is a very powerful first person piece, very unusual for us but extremely effective.

Another one we included was by Timur Aliev and we have two very fine journalists coordinating our projects in the northern Caucasus, Valery does the north Caucasus in general and Timur Aliev specifically does our Chechnya coverage. And the article we included, although we get many articles from Chechnya, was about trying to answer the question why don't the Russians capture Basayev. And the third piece was an opinion piece I wrote in the Moscow Times about the north Caucasus just after the siege.

I'd just like to make a few brief comments and basically the main point I want to make is that a lot of people are still seeing what's going on in Chechnya through an old lens -- which doesn't mean that there's still not terrible things going on in Chechnya but I think the nature of that particular tragedy has changed and I don't think people are paying particular attention to that. I think the main losers are the majority of Chechens, too many people are projecting their own image of Chechnya on to it, the most obvious example being the Jihadi's who see it mistakenly as a global Jihad but also for example you have Cold Warriors in Washington trying to re-fight the Cold War through Chechnya which does the Chechens no favours. And various people putting their own agendas on to Chechnya.

I think the Chechen conflict has changed in a number of ways it's no longer the sort of conflict that I covered in the mid-90's which was a classic guerilla conflict between a state army on the one hand and partisan guerillas with a clear political agenda on the other. That was very much the conflict that I and my colleagues, some of whom are here, covered in the mid-90's, that is no longer true. It is different in a number of ways, as Mary was hinting at, and this is the first way, it is no longer just about Chechnya, I think we're seeing symptoms of trouble right across the north Caucasus and I think this started before

Beslan. We've actually seen radical Islam in the north Caucasus getting support basically from the mid-90's and in many ways, strange as it sounds, radical Islam is actually stronger outside Chechnya in much of the north Caucasus than it is inside Chechnya where people are pre-occupied much more with everyday life, as much as one can judge. A symptom of that I think was that in Afghanistan in 1999 the Americans arrested seven

Russian nationals and sent them to Guantanamo Bay none of whom were Chechens, yet we kept hearing reports about Chechens fighting in Afghanistan and Chechens fighting in Iraq and yet there were no Chechens arrested in Afghanistan which I think logically in fact why on earth would you go to Afghanistan when there's a war going on inside Chechnya. In fact two of the people they did capture were from Kabardino-Balkaria a place that most people can hardly pronounce and yet, Kabardino-Balkaria has actually seen quite a strong growth in radical Islam over the last few years which in classic fashion has been made worse by the authorities who have closed down most of the Mosques there, thereby driving Islam underground.

We can talk, possibly in the question period, about the North Caucasus in general, it's far too complicated to talk about in any detail in a short presentation but obviously there's a huge problem here. A mainly Islamic region with the exception of North Ossetia, high unemployment, big social problems, increasing alienation between locals and Russians often caused by the Chechen war and corrupt authorities often a very important factor and increasing violence.

The very important event that was not much reported here happened on June 22 when a group of fighters took over the main town in Ingushetia. Now even though the Ingush are closely related to the Chechens they had largely stayed out of the Chechen conflict of the 1990s but three years ago President Putin replaced Ruslan Aushev the leader of Ingushetia who'd trod a very careful line between the Chechens and Moscow and replaced him with a more loyal figure called Murat Zyazikov, intending to stabilize, in his view, Ingushetia but actually de-stabilizing it and increasingly we've seen growing discontent and unrest in Ingushetia such that for one whole night on June 22nd warriors took over the whole of Nazran, a town many many miles from what is supposed to be the combat zone in what is supposed to be a conflict that normalizing in Chechnya.

Shamil Basayev the most famous Chechen warrior apparently led this band but most importantly it was organized by Ingush which suggests that the Ingush had many militants alongside the Chechens and I think this was a crucial factor in Beslan where we saw almost as many Ingush taking part in the attack on Beslan as Chechens. So we're no longer talking about an exclusively Chechen movement we're talking about a movement which is getting recruits from across the north Caucasus and therefore much harder to deal with for the Russian authorities.

And just to finish on that note there's increasing evidence that Shamil Basayev himself moves around the north Caucasus, he was spotted last year in Kabardino-Balkaria, as I said he was in Ingushetia in June. So it now seems that he has sufficient supporters outside of Chechnya and the north Caucasus to move around this region almost at will even though he is Russia's most wanted man. That also has very disturbing consequences and implications for the Russian authorities.

The 2nd point I would make is that there are now vested interests, cynical as this sounds in the conflict in Chechnya that the security forces, who I call the insecurity forces, the federal forces in Chechnya, a lot of them now have an economic stake in the conflict going on. Right from the level of ordinary soldiers who receive what's called boyevie 'fighting payments' to fight in Chechnya, to officers who are making profits from the oil trade to a lot of people on the federal side who are basically using extortion against the ordinary Chechen population. And there seems to be almost no incentive from the federal military structures to withdraw from Chechnya itself and the corruption as Valery's already started to mention is extremely worrying.

Just to give you one other example we wrote a story a couple of months ago from Chechnya about check-points and there is a major check-point between Ingushetia and Chechnya known as the Kavkaz check-point and the usual bribe to cross the check-point is about 30 rubles which is about \$1 or 60p and in this story a Chechen driver is quoted who'd just received his salary of 500 rubles and absent mindedly put inside his internal passport or travel document went through the checkpoint, handed over his 30 ruble fine as usual and a few miles down the road realized that he had also handed over his 500 ruble salary. He drove back to the check-point and said, 'Sorry guys, I meant to give you the normal 30 ruble payment but I gave you 530 rubles instead would you mind returning my 500 rubles to me.' To which the soldiers replied, 'How do we know that you didn't have a bomb in the car and you've unloaded it and driven back with an empty car?' From which we conclude that the price for taking a bomb through the Kavkaz checkpoint is about 500 rubles which is actually a very small sum indeed. So you want to know how Beslan happened. There's the beginning of your answer.

The second group in Chechnya and this I think a sign of the deep schizophrenia in Moscow policy, they're known as the Kadirovtsy after the pro-Moscow Chechen leader who was assassinated in May but they've now grouped round his son the sort of Udai Hussein of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, a really nasty and quite effective, it has to be said, enforcer of

Russian will in Chechnya. And this Kadyrov group is still receiving huge political and economic support from Moscow and shutting out other political forces in Chechnya but what's confusing is that they are very much a third force and acting in parallel often in direct competition with the federal forces.

So we're seeing a Chechen armed group and the numbers quoted go as high as 10,000, probably rather less than that but a significant number of armed Chechens who receive a salary many of them former fighters because Kadyrov fought against the Russians in the first war, so no love between the Kadyrovtsy and the federal forces. So a very strong third force who are basically not enforcing any particular noble political agenda but their own self-interest.

The third group is the group we loosely call the rebels but again I think they've changed substantially, the kind of rebels I would meet fighting in the mid 90s were typically village boys who felt that they were on a noble mission to fight the Russian Army that they were fighting for Chechen independence. I think Chechen independence has disappeared as a mirage, that most of those boys have either died out or given up fighting some of them have actually joined the Kadyrovtsy and the rebels are increasingly radicalized, increasingly Islamicised and again have an agenda which runs contrary to most Chechen traditions, they're anti-traditional Sufi Islam in Chechnya, they're targeting Chechen civilians which is very much against Chechen tradition and they're imposing a very foreign will on the Chechen people and I think the number of foreign jihadis in Chechnya is quite small, I think it's very hard to support Jihadis from abroad inside Chechnya for purely logistical reasons. But I do think they've had a very deleterious ideological influence on the rebels who have still a substantial minority and have an increasingly scary agenda as we saw in Beslan.

Finally the fourth group is the people I call the silent majority and I think everyone who has been to Chechnya recently and I must put up my hands and say that I haven't been for a number of years now says that Chechens no longer think about independence they think about survival, they think about surviving day to day, they've almost forgotten about politics, the professionals have mostly emigrated, there's an extraordinary amount of Chechens turning up in Europe nowadays. People out there in the villages probably reject all three of the above groups and if only someone would come in and guarantee them elementary rights and security they would welcome them with open arms, be it the Taiwanese, anyone would be welcome.

Unfortunately these people are not being represented they have no constituency, someone like Malik Saidullayev who is a Russian based Chechen millionaire would have been very popular in Chechnya but he was shut out of the elections in August in Chechnya on a pure technicality, it said in his passport that he was born in the Chechen Republic but he was of course born in the Chechen Ingush Republic and this was such a grave falsehood that obviously he had to be shut out of taking part in the presidential elections even though he is someone personally respected in Moscow and is a millionaire who would probably had won that election had it been a free and fair one.

So I think the level of the war has gone down in Chechnya but these people are still extremely insecure, extremely frightened and just to give you some figures from a disturbing Medecins Sans Frontieres report on Chechnya where they interviewed several thousand people in Chechnya and in Ingushetia, almost all refugees, they said that almost all people interviewed had been exposed to crossfire, aerial bombardment and mortar fire, more that one in five had seen killings and nearly half had seen maltreatment of family, about 90% in Chechen camps and 80% in Ingushetia had had someone close to them die as a result of war related violence. And I talked to Mark Brayne earlier about trauma and war and here's a very disturbing statistic, most Chechens have health problems, over 2/3, 80% in Chechnya and 67% in Ingushetia, of respondents said the conflict had triggered mental problems, so we're talking about huge numbers of people, possibly the situation on the ground has got better and stabilized to a certain extent but they're still living with enormous problems left over from the last decade, problems of trauma, problems of no reconstruction in Chechnya and problems of feeling that no-one is speaking for them and I think this the big tragedy.

There is a huge constituency out there who deserve support but nobody is supporting them. I think I've probably said enough but the final point I would like to make is that the paradox as I see it is that Russia talks about Chechnya as a front in the international war against terror but is still excluding any offers of international support, admittedly I think there are very few international offers of support because there's very little political will in the west to do something about it but the Russians are encouraging this situation and doing nothing to confront this paradox, that they say this an international problem and yet they're not encouraging any support from international institutions in fact they're actively obstructing even the humanitarian organizations that try to work in the north Caucasus and I think this poses great dangers, I think there's absolutely no reason, unfortunately, why another Beslan shouldn't happen, these people are

absolutely ruthless and there's no saying what target they may strike at next in an extremely corrupt Russia as we've heard and there's no reason why it shouldn't be a western target, so there are purely self-interested reasons for the west to pay far more attention to Chechnya.

Mary Dejevsky:

Thanks Tom, which provides an absolutely ideal transition for Roy to talk about the bigger Russian aspect of all this. I think I like the phrase Tom used about the deep schizophrenia in Russia about what to do, I think that maybe that's the point at which to take off.

Roy Allison:

Thank you very much Mary, I'm going to consider the security response by the Russian authorities and the problematic nature of the response to the extent that we can identify so far. It seems clear that the Beslan events are to become a catalyst for changes in Russia's domestic security and political arrangements and some extent also in the regional policy in the north Caucasus but it's less clear whether the measures proposed and proceeding how far those actually relate to the real needs of averting another Beslan and how far they are instrumentally being used to promote an agenda that Putin had, in a sense, pre-determined some of it was there. We know for instance that already after the Duma elections last December that those around Putin were encouraging the idea of an abolition of the regions and this was going the rounds and then this control over the regions emerges as a response to Beslan. Now before I go into that I want to tackle one issue and that is the rather simple analogy that has been drawn between Beslan events and 9/11, "this is Russia's 9/11". It's easy to jump to that kind of comparison but I think it does tend to obscure the effects, certainly it's had a profound psychological effect because in the scope and scale there's nothing to compare in the Russian Federation since Russia became independent. But Russia never had that sense of security within that Fortress America had before 9/11 not in the post independence period.

For years essentially Russia has been pervaded by a sense of vulnerability to crime and disorder. The weary knowledge of the incessant conflict in Chechnya, it's known even if it's not reported in an accurate way on the TV and memories of an invasion in the past earlier period, the psychology is different I think and there were a series of attacks in the north Caucasus, Tom referred to one of the major ones that occurred, and the planes came down, it wasn't a sudden shock of the kind to the sense of security that

9/11 was. Well Beslan raises several core questions it seems to me, first there is what are the security weaknesses that Putin needs to overcome if Russia is to avoid a repetition of this kind of event and because it was unprecedented in its scope it doesn't by any means mean that it could not be repeated in some guise or form?

Second is the domestic and also international security policy response appropriate for the challenge to try and prevent this kind of repetition, is it likely to be effective? And the third thing is the link between Beslan and Russia's international profile in the response to transnational terrorism, whether Russia's response is adequate or whether it is being used again for some other agenda. And I think that if we are to look at these questions we have to consider the nature of the political challenge that Putin has in the north Caucasus and throughout the Russian Federation but without going into that political discussion now I any great detail there are some stark realities that any Russian leader has to confront and the first is the problem of the Russian borders and Tom illustrated that with some instances.

The internal administrative borders of the Russian federation are completely porous and can't be effectively sealed and are likely to remain in this porous state, even Russia's borders with the CIS countries are hardly real, there hasn't been the resources to go into constructing effective borders and in the meeting Mary and I were in with Putin just a couple of days after the Beslan events with other analysts and journalists Putin openly said that Russia's borders all the way down to Afghanistan were quite open which is somewhat of an exaggeration in fact but it reveals the thinking that even the CIS borders cannot be sealed and this is notwithstanding the fact that Russia has tens of thousands of border troops, they can't really do this job.

Secondly a very important point that Tom brought out and before is the corruption of the security sector itself, the extent of this is so wide scaled that one could almost see the security ministry structures as being a commercial organization and this is exactly the kind of corruption that allows militants to pass unhindered in their trucks across checkpoints in the north Caucasus, that allows people to get on planes without any checks and that allowed both the downing of the planes and what happened in Beslan. This can't be changed in any short period of time, just this afternoon we had a meeting at Chatham House that I chaired on transnational crime and corruption in Russia and Georgia by someone that heads a transnational crime outfit in the States and there's been a lot of groundwork and interviewing done on this.

A very gloomy picture emerges, of course what might be defined as corruption in the west just merges into a kind of almost cultural attitudes as to how you manage your relations through economic means, and you can't institute some laws and expect people to change habits. The third issue here is that Russia lacks a counter-terrorism strategy. It hasn't really developed one, there is no learning experience from the first Chechen conflict to the 2nd Chechen conflict from other local conflicts to the Chechen conflict Russia hasn't developed a strategy for dealing with low insurgency operations and this is amazing considering the demands that exist. And also the fact that this has been highlighted for year after year as a core need, the various reasons are to do with the interests of the generals for maintaining a large conscript army and therefore the number of general officers with jobs and so on but this is the case. Russia for a major incident, a major emergency, it doesn't have a coordinating body, no apparent contingency planning which was shown in what happened and very weak coordination.

There is a Ministry for Emergency Situations but it seemed to have very little role in this particular case. The people in this ministry are actually rather forward looking compared to others in the security sector, they'd been quite involved in the Balkans but they were given no real lead or resources and they were hardly involved. And then, in a sense, irrespective of the ties that exist or don't exist between the Beslan hostage takers and the Chechnya conflict itself. Russia's coercive resources, we could call it that, in the north Caucasus overall are very weak, the state does not maintain a monopoly of violence in the region, it doesn't have that core attribute of statehood and it doesn't seem that this will change rapidly although quite a lot more money is going into the Ministry of Internal Affairs as well as the army.

The army's budget has trebled since 2001 but of course a lot of this money then just leaks out rather than actually being put to strengthening the structures. And the final weakness here is at the tactical level what we saw, the severe problems in crisis management, the coordination of forces in the technical operation itself, this whole raft of problems really has to be addressed. The security response that Putin announced doesn't seem to address these issues in any very clear way, it's all very much about centralization, unified system of executive power at the federal level and at the regional level a special commission for the northern Caucasus but in itself this is supposed to have the power to coordinate federal ministries and has some powers in security matter but it's really just an administrative declaration and at the local level there was talk about support for citizens initiatives to organize voluntary structures for public order protection.

If the citizens who were seen trying to get involved in Beslan were anything to go by this is not really going to be much of a contribution and the way it was presented these citizens' initiatives, citizens should collect information about the preparation for possible crimes and terrorism. This has a nasty déjà vu to how things were in the Soviet times. Putin has recognized publicly the need for some kind of crisis management system which would be effective in the event of what he calls a terrorist war being waged against Russia and the need for some kind of anti-crisis planning by the government, the ministries at the regional level and local authorities. He's also talked about the need for a Russian national security organization, something short of the Homeland Security Department because Russia doesn't have the resources that America put in to that. But something to try and prevent what he calls these terrorist invasions onto Russian territory as well as against man-made catastrophes organized by terrorists which covers many possible scenarios but this is only on a preparatory level at the moment.

There's talk of course that Russia should also prepare some kind of mobilisation plan for the fight against international terrorists which would be equivalent to the mobilisation plans that exist for large scale conventional war. But all of this talk of mobilizing the population has a very worrying ring to it and one is not quite sure what this mobilized population could effectively do. It's a very different approach to boosting the law enforcement and intelligence resources against sub-state groups threatening the state. Overall what we find in the last month or two is an emphasis on a re-centralisation of power and the psychological mobilization of the population, I find some of that really quite worrying.

We can expect some mergers and reshuffling of the Russian security apparatus and the agencies but there doesn't seem to be any credible policy in hand for training or re-training Russia's anti-terrorist and security services. And the regular arm of the internal troops, the FSB which also has the border troops underneath it all have different doctrines and tactics, they're not coordinated they have different training camps and rivalries between them. And the specialist units, the Alpha and the Vypel groups which have had the worse casualties since independence also remain weak. Finally the international dimension, the essential contention on the Russian side is that the hostage takers were part of a larger transnational terrorist network and that Russia does have an indispensable role in the global campaign against terrorism, the west should accept this and brace Russia further in this transnational and that it's essentially between civilization and barbarism. I find this Russian writing is more similar to the 'you're with us or against us' that we heard from the Bush administration

after 9/11 it's rather different to the EU or post-modern view that it's about security, it's very black and white and Beslan in Putin's thinking and it came out from that meeting we were in, is that he saw it very much as a reinforcement of his decision to go in in 1999, there was no option.

He claimed that Basayev's attacks in 1999 on Dagestan were not only aimed at Dagestan but at breaking apart the territorial integrity of Russia more generally. It's all about territorial integrity, it's a core thing Russia has no choice. And Beslan was an attack at the soft under-belly of Russia, some kind of horizontal escalation between the north Caucasus republics, the things mentioned by the others. And this way of thinking doesn't allow for much compromise on Putin's side, it's very inbuilt and we tried to challenge it. Jonathan Steele did his best, he came back to the issue with Putin and Putin really gave no ground, in fact that's the only time in the meeting that he did get agitated but he was trying to keep his cool. I was sitting very close to him and he steeled himself to stay calm in front of this international audience but eventually he did lose it a little.

Russia's put forward a number of proposals in the UN assembly post-Beslan which are part of this 'bonding' with the global anti-terrorist campaign, particularly with the American interpretation of this and we find afterwards that what we saw only in Russian ministry of defence documents now has become policy that Russia has the right to strike at terrorists outside its borders according to its own judgment, anywhere with any weapons system it has short of nuclear weapons. This kind of pre-emptive action is akin to the American approach, Washington hasn't criticized it, but it's really worrying for countries like Georgia. This pre-emptive threat doesn't take into account Russia's very weak capability to do this, so I think it's rhetorical, there's a lot of bluster but none the less you could see some Russian effort that could go off half-cocked and would act to just exacerbate the feelings in the north Caucasus and the support the radical groups which are projecting a more Islamist agenda in the north Caucasus, not only Chechnya, are trying to get. I think that that kind of talk may betray some real nervousness in Moscow that the north Caucasus could face a broader destabilization and that this could provide opportunities for transnational Islamist groups. The jury's out, this is a scenario that needs to be looked at very closely, it's beyond Russian propaganda there are real concerns there we can't rule out that contingency. And it's in the strong interest of Russia as well as the south Caucasus countries, the EU and the wider international community to try and prevent that kind of outcome.

Mary Dejevsky:

Thank you Roy. Well we've had very different aspects of the Beslan aftermath given to us this evening. One of the things I'd like to highlight both from what Tom said and from what Roy said is that there is this conception especially outside Russia that Putin is acting from a position of strength, that he's sitting in the Kremlin issuing edicts and acquiring power to himself and is on a fast path to dictatorship. Now I think that everything we've heard this evening suggests that Putin at least in the north Caucasus region and probably in quite a lot of Russia as well is acting from a position of quite considerable weakness and that a lot of the measures he appears to be taking actually never get further than the statute book even if they get that far.

I would also say that the question of the borders, we didn't just have a meeting with Putin we had a meeting with Sergei Ivanov the defence minister and he actually went a bit further on the issue of borders and he said rather quizzically 'isn't it ironic that in fact we have all these border fortifications that we built up during the Soviet period and actually they're all in the wrong place. The strongest border fortifications we have are with Norway' and he laughed because it seemed so absurd but that was the border with NATO. And now the border which was basically an internal border with the southern republics is now completely exposed and to a great degree chaotic.

There's one other thing that I would like to add from our meeting with Putin that I think puts a slightly different gloss on it and you can take it or leave it but this meeting happened only a couple of days after the disastrous breaking of the Beslan siege and the first question that we asked Putin was about Chechens and relations with Chechnya and where he proposed to go from there and he gave almost a potted history of Russian relations with Chechnya and with Chechens and having given this hard-line speech two days before in his broadcast to the nation where he talked about good and evil and adopted all the 9/11 rhetoric and talked about pre-emptive action and he talked about reorganizing the security forces. There was really very little of that, he gave a surprisingly soft line on Chechnya and Chechens, really like our post 9/11 line on Muslims, that there are really bad extremist Chechens and then there's the majority of Chechens who are incredibly courageous fighters who lost more people than any minority during the 2nd World War, who suffered terribly under Stalin, who were unjustly deported. Putin said, given their treatment it's hardly any wonder that it's turned out like it has and they harbour such hatred towards Russia.

Now this is not the sort of language or approach that you immediately associate with Putin talking about Chechnya and it's certainly not a

populist Russian view of Chechens, all you have to do is go to Moscow to see what the populist Russian view of Chechens is. But I think it's worth mentioning because I think it adds a different dimension to this whole situation in the north Caucasus. And from that I would like to invite questions.

Q:

Do you think there is any credible policy by Russia, by the Kremlin in the north Caucasus other than to protect the Russian Federation's borders? Is there a policy on anything at all?

Roy Allison:

I think the meeting we had, one of the conclusions that I came away with is that Putin does see this very much as a question of territorial integrity. And it's been given another spin it's not just about Chechnya it's broadened to the north Caucasus republics, that means that it forecloses more nuanced policy. Putin may have been more open to suggestion at one stage, I heard him actually in the year 2000 he had a meeting with the President of the Academy of Sciences, this was a private meeting and it wasn't supposed to get out and he said, 'we need to have ideas' he said, 'mobilise your academicians with ideas about this.' Now this is absolutely not the image he projects as being decisive they have a policy they are unwavering and so on, he showed very much more a floundering approach and the military had been given the lead which was unfortunate because they're not going to drive any solution forward. One clue to a way of rethinking was that in that speech that he set out the security responses there are actually a couple of paragraphs on the economic distress of the region and the need to address that. He gave some statistics on just how benighted an area it is, statistics on infant mortality and so on. It does express the recognition that resources need to come in before anything else can really be expected but then there was a federal policy for the north Caucasus in the 1990s and really the promised funding didn't arrive, so you could think that perhaps that there's an understanding, he has [Dmitry] Kozak who's a trusted aide coordinating a policy across the north Caucasus.

Mary Dejevsky:

Can I just pass that on to Valery. How much do you feel any sort of influence or power from Moscow and do you think that Moscow's only interest is in defending the border.

Valery Dzutsev:

I would argue with the opinion expressed that Moscow has no logical policy. Moscow does have a policy in the region. From my point of view it is probably weak and not always successful but the main problem with it is that Putin is trying to apply old methods of governing regions which simply cannot work today, that is the main thing. The system itself is just cut out for governing by old methods not new ones.

Mary Dejevsky:

And by old methods you mean top down methods?

Valery Dzutsev:

Yes just suppress and show off the power. I don't believe that Russians cannot understand the north Caucasus, I mean they are just as capable as everyone their arrogance comes from the fact that they think they are big and strong, supposedly, they can do anything. Whereas in fact this attitude doesn't work in the north Caucasus, it didn't work in the 19th Century and it probably won't work in the 21st Century.

Mary Dejevsky:

Tom do you have anything to add to that.

Tom de Waal:

Yes just a couple of things. I think it's very interesting what you had to say Mary that probably Putin and other people understand the scale of the problem, I think Valery was saying that. I think the trouble is that it takes enormous political courage which they either don't have or an even bigger crisis for them to change course. And two things need to happen for things to change, one is much greater international involvement in the region which would be a huge admission of failure on Russia's part and would go against many of their instincts to invite international organizations into the north Caucasus. And second breaking with people with whom they've invested a lot of money and power like Kadirov in Chechnya and Zyazikov in Ingushetia and the federal forces and to reach out to a totally new group of people, that's probably what's required and we're not there yet.

Behrouz Afgagh (BBC):

Question to Tom, how much would you say the rhetoric and the agendas of the Jihadist groups are linked or plugged into the mainstream Jihadist movements, the anti-Americanism, the Palestinian cause and suchlike. And what is it exactly that they are prescribing for Chechnya?

Tom de Waal:

I think it's interesting and disturbing that Chechnya has now made it on to, as it were, the top five of World Jihads along with Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Kashmir. International Islamists have put Chechnya in that top five and obviously there is material there to work with. There are people who have lost an enormous amount, who've had everything destroyed but I think Chechnya's probably the least typical of those conflicts. It's the most isolated, the Islam as I mentioned in Chechnya is Sufi Islam and went through the Soviet period, so in many ways the Chechens are the least promising material to work with fortunately for a World Jihad and I think that what we see is it working in parallel to Al Qaeda and the middle east rather than being in direct contact. It has to be said that to organize Beslan you didn't need international terrorist experience there was plenty of that on the ground, Basayev is a brilliant strategist and he claimed that it cost him about \$10,000 so he didn't need the money either, I think there were some Arabs there, a bit of experience, money and local knowledge.

Frederika Behr (Amnesty International):

Whenever I try to find out what is happening in Chechnya among the different groups having influence or power, I find it hard to understand their allegations. On the one hand, for example, Basayev has good contacts with the Russian army and he is a good friend with Shamanov is one of the things I've heard. Others say that the Kadyrovtsy are working because they're used to working alongside Basayev's troops. And the news about one of the guys who was captured Kulayev, or whatever his name was, his family knew he was in detention before he ended up in Beslan, the same thing was reported following the tragedy in Moscow. I can understand that the Chechens who were talking about that because there is no press freedom and there is no reporting in the Russian media and it's very difficult for them to assess whether there is any truth in this about the cooperation between Kadirov, Basayev and the army on whatever level and if it just comes to selling each other weapons or drugs or bribing each other, do you have any idea whether there's any truth in that?

Tom de Waal:

Well Valery has no idea and I'm even further away, I suppose the only short thing I would say is that because there are so many economic and criminalized interests in Chechnya and because so many people have crossed the line so many times and switched allegiance that's partly why these theories arise but it doesn't mean they're always true. Certainly there used to be a lot of connection between Kadyrov and Maskhadov and they used to be on the same side and then they changed sides. There are persistent rumours that Maskhadov spent last winter in the town of Gudames just a few doors down from the younger Kadyirov. So I think the answer is we don't know but if we start to look at things through a more cynical economic prism then some of these things make sense, though not all of them.

Valery Dzutsev:

I can just add one thing about Basayev. A well informed source in Kabardino-Balkaria told me that August last year Basayev was in Kabardino-Balkaria in the town of Baksan and he virtually was sealed off with a few fighters and that when he escaped he simply paid a bribe to the local interior minister.

Neil O'Shea (Freelance):

It's obvious that in Russia there's a lot of respect for the western progressive civilized democracy and the wealthy economies that they build. I'm surprised that the panel hasn't mentioned the EU, the UN or even Tony Blair this evening because I think that young Russians do respect Tony Blair and the West. Do you think the UN, US and UK have under-achieved in putting pressure in this global community on Russia to sort out these relatively simple problems?

Roy Allison:

Well you can't take out of account the role of the US here and I think this is related, it is linked because what I hear from those who are very well connected through to the Bush administration is that at quite an early stage in taking up the administration he was convinced of the fact that Chechnya was all about terrorism. And his advisors, even those who perceive to be the more martial supporters who could see more nuances haven't really tried to change that attitude; he's got a fixed view. I don't believe that Blair sees it like that but this is quite important, if you're trying to marshal a position in NATO. NATO has really skirted completely around this. The parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe has issued quite strong

statements and resolutions but ultimately it's toothless in trying to change Russian policy and it has become more difficult I think post-Beslan to get Western governments ready to set out the view that they had in a very consistent way. EU officials, like Chris Patten, put out strong statements about two weeks after Beslan that reinforced the fact that human rights cannot be set aside. And Bot the Dutch Foreign Minister whose initial response was ill-timed put out a much better worded and more nuanced assessment a few weeks later. It seems that there is a question about how far Russia's susceptible to outside influences or conditionality. And in the present mood I think that approach is going to be even less likely to lead to shifts in Russian policy than before and the whole nationalistic current is against being willing to adapt to norms that come from outside, from the EU or elsewhere.

Elsa Weill:

I had a question for Valery before we conclude. You mentioned in the introduction that you became a frontline journalist almost by accident, I just wondered whether you could tell us what it was like to actually report from Beslan, we've talked a lot about post Beslan but what was it like actually on the ground?

Valery Dzutsev:

I came across a conflict situation before in 1992 when an Ossetian/Ingush conflict took place and I was not a journalist, the main challenge for me was being local, having some relatives in the school at the same time trying to be impartial and do my best to tell the truth. The situation was grotesque and at times I thought it was decoration and the director of the film will come out and say it's all over, so go home now! The change that the Beslan hostage taking situation brought about was just so sudden because Beslan town was a very open town. It was probably one of the most open towns in north Ossetia, on the crossroads from different directions, it's half Muslim and it's had very good relations with neighbouring Muslim communities like the Ingush etcetera, there was no conflict in 1992. It was probably one of the places where you would least expect an attack; any attack not just a big scale unprecedented one.

Mary Dejevsky:

I would like to finish on a positive note and ask each of our panelists to sum up in one sentence what is the one thing that either Putin or western governments could do to improve things in the north Caucasus?

Roy Allison:

Alongside the raft of security measures that probably won't be implemented or don't really address the problem, the crying need to provide the economic resources to create some sense of hope and avoid the spiral of despair and desperation which maintains the corruption without which the security response will be ineffective and I think to some extent acts as the reservoir of support for the militants even taking extreme measures in the region.

Tom de Waal:

Just to reiterate the point that the majority of Chechens are so exhausted that actually there's a huge consensus that independence is off the agenda because it means absolutely nothing in modern day Chechnya and there is a huge reservoir of people who can be reached out to who would appreciate some western aid and could re-form some consensus politics in Chechnya if only somebody would listen to them.

Valery Dzutsev:

I would just say that virtually days after Beslan hostage crisis was over I saw a small boy, former hostage, at school, very lively with a smile talking to the journalists and nobody would have thought that this small boy of ten or eleven had gone through extremely hard times. The other optimistic point is that the hostage taking crisis brought about change in the Beslan community, it boosted the growth of grassroots organizations and before that Beslan did not know what a grassroots organization was. So that will help.

Mary Dejevsky:

Thanks to all our panelists and thanks for all the questions.