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Trafalgar 200
Nelson - Greatest Briton
in our Island History?

A cover dedication to Lord Nelson

Picture by Dr Mike Haywood

A Decade of Terrorism in Russia

Reviewing a decade of terror attacks in Russia – from Budennovsk 1995 to Beslan 2004 – Marcel de Haas focuses on the consequences of taking hostages in the attacks in Moscow in 2002 and Beslan in 2004 and the subsequent effect on Russia's internal security policy.



Marcel de Haas
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The taking of hostages at a school in Beslan in October 2004 marked a decade of terror attacks in Russia. In the first Chechen conflict the Chechen resistance demonstrated that hostage-taking was an excellent tactical weapon with political-strategic consequences. The total failure of Russian armed forces and security troops to cope with hostage-takings in 1995 and 1996 was an important factor in the decision-making process that resulted in the withdrawal of Russian forces and troops from Chechnya at the end of 1996.

The reputation of the military as well as that of President Yeltsin suffered deeply from this defeat. In summer 1999 – when Russia carried out military action against incursions in Dagestan – terror attacks occurred again. According to Russian authorities these incursions and acts of terrorism justified the subsequent invasion, which marked the start of the second Chechen conflict.

However, terror attacks still continued. A rough estimate of the number of people who were killed in terror attacks in Russia between 1995 and 2004 is 2000. The common denominator of these acts of terrorism is that they were all related and in response to Russia's military action in Chechnya.

Nord-Ost terror attack 2002

In October 2002 Chechen fighters took some 900 people hostage in a theatre in Moscow, in which the musical Nord-Ost was being performed. Using gas, Special Forces (spetsnaz) units violently put an end to this act of

terror, killing not only the terrorists but also more than 120 hostages. Nord-Ost brought the Chechen conflict into Russia's capital. As a result there was a broad feeling amongst Russian military-political decision-makers, as well as in Russian society, that this terrorist attack signalled a turning point in Russia's security policy, which was illustrated by the Russian press describing the Nord-Ost attack as 'Russia's 9/11'.

Revision of security policy

Shortly after Nord-Ost, parliamentarians such as Aleksey Arbatov and Andrey Nikolayev, as well as academic security specialists declared in public that this hostage-taking attack demonstrated that the current legal system lacked a normative basis to fight acts of terror effectively. The existing legal system did not live up to the demands of the necessary anti-terrorist operations: for the structure of these operations provisions concerning a joint approach – defence

(MoD) forces together with troops of the other security or so-called power ministries – were missing. In addition, for the conduct of operations, legal grounds for the use of spetsnaz units were also needed.

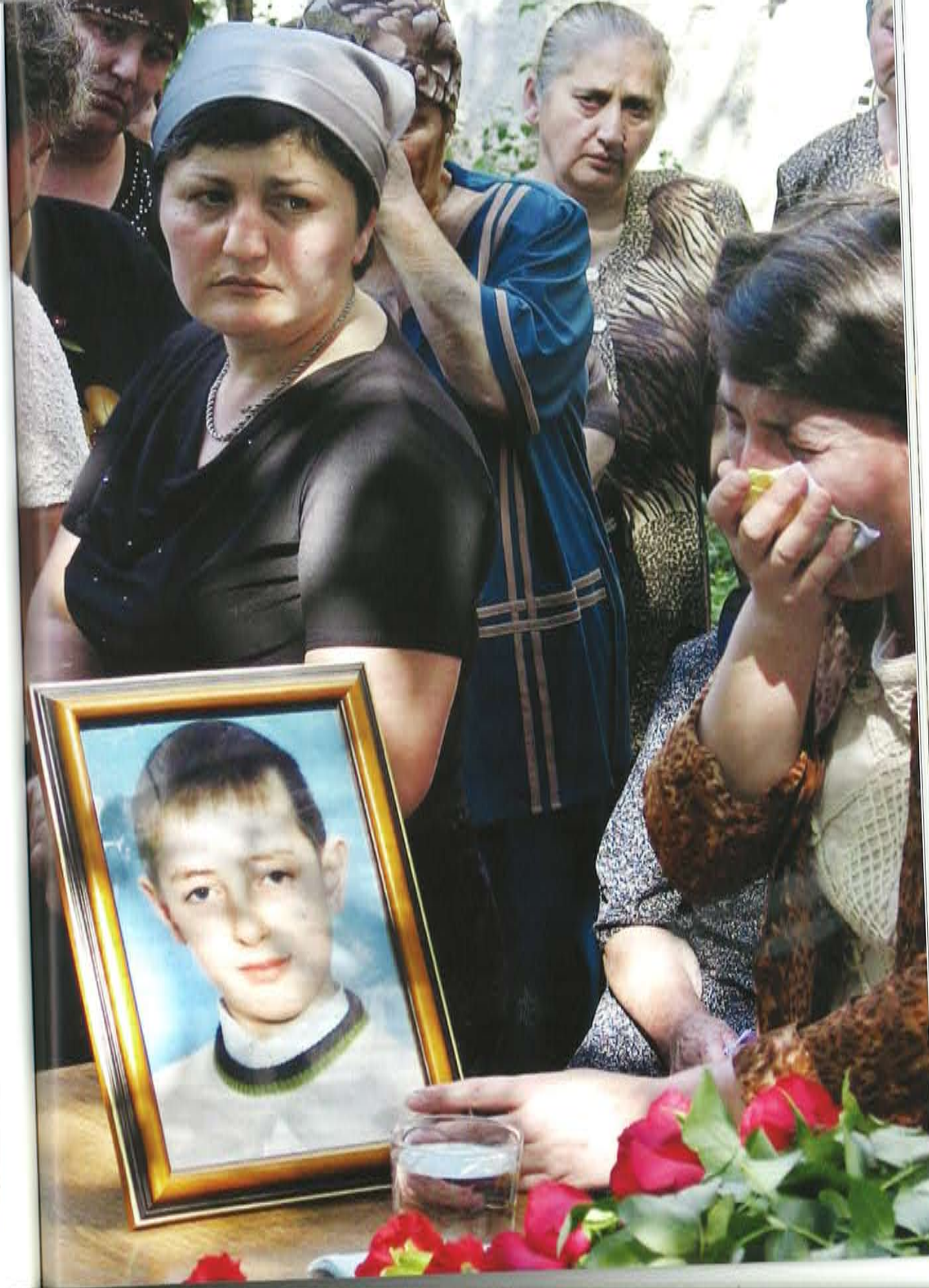
For these reasons current legislation was to be revised and new legislation passed. The plea for adaptation of current legislation and the introduction of dedicated additional legislation concerning operations against terrorism, not only touched upon laws and security documents, but included operational directives for forces and troops, which to a large extent were still directed at large-scale warfare.

On 29 October 2002 President Putin instructed his security ministers and chiefs to draft a revision of the NSC, Russia's overarching security document. According to MoD Minister Ivanov the adjustments of current legislation would include the following provisions: intensifying the



Right: Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Italy; NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson and President Vladimir Putin, Russian Federation

Far right: A relative of a victim of the Beslan hostage siege, cries near his coffin in Beslan, North Ossetia. At least 342 people, half of them children, were killed in the Beslan crisis



'Terrorism in Russia is based on social and economic roots: unemployment, poverty, lack of education, housing and medical care'

Legislative changes announced after Nord-Ost

Legislation to be revised on:

- the Constitution
- the National Security Concept (NSC) the Military Doctrine
- laws on anti-terrorism, defence as well as on State of Emergency

New legislation to be passed on:

- the joint use of forces, troops and security authorities in internal conflicts
- the deployment of Russian armed forces
- the anti-terror concept
- the fight against terrorism

Proposed changes in NSC

Key issues in the revised NSC as announced by Igor Ivanov on 1 February 2005:

- socio-economic problems
- the fight against terrorism
- disparities in development among Russia's regions
- insufficient funding for science and technology
- Environmental and demographic problems
- public confidence in government bodies and state institutions



involvement of MoD forces in fighting terrorism; assessing the increased threats against national security; and the readiness of Russia to act against terrorists and also against their sponsors abroad. After revising the NSC, the Military Doctrine was to be altered, followed by other security documents subordinate to the NSC.

Evaluation of policy decisions

The anticipated revision of security policy was ambivalent. On the one hand, recognising the increased importance of internal threats and conflicts seemed to be a realistic approach by Putin. This replaced the focus on large-scale warfare, which conservative circles in the General Staff, by emphasising nuclear instead of conventional forces, still considered to be the primary conflict. If the repeated conflicts in Chechnya and Dagestan did not make this clear, then surely Nord-Ost proved that the primary threats to Russia's national security were of an internal nature. Therefore it would make sense that the revised Military Doctrine as well as other security documents took account of the increased importance of non-nuclear military means, which would correspond with the perception of the current threat.

On the other hand, the ambivalence came to the fore with regard to the trend of the proposed revision in security policy, stressing military solutions and not socio-economic ones. The large number of policy concepts and laws that were to be drafted in the aftermath of Nord-Ost, unmistakably highlighted stress on military and political solutions to the problem of terrorism.

Another feature of ambivalence was the fact that Russian authorities repeatedly made it clear that Russia

granted itself the right to attack terrorists abroad. This option to use force abroad would not be conducted by an invasion of troops, but by employing precision-guided munitions in operations against terrorist training camps or against other targets out of the country, which were related to international terrorism. By doing so, Russia permitted itself to violate norms of international law, such as the prohibition of using force and the non-intervention principle, as laid down in the UN Charter.

These were not new concepts. These areas were already included in existing security documents but their importance was now to be stepped up. The emphasis in security policy remained on military instead of socio-economic solutions, although a switch from external to internal threats was rightly included. This gave the impression that current policy principles were continued.

Consequently, Nord-Ost did not result in a watershed for Russian security policy.

Beslan terror attack 2004

In September 2004 Chechen terrorists captured more than 1000 teachers, parents and children at a school in Beslan in the north Caucasus, during the festivities at the opening of the new educational year. On the morning of 3 September armed Ossetian civilians allegedly opened fire at the terrorists that started the fighting between the hostage-takers and Russian anti-terror units, which were unprepared for storming the building at that moment. Just as in the Nord-Ost attack, the Federal Security Service (FSB) anti-terror units Vypel and Alfa took the lead in bringing the hostage-taking to an end. As a result of the fighting between 300 and 400

'Russia's military and political elite considers foreign interference and a political settlement in Chechnya as signs of weakness'

'By granting itself the right to attack terrorists abroad, Russia permits itself to violate international law such as the UN Charter'



Major terror attacks 1995-2004

June 1995 - Hostages taken in a hospital in Budennovsk, when some 200 citizens and soldiers were killed

January 1996 - Civilian hostages taken in Pervomayskoye, when tens of spetsnaz officers as well as 90 citizens died

August-September 1999 - Several bomb blasts - one explosion took place in Dagestan, three in Moscow and another one in Volgogradsk

October 2002 - Hostages taken in a theatre in Moscow, in which the musical Nord-Ost was being performed

August 2003 - Suicide bomb attack against a hospital in Mozdok in north Ossetia

July-August 2004 - Attack on the military headquarters at Ingushetia; bomb blasts in aircraft and in the subway of Moscow

September 2004 - Hostages taken at a school in Beslan

hostages and servicemen were killed.

The taking of hostages at the school in Beslan was not the only terror attack in this period; the week before suicide bomb attacks at a Moscow metro station and on board two Russian airliners killed some 100 people.

Assessment of anti-terror policy

To a large extent the policy responses after Beslan were similar to those taken in the aftermath of Nord-Ost. In their statements the political and military leadership of the MoD repeated their views of 2002, maintaining that war had been declared against Russia and that, if necessary, (preventive) attacks by Russian forces against terrorists abroad would be carried out.

Likewise, politicians such as State Duma Speaker and former Minister of Internal Affairs Boris Gryzlov stated that new legislative initiatives against terror attacks would be presented to the Duma in short order. Furthermore, President Putin ordered the creation in the Southern Federal District - including Chechnya - of operative

groups to coordinate the anti-terrorism activities of all security agencies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the FSB, the MoD and the Emergency Situations Ministry. Thus, Putin endeavoured to establish a single command of joint operations against terrorists.

A new and unusual step taken was that Russia asked for an extraordinary session of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a request which was not made for previous terror attacks, such as Nord-Ost. At the special session of the UNSC, Russia asked for and received an unqualified condemnation of the hostage-taking. This UNSC resolution provided Russia with the acknowledgement that the Chechen conflict was part of international terrorism, which would legitimise its actions in Chechnya. However, this international recognition did not mean that Russia would allow the international community to interfere in its internal conflict in Chechnya.

Viewed from a point of view of international law, Russia is entitled to deny Chechnya independence. At the break-up of the Soviet Union it was formally agreed that only the Soviet republics would gain independence, whereas lower administrative entities, such as autonomous republics within a Soviet republic, would remain part of that sovereign republic. Moreover, during Chechnya's de facto independence from 1996-99, the anarchy and reign of warlords and bandits did not convince the outside world that Chechnya was able to rule itself in a proper way.

Conversely, while maintaining its legal control over Chechnya, Russia could allow foreign institutions, NGOs and international organisations, such as OSCE and EU, to enter the region with relief and socio-economic activities. Furthermore, Russia could grant Chechnya more autonomy and a leadership that is not closely related to the Kremlin as it is now. This would improve the circumstances of the population, weaken the position of terrorist groups and reduce the violence in neighbouring areas, such as North Ossetia and Dagestan, as well. However, a large part of the military and political elite in Russia considers foreign interference and a political settlement as signs of weakness. It is therefore unlikely that Russia will change its present policy towards Chechnya. Equally, terror attacks by Chechen separatists are likely to continue.

Outlook for internal security policy

On 29 October 2002 President Putin had instructed his security ministers and chiefs to draft a revision of the NSC. After Beslan a revision of the NSC again came to the fore as one of the necessary security policy measures. On 29 September 2004 Igor Ivanov, Secretary of the SCRF, announced that Russia would review its NSC in the light of the war against international terrorism.

Ivanov noted that the present concept was adopted in 2000, before the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and therefore it did not reflect the new reality. Surprisingly, no mention was made that in October 2002 Putin had already ordered such a revision of the NSC. It appears, until Beslan, the anticipated revision had not moved on from the rhetoric stage.

On 1 February 2005, at a scientific conference on the NSC, Igor Ivanov explained the current phase of development of the high security document. He made it clear that key issues in the new NSC would be on internal problems. This is a realistic approach. The Beslan attack showed that the present laws and military reforms are insufficient and legal and military measures are not enough. Also at the bottom of the threat of terrorism are social and economic roots: unemployment, poverty, lack of education, housing and medical care.

However, most of the areas for reform were also listed in previous proposals for the NSC, such as the current one of 2000. Furthermore, the assessment that internal socio-economic problems are the most complicated and urgent of tasks for Russia has also been stated before by the Russian authorities. The bottom line, as said before, is whether the observation of the prominence of internal problems will result in decision-making in that direction. Until now Russia's conservative security establishment has always been able to bypass a socio-economic approach and solution by putting a military approach to external as well as internal security on the agenda. Let us see if this time other players will be strong enough to influence the new NSC and the resulting policy measures and provide a genuine answer to Russia's challenges.

'The central point is whether the conclusion that solving internal problems is crucial will result in corresponding decision-making'

Russia granted itself the right to attack terrorists abroad by employing precision-guided munitions against terror training camps. By doing so, Russia permitted itself to violate norms of international law

Above left: Maskhadov and Basayev. The former was assassinated with a precision guided bomb