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## World: Europe

# Chechnya: The hard path to statehood



Building a state has proved difficult in Chechnya

Chechnya has been running its own affairs since the cease-fire with Russia in May 1996, although Moscow still lists the Islamic republic as part of the Russian Federation.

Since the end of the fighting, Chechnya has been plagued by a crime wave, which has brought the republic to the brink of anarchy. Hostage-taking is rife and has become a steady business for some criminal gangs.



British aid workers Camilla Carr and Jon James were only two of scores of hostages

The Chechen government says the kidnapping epidemic, which has seriously damaged its efforts to win international recognition, is at least partly orchestrated by the Russian secret services.

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov's government has been unable to stem the crime wave. The president, who commanded Chechen fighters during the war for independence, has himself been the target of an assassination attempt.



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The president's authority is weak and he has almost no cash to pay government employees, policemen or soldiers.

The criminal activity and desperate economic situation led him to appoint a tough new government, but that failed and now a number of influential commanders are calling for his resignation.

These include former Prime Minister Shamil Basayev the most famous - and feared - Chechen field commander, and one of Chechnya's most militant warlords, Salman Raduyev. They have accused Mr Maskhadov of usurping power, enriching himself and being too close to Russia.

President Maskhadov has many enemies within Chechnya, with the Islamic militants - usually known as Wahabis - at the top. He has ordered the expulsion of a group of foreign Islamists and banned a number of powerful warlords.

However, correspondents say the armed groups and Islamic militants have no interest in seizing power in a state they do not really believe in. They merely want the virtual anarchy in Chechnya to continue so as to consolidate their own local power.

### **The war with Russia**



The capital Grozny was devastated during the war with Russia

Chechnya is dwarfed by the country with which it fought a successful war of independence.

Smaller than Wales, it covers just over 6,000 square miles in the Caucasus mountains and has a population of about one million people.

More than 100,000 of these are believed to have died in the war with Russia. The secession movement began after the fall of Communism, with Chechnya proclaiming independence on 2

November 1991.

In March 1992, a constitution was adopted, defining the Chechen Republic as an independent, secular state governed by a president and a parliament.

In 1994, Russia sent troops to Chechnya to crush the independence movement of President Dzhokhar Dudayev.

### **Moscow cannot hold on**

Russian troops moved into the capital, Grozny, after a bombardment that reduced it to ruins. But they could not hold

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the city against a committed, warlike people.

In June 1995, Chechen rebels attacked the southern Russian city of Budyonnovsk, and took 2,000 civilians hostage in a hospital.

Russian troops unsuccessfully stormed the hospital twice. After negotiations between Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and rebels, the hostages were released.

In July 1995, negotiators signed a military agreement on troop withdrawals and disarmament of rebel fighters, but the pact stalled as clashes continued.

In February 1996, President Yeltsin admitted the Chechnya foray was "maybe one of our mistakes".

He announced a halt to military action and offered talks with rebels. A truce was agreed in May 1996.

On 1 August this year the then Russian Prime Minister, Sergei Kiriyenko, offered to make Chechnya a special economic zone within Russia in order to help revive its economy.

But its status is still a matter of dispute.

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