

# Chechnya Timeline



**1000 B.C.** the ancestors of the Chechen people settled in the northern Caucasus Mountains.

**In 1556** Russia began to show an interest in gaining control of the Caucasus Mountains region.

**In 1585** the Ottoman Empire conquered Chechnya, but Russian czars continued to claim ownership and Russian forces are repulsed by the Chechens throughout the 16th and 17th centuries.

**In 1774** Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire and in 1784, the Chechens, led by legendary Chechen resistance leader Sheikh Mansur, mounted the first of many insurrections against Russian encroachment.

**In 1817** Russian forces began a long and bloody fight that ended with Chechen surrender in 1862, with many Chechens fleeing to Turkey.

**In 1877** the Russians put down Another Chechen revolt.

**In 1918** Chechnya joined the Republic of the Northern Federation of the Caucasus, recognized by several European countries and the Russian Bolsheviks.

**In 1920** the Soviet Union invaded the new federation and occupied it. Subsequent Chechen revolts in 1929 and 1940 were brutally suppressed. In 1944, Soviet dictator Josef Stalin ordered some 500,000 Chechens shipped to Kazakhstan and Siberia and their villages burned. Half of the Chechen people died during the deportation. Chechnya remained part of the Soviet Union until it broke up in 1991.

**<http://www.cnn.com/CNN/Programs/presents/index.chechnya.new.html>**



**October 27, 1991** Chechnya holds presidential elections in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. Retired Soviet army Gen. Dzhokhar Dudayev wins, claiming 90 percent of the vote. Russia's legislature does not recognize the election's legitimacy, pointing out that six of the 14 districts in the Chechen-Ingush republic did not take part in the voting. Dudayev declares Chechnya independent of Russia almost immediately after the elections.

**November 1991** Russian President Boris Yeltsin enacts emergency rule in Chechnya in reaction to Dudayev's declaration of independence, sending Russian troops to the airport near Grozny. In response, Dudayev readies a military defense. During an emergency session, the Russian

Supreme Soviet refused to back Yeltsin's decision to take military action and the Russian troops left Chechnya soon thereafter.

Three militant Chechen separatists hijack a Russian passenger plane and force it to fly to Turkey with the intention of holding a news conference to condemn the Russian position on Chechnya. Afterwards, the three hijackers are not sent to Russian authorities for prosecution, but are instead allowed to return to Chechnya where they are reportedly greeted as "national heroes" according to John Dunlop's book, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*. One of the hijackers, Shamil Basayev, would later become a key figure in the separatist movement, leading militant attacks on Russian troops and a hospital in southern Russia.

**March 1992** All autonomous republics of the former Soviet Union sign a federation treaty except Chechnya and Tatarstan.

**June 1992** Russia recognizes the division of Ingushetia and Chechnya into two separate republics. Ingushetia keeps its ties to the Russian Federation while Chechnya's claim to independence remains unrecognized by Moscow or the international community.

**1992** Chechnya adopts a constitution recognizing itself as an independent state with a president and parliament. Dudayev refuses to sign a treaty with Russia that would have made Chechnya a Russian republic with a great degree of autonomy, instead repeating earlier demands for complete independence. In the following months, thousands of ethnic Russians flee Chechnya as the region struggles to deal with its complex ethnic makeup.

**1992-1993** According to a 1996 essay by Vera Tolz, there is no real local or federal authority or parliament in charge of Chechnya, and borders are ill-defined during this period. This leads to the creation of a huge black market for arms and drugs sales — a development that benefited Chechens and Russians alike, according to some regional observers. Official figures show industrial production drops in the Chechen and Ingush republics by some 30 percent in 1992 and another 61 percent in 1993, while unemployment skyrockets, author John Dunlop writes. According to Dunlop, this leads Dudayev and his partners to turn to illegal sources of income such as money counterfeiting, document falsification, weapons sales and the narcotics trade.

**January 1993** A Russian delegation visits Grozny and signs a protocol on the preparation of a treaty on the delimitation of powers in Chechnya, but Dudayev is excluded from the talks and does not recognize the negotiations as legitimate. The Russian delegation proceeds to negotiate with members of the Chechen parliament who were virtually powerless in the politics of the region at the time according to a 1996 essay by Vera Tolz.

**February 1994** After the Republic of Tatarstan signs a bilateral treaty with Moscow, the pressure increases on Chechnya to follow suit, as it becomes the only new republic not to participate in a Russian Federation treaty.

**November 1994** Disillusioned with many of Dudayev's decisions and supported by Russian special forces, Chechen opposition troops, known as the Provisional Chechen Council, attempt unsuccessfully to take over Grozny and end the separatist movement.

**December 9-11, 1994** Yeltsin orders Russian tanks and troops to enter Chechnya to restore "constitutional order."

**December 31, 1994** January 19, 1995 A deployment of some 40,000 Russian troops manages to gain control of most urban areas of Grozny, but not the mountainous regions of southern Chechnya. Thousands are killed as Chechen fighters continue to resist Russian military occupation for the next 20 months. Pummeled by intense bombing, the city center of Grozny is virtually destroyed and some 100,000 people -- many of them civilians -- are estimated killed over the course of the conflict, according to BBC reports.

**May 1995** As fighting continues between Chechen separatist fighters and Russian forces trying to gain further control over the region, Chechen rebels seize hundreds of hostages at a hospital in Budennovsk in southern Russia. More than 100 people are killed after an unsuccessful raid by Russian forces to end the standoff. During this time period, Russian troops begin the notorious zachistka operations -- known as "cleansing" or "mopping up" security missions -- during which Russian forces conduct house-to-house searches for rebel fighters or hidden weapons caches.

**July 1995** After weeks of negotiations, a fragile cease-fire is reached between separatist leaders and Russian officials, only to fall apart months later.

**January 1996** Doky Zavgayev, former president of the joint Chechen-Ingush republic, is elected Chechnya's president. However, Dudayev declares the results of the election invalid, claiming that the Zavgayev government is a puppet regime installed by Moscow.

**April 21, 1996** A Russian rocket kills Dudayev by locking onto the signal from his mobile phone, according to reports from journalists in the region. Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, the Chechen vice president, succeeds him.

**May 1996** In their first formal negotiations, Yeltsin and Yandarbiyev sign a short-lived peace agreement.

**August 1996** Separatist fighters, led by militant commander Shamil Basayev, launch a fierce attack on Russian troops, recapturing Grozny. Moscow sends Russian Gen. Alexander Lebed to negotiate an end to the violent situation, which had become a political disaster for Yeltsin. Chechen rebel chief of staff Aslan Maskhadov and Lebed sign a cease-fire as part of the Khasavyurt Accords.

**November 1996** Lebed and Maskhadov's cease-fire evolves into a proposed peace settlement that includes an agreement on Russian troop withdrawals and the discussion of full Chechen independence in five years.

**January 1997** Elections are held in Chechnya and are monitored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Russia recognizes the election of Aslan Maskhadov, considered a political moderate, following his victory in the presidential contest.

**May 1997** Yeltsin and Maskhadov sign a formal peace treaty as well as a number of economic agreements, but fail to reach a deal on the overall issue of Chechen independence. This leads to bursts of violence between separatist fighters and Russian soldiers and the imposition of curfews.

**May 1998** With the economy in shambles from the first Chechen war, an atmosphere of lawlessness continues under Maskhadov. During this period, Russia's presidential representative in Chechnya, Valentin Vlasov, is kidnapped and held hostage for six months.

**December 1998** Four Western engineers from Britain and New Zealand are captured and beheaded in Chechnya in one of several instances of kidnapping.

**February 1999** Amid a growing threat from a rival Islamic government, President Maskhadov endorses the introduction of Islamic Sharia law to Chechnya over the next three years. The decision essentially removes the Chechen parliament's ability to make law and means that the secular constitution has to be rewritten to abide by the rigorous codes of Islamic Sharia. Maskhadov also abolishes the post of vice president -- a move that backfires when Vice President Vakha Arsanov refuses to step down and says he will not leave office unless Maskhadov also resigns. Meanwhile, Russia condemns the Sharia law decision, citing concerns about the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Russian republics.

**July 1999** Chechen fighters and Russian troops clash on the border of Chechnya and the neighboring republic of Dagestan.

**August 1999** Chechen rebel fighters, led by militant commander Shamil Basayev and a Saudi Arabian mercenary known as Khattab, stage armed incursions into neighboring Dagestan with the goal of creating an Islamic state. They succeed in taking over seven villages on the border, according to reporter Anna Politkovskaya's account in her book, *A Dirty War*. Over the course of the next several weeks, federal Russian forces slowly retake control of the villages.

**September 1999** Russian authorities blame Chechen rebels for an attack on Russian military housing in Dagestan and a series of apartment building bombings in other parts of Russia that kill nearly 300 people. Under the direction of the newly appointed Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, federal Russian forces re-enter Chechnya in response to the apartment bombings and in what Moscow says is an effort to fight future terrorism. A battalion of some 20,000 to 30,000 Russian troops amasses along the Chechen border. Meanwhile, some 15,000 people are expelled from Moscow and another 60,000 forced to register with authorities as part of "Operation Foreigner"-- part of Yeltsin's anti-terrorism campaign.

**September 23, 1999** Grozny is bombed by the Russian air force for the first time in nearly four years. Maskhadov declares martial law and calls for a ghazavat, or holy war, meaning that all men of eligible age must fight to defend Chechnya.

**October 1999** Former members of the Chechen republican legislature form the Moscow-based State Council of the Republic of Chechnya. Moscow acknowledges this group as the only legitimate Chechen authority and refuses to negotiate further with Maskhadov. Thousands begin to flee Grozny for Ingushetia, Turkey and other surrounding areas as Russian troops begin to advance into Chechnya.

**December 1999** After Russian forces begin a full-scale attack on Grozny, Maskhadov declares that the city will be defended to the last. The European Union threatens Moscow with sanctions after Russian authorities warn all civilians to leave the Chechen capital by Dec. 11. On Dec. 31,

Yeltsin resigns citing ill health and Putin takes over as the acting president of the Russian Federation.

**February 2000** After weeks of intense battles, Chechen fighters withdraw from Grozny and Russian troops capture the city. Most of the city is left in ruins and thousands of Chechens are scattered among refugee camps, creating a dire humanitarian situation. Putin announces that the Russian operation in Grozny is complete, but some fighting continues in the mountainous regions of the South where Chechen rebel fighters have regrouped, according to Anna Politkovskaya's account in a Dirty War.

**March 2000** Putin visits Grozny and announces that he will reduce the number of federal troops in the region. Later in the month, Putin wins the Russian presidential election.

**April 2000** United Nations Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson visits Chechnya and denounces evidence of Russian troops' curtailing of Chechen human rights, calling the violations "so consistent and so serious" that Russia should take immediate action to curb them.

**May 2000** President Putin announces that Chechnya will be governed from Moscow. Maskhadov remains the leader of the separatist movement.

**June 2000** Moscow appoints a former Chechen cleric, Mufti Ahkmed Kadyrov, to head its administration in Chechnya, answerable to Putin. Maskhadov denounces Kadyrov as a traitor.

**August 2000** A bomb blast in a Moscow subway, blamed on Chechen militants, leaves eight dead and dozens more injured.

**January 2001** Moscow transfers control of "anti-terrorist" operations in Chechnya to the Russian Federal Security Service, commonly perceived as the successor agency to the Soviet KGB. Human rights organizations continue to express sharp concern about violations in Chechnya and report on the alleged detainment and torture of Chechens by Russian troops and the discovery of mass graves in Grozny.

**September 2001** After the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Putin casts the conflict with Chechnya as part of the international war on terror. Later the same month, a major Chechen militant offensive on the city of Gudermes, Chechnya's second-largest city, leads to the downing of a Russian helicopter carrying military officials.

**November 2001** Russian officials hold meetings with Maskhadov's official representative Akhmed Zakayev -- the first formal talks with a Chechen separatist representative since 1999. Zakayev and Putin's southern envoy, Viktor Kazantsev, discuss a possible peace settlement on a secret government estate in Moscow.

**May 2002** An explosion during a Victory Day military parade in Dagestan kills at least 35 people, including 12 children. No groups claim responsibility for the bombing, but Chechen separatists, also described in the media as Islamic militants, are widely suspected. Later that day, U.S. diplomats reiterate the American position on Chechnya at a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. They say Putin should foster a political agreement giving Chechnya broad autonomy within Russia, and say that Moscow should be held accountable for

human rights abuses its military may have committed during the fighting in the breakaway republic.

**July 2002** With the exception of water distribution in Grozny, the U.N. halts aid operations in Chechnya for six weeks after a Russian aid worker is kidnapped. U.N. aid work in neighboring Ingushetia, home to hundreds of thousands of Chechen refugees, is also halted for two days. The U.N. had been providing food, health care and education programs in an effort to assist the Chechen people.

**August 2002** A Russian military helicopter crashes into a minefield outside of Russia's main military base in Chechnya, killing more than 100 people. Despite Russian military claims of an engine malfunction, it is widely reported that militant separatists shot the helicopter down using a Russian-made shoulder-held missile.

**October 2002** Militant Chechen separatists, led by 25-year-old Movsar Barayev, seize a Moscow theater and hold some 800 people hostage, demanding that Russian troops withdraw from Chechnya within one week. Nearly 130 hostages and 41 of the 50 hostage-takers are killed when Russian forces storm the building with a mysterious gas later determined to be an opiate-based compound.

**November 2002** Moscow contends that Chechnya should move forward with a new political referendum for peace, including the staging of new elections and the drafting of a new constitution, but refuses to negotiate directly with separatist leaders. According to media reports, Russian authorities begin to close refugee camps on the border of Chechnya and Ingushetia, forcing thousands of Chechens to return to cities many believe are still unsafe. Russian officials deny that anyone is being forced to return to any particular area.

**December 2002** Suicide bombers drive a truck full of explosives into a Russian government office building in Grozny killing more than 80 people. Despite the violence, Putin says the peace referendum will move forward as planned.

**March 2003** Voters in Chechnya participate in a Moscow-backed constitutional referendum that Kremlin officials say will help pave the way toward stability and civil rule in the war-torn republic by approving a draft constitution and cementing its place in the Russian Federation. The referendum passes with more than 95 percent of the vote but separatist leaders warn the move won't bring peace.

**April 2003** The United Nations Human Rights Commission rejects the latest bid by the European Union to formally censure Russia for alleged human rights violations in Chechnya. The EU had encouraged the U.N. to declare "deep concern at the reported ongoing violations ... including forced disappearances, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, torture, ill-treatment ... as well as alleged violations of international humanitarian law" by federal Russian forces in Chechnya.

**May 2003** Two suicide bombings rock Chechnya within days of each other in the largest flare-up in violence since the constitutional referendum. A truck loaded with explosives ripped apart a compound of government buildings in northern Chechnya, killing at least 59 people and wounding dozens more. The next day, a second suicide attack near Grozny killed at least 16 and

wounded dozens when at least one woman detonated explosives strapped her body as thousands of Chechens, including the pro-Moscow administration leader Akhmad Kadyrov, gathered for a religious festival.

**July 2003** Two female suicide bombers detonate belts laden with explosives and scraps of metal outside a rock concert that was attended by some 40,000 at the Tushino airfield in Moscow. The explosions occurred after police apparently stopped one of the women as she approached the concert's entrance. Authorities immediately accused Chechen separatists of carrying out the bombings, which killed 15 people and injured more than 50 others

**August 2003** A powerful vehicle bomb blast destroys a Russian military hospital near Chechnya, killing at least 50 and wounding some 70 others. The military hospital is located in the North Ossetia town of Mozdok, considered the headquarters for Russian forces combating separatist Chechen fighters.

**<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/europe/chechnya/timeline.html>**