

Violence in Kabardino-Balkaria

The Russian North Caucasus republic of Kabardino-Balkaria has been prone to violence over an extended period, unemployment is high, corruption is rife and the general environment may be considered fairly volatile and religious relations fraught.

Since the 2004 school siege at Beslan in neighbouring North Ossetia, Russia has made repeated efforts in order to address spiralling Islamic extremism in Kabardino-Balkaria.

Mosques in the capital, Nalchik, were closed as part of a wider crackdown by security services after the area hosted such figures as Shamil Basayev and his wife earlier in the year where they took refuge with sympathizers. There have been armed operations against suspected Islamic militants, some of whom have died in a number of targeted raids.

On October 13 2005 militants staged a coordinated armed assault on government buildings in Nalchik. Sporadic shooting continued over an extended period. Russia responded with a deployment of troops and special forces taking aggressive steps to address the violence.

According to the Russians, 91 attackers were killed and 36 captured, while 33 members of its own forces and 12 civilians also died. The initial Chechen statement published on Kavkaz Center claimed that "about 110 Kafirs and Munafiqs were killed during the operation" Such figures are as yet unconfirmed and there are allegations that the Russians may have doctored the figures.

Corrupt and heavy handed leadership in the area has been implicated as the core motivation for such attacks. Campaigns over a period have appeared to target some Muslim groups in a humiliating operation of apparently forced beard shaving and desecration of mosques. These reports are denied by the Government.

Yarmuk, (purportedly named after the Battle of Yarmuk which witnessed a battle between Arabs and the Byzantine Empire in 636) a local militant Islamic group with

Chechen links, said that its fighters had been involved on the ground as part of a Caucasus Front. Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev issued a statement saying that he had been in overall command and confirming that Caucasus Front forces had been in operation. Russian officials were quick to portray the attacks as part of a general plan by a worldwide militant movement to destabilize Russia which has been a consistent position.

Yarmuk has called on Muslims to engage in a jihad (holy war) against the "amoral puppet" authorities in their region.

The organisation of a Caucasus Front against Russia was decreed in May 2005 by Chechen rebel leader Abdul-Khalim Saydullayev whose predecessor, Aslan Maskhadov, had been killed by Russian forces. The decree was perceived as a bid further to widen Chechnya's conflict with Russia.

In December, gunmen raided the regional branch of the federal Drug Control Agency in Nalchik, killing four employees, looting an arsenal and setting the office ablaze. Reaction to the event seems likely to be swift and severe and possibly lead to further alienation.

<http://www.windsofchange.net/archives/007632.php>

http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details_print.cfm?id=13142

http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/0/28.html?id_issue=11408795

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