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John B. Dunlop
Stanford University

Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies



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Center on Democracy, Development,
and The Rule of Law
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies
Stanford University
Encina Hall
Stanford, CA 94305
Phone: 650-724-7197
Fax: 650-724-2996
<http://cddrl.stanford.edu/>

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CDDRL was founded by a generous grant from the Bill and Flora Hewlett Foundation in October in 2002 as part of the Stanford Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. The Center supports analytic studies, policy relevant research, training and outreach activities to assist developing countries in the design and implementation of policies to foster growth, democracy, and the rule of law.

The September 2004 Beslan Terrorist Incident: New Findings

John B. Dunlop

In 2006, I published a book containing a lengthy chapter entitled “Beslan: Russia’s 9/11?” that was devoted to the September 2004 Beslan hostage crisis. The chapter examined all of the available information concerning the terrorist episode that had come to light in the period from September 2004 through December 2005.¹ Following the appearance of this volume, I expanded my research into the Beslan incident, reporting new findings at academic seminars held in November 2007 at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, and the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies, Stanford University.²

At the time that my 2006 book appeared in print, there remained several key questions concerning the Beslan incident that needed to be answered. Most importantly, there was the central question of what had occurred shortly after 1:00 p.m. on 3 September 2004 when a loud explosion had been heard, followed several tens of seconds later by a second loud blast. The two explosions served as the justification for an assault on School No. 1 by Russian FSB, MVD and military forces armed, inter alia, with tanks, grenade launchers and thermobaric “flamethrowers.”³ A second major question that was not resolved in my book concerned the authorities’ negotiations with the terrorists. Could the sanguinary toll of the assault, which left 317 of the 1128 hostages (186 of them children) dead—i.e., almost thirty percent of those who had been taken captive—been avoided?

Ferretting out the Truth: That we know a great deal more today concerning the Beslan incident than we did five years ago is due in large part to the relentless digging carried out by North Ossetian and Russian women. First, there were the efforts by two North Ossetian women’s groups comprised of relatives of both the deceased and the surviving hostages, the “Mothers of Beslan” (Materi Beslana), headed by Susanna Dudieva and “The Voice of Beslan” (Golos Beslana), headed and later co-chaired by Ella Kesaeva.

As I reported in my 2006 book, the Mothers—still one group at the time—had obtained a meeting with President Vladimir Putin on 2 September 2005, but, subsequently, relations between the Russian political leadership and the mothers’ groups had soured due to the regime’s perceived unwillingness to sanction an investigation into the role of the Russian power structures in storming of the school.

Another woman activist whose work deserves to be singled out is Marina Litvinovich, a well-known human rights defender politically aligned with former world chess champion and pro-democracy politician Garri Kasparov. Litvinovich is the web-master of an ambitious site devoted entirely to the Beslan tragedy, pravdabeslana.ru [The Truth about Beslan.ru]. This site posted the transcripts of the trial of the sole accused terrorist taken into custody by the Russian authorities at the time of the Beslan events, a Chechen named

Nur-Pashi (Nur-Pasha) Kulaev. The trial, which continued on-and-off for about a year, eventually resulted in a life sentence being meted out to Kulaev in mid-2006.

The trial of Kulaev included lengthy testimony from a number of former hostages and other eyewitnesses to the Beslan events. The transcripts of this court testimony were then posted by Marina Litvinovich on her web-site pravdabeslana.ru. Subsequently, testimony given during a trial of three North Ossetian police officers charged with criminal negligence was also posted on the site. (In a miscarriage of justice, the three officers were eventually acquitted of the charges.⁴)

Another remarkable woman whose work deserves to be highlighted is Elena Milashina, an investigative journalist writing for a leading twice-weekly, pro-democracy newspaper, Novaya gazeta. Milashina's stream of pioneering essays devoted to the terrorist incident appeared over the course of several years. In the 28 August 2006 issue of Novaya gazeta—devoted entirely to the Beslan tragedy—Milashina presented the most detailed summary of the terrorist episode available to date.⁵

The Torshin Commission Attempts a Cover-Up: An effort by pro-regime elements to shape public perceptions of the Beslan incident was the report of the Russian parliamentary commission on Beslan, a body chaired by Aleksandr Torshin, a deputy speaker of the upper (non-elected) chamber of the Russian parliament, the Council of Federation. The commission's report to the full Council of Federation and to the Russian State Duma took place on a single day, 22 December 2006. Torshin's commission, it should be noted, consisted of ten members each from the Council of Federation and the State Duma. The State Duma representation consisted of seven deputies belonging to the Edinaya Rossiya [United Russia] faction (the so-called party of Putin) plus one from the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (also de facto a party of Putin), and one deputy each from the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (Yurii Ivanov) and from the Rodina faction (Yurii Savel'ev).

The two independent Duma members of the commission—Savel'ev and Ivanov—were the only deputies who elected to vote against the final version of the report of the commission that was presented to both houses of parliament on 22 December 2006. On the morning of the 22nd, Aleksandr Torshin summarized his commission's report during a session of the Federation Council; no copies of his report were circulated in advance to either the members of the Council or to their staffers. During his presentation, Torshin asserted categorically that “the reason for the [first] explosion in the school was the actions of the terrorists,” and, while admitting that Russian forces had “fired at the school from tanks and flamethrowers,” he emphasized that they had directed their fire “only at places where there were no hostages.”⁶

In the State Duma, a mere fifteen minutes were allotted for a discussion of a major terrorist event that has often been referred to as “Russia's 9/11.” Here, too, the report had not been read in advance by the members of the Duma Council, which normally screens all subjects to be discussed on the parliamentary floor. After deputy A. Moskalets, a member of the Torshin commission, had summarized the commission's findings in ten

minutes' time, the Edinaya Rossiya and LDPR factions voted to accept the report on a voice vote. Given the strong opposition of the KPRF and Rodina factions to these railroading tactics, as well as heated objections on the part of single mandate deputies, the chamber's speaker, Boris Gryzlov, allotted Yurii Savel'ev and Yurii Ivanov three minutes each to summarize their objections to the Torshin report.⁷ The report was then adopted by a vote of 333-91.⁸ The work of the Torshin commission was declared "completed."

The Findings of Duma Deputy Yurii Savel'ev: As has been noted, the 28 August 2006 issue of Novaya gazeta was entirely devoted to the Beslan incident. Among its contents was an abridged version of a seven-part 800-page report concerning the terrorist event authored by the aforementioned Duma deputy Yurii Savel'ev, who had been serving as a member of the Torshin commission. Savel'ev's report was then posted in its entirety on Marina Litvinovich's web-site.

Unlike Litvinovich and journalist Elena Milashina, who were both Russian "democrats," Savel'ev represented a rather fervent Russian nationalist. In a sense, he could also be considered a silovik (representative of the power ministries), since he was the former rector of the St. Petersburg Institute of Military Mechanics, where he had served as one of Russia's leading specialists on the physics of combustion and explosives. He was, in addition, the author of 450 academic works and the only specialist on combustion and explosives to be asked to serve on the Torshin commission. Savel'ev had presumably been placed on the commission because of his academic expertise but also, quite likely, because he was seen—wrongly as it turned out—as a regime loyalist.

In a program devoted to the terrorist incident carried by Ekho Moskvyy Radio on 3 September 2007—the third anniversary of the storming of the school—Savel'ev recalled: "I fully shared the official point of view [on Beslan]... But when I left [the commission]—after I had acquainted myself with all of the materials—I had arrived at completely different conclusions."⁹

Milashina Interviews Savel'ev: In prefacing her interview with Savel'ev, which appeared in the 28 August 2006 issue of Novaya gazeta, Elena Milashina wrote: "Today we publish in this issue the report of Yurii Savel'ev, a member of the federal parliamentary commission. The report consists of six parts... The research of the sole explosives specialist serving on the parliamentary commission was not included in the Torshin report. Moreover [she underlined] the conclusions of the parliamentary commission directly contradict the results and conclusions of Savel'ev's work."¹⁰

In his responses to Milashina's questions, Savel'ev stressed that his conclusions were largely based on the testimony of former hostages and eyewitnesses at the Kulaev trial. "I have already said," he noted, "that the most important source for those engaged in investigating the Beslan terrorist act were the trial of Nurpasha Kulaev and the testimony of former hostages and eyewitnesses. I never shared the opinion that the former hostages and victims were inadequate people. To the contrary, I believe that precisely they

recalled and brought to us everything that happened during those three days in the Beslan school.”

Savel'ev then focused his attention upon the central question of what had caused the two powerful explosions that rocked the school building beginning at 1:03 p.m. on 3 September 2004. “As far as the first explosions are concerned,” he began, “if you study the testimony of the hostages [posted on the web-site pravdabeslana.ru], you will see a serious departure from the investigation's version. The investigation maintains that the first explosions took place in the western part of the gymnasium as a result of the detonation of explosive devices that had been placed there by the terrorists.” “But,” he continued, “a majority of the hostages describe effects from explosions which occurred in the opposite (eastern) part of the gymnasium... It is a complete non-convergence. If you study the testimony attentively, then it becomes clear that after the first explosions in the gymnasium the explosive devices set by the terrorists did not go off. (They detonated later, as a result of a fire in the gymnasium.)”¹¹

Savel'ev then observed: “In accord with the conclusions reached by me, the first explosion was the result of the use of an RPO-A [i.e., a thermobaric ‘flamethrower’] fired from the roof an apartment building (Shkol'nyi pereulok, No. 37) at the roof of the gymnasium in its northeastern corner... The second explosion was the result of a shot fired from the roof of an apartment building (Shkol'nyi pereulok, N. 41) by an RShG-1 [grenade-launcher] using a high-explosive fragmentation grenade...”

“My conclusions,” Savel'ev summed up, “are the following: In the span of time during which the first [two] explosions were heard in the gymnasium—approximately 22 seconds—not one homemade explosive device placed by the terrorists went off. The first explosion occurred in the attic area of the gymnasium in the northeastern corner... The effects of the first explosion were these: the ceiling was broken through and a hole... was formed; there was also the destruction of the roof above the hole and the beginning of a fire in the attic section of the gymnasium. The second explosion took place under the windowsill of the northern window of the gymnasium adjoining its western wall. The result of this explosion was a breach in the wall under the window.”

What was the purpose behind this first shot? In Savel'ev's view, “The first shot was directed at the roof [of the gymnasium]—at that time there was sitting on the roof a rebel sniper who was shooting at the courtyard, where at the time two armored vehicles were moving and from where, possibly, a storm was intended to come. Evidently they wanted to kill this sniper...”¹² What resulted from this initial explosion, he noted, was described by the former hostages in their testimony. “They [the hostages] described how the [first] explosion occurred, how the ceiling was breached, how the roof shattered, how they lay on the floor, how around the hole [in the roof] a fire developed, and how burning fragments fell down upon them. But the [official] investigation stubbornly refuses to see that hole...”¹³

The purpose of the second shot was, as Savel'ev saw it, to blow a hole in the gymnasium wall large enough to permit significant numbers of hostages to escape. As Elena

Milashina wrote in her 2006 chronicle of events: “1:04-1:25 p.m. From the gymnasium there run out those hostages capable of moving on their own. The surviving hostages testify that the bombs placed by the terrorists on basketball hoops, on chairs, and in the center of the hall did not explode. Many hostages (about 300 persons) who preserved the ability to move but did not succeed in running out of the gymnasium were then herded by the rebels into the central building of the school—the auditorium, the cafeteria and the workshops.”¹⁴

During the course of a January 2007 interview, Savel’ev remarked that the Torshin commission—of which he had been a member—had elected not to include his findings in its report.¹⁵ “I asked,” he recalled, “that my materials (and that included more than 800 pages of text and hundreds of testimonies by eyewitnesses) be taken into account in the report.” However, “the majority of the members of the commission, who represented the ruling faction [Edinaya Rossiya] in the Duma, ignored my request. Moreover, several members of the commission told me directly that no-one intended to read my report. They intended simply to sweep my investigation under the rug... I was therefore required to bring to the people the results of my investigation. My duty as an [elected] deputy and my conscience as a scholar obliged me to do that.... Of all the members of the commission I was the only one who had a professional understanding of issues involving explosive technology...” Savel’ev then took a decision to have his report posted on the web-site administered by Marina Litvinovich. “I did not choose precisely that site by accident. In my view, Marina Litvinovich has performed an act of great civic significance.”

A Videotape is Revealed Backing up Savel’ev’s Version: The official investigation of the terrorist incident, one sponsored by the Russian authorities, did all that it could to discredit Savel’ev’s research. The Karbushev Institute, which is attached to the Ministry of Defense, and a scientific-productive enterprise named “Bazalt” were commissioned to examine the available evidence. “Eleven months and 600,000 rubles were spent [on this].”¹⁶ The apparent effort at a cover-up, however, came to naught once a key videotape unexpectedly made its appearance.

In July of 2007, the public organization “Mothers of Beslan,” headed up by Susanna Dudieva, announced that it had received an important videotape by post. “That tape was sent to us in the mail. There are people who are helping us to achieve an objective investigation,” Dudieva commented.¹⁷ Two months later, in September of 2007, Elena Milashina of Novaya gazeta revealed during an interview broadcast over Ekho Moskvyy Radio that this tape “was filmed by an employee of the republican [i.e., North Ossetian] procuracy.”¹⁸ Earlier she had reported: “The videotape, which the residents of Beslan received and then disseminated, represents footage taken by an official employee of the republican procuracy of North Ossetia. This person filmed on a video-camera the events of 1-3 September 2004, as well as the investigation that followed after the tragedy: the examination of the locus of events; the questioning of eyewitnesses, etc. The man was also questioned, and his name is known to the investigation. But all of his footage, in the words of the investigator from the General Procuracy, Solzhenitsyn, had been lost. But now, almost three years later, it has been found.”¹⁹

The footage that had been sent to the Beslan Mothers, Milashina pointed out, “represents far from all of the film shot by the procuracy cameraman. It is only a small part, but even this footage is enough to bury once and for all the official version of the beginning and the circumstances accompanying the storming of School No. 1.” What the film footage demonstrated clearly, Milashina emphasized, is that, “There were no explosions inside the gymnasium, i.e., the rebels did not explode a single one of their homemade explosive devices. Sappers from the Fifty-eighth Army succeeded in de-mining a part of those devices during the storming [of the school], while the remainder exploded following the outbreak of a broad-scale fire in the gymnasium, approximately after 3:30 p.m.”

On the film taken by the procuracy cameraman there had also been recorded a conversation of an official investigator with two army sappers named Gagloev and Nabiev, both of them holding the rank of lieutenant colonel. The former, Andrei Gagloev, was in fact the commander of the engineering troops of the Fifty-eighth army.²⁰ It emerged that Gagloev and Nabiev had gone into the school on their own initiative to de-mine the gymnasium. Their motive had been a simple one: to save lives. In so doing, they had disobeyed their official orders. They had been ordered by the leaders of the counter-terrorist operation to stand without moving in the encirclement outside the school.

What did the sappers see once they had made their way into the gymnasium (before most of the roof came crashing down)? The homemade explosive devices, Gagloev recalled, were supposed to be connected but, for some reason, the chain connecting the devices was “a mess,” incapable of exploding. As for the hole that had been formed under the window, Nabiev insisted that it could not have come from an explosion occurring inside the gymnasium. “We dragged out the children, and there were no [grenade] fragments. And around (on the walls) there were also none.”

“So,” the investigator summed up his taped questioning of the sappers, “in the room [i.e., the gymnasium] there were no explosions?”

Nabiev replied categorically: “There were none in the room.”

Commenting on this remarkable footage, Yurii Savel’ev observed during the course of a September 2007 radio interview: “The fact that the explosions were introduced from outside [the school building] did not elicit from me any doubts, all the more so because there appeared not long ago a tape of the questioning of two sappers, two colonels from the Fifty-eighth army, Nabiev and Gagloev. Their questioning took place at 4:00 p.m. on the third [of September]—at 4:00 p.m. At 3:00 p.m. they had left the gymnasium where the roof had not yet fallen—it would fall at 3:25 p.m.—and an investigator is questioning them. They say [on the film] that not one of the explosive devices [placed by the terrorists] blew up.”²¹

On 4 September 2004, Milashina has noted, “the investigators would find material confirmation of the testing conducted by the sappers, i.e., the weapons with whose help

the ‘first explosions’ were produced—an RPO [thermobaric flamethrower] and an RShG [grendade launcher].”²²

Another well-known Russian journalist, Yuliya Latynina, confided during the course of one of her weekly radio programs on Ekho Moskvyy Radio in December 2006: “I have been mistaken twice about Beslan. In the first minutes after the explosions there circulated rumors that the explosion had not been accidental, and that the first shot fired at the hostages had come from the federal forces. This proposed such a level of conspiracy that it seemed to me to be improbable. I don’t like conspiracy theories, I like natural events and accidental occurrences. And it seemed to be more likely that the terrorists had lost self-control after three days.... But then there came facts, that is, neither rumors nor logic, but the testimony of the hostages, the findings of the examination, and the conclusions of the commissions of [Stanislav]] Kesaev and Savel’ev, and I was forced to reexamine my position, and to say, no, the facts testify to the fact that the explosions which sounded at 1:03 and 1:04 p.m. were the work of the hands of the federals.”²³

In a subsequent essay published in *Ezhednevnyi zhurnal* in January of 2008, Latynina wrote: “Why did the first explosion in the gymnasium take place? Two reports—a separate report by Yurii Savel’ev and the report of the parliamentary commission of Stanislav Kesaev—demonstrate that the two first explosions, at 1:03 p.m. and 1:04 p.m., were not the explosions of bombs that had been hung by the terrorists on basketball hoops.... There is a tape of a questioning of the sappers made after the storm. In it the sappers categorically declare that the first explosions were not connected with the homemade explosive devices of the terrorists. There are video-recordings in which a tall column of debris is visible following the first explosion over the roof of the gymnasium. Such a column occurs when something strikes a roof from outside. There are also the testimonies of the hostages about a ‘clump of fire’ and a ‘white sphere.’”²⁴

Commenting on the importance of this videotape made by a North Ossetian procuracy employee, Latynina observed elsewhere: “In my view, one of the most interesting things, or rather the most interesting, was the posting in *Novaya gazeta* of the tape showing what happened in Beslan... [Earlier] there had appeared the conclusion of Yurii Savel’ev... This film, on which is fixed from afar the very moment of the [initial] explosion, shows visibly that the gymnasium did not explode from within. Instead, above it there rises a cloud of fragments, as if something had struck the roof. And, finally, there is also the protocol of the interrogation of the two sappers.”²⁵

Another point that was stressed by Savel’ev, Milashina and Latynina is that there undoubtedly exist a number of other tapes that were made of the storming of the school building on 3 September. Unfortunately, the Russian power ministries in possession of these tapes have chosen not to release them. Of particular importance, they stress, are the tapes made by the FSB, the organization which directed the assault on the school. As Elena Milashina reported in July of 2007: “The victims [of the terrorist incident] are being stubbornly refused an opportunity to question the employees of the FSB and to make use of the video-archive of the Center for Special Purpose of the FSB of the

Russian Federation which contains a film of the storm conducted on 3 September 2004. At first, it is true, investigator Solzhentisyn acceded to this request, for which he received a strong reprimand from his superiors. Then investigator Ramonov directly stated to the victims that it was impossible to demand anything from the FSB because ‘the FSB is the foundation of the state.’ Deputy procurator Sydoruk... was unwillingly forced to admit to the powerlessness of the procuracy. ‘If you request information from the FSB [he said], then it will be necessary immediately to classify it.’”²⁶

On the subject of the FSB’s unwillingness to release these critical videotapes, Yurii Savel’ev commented in March of 2008: “In order to confirm the truth of the version of the hostages, one needs simply to force the FSB to declassify and, finally, to present to the investigators and to the public the videotape of the storming of School No. 1, taping which the personnel of the FSB carried out all three days, and especially during the period from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. on 3 September 2004. For several years the [former] hostages have been trying to obtain them. But the FSB has rebuffed the residents of Beslan, as well as the General Procuracy, both parliamentary commissions, the court, and the president of Russia. Such behavior says a lot to me.”²⁷

Other Russian power ministries also conducted filming, as Milashina noted in September of 2007: “I suspect that the MVD and, for certain, the FSB, as well as the North Ossetian Procuracy all conducted filming [of the terrorist incident]. The Ministry for Emergency Situations was not filming, but an adjutant accompanied the minister for the Ministry for Emergency Situations of North Ossetia around and filmed everything—the time, the commands, the events, everything that happened—by the way, that is the first chronology in which we learned that the fire had begun in the gymnasium immediately after the explosions, and that it had burned there for two and a half hours before they began to extinguish it—everyone remaining there burned up... Everything was filmed—all of the special services were making films for themselves. The hostages and victims in Beslan tried for three years to obtain the footage taken by the FSB.”

A Fire Breaks Out: As Elena Milashina reported in a July 2007 article, “The head of the North Ossetian Ministry for Emergency Situations, [Boris] Dzgoev, ordered one of his subordinates to follow around after him, at his heels, and film a chronology of what happened... Precisely thanks to this adjutant of Boris Dzgoev, we for the first time learned when the initial information came concerning the flaring up of a fire in the gymnasium reached the headquarters (it was at 1:05 p.m., immediately after the school had been fired at from flamethrowers and grenade-launchers). We also learned what the reaction was of the members of the headquarters to those communications. The head of the spetsnaz of the Center for Special Purpose of the FSB [General Aleksandr] Tikhonov over the course of several hours FORBADE firemen to go to the locus of the fire, despite the fact that, according to the sapper of the Fifty-eighth army Gagloev, the seat of the flare-up in the gymnasium could have been extinguished with the aid of a single fire extinguisher. But the command arrived only after a broad-scale fire had burned up all of the evidence of the firing at the school from grenade-launchers and had also burned up a hundred or more hostages. Many of the hostages, incidentally, had the following cause of death indicated in the postmortem autopsies: ‘thermal shock,’ i.e., almost 100% of

their skin covering had been scorched. But these people bore no other wounds (from bullets or fragments).”²⁸

According to Milashina’s August 2006 chronology, at 3:10 p.m. on 3 September, General Tikhonov gave an order to the North Ossetian minister for emergency situations Dzgoev to set about extinguishing the fire in the gymnasium.²⁹ The ministry’s firemen then arrived at the school and began directing water at the fire in the gymnasium at about the same time that the roof collapsed onto the gymnasium floor killing any hostages who might have remained alive. At 4:37 p.m. the firemen entered the area of the gymnasium and by 5:00 p.m. the fire had been extinguished.

General Tikhonov Launches an All-Out Assault on the School: According to Elena Milashina, who was making use of the videotape made by the North Ossetian procuracy, the two army sappers Gagloev and Nabiev had quit the gymnasium at 3:05 p.m.³⁰ Three minutes later, at 3:08 p.m., “The gymnasium and the school begin to be massively fired at from grenade-launchers and [thermobaric] flamethrowers. Three mushroom-like clouds rise over the school—two white ones and one black one. Over the next half hour one can count thirteen explosions. All of this is visible and audible on the videotape taken by an employee of the republican procuracy. On the same tape, at this time, are shown civilians located outside on the street who are shouting and pointing out to each other the roof of the five-story building No. 37 on Shkol’nyi pereulok. The camera focuses in. On the roof are people wearing helmets. (This is a position of the Center for Special Purpose of the FSB of the Russian Federation; here the parliamentary commission [later] found used flamethrowers and grenade-launchers.) Explosions are heard; to the left of the school in the footage is shown how a large cloud begins to rise.”³¹

Susanna Dudieva, head of the “Mothers of Beslan” organization has likewise reported: “On the tape it is visible how at approximately 3:00 p.m. [on the 3rd of September] a flamethrower is firing at the school from a five-story building next to it. It is visible how the building itself then explodes, how explosions are heard. On the tape are recorded thirteen explosions.”³²

In her August 2006 chronology, Milashina writes that at about 3:00 p.m. on September third, “at a time when there remain living hostages in the hall [gymnasium], the spetsnaz of the Center for Special Purpose of the FSB of the Russian Federation began to deliver blows at the school from an RPO-A [thermobaric flamethrower]. There also occurred repeated firing at the building from a grenade launcher. Tanks belonging to the Fifty-eighth army were also firing at the school.” “Two tanks repeatedly fire at the school, their aim directed by officers of the Center for Special Purpose... As a result of the tank shells the grilles are torn off the windows... At 4:00 p.m. there enter spetsnaz from the Center for Special Purpose into the cafeteria through the windows. The tanks cease to fire.”³³

And Milashina concluded her analysis: “I propose that precisely the continued firing at the school and the gymnasium and the absence of a timely order to put out the fire led to the broad-scale fire and to the full incineration of the still-living but wounded, concussed and helpless hostages [lying in the gymnasium].”³⁴

Savel'ev, for his part, has commented: "If General Tikhonov is correct, there is in essence his admission that the spetsnaz of the Center for Special Purpose of the FSB of the Russian Federation fired from weapons of non-selective destruction [neizbiratel' nogo porzheniya] while living hostages were still in the school. I remind you: after the first explosions the rebels led about 300 persons out from the gymnasium and concentrated them around the school: in the cafeteria, in the auditorium, in the classes of the south wing. According to the descriptions of the [surviving] hostages, it was hell there, because everyone was firing without knowing who belonged to whom."³⁵

Writing in August of 2006, Milashina had reported that "106-110 persons perished in the southern wing of the school, in the cafeteria, in the auditorium and in other areas of the school [not counting the gymnasium]."³⁶ If three hundred hostages had been forcibly moved into these areas by the terrorists, it means that more than a third of that number perished during the storming of the building by Russian spetsnaz.

Could the Hostage Crisis Have Been Resolved Differently? On 1 June 2008, the French newspaper Le Monde published an extensive interview with Prime Minister Putin (Dmitrii Medvedev had been inaugurated as president the previous month). One of the questions asked by the French reporters was the following: "The war in Chechnya, the taking of hostages in Beslan and Nord-Ost represent black pages in your presidency. Was it possible to act otherwise?"

Putin's response was firm and unequivocal: "No. I am certain that if we had tried to act otherwise, all of that would be continuing to the present time. We must counter attempts to destabilize Russia. Any country which tries to make concessions to terrorists will in the final analysis bear greater losses than those occurring during the course of special operations. In the final analysis, that destroys the State and increases the number of victims."³⁷

As background, it might be noted that, in early 2007, a former commander of the FSB special forces unit "Vympel," Duma deputy Anatolii Ermolin, had summed up what the traditional view of the USSR KGB had been toward the handling of terrorist incidents: "Both the USSR and a number of other special services worked under the principle, as it was customary for us to say, to 'rub them out under any circumstances'—notwithstanding any possible losses [suffered by hostages]. The logic was precisely this: if you show weakness, then you will receive an escalation of terrorist acts." This view, —the one seemingly embraced by Putin during his interview with Le Monde—Ermolin emphasized, had become dangerously outmoded: "Unfortunately, the terrorists also possess innovative thinking, and their answer to such a practice among the special services is a mass seizure [of hostages]..."³⁸

Putin's confirmation that he had never intended to negotiate with the terrorists at Beslan drew an angry response from the members of the "Voice of Beslan" organization. "The death of 333 persons in the Beslan terrorist act," they wrote, "testifies to the negligent

attitude of Putin toward his official duties.” “Since in Beslan on 1-3 September,” they continued, “the power structures, subordinated to the president of the Russian Federation, committed a crime, refusing to engage in negotiations [with the terrorists] and making use of the army, by so doing they comprised a criminal association [soobshchestvo].” Putin, the Mothers declared, “together with the terrorists, disregarded the lives of children and adults and thus bears with them a responsibility for the deaths of people.” Accordingly, “Voice of Beslan” demanded that the Russian prime minister be summoned for questioning and that criminal charges be leveled against him according to eleven articles of the Russian Criminal Code. Among these articles there was “murder, committed in the exceeding of the limits of the necessary defense or in exceeding the measures needed to take into custody persons having committed a crime” (Article 108), and “the intentional causing harm to the health of persons in various degrees of gravity” (Articles 111, 112, 114 and 115), as well as “negligence.” (Article 282)³⁹

“We believe,” Ella Kesaeva, the co-leader of the “Voice of Beslan” organization, maintained, “that his [Putin’s] own words indicated his participation in the blame for the Beslan tragedy and the deaths of the hostages. The repudiation of negotiations and the use of the armed forces de facto also cost the hostages their right to life, which is guaranteed by the Constitution.”⁴⁰

The charges leveled against Putin and the FSB officials who had headed up the anti-terrorist effort at Beslan repeated criticisms which had been made earlier. Yurii Ivanov, one of the two “independent” Duma deputies serving on the Torshin Commission, had, for example, stated in early 2007: “The situation was not great but there was a choice. Let us recall that both the Western countries and the Muslim world never considered [Aslan] Maskhadov to be a terrorist... For the sake of saving the children, Putin, in my view, should have entered into negotiations precisely with Maskhadov.”⁴¹

To bolster his argument, Yurii Ivanov noted that the former president of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev, as well as a leading Ingush businessman, Mikhail Gutseriev, had been conducting negotiations with Akhmed Zakaev, a Chechen separatist spokesman living in London, concerning the possibility of Maskhadov’s coming to Beslan. “This took place,” Ivanov noted “at a time when the hostages were being tortured by hunger, thirst and a lack of air in the gymnasium and while the children were drinking their own urine.” “On the evening of 2 September there arrived the first information from abroad that Maskhadov was prepared to come to Beslan... On 2 September 2004 at 10:15 p.m. Zakaev announced through the foreign mass media that ‘Aslan Maskhadov is prepared to come without preliminary conditions to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the crisis.’ On the next day [3 September] at 12:00 p.m. Zakaev told the President of Ossetia, A. Dzasokhov, about the preparedness of Maskhadov to come to Beslan, and I remind you that it was precisely after that news... that there sounded the ‘accidental explosion’ [at 1:03 p.m.] and the bloodbath began.”⁴²

A Key Potential Negotiator Is Removed from the Scene: The well-known journalist and specialist on Chechnya, Anna Politkovskaya, who was assassinated in Moscow in October 2006, was one individual who could have played an important role as an

intermediary in the negotiations with the Beslan terrorists. She had earlier played such a role in the negotiations with the terrorists who had seized a Moscow theater (the Nord-Ost incident) in 2002.⁴³

As BusinessWeek journalist, Steve LeVine, who was personally acquainted with Politkovskya and her family, has related: “In 2004, Chechen terrorists seized an elementary school in Beslan... Anna in Moscow took matters into her own hands. [On September 1st] she telephoned Akhmed Zakaev, the European representative of rebel Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov, and urged the latter to go quickly to the school and negotiate for the children’s immediate release. Zakaev... told her that he would get in touch with the rebel commander and try to make that happen.”⁴⁴

“Along with a mob of other journalists,” LeVine continues his account, “Anna rushed to a Moscow airport to catch a flight to Beslan, but none could be had. Then a young man approached and identified himself as an airport employee. ‘Are you Anna Politkovskaya?’ he said. ‘We very much respect your newspaper [Novaya gazeta]. We are going to let you on this flight,’ referring to a departure to Rostov, from where she could drive to Beslan. According to Anna’s account, he said that someone from the FSB had directed him to put her on the flight.”

But, it turned out, Politkovskaya never made it to Beslan: “On board Anna asked for a cup of tea. Within minutes of drinking it, she became extremely ill. She later recalled that aircraft crew members ‘beat me on the face and asked me, cried to me, ‘Please don’t die. Don’t die.’ An unconscious Anna was hospitalized in Rostov and given emergency care. A nurse later told her she was ‘almost hopeless’ when brought in. ‘My dear, they tried to poison you,’ the nurse said. Doctors who treated her later in Moscow confirmed that her symptoms were consistent with poisoning... Anna was irritated at her own carelessness. How vain to think that airport personnel would recognize her so readily. She should have had second thoughts when they let her on the plane without demanding a passport or any other document.”

If the Russian authorities had wanted to achieve a negotiated settlement with the terrorists, they would likely have acted differently in the case of Politkovskaya.

The President of North Ossetia and the Former President of Ingushetia Seek a Negotiated Solution to the Crisis: One official who persistently attempted to promote a negotiated settlement with the terrorists was the elected president of North Ossetia, Aleksandr Dzasokhov. In testimony given at the trial of Nurpashi Kulaev, he emphasized that he was not a member of the headquarters that was de facto running the anti-terrorist operation at Beslan. What he had done, he recalled, was to reach out to Aslan Maskhadov: “In our milieu,” he said, “no-one disputed the importance of establishing contacts with Maskhadov for the use of his possibilities in freeing the hostages. In my presence, [Ruslan] Aushev, having obtained the telephone number of Zakaev, called him in London... Then I took the receiver and spoke with Zakaev decisively, one could say that I demanded that that he do something about resolving the situation with the hostages.

Zakaev said that his connection was a one-sided one, but as soon as Maskhadov checked it, he would let him know.”⁴⁵

In the course of a 2008 interview, Ruslan Aushev described his own involvement in the negotiations:

“Journalist: [In September 2004] the Kremlin had to ask you to come to Beslan...

Aushev: Not the Kremlin. Shoigu [the Russian minister for Emergency Situations] telephoned me and asked me to come and to provide help.

Journalist: Did the rebels call you?

Aushev: No, they asked for Dzasokhov and Zyazikov [the president of Ingushetia]...

Shoigu asked me to fly there. I did so, and Mikhail Gutseriev was [already] there. He had a link to the terrorists through his mobile phone.... He [the terrorists’ press secretary] said: Wait fifteen minutes. Then come alone. I said: good.

Journalist: You came to [the school building] and what did you say?

Aushev: I asked what they wanted. They gave me their demands written down on a school notebook. The Colonel (the head of the terrorists) became agitated: Why are they speaking of 300 hostages when there are 1200 of them? Then the director of the school came in. She said: There are more than a thousand [hostages]. I asked how many killed there were. He [the Colonel] said: twenty. I said: Show me. He showed me. That was all.

Journalist: You then led more than 20 persons [out of the school building]...

Aushev: Twenty-six. Eleven women and fifteen children.”⁴⁶

Vitalii Zangionov: A Passive FSB Negotiator: While Aushev and other politicians from the North Caucasus were pressing ahead in an effort to achieve a bloodless solution to the hostage crisis, the regime’s designated negotiator, Vitalii Zangionov of the FSB of North Ossetia, behaved markedly differently. In early 2006, Elena Milashina summarized his testimony before the Supreme Court of North Ossetia.⁴⁷

“Zangionov,” she wrote, “began to conduct negotiations with the terrorists on 1 September near the school, during which time he personally received a note [from the terrorists]... In this note, according to Zangionov’s version, the question concerned, ‘If in the course of three minutes, no-one enters into contact with the terrorists, then they will shoot and blow up twenty persons.’ Zangionov then ‘sat in an isolated room into which there entered only Andreev [the head of the North Ossetian FSB], who gave him his orders. Neither [generals] Pronichev, nor Anisimov, nor Tikhonov, nor any other members of the headquarters gave him any orders.’”

“In this room together with him,” Milashina continued, “there was present on a constant basis only a negotiator from the central office of the FSB of the Russian Federation.... Concerning what decisions were being taken by the headquarters and who besides himself was telephoning the terrorists and conducting negotiations with them Zangionov did not know and was not interested in knowing. Thus, Zangionov did not know that Mikhail Gutseriev was conducting negotiations with the terrorists; he did not know that Ruslan Aushev was to go to the school; he did not know that an advisor to the president [Putin], Aslakhanov, had established contact with the terrorists; he did not know that

Gutseriev had negotiated bringing out the bodies of the executed hostages [on September 3rd] in a vehicle belonging to the Ministry of Emergency Situations; he did not know that Dzasokhov had agreed with Zakaev concerning the participation of Maskhadov in the negotiation process; he did not know the precise number of hostages in the school; he did not know about the demands of the terrorists to withdraw [Russian] troops from Chechnya; he did not know about the video-cassette which was carried out of the gymnasium addressed to President Putin; he did not know about the note that was also addressed to President Putin.... Zangionov learned all of this after the force operation to destroy the terrorists had been completed.”⁴⁸

A Specialist on Hostage Negotiations Critiques the Russian Anti-Terrorist Effort: In August of 2007, Milashina published the text of a lengthy interview she had conducted with Adam Dol’nik of the University of Wollongong (Australia), a specialist on hostage negotiations.⁴⁹ During the course of the interview, Dol’nik made a number of apt observations: “To conduct negotiations,” he stressed, “does not mean to make concessions to terrorists or to unconditionally fulfill all of their demands.” But it is, he noted, essential to carry out negotiations: “The essential mistake of the [Russian] special services was their lack of desire to conduct negotiations with the terrorists from the very beginning.”

Asked about Zangionov’s performance, Dol’nik replied: “I gained the impression that Zangionov was acting absolutely according to instructions, as if before him there lay a textbook on the negotiation process. He asked: Do you need a doctor? Do you need mass media? Do you need a green corridor? The problem consisted in the fact that the negotiation process was formal. Only to create an alibi for themselves [the special services]: to be able to say that we proposed this and that to them and they did not accept our proposals.”

Turning to the testimony of hostage Larisa Mamitova, a medical doctor who managed to establish a good working relationship with the terrorists in order to achieve humanitarian goals, he commented: “She, incidentally, turned out to be an extraordinarily good negotiator to have. The rebel, Ali, who negotiated with Zangionov, told her that he did not want to blow up the school but that he had been told over the telephone that Russia would never conduct negotiations with terrorists and that the rebels had three days to think about that.”

Asked by Milashina his opinion concerning the initiative of Dzasokhov and Aushev to draw Maskhadov into the negotiations, Dol’nik replied: “Aushev told me that was his initiative. Politkovskaya also played a role in this, trying to draw Maskhadov in through Zakaev on the first day of the seizure [of hostages]. In such a situation... you want to attract the maximal resources for this. Maskhadov was a very strong resource to act on the terrorists.”

Nonetheless, Dol’nik added, “The arrival of Maskhadov or Zakaev in Beslan was impossible. The Kremlin would not have permitted the terrorist Maskhadov to save the hostages. They could not have permitted him to become a hero.”

Milashina: “That would have been a problem of losing face?”

Dol’nik: “Yes.”

“I think,” Dol’nik went on, “that it was possible to use Aushev more effectively. He enjoyed respect on the part of the terrorists, he went into the school, he brought some of the mothers and children out. But, again, before the regime there stood the same problem as with Maskhadov, but to a lesser extent, of course. An informal leader, the former president of Ingushetia would have become a hero, and the Kremlin did not need that.”

Hence the launching of an assault on the school became highly likely.

Summing up Putin’s Role in the Beslan Tragedy: On 1 September 2004, Putin, who had been vacationing on the Black Sea at the resort town of Sochi, returned by plane to Moscow after learning of the hostage-taking incident. Immediately upon his arrival at the airport in Moscow, he held a meeting with the head of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Rashid Nurgaliev, with the prosecutor general Vladimir Ustinov, with the director of the FSB, Nikolai Patrushev, and with the first deputy director of the FSB and commander of the Russian border-guards, Vladimir Pronichev.⁵⁰ The presence of General Pronichev at this meeting was particularly significant. It was he who had overseen the storming of a theater building at Dubrovka in Moscow in October 2002 in which 174 hostages had perished from the effects of a special gas employed by the FSB.⁵¹

Following this meeting with his power ministers, Putin, at about noon on the first, placed a call on a special phone to the president of North Ossetia, Aleksandr Dzasokhov. Putin gave Dzasokhov “an [oral] command to hand over the organization of the counter-terrorist operation to the organs of the FSB.”⁵² This account, it should be noted, is in full accord with what Putin told *Le Monde* in the afore-mentioned interview published in the 1 June 2008 issue of the French newspaper. Putin manifestly had no intention of negotiating with the terrorists and outsourced the decision concerning how and when to storm the school to the FSB and, in particular, to the FSB *spetsnaz* (special forces) under the command of General Aleksandr Tikhonov. Putin then disappeared from public view until the morning of 4 September when the storming of the school had been completed.

Following the deaths of the 317 hostages (including 186 children), Putin arrived in Beslan at 5:00 a.m. on 4 September. Joined by North Ossetian president Dzasokhov, he went to the district clinical hospital where the two leaders visited all of the rooms containing victims of the assault. Having remained in the hospital for half an hour, Putin then attended a session of the operational headquarters for the liberation of the hostages located in the town administration building.

Looking directly into a camera of state television’s Channel 1, Putin then declared: “We examined all possible variants and did not ourselves plan an action using force. Events developed very quickly and unexpectedly, and the personnel of the special forces

manifested particular courage.”⁵³ This statement was, as we know now, untrue. Then, apparently without visiting the site of the ruined school, Putin returned by plane to Moscow.

Conclusion: Journalist Elena Milashina has aptly summed up the key question of who, in addition to the terrorists, should be held responsible for the large number of deaths that occurred at the school: “I think that after the third of September [2004] it was necessary to open a separate criminal case on the fact of a mass destruction of people as a result of the storm... [It was necessary] to pass a resolution concerning the bringing to responsibility of a number of people. I think that it should have begun at the very top—that is, unquestionably, with the director of the FSB [Nikolai Patrushev], and his deputies Pronichev, Anisimov and Tikhonov, who in reality directed the entire force operation and in general the entire developing situation in Beslan.”⁵⁴ It seems clear that President Putin could likewise have been charged with the same crime, since he had outsourced the decision concerning a storming of the building to the four high-ranking FSB generals mentioned by Milashina. To date, however, Putin and the four generals have not been held legally accountable for the carnage at School No. 1 in Beslan.

¹ See John B. Dunlop, The 2002 Dubrovka and 2004 Beslan Hostage Crises: A Critique of Russian Counter-Terrorism (Stuttgart, Germany: idebem-Verlag, 2006). The chapter in the book that is devoted to Beslan takes up pp. 17-102.

² On the latter presentation, see Susan Skoda, “John Dunlop reflects on Beslan hostage crisis,” CREEES Chronicle, Stanford University, Winter Issue, 2007-2008, p. 13.

³ The Shmel’ or “thermobaric flamethrower” is similar to the controversial “fuel-air” bombs used by the U.S. military in heavy combat. It disperses highly explosive droplets of petrochemicals into a space occupied by the enemy and then ignites them. On this weapon, see Chechnya Weekly (Jamestown Foundation, Washington D.C.), 11 October 2004.

⁴ See “Verkhovnyi sud Severnoi Osetii podtverdil amnistiyu beslanskikh militsionerov,” newsru.com, 2 August 2007, and Zaur Farniev, “Amnistiorvali nevinovnykh,” Kommersant, 3 August 2007.

⁵ Elena Milashina, “Rezul’taty issledovaniya: fakty, svidetel’sstva, khronologiya. Est’ lyudi, kotorym izvestno vse,” Novaya gazeta, 28 August 2006.

⁶ See “Komissiya Torshina po Beslanu: vzryv sprovoztirovali terroristy,” newsru.com, 22 December 2006, and “Aleksandr Torshin: itog deyatel’nosti komissii po Beslanu,” echo.msk.ru, 26 December 2006. See too, “Rabota parlamentskoi komissii po rassledovaniyu terkata v Beslane zavershena,” echo.msk.ru, 22 December 2006, and Marina Litvinovich, “Vse eto delaetsya s odnoi edinstvennoi tsel’yu—zakryt’ vopros o Beslane,” ej.ru, 22 December 2006.

⁷ On this, see Yurii Ivanov, “K istine Beslana,” Sovetskaya Rossiya, 3 February 2007.

⁸ See “Raspushchena parlamentskaya komissiya po Beslanu,” grani.ru, 22 December 2006; Elena Milashina, “Komissiya nevyopolnima: ‘Edinaya Rossiya’ prekratila rassledovanie po Beslanu,” Novaya gazeta, 25 December 2006. See, too, “Marina Litvinovich: Beslanskaya tragediya: delo zakoncheno. Zabud’te,” echo.msk.ru, 24 December 2006.

⁹ “Beslan,” echo.msk.ru, 3 September 2007.

¹⁰ Elena Milashina, “Pravda o pervykh vzryvakh,” Novaya gazeta, 28 August 2006.

¹¹ The explosive devices used by the terrorists during the 2002 Dubrovka terrorist episode also failed to detonate. On this, see Dunlop, The 2002 Dubrovka and 2004 Beslan Hostage Crises, pp. 116, 124-126, 129, 135, 148, 151 and 154.

¹² “Beslan,” echo.msk.ru, 3 September 2007.

¹³ See “Beslan,” echo.msk.ru, 3 September 2007.

¹⁴ Elena Milashina, “Rezul’taty rassledovaniya,” Novaya gazeta, 28 August 2006.

- ¹⁵ Yurii Savel'ev, "Beslan—Moment istiny," APN.ru, 22 January 2007.
- ¹⁶ Elena Milashina, "Novaya versiya pervykh vzryvov," Novaya gazeta, 13 March 2008.
- ¹⁷ See Oleg Kusov, "'Materi Beslana' poluchili videopodtverzhdienie svoei pravoty," svobodanews.ru, 27 July 2007.
- ¹⁸ "Beslan," echo.msk.ru, 3 September 2007. The investigator Solzhenitsyn mentioned here is not, it should be noted, a relative of the late Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.
- ¹⁹ Elena Milashina, "Shkolu vzorvali ne terroristy," Novaya gazeta, 30 July 2007.
- ²⁰ See Ol'ga Bobrova, "Tanki mstili za spetsnaz," Novaya gazeta, 19 January 2007.
- ²¹ "Beslan," echo.msk.ru, 3 September 2007.
- ²² Elena Milashina, "Shkolu vzorvali ne terroristy," Novaya gazeta, 30 July 2007.
- ²³ "Yuliya Latynina," echo.msk.ru, 30 December 2006. On the findings of the North Ossetian parliamentary commission chaired by Stanislav Kesaev, see Dunlop, The 2002 Dubrovka and 2004 Beslan Hostage Crises, p 101. A leaked copy of the full version of the Kesaev Commission's report was posted at the website of the newspaper Novaya gazeta on 29 November 2005. It may be found at this URL: <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/rassled2/beslan/article/article2.shtml>
- ²⁴ Yuliya Latynina, "Nash otechestvennyi Vizental'," Ezhdnevnyi zhurnal, 9 January 2008.
- ²⁵ "Yuliya Latynina," echo.msk.ru, 4 August 2007.
- ²⁶ Elena Milashina, "Kogda strelyal tank No. 325?," Novaya gazeta, 23 July 2007.
- ²⁷ See the interview with Savel'ev in Elena Milashina, "Novaya versiya pervykh vzryvov," Novaya gazeta, 13 March 2008.
- ²⁸ Elena Milashina, "Shkolu vzorvali ne terroristy," Novaya gazeta, 30 July 2007. The capitalization occurs in the original text.
- ²⁹ Elena Milashina, "Rezul'taty rassledovaniya," Novaya gazeta, 28 August 2006.
- ³⁰ Elena Milashina, "Shkolu vzorvali ne terroristy," Novaya gazeta, 30 July 2007.
- ³¹ Elena Milashina, "Shkolu vzorvali ne terroristy," Novaya gazeta, 30 July 2007.
- ³² Oleg Kusov, "'Materi Beslana' poluchili videopodtverzhdienie svoei pravoty," svobodanews.ru, 27 July 2007.
- ³³ Elena Milashina, "Rezul'taty rassledovaniya," Novaya gazeta 28 August 2006. It remains unclear whether the FSB spetsnaz who fired the first shot at the school from a thermobaric flamethrower were aware that a fire would likely be ignited by that shot. Once the fire had broken out, however, the commander of the spetsnaz delayed permitting firemen from the Ministry for Emergency Situations to come to the school for more than two hours, thereby in effect dooming the large number of wounded and concussed hostages remaining on the floor of the gymnasium.
- ³⁴ Elena Milashina, "Shkolu vzorvali ne terroristy," Novaya gazeta, 30 July 2007.
- ³⁵ Savel'ev interviewed by Milashina in "Pravda o pervykh vzryvakh," Novaya gazeta, 28 August 2006.
- ³⁶ Elena Milashina, "Rezul'taty issledovaniya," Novaya gazeta, 28 August 2006.
- ³⁷ "Vladimir Poutine: 'Elargir l'Otan, c'est eriger de nouveaux murs de Berlin,'" Le Monde, 1 June 2008. The Russian text of Putin's response, with slightly different wording, was posted on the government website government.ru on 31 May 2008.
- ³⁸ "Zakhvat zolozhnikov: kak vesti peregovory s terroristami," echo.msk.ru, 4 January 2007.
- ³⁹ Ekaterina Savina, Tamila Dzhodzhuueva, "Vladimira Putina obvinili v prestupnoi khalatnosti," Kommersant, 5 June 2008.
- ⁴⁰ "Ella Kesaeva 'Golos Beslana,'" ej.ru, 3 June 2008.
- ⁴¹ Yurii Ivanov, "K istine Beslana," Sovetskaya Rossiya, 3 February 2007. See also Yurii Ivanov, "V beslanskoi tragedii vinovat president," ej.ru, 14 January 2006. See, too, Anna Politkovskaya, "Prezident iz spiski svidetelei prosto ischez....," Novaya gazeta, 23 January 2006.
- ⁴² Yurii Ivanov, "K istine Beslana," Sovetskaya Rossiya, 3 February 2007.
- ⁴³ On this, see Dunlop, The 2002 Dubrovka and 2004 Beslan Hostage Crises, pp. 140-142.
- ⁴⁴ Steve LeVine, Putin's Labyrinth (New York: Random House, 2008), pp. 103-121.
- ⁴⁵ See Ol'ga Bobrova, "Kontakt s Maskhadovym byl ustanovlen," Novaya gazeta, 16 January 2006. See, too, Ruslan Osetinskii, "Dzasokhov kak svidetel'," Rossiiskie vesti, 18 January 2006, and Sergei Migalin, Alan Tskhurbaev, "Sud dotyanulsya do prezidenta," Nezavisimaya gazeta, 13 January 2006.
- ⁴⁶ For the interview with Aushev, see "Voina za Kavkaz eshche vpered," Kommersant-vlast, 1 December 2008.
- ⁴⁷ Elena Milashina, "Korpunkt v Beslane. Peregovorshchik," Novaya gazeta, 30 January 2006.

⁴⁸ The italics occur in the original text. It should be noted that, though retired MVD major general Aslambek Aslakhonov was serving as an advisor to Putin, he was not personally close to the Russian president. He had been given the post of presidential advisor as a kind of consolation prize for agreeing to withdraw his name as a candidate for the presidency of Chechnya. Putin was reported not to trust him.

⁴⁹ Elena Milashina, "Na peregovory idet sil'nyi," *Novaya gazeta*, 20 August 2007.

⁵⁰ "Boeviki poshli v shkolu," *politcom.ru*, 1 September 2004. This section on Putin's role in the Beslan crisis largely repeats information contained in my 2006 book.

⁵¹ "Advokat postradavshikh na Dubrovke uznala iz zasekrechennogo dela: v 'Nord-Oste' ubity ne 129, a 174 cheloveka," *newsru.com*, 17 March 2005. Of the 317 hostages who perished at Beslan, twenty-one were killed by the terrorists; the rest died as a result of the operation mounted by Russian special forces.

⁵² Svetlana Meteleva, "Beslan bez grifov," part III, *mk.ru*, 26 May 2005.

⁵³ "Putin ne doekhal do razrushennoi shkoly," *gazeta.ru*, 5 September 2004.

⁵⁴ "Beslan," *echo.msk.ru*, 3 September 2007.