Armed Conflicts Report

Russia (Chechnya) (1999 – first combat deaths in current phase)
Update: January 2009

Summary
Type of Conflict
Parties to the Conflict
Status of the Fighting
Number of Deaths
Political Developments
Background
Arms Sources
Economic Factors

Summary:

2008 Sporadic violence continued in Chechnya in various areas across the state with multiple deaths in separate incidences. Disappearances of civilians, though reported to be in decline in 2008, remain a constant reality. Reconstruction efforts to rebuild Chechnya’s shattered infrastructure became a priority this year as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced 120.6 billion rubles ($5 billion) to be spent on developing Chechnya in the next 4 years. Political turmoil erupted in September when Ruslan Yamadayev, a former MP and bitter rival of Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov, was shot dead outside the British embassy in central Moscow. His death was claimed to be politically motivated and linked to President Kadyrov though no evidence suggests this is true. In June 2008, the European Court of Human Rights found Russia responsible for human rights violations in Chechnya in cases that involved torture, disappearances, and executions.

2007 In July Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov declared that fighting in Chechnya had “finally and irreversibly” ended, prompting skepticism from the international community as to the stability of peace in the region. However, throughout 2007 Chechnya saw a significant decline in hostilities as well as casualties. Over 500 rebels surrendered under an amnesty agreement that ended in January 2007 although human rights groups claimed that many of those who turned themselves in were guilty of widespread human rights abuses. Rebuilding processes currently underway have failed to provide adequate housing for many who have been displaced, prompting increased fear that instability may resume if the problem persists.

2006 Intensity of fighting in Chechnya decreased as Russia continued to reduce the number of federal troops in Chechnya and the security forces of pro-Moscow Chechen PM Ramzan Kadyrov stepped up their control of the region, while two notable rebel leaders were killed. Chechen rebel representatives agreed to peace talks in July, but president Umarov later withdrew this offer. Russian officials extended the amnesty agreement, and by the end of the year 374 rebels had reportedly surrendered. Unrest in the neighbouring republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia continued throughout the year.

2005 Fighting in Chechnya spread to neighbouring territories, in particular Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria. Islamist groups became increasingly involved in armed resistance to Russian forces and local police.

2004 Fighting continued through the year, with reported deaths in the hundreds. Although the Russian government signalled a willingness to work more closely with international bodies for a peace agreement and eventual reconstruction in Chechnya, its attitude hardened following a school massacre in Beslan and the assassination of the Chechen president.

2003 Fighting remained intense as Chechen rebels continued a guerrilla campaign against Russian government and military targets, while Russian security forces continued abducting, detaining and allegedly killing suspected rebels. Although Moscow heralded the October presidential
Armed Conflicts Report - Russia

In Chechnya as progress towards peace, many questioned its legitimacy and capacity to end the conflict. It is estimated that close to 5,000 soldiers, rebel fighters and civilians were killed in 2003.

**2002** Fighting escalated this year with both sides stepping up attacks on each other and civilians. The conflict received enormous international attention in October when Chechen rebels took approximately 800 people hostage in a Moscow theatre, calling into question Russian government claims that it had successfully ended the war in Chechnya.

**2001** Bombings, assassinations and guerrilla attacks were almost a daily occurrence and a number of fierce rebel offensives were launched during the year. Representatives of the Russian government and Chechen rebels met for talks in November.

**2000** In early February Russian forces captured the Chechen capital, Grozny, forcing rebels to retreat to a stronghold in the southern mountains. Since, the war has evolved into guerrilla fighting against Russian personnel and assets. Hundreds of people, and possibly thousands, were killed in the fighting in 2000.

**1999** A second phase of the Russia-Chechnya armed conflict began in 1999 after Russian troops launched attacks against the breakaway republic of Chechnya following two invasions attributed to Islamic rebels into the neighbouring republic of Dagestan. By December, the Russian military had captured several key Chechen towns and controlled almost all the lowlands of northern Chechnya. Later attacks targeted the area in and around Grozny. Over 2,000, and as many as 5,000, people died in the fighting.

**1996** The Russian-Chechen Truce Agreement was signed in 1996 ending a two-year war between the two sides which began in 1994 when Russian troops invaded Chechnya. An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 lives, mostly civilian, were lost in the first phase of the war.

**Type of Conflict:**
State formation

**Parties to the Conflict:**

1) Government of Russia, led by President Vladimir Putin. Although Chechnya is administered by an elected president, Moscow maintains control over the republic through the presence of federal troops, though the number of estimated Russian troops has been reduced over the past three years. At one point Russia had as many as 100,000 soldiers in Chechnya, but as of early 2006, less than 40,000 remained, as Moscow continued to hand over control to Chechen security forces. The number of Russian troops has increased, however, in other regions of the North Caucasus, such as Dagestan and Karachayevo-Cherkessia.

"The Kremlin is struggling to contain a mix of Islamist groups, separatist fighters and organized crime in the North Caucasus." [Aljazeera, 13 June 2008]

"In addition to just under 40,000 federal troops that remained in Chechnya this spring (including all special forces), there are now Chechen "Battalions" supported by Moscow and the security forces of the Chechen Interior Ministry." [Jeronim Perovic, ISN Security Watch, June 6, 2006]

"Russia says it is carrying out an 'anti-terrorist operation' in Chechnya that forms part of the world campaign being conducted against terrorism since September 11. The number of Russian troops deployed in the republic is estimated at 100,000." [Le Monde, October 17-23, 2002]

2) Kremlin-backed government of Chechnya, currently led by President Ramzon Kadyrov. Ramzon Kadyrov was approved as the president in March, 2006, after his predecessor Abramov resigned due to injury. Ramzon Kadyrov is the son of former pro-Moscow Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov, who was killed by a rebel car bomb in 2004.

"The Moscow-backed parliament of Chechnya today unanimously approved the appointment of Ramzan Kadyrov as the republic's prime minister." [RFE/FL, March 4, 2006]
3) Chechen ‘rebel’ forces, currently led by Doka Umarov. Umarov replaced Abdul-Khalim Saidulayev who was assassinated by pro-Russian forces in June 2006. Shamil Basaev, a long time rebel leader, was appointed Umarov’s deputy in June, but killed under disputed circumstances in July 2006. At one point there were an estimated 1000 to 3000 rebel fighters, though later estimates put the number of active rebel fighters at between 700 and 750.

"Although the military still carries out operations against remaining Chechen rebel woups (whose total number, according to the Russian Interior Ministry, is around 750 active fighters), the intensity of war has indeed dropped over the past three years." [Jeronim Perovic, ISN Security Watch, June 6, 2006]

"Chechnya’s beleaguered separatist movement has appointed militant commander, Doka Umarov, as its new president following the assassination of his predecessor." [Nick Paton Walsh, The Guardian, June 18, 2006]

"In spite of Russia’s insistence that Chechen fighters have links to Islamic terrorists outside Chechnya, no evidence has been found to substantiate this claim." [SIPRI Yearbook 2003]

"Russian officials quickly blamed the [suicide] attack on Chechen militants and singled out Arabs who they said have gained significant influence in the movement." [Washington Post Foreign Service, May 13, 2003]

4) A growing number of militant Islamist groups have become increasingly active throughout the north Caucasus including Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and other neighboring territories attacking local police and Russian military forces. They are often organized as local ‘jamaats’ or local councils that act as parallel local governments enforcing Sharia rule although not all jamaats are actively engaged in armed struggle. Their stated goal is to establish Sharia rule and an Islamic caliphate in the north Caucasus. Links to Chechen rebels are informal and fluid.

"...Dagestan retains active, extremist local jamaats. Explosions and gunfights have claimed the lives of police and militants almost every second day since January." [Nick Paton Walsh, The Guardian, November 30, 2005]

**Status of Fighting:**

**2008 In spite of sporadic violence across Chechnya in 2008, increased reconstruction efforts remained a priority in Chechnya’s demolished capital, Grozny. Various human rights organizations have cited multiple human rights violations since 1999 by both sides in forms of torture, executions and disappearances. A decline in disappearances was reported in 2008 by local human rights organizations and a limited attempt has been made to uncover and address the possible 5,000 people who have allegedly disappeared since 1999. There were also still more than 50,000 displaced Chechens living in private accommodation in early 2008, as well as almost 6,000 still in temporary homes, according to the U.N. refugee agency, UNHCR.

"Russia sent troops to Chechnya in 1994 and again in 1999 to put down separatist rebellions. In the last few years, Moscow has poured millions of dollars into rebuilding the province.” [Reuters, 20 March 2008]

"Violence from Chechnya has spilled over into neighbouring regions of the North Caucasus, Ingushetia and Dagestan. Over the past year, shoot-outs have become more frequent in the adjoining regions than in Chechnya itself, which the Kremlin claims has been restored to near normality.” [Reuters, 20 March 2008]

"Major fighting between Chechen rebels and Russian forces has died down in recent years but hit and run attacks on security forces have continued." [BBC News, 5 May 2008]

"As of June 2008, the European Court of Human Rights had found Russia responsible for human rights violations in Chechnya in 31 rulings, including torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions.” [RULAC, 3 June 2008]

"Local human rights groups continued to report a decline in the number of enforced
disappearances, documenting 30 abductions leading to nine disappearances by September. However, few efforts have been made to address the cases of as many as 5,000 people “disappeared” since 1999.” [Human Rights Watch, World Report 2009]

2007 On the 9th of July Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechnya’s pro-Moscow president, declared that the fighting was “finally and irreversibly” over. He also declared Chechnya to be “the most stable region in the North Caucasus”. Despite sporadic fighting in the south as well as the capital of Grozny, Kadyrov’s claims have held some truth, as Chechnya has been relatively peaceful over the past year. Although several hundred fighters still remain active throughout the country, demobilization programs saw over 500 former rebels surrender in January under conditions of amnesty. However, there are many claims that those who have turned themselves in are guilty of numerous violations against civilians including torture, extrajudicial killings and kidnapping. Competition for oil resources between Chechnya and the Kremlin has also been an area of high tension, prompting fears that the region could once again be engulfed by violence.

"In his first public address to the people of Chechnya, the republic’s pro-Moscow president Ramzan Kadyrov announced on July 9 that the fighting had “finally and irreversibly” ended. Chechnya was now “the most stable region in the North Caucasus,” he said. That same day, however, rebel fighters carried out an attack on a Russian military convoy in the mountainous Vedeno region of southeastern Chechnya. They blew up an armoured troop carrier that was escorting a group of trucks transporting soldiers, and then raked it with automatic fire. According to official reports, three soldiers were killed and five injured in the raid. " [Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 12 July 2007]

"A few months ago, Russian deputy interior minister Arkady Yedelev estimated that there were 37 “bandit groups” active in Chechnya, totaling around 450 men. President Kadyrov said that only a few dozen fighters remained in the hills and promised to “destroy them within the next few months”. Whether or not the recent increase in fighting is merely a short-lived summer campaign, it does suggest that such claims are over-confident and that the rebels still possess the strength to keep the security forces in Chechnya – numbering some 20 000 men, on a state of alert.” [Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 12 July 2007]

"Fighting has been sporadic and small in scale for a second year. A large rebel offensive did not materialize this summer, as the separatists had predicted. Buoyed by a sustained lull in fighting and flush with cash, Kadyrov’s government has rebuilt most of its capital and outlying areas.” [International Herald Tribune, 30 September 2007]

"More than 500 armed militants in Chechnya and other parts of Russia’s troubled North Caucasus surrendered to authorities as part of an amnesty that expired Monday, a Russian official said. An official with the office of Dmitry Kozak, President Vladimir Putin’s envoy to the southern federal district, told the Associated Press that more than 500 militants had turned themselves in; the official spoke on condition of anonymity since he was not authorized to speak to the media. Among those surrendering during the weekend were two bodyguards and the driver of slain Chechen rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev.” [The Seattle Times, 15 January 2007]

“According to rights groups, many of those who surrender join the ranks of Chechnya’s security forces, which have been accused of involvement in abductions, torture and extrajudicial killings targeting civilians.” [The Seattle Times, 15 January 2007]

2006 While isolated attacks and clashes between security forces and rebels led to over 100 reported deaths this year (including the notable deaths of 2 important rebel leaders), the intensity of fighting declined in 2006. Putin declared that the conflict in Chechnya was no longer a “war,” but limited to isolated cases of terrorism, and announced that anti-terrorism operations had come to a close. However, though the number of federal troops continued to decline and some semblance of stability seems to have returned to the region, human rights advocates argue that this has come by outsourcing the fight against separatists to Kadyrov’s security forces who have been accused of human rights abuses such as hostage taking and torture. Unrest in the neighbouring republics of Dagestan and Ingushetiya continued throughout the year.

"Twelve years after Chechnya sank into a maelstrom of violence, Russia has all but won its war
against separatist rebels in the breakaway Muslim republic. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s strategy of slowly withdrawing federal forces and relying on a pro-Moscow Chechen strongman to quench the conflict seems to have worked. But maintaining peace in Chechnya has come at a huge cost. In order to suppress the estimated 700 rebels who remain, the Kremlin is accused of giving the nod to a gamut of brutal methods, including abduction and torture.” [Tom Parfitt, The Boston Globe, December 3, 2006]

"Russian officials say Putin has pursued a policy of outsourcing the fight against separatists to local strongmen and that he wants to reduce Russia’s 40 000 soldiers in Chechnya.” [James Kilner, Reuters, October 25, 2006]

2005 Guerrilla-style attacks by Chechen rebels and Russian army operations continued in Chechnya. Islamist rebels in the territory of Kabardino-Balkaria launched a large but failed attack against Russian security forces in Nalchik in October. Repeated attacks by Islamist rebels also took place in Dagestan and Ingushetia as the conflict expanded beyond Chechnya to other parts of the north Caucasus region.

"Militants conducted a coordinated series of attacks on police and other government buildings in Nalchik on Thursday. Some 137 people were killed in the fighting, according to official data...Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev...claimed he was behind the attacks...Basayev said the attacks were carried out by militants affiliated with the Chechen rebels, but that Chechen fighters were not involved, indicating an increasingly organized effort to set up militant cells throughout the region that take direction from him.” [Fatima Tlisova, Associated Press, October 18, 2005]

"Investigators questioned witnesses and searched for suspects Wednesday, a day after an ambush on security forces in Chechnya that killed 14 people, including two children. The attack, which wounded nearly 30 people, was one of the worst on law enforcement forces in the violence-torn southern Russian region in recent months...Officials say attackers set a trap Tuesday by firing at a corpse left in a stolen police jeep to make the Interior Ministry troops believe a shooting was taking place. When the troops arrived, a bomb went off. Roman Shchekotin, a spokesman for the southern federal district Interior Ministry, said 14 people died, including 11 law enforcement officers and three civilians. Two children, aged 13 and 14, were among the dead.” [International Herald Tribune, July 20, 2005]

2004 Sporadic and intense fighting continued for much of 2004 with reported casualties in the hundreds. Kidnappings and hostage-takings remained common rebel tactics as Russian forces stepped up attacks on rebels in mountain areas. The year’s most serious incident, a hostage-taking by rebels at a school in Beslan, resulted in 344 deaths.

2003 Fighting continued between Russian armed forces and rebels in Chechnya and in bordering areas. The rebels engaged the numerically superior and better equipped Russian forces, largely through guerrilla tactics such as ambushes and bombings. Despite few reported rebel casualties, it is widely held that the Russian security forces were active in abducting, detaining and killing hundreds of alleged rebels. Civilians continued to be killed by both sides and a surge of suicide bombings in and around Chechnya, targeted mainly at Russian governmental and military establishments, resulted in approximately 200 deaths, many of them civilian. Both conflict parties continued to use landmines and reports of child fighters within Chechen ranks persisted.

"The brutality of the four-year armed conflict in Chechnya has started spilling across the border to the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia. In the summer of 2003, Russian forces based in Chechnya and the forces of the pro-Moscow Chechen administration conducted a series of operations in Ingushetia, in which they replicated many of the same abuses as those they committed during operations in Chechnya.” [Human Rights Watch, September 22, 2003]

"Three children aged between 10 and 12 died when an explosive device they were setting up in the southern Russian republic of Chechnya blew up in their faces, military sources said Monday. ... The rebels have long been suspected of using children to help them lay them down.” [Agence France-Presse, September 22, 2003]

"Five Russian servicemen were killed in Chechnya yesterday by a bomb detonated under their
armed personnel carrier, Interfax news agency quoted a Russian military source as saying."

[\textit{globeandmail.com}, August 14, 2003]

"In a series of attacks on Russian targets in Ingushetia and north Ossetia, another neighbouring province, in the past three months, Chechen guerrillas have expanded their operations outside their home turf. Two assaults on military convoys in the past two weeks near Galashki killed 11 Russian soldiers. Twelve days ago, a suicide bomber smashed his truck through the gates of a military hospital in Mozdok, 45 miles to the north, destroying the building and killing 50 people."

[\textit{Washington Post Foreign Service}, August 13, 2003]

**2002** Russian troops continued to detain, torture and kill suspected Chechen rebels, despite efforts by Moscow to improve the human rights practices of the military. The rebels targeted Russian troops and civilians with ambushes, bombs, landmines and hostage-taking.

"Investigators for Memorial [a Russian human rights group] said it has documented proof that 946 innocent Chechens died at the hands of Russian troops in just three of Chechnya's most populated districts during a 14-moth period that ended in November. Another 1,200 to 2,000 were listed as missing, the group said." [\textit{washingtonpost.com}, June 29, 2002]

"... the toll on hapless civilians is agonizing. International aid agencies estimate there are at least 10,000 mine victims in Chechnya - 4,000 of them children - in urgent need of physical therapy, prosthetics, and psychological counselling." [\textit{The Christian Science Monitor}, February 8, 2002]

**2001** Despite Russian government assertions that it was in control of Chechnya, guerrilla-style attacks, bombings, and assassinations took place almost on a daily basis throughout Chechnya. On several occasions the Chechen rebels launched large-scale offensives against Russian military targets.

"Chechen fighters were widely believed to be responsible for a wave of assassinations of local civil servants and religious leaders who were reported targeted for their cooperation with the Russian government. In 2001, those murdered included at least eighteen leaders of districts and town administrations, at least five religious leaders and numerous police officers, teachers, and lower ranking civil servants." [\textit{Human Rights Watch, World Report: Russian Federation}, February, 2002]

"Despite Russian claims that most resistance has been quashed, sporadic violence continues to be a feature of daily life in Chechnya, and early this month General Vladimir Moltenski, commander of the Russian Unified Group of Forces in the North Caucasus, stated that the number of military bases in Chechnya would need to be dramatically increased to control the situation." [\textit{Janes Defense Weekly}, November 28, 2001]

**2000** After weeks of heavy bombardment, Russian forces captured the Chechen capital, Grozny, from rebels in early February and then shifted military operations to the rebel stronghold in Chechnya's southern mountains. The Chechen rebels moved to guerrilla-style attacks against Russian troops and officials, vehicle checkpoints, and administrative buildings. In June, Russia suspended heavy attacks in Chechnya to build public support for Akhmad Kadyrov, Moscow’s newly appointed administrator of the war-ravaged republic.

"Chechen field commanders have threatened to launch operations to recapture towns taken by Moscow since its troops poured into the rebellious republic on Oct 1. However, rebel forces continue to avoid larger scale fighting with the much larger Russian army, which controls most of the republic, instead keeping a daily barrage of ambushes." [\textit{AFP}, August 10, 2000]

**1999** Armed conflict between Russian and Chechen troops resumed in late August 1999 when Russian forces dropped bombs on the breakaway republic of Chechnya. Russian officials blamed Chechens for recent apartment building bombings in Moscow and other Russian cities, as well as rebel incursions into Dagestan, which Russian officials claimed as proof of the terrorist threat posed by Chechens. Chechen leaders denied both activities. Russian advances in Chechnya included air raids, bombing, and shelling of Chechen towns to establish a security zone that would cut off the republic from the rest of the federation. Some reports suggested the Russian military used aerosol bombs before troops engaged in the first on-the-ground battle against Chechen troops in mid-December. Many civilians were killed in this new phase of the conflict, despite
Number of Deaths:

Total: Estimates of the total number of deaths since 1999 typically range from 25,000 to 100,000. According to a number of human rights organizations, the war has caused the deaths of close to 30,000 Chechen and Russian civilians - although no official civilian death toll has ever been published - and has generated hundreds of thousands of Chechen refugees. The Russian military has been accused of deliberately attempting to reduce the male population in Chechnya. Official Russian sources claimed that approximately 5,000 Russian troops were killed between August 1999 and October 2003 while at least one non-governmental organization estimated more than double the official figure. Interfax (Russia’s state-run media) estimated that 15,000 rebels were killed in the same period. In 2008, Memorial, a Russian based human rights organization, projected that up to 15,000 Russian soldiers have died in total while various other organizations put the number as high as 40,000. Memorial also estimated that since 1999, up to 25,000 civilians have been killed or have gone missing.

"Memorial, for example, estimates about 15,000 Russian soldiers have died in total, while others estimate up to 40,000." [Reuters, 3 September 2008]

"Human rights organization Memorial estimates the number of killed or missing civilians at up to 50,000 for the first Chechen war and up to 25,000 for the second and its aftermath." [Reuters, 3 September 2008]

"Russian and Chechen officials have to some extent recognized the scale and gravity of the problem. As of 1 March 2007, up to 2,800 persons were listed as abducted, disappeared and missing in Chechnya. Memorial has estimated that in fact, between 3,000 and 5,000 men, women and children have gone missing in the Chechen Republic following what they term as abductions, arbitrary arrests and detentions since 1999." [Amnesty International, July 2007]

"Lightly armed rebels have for years fought against Russian forces in Muslim Chechnya in a conflict that has killed 10 000 Russian soldiers, according to official figures, and as many as 100 000 civilians according to independent estimates. Thousands of rebel fighters are believed to have been killed." [Sebastian Smith, Agence French Press, June 23, 2006]

2008 The online publication Caucasian Knot reported that because of violent conflict during the year, 237 persons were killed in Chechnya – 25 civilians, 97 police officers, and 115 militants. [Source: 2008 Human Rights Report: Russia, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 2009]

2007 Sporadic bouts of violence claimed the lives of less than 100 people in 2007, prompting optimism that organized armed violence between Chechen rebels and the Russian government has ended.

2006 At least 100 people were reported dead this year, including approximately 50 Russian soldiers/security officers, 30 civilians, and 25 Chechen rebels. This is by far the lowest annual death toll since the conflict began.

2005 At least 400 people were killed this year. With daily incidents of violence in Chechnya and reports of numerous and violent clashes in neighbouring territories, it is likely that the actual number of deaths is far higher. It remains difficult to identify accurate numbers due to the lack of media access and remoteness of the region’s hotspots.

2004 At least 600 people were reported killed in 2004. A precise estimate remains difficult because of the nature of the conflict and the limited capacity of media sources to report details.

2003 At least three hundred and possibly over a thousand people were killed in and around Chechnya in 2003. Due to the limited capacity of external media sources, the tainted reporting of domestic media sources and also to the nature of the conflict, it is impossible to provide an accurate number for conflict deaths. Independent media reported over 100 Russian soldiers were killed in Chechnya, with approximately 70 more security personnel killed in neighbouring regions. Although there were only 10 reported rebel deaths, it is widely held that the actual figure is much higher. Approximately 100 Chechen and Russian civilians were reported killed. These figures do
not include the significant number of alleged abductions of Chechen fighters and civilians by Russian security forces.

"... the Russian military in Chechnya suffered 4,749 casualties [both injuries and fatalities] in 2002-03, the highest figure in one year since the current Chechen conflict began." [The International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance 2003-2004]

2002 At least 2,000 federal troops were killed this year. Exact figures on rebel casualties were not available but a number of reports claimed that at least 50 Chechen rebels were killed. Hundreds of Chechen civilians and at least 100 Russian civilians died as a result of the conflict.

"A leaked Russian government report has accused its own soldiers of murdering more than 1,000 Chechen civilians last year in an apparent admission that discipline has broken down among its troops." [telegraph.co.uk, April 18, 2003]

2001 According to official Russian government figures the death toll for 2001 was in the hundreds. Some international agencies claim the actual death toll is in the thousands.

"Russia said its troops killed 73 Chechen separatist rebels during an operation to flush out militants in mountainous areas southeast of the regional capital Grozny. Rebel sources reported clashes throughout much of the region on Russian’s southern flank and said 20 Russian servicemen had been killed or wounded." [CNN, December 31, 2001]

2000 Hundreds of people, and possibly thousands, were killed in the fighting.

(Military losses are hard to estimate. Both sides have been engaged in a propaganda war making it difficult to ascertain the truth about casualty figures.)

"The fighting in Chechnya, which officially began on October 1, 1999, with the Russian army’s intervention in the breakaway republic, has officially left almost 2, 400 Russian troops dead, though the real death toll is twice that, according to the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers." [AFP, Oct 1, 2000]

1999 Hundreds of combatants were killed, with one report claiming almost 1,200 Russian soldiers killed. Likely at least 1,000 civilians died, with some reports exceeding 4,000.

Political Developments:

2008 Territorial disputes between the pro-Moscow government of Chechnya and the government of Russia caused tensions between the two parties. Control over much of Chechnya’s territories includes military occupation of schools, hospitals, and grounds which are said to be needed in order to rebuild Chechnya's republic. Political tensions arose in September when Ruslan Yamadayev, a former MP and bitter rival of Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov, was shot dead outside the British embassy in central Moscow. President Kadyrov was accused of being linked to the murder for political motivations. It has been reported that President Kadyrov has since denied any involvement in the death of Ruslan Yamadayev.

"The Russian army occupies some 15 times more territory than it had been renting in the latter years of Soviet rule, according to Chechen figures, with official bases alone taking up 31,000 hectares (120 square miles) and yet more occupied illegally." [AFP, 19 July, 2008]

"We are forever begging, we beg the military daily for them to give up schools and hospitals that the republic lacks. We cannot restore them, while the military are properly financed and are supposed to build what they need themselves," – Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov [AFP, 19 July, 2008]

"Russia launched an investigation yesterday into the assassination on Wednesday night of Ruslan Yamadayev, a former MP and bitter rival of Chechnya's pro-Kremlin president Ramzan Kadyrov.” [The Guardian, 26 September, 2008]
"Today, a brother of Ruslan and Sulim alleged Kadyrov was behind last night’s well-planned execution. Isa Yamadayev told Kommersant newspaper: "Our family has information that he [Kadyrov] was preparing a reprisal. Today, however, Kadyrov denied involvement. Lema Gudayev, a spokeswoman for Kadyrov, told Interfax" [The Guardian, 25 September 2008]

2007 International skepticism surrounding the credibility of Chechnya’s Moscow-appointed president, Ramzan Kadyrov continued throughout 2007 amidst claims that he and his followers, known as “Kadyrovtsy” are guilty of widespread human rights abuses. Many observers felt that Kadyrov’s July declaration that violence in Chechnya had “finally and irreversibly” ended was premature, but the region has experienced the lowest levels of violence since the conflict began. Furthermore, there are no mechanisms in place to address crimes against civilians committed by both Russian troops and Chechen rebels. Efforts to rebuild the region are currently underway, but many of those who have been displaced are having significant difficulties securing housing, prompting fears that destabilization may soon resume. Observers are finding that many areas that have been designated as “rebuilt” only appear to be so and are often lack essential services such as electricity and running water. More than half of the funds available for reconstruction are administered through the Akhmad Kadyrov Fund, named for Kadyrov’s father. The fund is not open to outside scrutiny and its holdings and financial sources are not publicly known.

"Three years after a wave of guerilla and terrorist attacks caused many analysts to say that Russia’s war against Chechen separatists could not be won, the republic has fallen almost fully under the control of the Kremlin and its indigenous proxies, led by Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen president." [International Herald Tribune, 30 September 2007]

"Kadyrov or, to be more accurate, his people are referred to not just in human rights reports by in documents of the official European organizations,” says Tatyana Lokshina, an analyst and human rights activist with the Demos centre. “The word ‘Kadyrovtsy’ has acquired international usage. The nomination of Kadyrov means that on the one hand Russia doesn’t care what the West thinks of it and on the other that Russia thinks the issue of Chechnya is closed.” [Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 19 February 2007]

"Russia’s military defeat of the heart of the rebellion in Chechnya appears to flow, in the simplest sense, from a two-state formula: extraordinary violence, followed by extraordinary investment. One corollary has been that allegations of human rights abuses by Russia and its local allies have been largely ignored. Kadyrov, like the republic he leads, has defied the dark projections. As Chechnya’s president since the spring, he has become a populist who has managed to embrace Sufi Islam, Chechen ethnic identity and Kremlin authority simultaneously.” [International Herald Tribune, 30 September 2007]

"Support for Kadyrov is by no means complete. In one enduring slum known locally as Shanghai, residents said they were being forced to move to worse housing – tiny wood-framed huts in a field polluted by oil – because their land was now valuable to Grozny’s new real estate speculators.” [International Herald Tribune, 30 September 2007]

2006 Changes in leadership occurred on both sides, as Kremlin-backed Ramzan Kadyrov became Chechnya’s Prime Minister when Abramov resigned in March, and Doka Umarov was appointed president of Chechnya’s separatist movement after his predecessor, Abdul-Khalim Saidulayev was killed in June. A manifesto agreeing to peace talks was drafted by Chechen representatives in July, but withdrawn by Chechen rebel leader Umarov in October. In September, Moscow extended the offer of amnesty to Russian rebels in exchange for the surrender of their weapons, and by the end of 2006 a reported 374 rebels had surrendered, though Umarov continued to reject amnesty offers. A proposal to withdraw more Russian troops and divest more power to Chechen security forces was welcomed by Chechen PM Kadyrov.

"Thirty-five rebels who had fought pro-Russian forces in Chechnya laid down their weapons on Thursday in one of the biggest mass surrenders under an amnesty agreement, a Russian military spokesman said...‘This is a big number,’ a spokesman for Russia's forces in Chechnya, Nikolai Varavin, said. ‘In the last 10 months 339 people have already surrendered, plus another 35 today.’ In August 50 rebels surrendered at one time." [Reuters, November 23, 2006]
"Rebel leader Umarov issued statement armed campaign would continue, withdrawing offer of peace talks; Russian parliament extended rebel amnesty until mid-January." [CrisisWatch, October 2006]

2005 The possibility of peace talks were severely diminished by the killing of moderate Chechen rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov by Russian forces. Shamil Basaev took over as the de facto leader of the rebel movement signaling a radicalization of the rebel Chechen leadership. The governing pro-Moscow United Russia party won disputed local parliamentary elections in November. Negotiations establishing a formal power-sharing framework between the pro-Moscow Chechen government and Moscow continued without a final agreement.

"Chechen warlord and rebel leader Shamil Basaev has been appointed to the second-ranking position in the separatists’ hierarchy in a move that reflects the rebels’ growing radicalization...While the ‘hawks’ were returning to the separatist cabinet, moderates - like Ilyas Akhmadov, Maskhadov’s long-time foreign minister, who favors ‘partial sovereignty’ rather than full independence from Russia - were shut out. Akhmadov now lives in the US, where he has been granted asylum. By bringing back in the separatist government such odious figures as Basaev and Udugov, who make common cause with foreign Muslim radicals, Sadulaev is effectively removing the divisions between separatists and religious radicals, said Malashenko." [International Relations and Security Network, Security Watch, August 26, 2005]

2004 The Russian government announced willingness to work more closely with international bodies and human rights organizations towards a peace settlement and reconstruction in Chechnya. The United Nations announced it would continue field activities in Chechnya and neighbouring countries. However, the impact of a surge in violence late in the year, including a school massacre in Beslan and the assassination of Chechnya’s president in a rebel attack, remained unclear. A new President, Alu Alkhanov, was elected in August. The situation improved sufficiently for Russian authorities to close the last Chechen refugee camp in Ingushetia, but human rights groups continued to condemn the rights situation in both Chechnya and Ingushetia.

"Moscow-backed candidate Alu Alkhanov has won presidential elections in Russia's troubled republic of Chechnya." [BBC News, August 30, 2004]

2003 A new constitution in March, created to replace the Chechen separatist constitution, sought to affirm the republic’s place within the Russian Federation. In October Akhmad Kadyrov, the Kremlin’s candidate for the post, was elected president and the President-elect stated there would be no negotiations with Chechen separatist leader Maskhadov and Chechnya would remain within the Russian Federation. (However, despite government claims that it was fair and free, critics within Chechnya, human rights groups and inter-governmental organizations dismissed the election, citing questionable electoral practices.) Russian parliamentary elections in December strengthened President Putin’s political position prior to 2004 presidential elections, as the pro-Kremlin United Russia Party gained almost half of the seats in the Duma. In 2003 the US State Department placed three Chechen groups on its list of foreign terrorist organizations and designated rebel leader Shamil Basayev a threat to US security, lending legitimacy to Moscow’s claim that the conflict was part of a global "war on terror". Moscow’s amnesty offer to Chechen fighters meanwhile went largely ignored, a reflection of continued instability. The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) Assistance Group in Chechnya, created in 1995 to monitor the conflict, was terminated in 2003 at the request of the Russian government, thereby ending any substantial international governmental presence in the republic.

"According to the official result issued by the Chechen Central Electoral Commission (CEC) on 7 October, the turn-out was 87.7 percent ... Akhmad Kadyrov got 80.84% of the votes ... The Presidency of the European Union expressed serious concern regarding the conditions in which these elections were held." [Council of Europe, October 20, 2003]

"... critics including Russian opposition politicians and rights groups have dismissed the election as a farce, denouncing the strong institutional bias in Kadyrov’s favour and the withdrawal or disqualification of his main rivals. ... The official turnout figure appeared barely credible to journalists who had visited several polling stations and observed few voters." [Agence France-Presse, October 6, 2003]

"Since the amnesty went into effect in June, only 170 rebels turned themselves in, out of an
estimated 2,000 to 3,000 who have been fighting Russian troops in the Caucasus republic in a brutal guerilla war since 1999."
[Agence France-Presse, September 1, 2003]

"U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell on Friday designated Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev a threat to the security of the United States and to U.S. citizens. ... The U.S. action supports Russia’s efforts to win acceptance of its widely criticized four-year was in Chechnya and its refusal to negotiate with the rebels. ... A Foreign Ministry statement praised the move as a ‘further step in strengthening global anti-terrorist cooperation.”
[Associated Press, August 11, 2003]

2002 The Russian government failed to produce a long-term political solution to the conflict although informal talks between Russian and Chechen officials began in March. The plight of Chechens gained international recognition in October when Chechen rebels took approximately 800 people hostage in a theatre in Moscow, and demanded that Russia stop the war in Chechnya and pull out its troops. This crisis highlighted the extensive human rights abuses committed by Russian forces against Chechens. In response to domestic and international pressure, the Russian government created Order 80, intended to prevent Russian troops from violating the rights of Chechens during routine "clean-up" operations. However, human rights groups claimed this initiative accomplished little as troops continued to detain, torture and murder innocent civilians.

Both the government and human rights groups agreed that the main achievement of the dialogue between the government and human rights groups was the issuance March 27 of the so-called Order 80. It required troops in Chechnya carrying out zachistki, or cleanup operations, to have visible numbers on their armored vehicles; to identify themselves when conducting searches; and to give local authorities a list of names and reasons whenever terrorist suspects are taken away, including stating where they will be held. In exchange, local administrators were obliged to sign a statement confirming that the zachistki were carried out properly."
[latimes.com, July 13, 2002]

"After more than two years of civil war in Chechnya, Russian lawmakers have opened a new dialogue with Chechen political figures in hopes of setting terms for direct talks between President Vladimir Putin and the rebel leaders he has branded terrorists. The opening of the informal talks in Moscow this month followed the failure of an initiative by Putin last fall to begin direct talks with Chechen leaders hiding in the northern Caucasus, where guerilla operations against federal troops continue." [International Herald Tribune, March 26, 2002]

2001 In November, Russian and Chechen representatives met for talks near Moscow. "Russian and Chechen officials have held their first face-to-face talks since the start of the war in 1999. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s envoy to Chechnya met with a Chechen rebel representative in Moscow. The meeting between Putin’s envoy Viktor Kazantsev and Akhmed Zakayev, a representative of separatist Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov, took place at Sheremetyevo airport outside Moscow and continued at a government guest house outside the city. Kazantsev told the Interfax news agency after the two hour meeting that the talks ‘went exclusively along the lines of the recent statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin concerning Chechnya.’ The dialogue will continue, he said, without setting a date for a next meeting. Kazantsev’s advisor Mazim Federenko told Interfax that the two discussed ways for the guerillas to lay down their weapons and begin a peaceful life." [CNN, November 19, 2001]

2000 In March, acting President Vladimir Putin was elected as Russian president in a major election victory. Putin’s victory was linked to his military campaign in Chechnya.

1999 Despite concern expressed by US and European officials at the rising number of civilian casualties and the stability of the Caucasus region, Russia maintains the crisis is an internal matter and refuses to accept outside assistance. Russia’s offensive has created diverse reactions from the international community. While the United States and European nations pondered whether to support a Russian military operation just three years after the end of a devastating civil war, China expressed support for Russia’s military campaign in Chechnya, stating that outside intervention in the internal affairs of a country is a violation of sovereignty. The European Parliament voted in mid-December to condemn Russia’s military campaign in Chechnya. On December 31, President Boris Yeltsin resigned and was replaced by Vladimir Putin as acting President.
Background:

One of 21 Russian republics, Chechnya claimed independence in 1991, a status never recognized by Russia or other states. Moscow says Chechnya is part of Russia even though it has little or no control there. In mid-1994, Russia began moving troops into Chechnya in a covert war to overthrow then Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev and reintegrate Chechnya into Russia. After a humiliating defeat against Chechen separatists two years later, Russia withdrew all forces and signed a peace agreement in August, 1996. The agreement postponed any definition of Chechnya’s status until 31 December 2001 and failed to define who would govern Chechnya until its status was determined. The lack of definition allowed both sides to continue to promote their own interests: Chechnya continued to assert its independence while Russia maintained its influence over the territory.

A second phase of the Russia-Chechnya armed conflict began in 1999 after Russian troops launched attacks against the region following two invasions 'attributed to Islamic rebels' into the neighbouring republic of Dagestan. Fighting between Russian forces and Chechen groups resumed. Russian control over Chechnya was reinforced in 2003 by a Chechen constitution emphasizing the republic’s permanent inclusion in the Russian Federation and by the election of a pro-Russian president in a process dismissed by independent observers. Moscow has stated repeatedly that the conflict is not over Chechen independence, but a war against terrorism and Chechen attempts to spread subversion through the North Caucasus. Others challenge this explanation noting that Chechen forces claim the right to establish an independent Islamic republic. Chechen leaders also claim that Chechens are targeted as scapegoats for regional problems and that the war serves Moscow to deflect attention from Russian domestic problems. Moscow has continually resisted the involvement of international actors in the conflict.

Since the election of a pro-Kremlin government in 2005, Moscow has significantly reduced the number of federal troops in the region, choosing instead to transfer more responsibility for the security situation and more political control to the Chechen government. By 2006, some semblance of security seemed to have returned to the area, as key leaders of the rebel movement were killed and an increasing number of rebels disarmed in return for amnesty. Putin declared that the conflict was no longer a “war,” and that the Kremlin’s anti-terrorism operations had come to a close. Human rights advocates, however, say that the region’s stability has come at a cost, arguing that Putin outsourced the fight against separatists to Chechnya’s security forces, who have been accused of human rights abuses such as torture and hostage taking. In 2007 Moscow-appointed Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov declared fighting in Chechnya to be “finally and irreversibly” over, a statement that was originally thought to be premature, but has largely been realized throughout the region. Rebuilding efforts are currently underway but conflict between Moscow and Chechnya over oil resources as well as the displacement of those currently residing in oil-rich areas could threaten to destabilize the region once again.

Arms Sources:

The government of Russia produces its own weapons domestically and receives weapons from the United States and other NATO countries. Chechen forces receive their weapons illegally from Russia. Moscow has accused several states, including Saudi Arabia, of helping the Chechen fighters acquire arms.

"In contrast to previous years, [journalist Andrei] Babitskii said, there appears to be little problem with buying weapons from Russian soldiers garrisoned in the lowlands below ... The Chechen mujahedin get almost all of their armaments - from guns to mines to grenades to rocket launchers - from Russian soldiers." [Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, August 14, 2003]

"Russians are selling their own weapons to the Chechens, as they did in the previous war." [Globe and Mail, 14 December 1999]

"Russia has urged several Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, to cooperate in the fight against Islamic insurgents in Chechnya and Dagestan. Russian officials have accused Saudi Arabia of providing funds and arms to Chechnya." [World Tribune.Com, October 7, 1999].


Economic factors:
Some observers have suggested that disputes over oil transit explain to a large degree the renewed fighting. In 1997, Russia and Chechnya signed an agreement allowing Azerbaijani oil exports to travel through Chechnya. Russia then decided to build an alternative pipeline in Dagestan to bypass the unstable Chechen section. However, the alleged Chechen rebel invasion into Dagestan also made this area unsafe and the current Chechen war started shortly after. In addition, widespread poverty has fueled anger against Moscow and local authorities providing a substantial pool of young recruits to Chechen and Islamist rebels who appear increasingly as attractive alternatives. Rebuilding efforts are currently underway following a decline in hostilities throughout 2007, but conflict between Moscow and Chechnya over oil resources as well as the displacement of those currently residing in oil-rich areas could threaten to destabilize the region once again.

"Russian PM Putin announced 120.6 billion rubles ($5 billion) to be spent on developing Chechnya in the next 4 years." [Crisis Group, 1 July 2008]

"Unemployment is rampant, but the Chechen capital, Grozny, is getting back on its feet after 85 percent of it was damaged or destroyed by heavy fire during major offensives at the end of 1994 and again in 1999-2000." [Reuters, 3 September 2008]

"...In June this year, Putin’s envoy to the north Caucasus, Dmitri Kozak, wrote a report for his boss that said local corruption, unemployment and police abuses were bolstering the role 'extremist groups' and 'Sharia enclaves' were playing in the region. Poverty hasn't helped; over the past three years, the United Nations Development Programme in Moscow has noted, living standards have risen across Russia but remained the same in the north Caucasus. In this climate, anger has grown and the response from Moscow has been brutal...All of which has made the Islamist alternative appear more attractive." [Nick Paton Walsh, The Guardian, November 30, 2005]