

# The tragedy of Beslan 2004:

Was this event a turning point in Russia's approach to  
counter-terrorism?

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## Abstract

The Russian Federation is subject to a high degree of terrorist activity because the instability of the North Caucasus region makes it a breeding ground for terrorism. The main contemporary threat to the Russian Federation is terrorism linked to the North Caucasus. This thesis is based on Russian counter-terrorism policy in relation to public perceptions of the September 2004 tragedy of Beslan (North Ossetia). In September 2004, a school in Beslan was seized for three days by North Caucasian terrorists which resulted in a massacre with an extremely high number of hostages (1300), fatalities (372) and injuries (747). The Beslan tragedy is considered to be the Russian 9/11 and could, due to its magnitude and impact, theoretically be a turning point in counter-terrorism policy and public perceptions in the Russian Federation. However, the Beslan event has not been a significant turning point in Russian counter-terrorism legislation and laws, despite certain changes and amendments. Furthermore, despite relatively small reforms in the security services, these reforms have been considered to be primarily cosmetic and have not yielded significant results. Also, the perceptions of terrorism and the government's efforts to combat terrorism among Russian citizens have not improved since Beslan. The rhetoric by the media and government seems to focus primarily on the ostensible success of its counter-terrorism approach. However, despite the qualification of Beslan as the Russian 9/11 and the changes in policy following the event, terrorist activity remains a serious part of daily life within the Russian Federation and any potential improvements in the near future are considered to be unlikely.

Keywords:

Russia, North Caucasus, Beslan, Terrorism, Counter-terrorism

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

CF	–	Caucasian Front
CODEXTER	–	Committee of Experts on Terrorism
GTD	–	Global Terrorism Database
FOM	–	Public Opinion Foundation
FSB	–	Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
KBR	–	Kabardino-Balkar Republic
KGB	–	Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)
LC	–	Levada Centre
MoIA	–	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoD	–	Ministry of Defense
MK	–	Moskovsky Komsomolets
NATC	–	National Anti-Terrorism Committee
NC	–	North Caucasus
NGO	–	Non-Governmental Organization
RAD	–	Russian Analytical Digest
RF	–	Russian Federation
RFE	–	Radio Free Europe
RULAC	–	Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts
SNO	–	School Number One
SU	–	Soviet Union
UK	–	United Kingdom
USA	–	United States of America
USSR	–	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

“This abhorrent and calculated action by an armed group on a school displays a callous disregard for civilian life, it is an attack on the most fundamental right - the right to life; our organizations denounce this act unreservedly.”

(Amnesty International, 2008)

“The terrorists who seized the school in Beslan also said that their families had died, their loved ones killed and that is why they had come to kill. But this is a vicious circle that has to be broken [...] The law is above everything. If only the law had worked, then what happened to Kaloyev<sup>1</sup> and to us would not have occurred.”

(Ella Kesayeva, Voice of Beslan, 2008)

The first quote above represents a joint NGO statement published by Amnesty International in 2008 regarding Beslan. Several worldwide respected NGO's such as Human Rights Watch, International Federation of Human Rights, International League for Human Rights and the All-Russia Movement for Human Rights agreed upon the statement. This quote marks the importance and impact of the terrorist act in Beslan. The second quote is derived from Ella Kesayeva –head of a North Ossetian pressure group that can be linked to the Mothers of Beslan– in which she clearly focuses on the inefficient laws that were in place at the time of the attack. She implies that the Russian government should be held responsible for casualties among allegedly innocent people in the North Caucasus who are seeking revenge. The combination of both quotes, the magnitude and impact of the Beslan event created a personal desire to study the Russian Federation's counter-terrorism policy.

The specific purpose of this thesis is to analyze, using a two-pronged approach, any changes in the Russian counter-terrorism [1] policies and [2] public perceptions in the aftermath of the 2004 tragedy in Beslan. This thesis aims to answer the following research question: *was Beslan a turning point in Russia's approach to counter-terrorism?* In a broad sense, the counter-terrorism *policy* refers to legislation, laws and reforms in Russian security departments, while *public perceptions* refers to the Russian citizens, the role of the media and its accompanying rhetoric in the creation of public

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<sup>1</sup> Vitaly Kaloyev – an architect from North Ossetia – is used as an example by Kesayeva of someone who lost his family due to an air crash in Switzerland and who blamed the traffic controller and the failing authorities. Kaloyev took matters into his own hands and took revenge on the traffic controller by stabbing him to death. He is therefore seen as a hero in his home country of North Ossetia.



perceptions of terrorism as well as actual facts and figures about terrorist incidents and victims. These two approaches will serve as the underlying foundation and framework of this research.

Answering the research question is difficult because the extent to which counter-terrorism is successful is determined by the rhetoric of both the Russian media and the government regardless of reality and the perceptions of Russian citizens. In other words, it does not matter whether counter-terrorism policies have actually changed or improved as long as the public thinks that they have. Obviously, this control of perception has been achieved through the creation of vigorous and misleading rhetoric. Counter-terrorism policy prior to and after Beslan will be analyzed and compared in order to emphasize any changes, similarities and differences and whether they can be linked to Beslan. In doing so, one can determine whether Beslan sparked an actual turning point in regard to counter-terrorism policy in Russia. The primary focus of this thesis relates to the North Caucasus region. I acknowledge that terrorism is considered to be a nationwide phenomenon in Russia, however it is not within the scope of this thesis, to analyze terrorism nationwide. The North Caucasus is the region most subjected to terrorist activity in the Russian Federation, which explains the focus on this unstable and erratic region where the tragedy of Beslan occurred.

The Beslan tragedy is classified as a 'hostage-taking tragedy' and will serve as the central point of this thesis. Ten years ago, on 1 September 2004 at 9:20am, terrorists seized School No.1 in Beslan. What was to be a festive start of the new school year ended as a nightmare. The event of Beslan is branded as Russia's 9/11 which further explains the importance of this event. This research was conducted during the 10 year anniversary of the Beslan event, an important time to gauge Russia's counter-terrorism policy in its aftermath. In order to put the alleged changes in legislation after Beslan into perspective, another prominent attack in the city of Nalchik, situated in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic (KBR) that followed in 2005, will briefly be analyzed.

It is important to bear in mind the context of terrorism within the Russian Federation. Therefore, this thesis covers more than just legislation, laws and security reforms. The role of the Russian media and its rhetoric and the Russian citizen's general perception of (counter-) terrorism will be analyzed to provide a broader context. The historical setting, the origin and the reasons for terrorism will also be analyzed throughout this thesis.

This thesis ultimately aims to demonstrate that Beslan, despite its magnitude, has not been a major turning point in policy change. I argue that the changes in Russian counter-terrorism policy and perceptions of it in the aftermath of Beslan have been minimal and that terrorist activity continues on a large scale. Local authorities and the national government have failed to adapt policy based on previous attacks which reflects a dysfunctional power structure regarding the implementation of effective and successful counter-terrorism policy. Along with government dysfunction, misleading media also contributes to the lack of significant post-Beslan changes.

### 1.1 Statement of terrorism issue

The term terrorism is generally complex and therefore difficult to define. As a result, the term has been continuously surrounded by controversies, debates and different perceptions and interpretations over centuries. There is no universally agreed upon definition but many in the field of terrorism, including scholars whom I reference in this thesis, such as Martin (2010), Simon (1994), Schmid & Jongman (1988), Merari (1993) and Laqueur (1987), have attempted to define terrorism. According to Martin, the term terrorism has hundreds of different definitions (Martin, 2010, p.41). In fact, other studies predicate even more than 200 definitions of the term terrorism which marks the complexity of the concept (Simon, 1994). Therefore, over a hundred official definitions have been collected and organized into four components in order of importance: [1] political goals, [2] causing fear and terror, [3] arbitrariness and indiscriminate targeting, [4] the victimization of civilians, noncombatants, neutrals, or outsiders (Schmid & Jongman, 1988, p.5).

One can also distinguish 'international' and 'domestic' terrorism. Russia is primarily concerned with domestic insurgency and terrorism. The term terrorism is also differentially interpreted worldwide but the definitions have common features that can be divided into the following categories: "state, dissident, religious, criminal and international terrorism" (Martin, 2010, p.46). Although some categories could very well intertwine, it is evident that every single country or region faces its own complexities and threats. Therefore, every country defines terrorism in its own way.

An official definition of counter-terrorism policy is non-existent due to the absence of an official universal definition of terrorism. This lack of definition complicates the process of establishing counter-terrorism policy (Setty, 2011, p.7). Despite the lack of an official definition of terrorism, Russia has managed to work around this absence and has, to a certain extent, created a counter-terrorism policy that will be delineated throughout the thesis. It is very important to establish, for the specific purpose of this thesis, how the Russian Federation defines terrorism. Throughout this thesis, it will become clear how Russia defines the term terrorism and what its approach to combat terrorism is.

### 1.2 Literature review

In general, terrorism is a pressing issue within the Russian Federation and has its roots in Chechnya and the conflicts of the 1990s. In their book entitled *National Counter-Terrorism Strategies*, Ortung and Makarychev (2006) attempt to determine how terrorism affects the Russian Federation. They posit that "[1] Russian citizens and property are the targets of terrorism, [2] terrorism represents an obstacle to the peace process in the North Caucasus, [3] terrorism threatens the internal stability of Russia and finally, [4] terrorism endangers the spread of democratic norms and traditions in the

country” (Orttung & Makarychev, 2006, p.170). The North Caucasus poses the largest problem to security so many scholars in the academic field of Russian counter-terrorism policy, write about Russia and the ongoing conflicts and unrest in the North Caucasus region. In his article *Between Appeasement and Coercion: Russia 's Center- Periphery Relations from Yeltsin to Putin*, Thumann points out that “the relationship between Russia and the south-periphery has always been difficult and complex due to multicultural diversity in the regions as well as rebellious minority peoples” (Thumann, 2001, p.193). The conflict between Russia and Chechnya dominated the 1990s and led to multiple bilateral wars and an ever-disturbed relationship. In his article entitled *Nationalism and Islam in Russia's North Caucasus*, Zhemukhov attempts to explain the role of nationalism and Islam in the North Caucasus during the volatile 1990s as “an outgrowth of the eradication of religious and ethnic institutions by the Soviet regime. In the early years after the dissolution of the USSR, the ideology of nationalism became the primary ideology of the separatist groups situated in the North Caucasus” (Zhemukhov, 2013, p.2). Stepanova (2005) draws attention to the problems concerning the North Caucasus: “in all the problematic regions of Russia that have been torn by a combination of political, socio-economic, ethnic and religious problems and unrest, a peaceful solution has been found to major disagreements – in all, that is, except Chechnya” (Stepanova, 2005, p.303). It is therefore not surprising that the largest terrorist threat to Russia has roots in Chechnya. In fact, the majority of perpetrators at Beslan were Chechens.

Counter-terrorism policy and execution are perceived to be complex. In her article entitled *From Dubrovka to Beslan: Who is learning faster?*, Stepanova (2004) explains the complexity of counter-terrorism policy and the vast complexity of mass hostage crises. Further, she argues that “no country in the world seems to have a ready-made recipe for guaranteeing success in dealing with mass hostage crises” (Stepanova, 2004, p.1). The tragedy of Beslan reflects this lack of a ready-made recipe as, it eventually ended in a massacre.

Interestingly, the Russian Federation had already experienced numerous hostage crises prior to Beslan, namely in Budennovsk in 1995 (with more than 2,000 people held hostage), in Kizlyar 1996 (over 2,000 hostages taken) and in Moscow in 2002 (over 800 hostages at the Dubrovka theatre), which suggests that the authorities lack the ability of learning from past crises.

Besides the issues concerning the North Caucasus, certain scholars and experts have written about counter-terrorism legislation and laws in Russia before and after Beslan. Counter-terrorism legislation and laws were already present in the 1990s. In her article *Russia's Counterterrorism Policy: Variations on an Imperial Theme*, Omelicheva, Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas, claimed that “the 1998 law became the main pillar of counter-terrorism laws that were implemented in the 1990s” (Omelicheva, 2009, p.4). She furthermore argues that “president Putin pledged to overhaul the system of Russia's security services and develop procedures for coordinating the

activities of counterterrorism agencies at the turn of the century” (Omelicheva, 2009, p.4). This was an interesting promise by the president in the light of Beslan and its aftermath. However, the changes of post-Beslan legislation and laws are considered to be minimal. The 2006 counter-terrorism law is considered to be the most significant new counter-terrorism law, but is not sufficient to combat terrorism. So, despite this qualification, the article *Russia Adopts New Counter-Terrorism Law*, by Luchterhandt (2006), aims to demonstrate that this new law “does not correct the problems revealed by the Beslan crisis. Articles 7 and 8 of the presidential decree state that the organizational and leadership structures of counter-terrorist activities in the Northern Caucasus will be defined in the future by special regulations. It is not clear from the new law, however, what these regulations will be” (Luchterhandt, 2006, p.3). Omelicheva’s article *After Beslan: Changes in Russia’s Counterterrorism Policy* elaborates Luchterhandt’s ideas: “the legislation is silent about preventive or prophylactic measures of counteraction to terrorism. Russia’s counterterrorism policy retained its reactive and ‘catch-up’ characteristics with most of the measures adopted in response to terrorist incidents” (Omelicheva, 2012). Therefore, severe criticism has arisen against this law, as Nichol points out in his article *Stability in Russia’s Chechnya and Other Regions of the North Caucasus: Recent Developments* that this new law permits “police and other security forces to declare a ‘counter-terrorism operations regime’ in a locality and to detain suspects for up to 30 days, search homes, ban public assemblies, and restrict media activities without any pre-approval by the courts or legislative oversight” (Nichol, 2009, p.12-13). In addition, Omelicheva (2012) claimed that “the law has a negative effect on freedom of speech in Russia and the openness of debate concerning terrorism.” It seems that the 2006 law is controversial and not sufficient to combat terrorism.

However, it would be too simplistic and therefore a limitation to focus solely on laws and legislation. An important aspect of Russian counter-terrorism is the capability of the responsible authorities. In the article *Russia in the Year 2003*, Reddaway *et al.* (2004, p.4) suggest that “the *siloviki* appear—as a loose, bureaucracy-based faction—not to have a leader or leaders, not to meet in even a semi-public way, and not to have any means of coordinating their goals and plans.” Besides the ‘siloviki’ (former members of the Russian security and military services who were appointed as politicians during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin) in the Russian political system, the local authorities in the North Caucasus are the subject of criticism. Forster (2006), in his article *Beslan: Counter-terrorism Incident Command: Lessons Learned* claims that, following the events on Beslan and Nalchik, “the counter-terrorism policy conducted by the security services and local authorities proved to be, poor and enhances the lack of a learning system after Beslan in terms of coordination, anticipation, prevention and discriminate assessment of the situation” (Forster, 2006, p.5). It is therefore also important to focus on authorities and not just policies.

The Russian media seems to focus on the ostensible success of Russia's approach to counter-terrorism. In her publication *Beslan School Tragedy: The Rhetoric of the Russian Media*, Zaytseva (2005) explains how Russian newspapers "described Russian unity and support for President Putin as a goal that should be achieved at any cost. In some instances, the journalists' arguments hardly followed any logical pattern and sounded like a magical incantation that was expected to bring positive results after numerous repetitions" (Zaytseva, 2005, p.43). Simons' article *The Use of Rhetoric and the Mass Media in Russia's War on Terror* (2006), suggests that the media plays a significant role in terms of influencing public opinion as 'one of the 'problems', which is by no means a problem solely confined to the present situation in Russia, but stems from the proximity of the mass media to society's establishment' (Simons, 2006, p.3). Simons furthermore argues that the use of rhetoric has become harsher in the wake of Beslan namely 'one of the frames that have emerged revolves around the slogan of "some people are unfit for talks". In the wake of the Beslan attack, Putin was at a CIS conference in Astana (Kazakhstan), where he issued the comment "there are people with whom no talks can be held", after which he made some links to other frames by mentioning Osama Bin Laden as being one such person and double standards in the War Against Terrorism' (Simons, 2006, p.10). These former statements suggest that the use of violence by the Russian government towards terrorists was likely to increase. This can also be explained as bluster by the President to create a positive and strong image of its counter-terrorism policy towards the Russian citizens.

The literature suggests that the problem of terrorism within the Russian Federation is in practice even greater than expected. Russia's counter-terrorism policy does not seem sufficient to effectively combat terrorism and improve in the near future. This is mainly exposed in the problemacy concerning the North Caucasus and the Russian government as a whole. In a broader context, there is limited information in the existing literature regarding the links between actual counter-terrorism policy and the role of the media and public perceptions of counter-terrorism. Legislation and laws, security reforms, the role of the media and the Russian public perception are analyzed only generally or evaluated in separate studies. Therefore, this thesis attempts to integrate the role of the media and public perception with legislation, laws and security reforms in order to place Russia's counter-terrorism policy in a broader context and gain deeper insight into the problem of terrorism in Russia.

### 1.3 Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is based on policy evaluation. The concept of policy evaluation involves many theories, models and definitions. William Trochim (2009, p.23), professor of policy analysis and management at Cornell University, defines policy evaluation in a broad manner as

follows: “evaluation is undertaken to assess processes, effectiveness, and impacts to improve programs and enhance accountability.” For the purpose of this thesis, these guidelines will be followed in the evaluation of Russia’s counter-terrorism policy in relation to Beslan and the aftermath. Throughout the thesis, it will become clear whether counter-terrorism policy and collaboration within Russia’s power vertical (the top-down structure of command created during Putin’s presidency) can be considered as effective. Furthermore, a multi-method approach is applied in regard to the counter-terrorism policy of the Russian Federation. To specify, the legislation and laws, security reforms, the Russian public perception and the rhetoric of the Russian media will serve as the framework of this thesis.

Thus, statistical data by leading research organizations, terrorism and counter-terrorism legislation and laws in Russia as well as in the United States and the United Kingdom, experts on Russian terrorism and its history, experts on the event of Beslan and leading newspapers will be the primary sources of this analysis. In addition, surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation and the Levada-Centre are drawn upon in order to analyze Russian public perception. By doing so, the counter-terrorism policy of Russia will be placed in a broader context.

#### 1.4 Justification

Terrorism merits study because it remains a contemporary threat to daily life. One could argue that, in terms of terrorist attacks, the abnormal has become normal within the Russian Federation. One could even argue that Russia is the architect of its own misfortune in relation to terrorist activity. The Russian struggle regarding terrorism is complex and it plays a prominent role in society. Russia is experiencing all sorts of attacks that differ in magnitude. The majority of attacks take place in Moscow, southern Russia and the North Caucasus. These attacks are committed primarily by North Caucasians. Russia’s counter-terrorism policy is based on legislation, laws and in the practices on the ground. It is evident that counter-terrorism legislation, laws and practices on the ground face on-going developments and should therefore be subjected to evaluation and modification occasionally. The impact of a tragedy like Beslan can inter alia expose itself in certain manners such as a general feeling of fear in a society, the capability or incapability of security forces and intelligence services, media rhetoric and legislation and laws.

#### 1.5 Limitations

This thesis has a number of limitations. First of all, there is a lack of interviews due to the questionable truthfulness in regard to this ‘sensitive’ and delicate subject as well as a lack of contacts with the expertise in high positions in the Russian government and terrorist organizations. In addition, there is undoubtedly information that is kept from the public and media; this means

classified and secret information withheld by both the Russian government and the terrorists and terrorist organizations. Another limitation is my interpretation of the documents. The penultimate limitation is a lack of Russian language sources. This research will therefore mainly depend on 'Western-point of view' sources. As a final limitation, the conclusions of this thesis are limited to the information that was accessible at the time this research was conducted.

### 1.6 Chapter overview

This thesis is compiled into three main chapters and an accompanying conclusion which proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 sets the scene of the 1990s as a prelude to the tragedy of Beslan in 2004. This chapter also serves to delineate terrorist activity and the degree of religion and nationalism in the North Caucasus as well as the actual definitions of terrorism that are used by Russia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). This will be followed by an analysis of the situation concerning Beslan in relation to the actual course of the event, the hostage-takers and their motives as well as the importance of the event.

Henceforth, the thesis will focus on the crucial aspects concerning counter-terrorism policy and public perceptions. Chapter 3 analyzes the counter-terrorism policy and changes in legislation, laws and security reforms. This chapter provides an overview and analysis of the legislation and laws prior to Beslan as well as new or amended laws in the aftermath of Beslan. Besides legislation and laws, the security measurements and reforms will be analyzed with Beslan as the main point of focus. The city of Nalchik in the autonomous Kabardino-Balkar Republic will serve as a second case study due to the significant impact of the terrorist attack in 2005 and its geographical position in the North Caucasus. Chapter 4 focuses on the role of the media and accompanying rhetoric concerning counter-terrorism policy. Moreover, this penultimate chapter provides insights into Russian citizens' perceptions of counter-terrorism and Russia's efforts to improve counter-terrorism policy. This chapter concludes with the link between the general perceptions of terrorism amongst the Russian public and actual terrorist activity after Beslan. Each individual chapter will end with a concise and coherent conclusion. Finally, chapter 5 will provide an overall concluding answer to the aforementioned research question.

## Chapter 2 – Road to Beslan

This chapter aims to demonstrate the historical and contemporary plight of terrorism within the Russian Federation. By identifying the historical nature of terrorism, one is able to determine the contemporary Russian definition of terrorism. First of all, section 2.1 explains the impetuous epoch of the 1990s, highlighted by conflicts between Russia and Chechnya, which serves as an explanation for the augmentation of terrorist activity in the aftermath of the two wars. Section 2.2 showcases the terrorist activity, its origin and the accompanying role of Islam within the Russian Federation and the North Caucasus. This section also demonstrates the magnitude of the issue of terrorism within the Russian Federation. Section 2.3 delineates the transformation of Russia's definition of terrorism and ends with the contemporary definition. In addition, the following sub-section attempts to highlight the differences between Russia's definition of terrorism from those of the UK and USA to create better understanding. Section 2.4 explains the actual tragedy of Beslan and its importance as a potential turning point in policy. The sections following elaborate on the Beslan section by describing the hostage-takers, their motives and the importance of the event in a broader sense.

### 2.1 Russia-Chechnya conflict

One of the key events during the 1990s was the conflict between Russia and Chechnya. This thesis questions whether this conflict could have been a catalyst for terrorist activity in the aftermath. The post-Soviet conflict between Russia and Chechnya resulted in multiple bilateral wars throughout the 1990s. These conflicts were an outgrowth of the eradication of religious and ethnic institutions by the Soviet regime. In the early years, after the dissolution of the USSR, the ideology of nationalism became the primary ideology of separatist groups situated in the North Caucasus (Zhemukhov, 2013, p.2). Therefore, large numbers of North Caucasian separatist groups were driven by strong nationalist feelings. One can link the increased feeling of nationalism in the 1990s to the political destabilization as well as to the poor socio-economic situation in the region, which was a direct result of the collapse of the Soviet-Union.

The republics situated in the North Caucasus became ostensibly independent but remained under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation in the early 1990s. The early 1990s were turbulent times for the Russian Federation and the North Caucasus (Zhemukhov, 2013, p.2). The Chechen general Dzhokhar Dudayev seized power in 1991 and declared the independence of Chechnya without the approval of the President of the Russian Federation at that time, Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin executed a number of attempts to rein in Dudayev without great success due to the dissolution and other domestic problems that Russia faced at that time. It was therefore, in 1994, that Boris Yeltsin launched a military campaign against the rebellious Chechens. By that time, Russia had been able to



recover as a state and to strengthen its military forces. Nevertheless, the Chechen forces were able to resist the Russian troops. This eventually led to massive air and artillery bombings for two months before the federal army captured Grozny<sup>2</sup>. As a result, there were over 20,000 casualties, the whole city of Grozny was destroyed and thousands of people were displaced (Cornell, 2003, p.170). In 1996, the Chechen forces were able to recapture three important cities, including Grozny, despite the fact that the Chechen general Dudayev was assassinated by the Russian troops. The period prior to 1999 can be marked as an impetuous period with continuous bombings in Russia by terrorists as well as in Chechnya by Russian troops.

The second Chechen war started in August 1999 as a result of the invasion of Dagestan by Islamic militants from Chechnya led by Shamil Basayev. Another trigger that led to the start of the second war was the apartment bombing in Moscow, which the Russian government blamed on the Chechens, that caused 300 casualties. According to Trenin, Senior Associate and Deputy Director at Moscow Carnegie Center, the second military campaign was aimed at “defeating Chechen separatism and the safe haven it provided for terrorism” (Trenin, 2003, p.2). Although the Russian government declared its victory over terrorists in 2000, the number of terrorist attacks severely intensified. Due to the brutal actions—from Chechen point of view—by the Russian troops against the Chechen population, the feeling of revenge increased. The result of the second campaign was the restoration of the Chechen government in which Putin appointed Akhmad Kadyrov<sup>3</sup> as interim head of the new pro-Moscow government. According to independent observers, the elections were characterized by intimidation of voters, falsification of results as well as harassment of other candidates that led to a landslide victory for Kadyrov (Brouwers, 2007, p.4).

The two wars with Chechnya can therefore be marked as key events during the 1990s related to terrorism. Hence, the largest threat of terrorism that Russia faces has its origin primarily in Chechnya. Thus, Russia’s counter-terrorism legislation is for the most part based on the intensified Chechen, Islamic and, in a broader perspective, the North Caucasian threat.

## 2.2 Terrorism in the Russian Federation

Terrorism in Russia is a nationwide phenomenon. However, the threat of terrorism in Russia is mainly caused by terrorist activity from the North Caucasian terrorists. The following map (The Guardian, 2013) reveals the locations of terrorist attacks since 1991:

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<sup>2</sup> Grozny is the capital city of Chechnya.

<sup>3</sup> Akhmad Kadyrov: a former separatist who sided with the Russian government at the start of the second Chechen war in the late 1990s and therefore became the most favored candidate from Kremlin perspective.

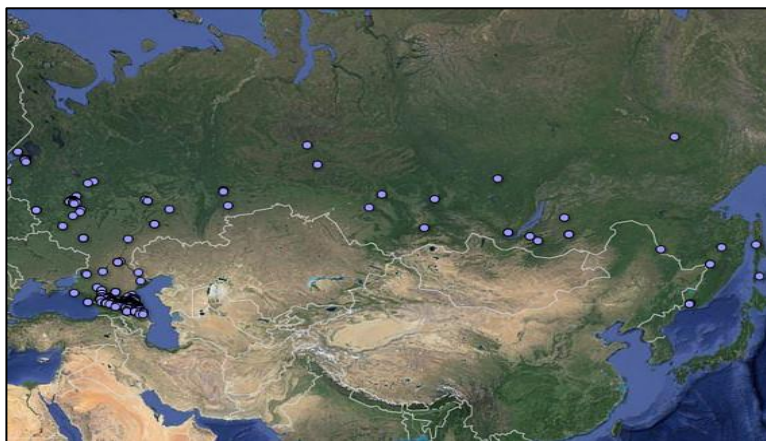


Figure 2: Map of terrorist activity in the Russian Federation (Guardian, 2013)

The map above shows a clear emphasis on the terrorist activity in the North Caucasus in terms of terrorist activity. Besides the North Caucasus, Moscow is, although far less, the second most intense point of focus for terrorist activity. Prior to the Beslan hostage crisis, the 1990s were characterized by attacks throughout Russia and specifically in the North Caucasus region. This brief prelude to the Beslan tragedy focuses primarily on the terrorist activities in the North Caucasus due to the specific focus on this region and the important aspect of separatism.

According to the official definition in the Oxford Dictionary, separatism is defined as: “the advocacy or practice of separation of a certain group of people from a larger body on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or gender” (Oxford dictionary, 2014). However, in the specific case of Beslan, one could say that separatism nowadays is linked much more to ethnic groups who are aiming at independence and who are therefore willing to use violence. Therefore, although the Russian Federation experienced occasional acts of terrorism<sup>4</sup> prior to the 1990s, the Russian Federation experienced a significant change from occasional and unique attacks to a systematic and structural terrorism threat during the 1990s and onwards. The relationship between Russia and the south-periphery has always been difficult and complex due to multicultural diversity in the regions as well as rebellious minority peoples (Thumann, 2001, p.193). This has been the case under Tsarist rule as well as under the Soviet regime and one could claim that this problem is still contemporary.

The two important factors in regard to this problem are nationalism and Islam. Obviously, it is certainly not the case that every Muslim can be considered an extremist but throughout the last two decades, splinter groups have developed into ‘Jihadi’ movements that conduct terrorist activities (Zhemukhov, 2013, p.3). The following figure shows the ideological division in the North Caucasus in the 2000s:

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<sup>4</sup> Armenian nationalists who bombed the Metro in Moscow in 1977 as well as a hijacking attempt by a group of youths at the airport of Tbilisi in Georgia in 1984 were considered unique events in the Russian Federation (Soviet-Union) prior to the 1990s.

	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>
Geographical division	Chechnya Dagestan Ingushetia	Adygea Kabardino-Balkaria Karachaevo-Cherkessia North Ossetia
Major ideological trends	Radical Islam Moderate Islam	Nationalism Radical Islam Moderate Islam Traditionalistic Islam
Historical differences in the approach to Islam	Islamic Imamate (1829–1859)	Islamic-nationalistic Circassian state (1861–1864)
Practical differences in the approach to Islam	Shaafi school	Hanafi school
Religion	Islam	Christianity and Islam
External influence	No diasporas	Large diasporas

Figure 2: Ideological Division in the North Caucasus in 2000s (Zhemukhov, 2013, p.5)

As the table above shows, the role of Islam is clearly visible throughout the North Caucasus. The combination of nationalism and radical Islam within the North Caucasus is considered to be the largest threat to Russia in terms of terrorism. Therefore, the definition of terrorism by the Russian Federation may very well differ from other countries and states. By defining terrorism, one can implement appropriated policy and legislation which effectively combats terrorism. Furthermore, one should bear in mind that the definition of terrorism is interpreted differently worldwide. For example, the United Kingdom and the United States have a different definition of terrorism than Russia. By analyzing the definitions from the UK and the USA, one is able to determine the differences in terms of interpretation and could gain a better understanding of the term terrorism applied in Russia.

### 2.3 Terrorism definition in Russia

The definition of terrorism in Russia experienced several small transformations since the late 1980s. In an article by the International Federation of Human Rights (2009, p.4), “the murder of a politician, public figure or government agent committed with the aim of undermining or weakening Soviet power was deemed an act of terrorism” in the Criminal Code of the USSR. Onwards, in 1997, the director of the Federal Security Service, Nikolay Kovalev, stated that “Russia faced three main types

of terrorism: [1] social, which aims at political and economic changes [2] nationalist and ethno-separatist and [3] religious” (Smith, 2004, p.2). However, in practice, Russia’s struggle against terrorism within the Russian Federation has concentrated on Chechen terrorism. Russia perceives Chechen terrorism as a mixture of the three main types of terrorism. However, according to Smith, the “actions have not been exclusively concentrated on Chechnya and other parts of southern Russia, but this region has understandably been the main focus” (Smith, 2004, p.2).

The definition of terrorism in the mid-1990s does not significantly differ from the contemporary definition of terrorism that is used by Russia due to its permanent focus on terrorism coming from the North Caucasus. However, the most recent definition of terrorism in Russia is defined in the law “On Counteraction to Terrorism” of 2006 which reads as follows: “terrorism is an ideology of violence and a practice affecting the way decisions are made by national and local authorities or international organisations, related to intimidation of the population and (or) to other illegal violent acts” (Committee of Experts on Terrorism, 2008).

Besides the definition of terrorism, the 2006 law also defines counter-terrorism within three dimensions as follows: “preventing of terrorism; the fight against terrorism; and the mitigation and management of its consequences” (Committee of Experts on Terrorism, 2008). To further specify, prevention of terrorism is related to the elimination of the conditions that potentially give rise to acts of terrorism whereas the fight against terrorism represents measures to suppress terrorist activity. The 2006 law will be further analyzed in the third chapter within the section of laws and legislation in the aftermath of Beslan.

### 2.3.1. Definition in UK and USA

The United Kingdom<sup>5</sup> defines terrorism as follows: “[1] the use or threat of action where the use or threat is designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause, and [2] it involves serious violence against a person, involves serious damage to property, endangers a person’s life, other than that of the person committing the action, creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public, or is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system.” (United Kingdom Terrorism Act, 2000). The United States of America and the U.S Department of Defense (2008) define terrorism as: “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.” In an article by Aleksandr Kuznetsov and Vasilii

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<sup>5</sup> United Kingdom; England, Wales, Scotland and Northern-Ireland share a common definition of terrorism.

Kuznetcov (2013, p.131), the term terrorism is further specified as follows: “to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.”

Following the aforementioned terrorism definitions, the conclusion can be made that in general, the definitions and perceptions of Russia, the UK and the USA share many similarities. However, one can also conclude that Russia has a slightly different interpretation of the term terrorism. As stated, Russia faces “three main types of terrorism: social, which aims at political and economic changes; nationalist and ethno-separatist; and religious” (Smith, 2004, p.2). Although it is not included in Russia’s 2006 definition, the most important difference is evidently Russia’s focus on the North Caucasus threat, whereas the UK and the USA share a more internationally-oriented focus. In other words, within the three main types of terrorism, the factor of ethno-separatism is absent within the definitions of the UK and the USA. It is important to bear in mind that the definitions of terrorism by Russia, the UK and the USA are personal definitions due to the fact that a universal definition of terrorism remains absent.

#### 2.4 Beslan tragedy

It is crucial to explain why Beslan specifically, among so many other attacks, can be perceived as a turning point with regard to counter-terrorism policy. The Beslan tragedy distinguishes itself from other terrorist attacks that have occurred in the history of the Russian Federation due to its magnitude and complexity. I acknowledge that, in terms of hostage-taking tragedies, the terrorist attacks of Budennovsk (1995), Kizlyar (1996) and Dubrovka (2002) were also momentous acts that threatened the security of the Russian Federation (Gilligan, 2013, p.8). However, the main reasons for considering Beslan a potential turning point are the extremely high level of hostages (1300), fatalities (372) and injuries (747), the cruel acts of the terrorists towards children and women, the long duration of the siege (3 days), the well-preparedness of the perpetrators that led to severe issues among the responsible security services at the time of the siege as well as the fact that Beslan was a global media event which led to questions about the capability of Russia to prevent and to manage terrorist attacks (Johnston, 2014; Tuathail, 2009, p.4; Plater-Zyberk, 2004, p.1). In face of the large number of fatalities, it is surprising that the post-Beslan changes in counter-terrorism policy were minimal and modest.

However, before analyzing policy change, it is important to contextualize the Beslan tragedy within three historical geopolitical processes which could explain the direct or indirect cause. The first process is the ongoing ethnical problem within the Caucasus region in combination with Russia’s expansion into the region and centralized its power (Tuathail, 2009, p.6-7). Russian imperialism eventually led to the Caucasian war which dated from 1817 to 1864. Among Circassia, the Northwest

Caucasus, modern Krasnodar Krai, and the republics of Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia and Abkhazia were subjected to the Russian military forces. In the specific case of Beslan, it is important to focus on the Chechens and Ingush because the hostage-takers were mainly of Chechen or Ingush origin. Russia's raid into the North Caucasus led to ethnic and confessional otherness in the already complex ethno-cultural structure within the region that continued during the aftermath of the Caucasian war. The Caucasians were victims of Stalin's deportation process. Stalin deported the Ingush and Chechens and transferred most of Ingushetia's territory to North Ossetian control. In 1956, under Nikita Khrushchev, the Ingush were allowed to return to their ancestral lands and Ingush lands were partially restored with the exception of eastern Prigorodnyy.

The second process is the ethnic secessionism which can be defined as 'formal separation from an alliance or federation' that followed after the Soviet-Union breakdown. This specific process can be divided in two major events. The first was the rise of Ingush-Ossetian tensions due to the Ingush activists who were claiming Prigorodnyy territory. The second was the Chechen battle for independence from Russia under the leadership of Dzhokhar Dudayev. As a result, the first Chechen war that lasted from 1994 to 1996 led to a large number of casualties as well as an increase of terrorist attacks.

The third process is linked to the rise of Putin and his military re-assertion of Russian power in the unstable and erratic Caucasus region that led to the second Chechen war. During this war, Putin used aerial bombings and merciless shelling against the citizens of Grozny (Tuathail, 2009, p.6). According to Sagramoso, Ph.D. at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at the University College London, the number of fatalities during this war, among Chechens as well as Ingush, were between 10,000 and 20,000; another 300,000 Chechens were forced to leave the republic and were held in camps in Ingushetia (Sagramoso, 2007, p.701). This process of 'modern deportation' was known as 'mop up operations'. In Putin's view, the Chechen war was now couched in the 'global war on terror' that was worldwide deployed after 9/11 in 2001 in the United States. The Chechens and Ingush were exposed to years of violence, domination, torture and death.

Putin's approach combined with the historical events concerning the North Caucasians (Chechens and Ingush) described above led to a peak in terrorist attacks in 1994 and could therefore serve as the alleged cause of the Beslan attack.

#### 2.4.1 Hostage takers

Who were the actual perpetrators of this tragedy: 'international terrorists,' 'Chechen rebels' or 'Jihadis'? According to Vladimir Bobrovnikov from the Moscow Institute for Oriental Studies, the al-Riyad al-Salihin group carried out the attack (Bobrovnikov, 2005, p.13). This group can be classified as Caucasian Muslims who, in the specific case of Beslan, can be further categorized into Chechens,

Ingush and Daghestanis. The leader of the Chechen nationalists, Shamil Basayev, took responsibility for initiating and planning the attack. However, the leaders on the ground were the Ingush Ruslan Khachubarov, the Ukrainian Vladimir Khodov, who was raised in North Ossetia and the Chechen Nurpashi Kulayev. Kulayev happened to be the only one to survive the siege but was sentenced to life in prison. All three leaders on the ground at Beslan were driven to kill because of personal tragedies related to family losses at the hand of Russian forces.

Besides the mentioned perpetrators, there were also four women, classified as 'black widows', at the site. Black widows<sup>6</sup> can be defined as "Chechen women committed to suicide missions, and who have been involved in numerous terrorist acts in Russia" (Banovac *et al.*, 2007, p.71). The majority of black widows seek revenge by suicide-bombings due to the loss of their husbands or children at the hands of Russian forces. These black widows are considered a serious threat to Russia's safety in general.

In any case, concerning Beslan, the perpetrators were very well-prepared for the assault (Plater-Zyberk, 2004, p.1). This argument is supported by Stepanova (2004, p.2) who states that: "among other things, pre-planted weapons and explosives were hidden beneath the school's floorboards during renovation work over the summer." Furthermore, the gunmen installed several remote control surveillance cameras throughout the school building, were in possession of gas masks and took medical substances to stay alert during the siege (Plater-Zyberk, 2004, p1). This proves the determination and tactic skills of the perpetrators to create detrimental results at the Beslan site. This also could explain the difficulties faced by the authorities charged with handling these kinds of attacks.

#### 2.4.2 Motives

What have been the underlying motives for the perpetrators and why? The alleged main motive behind the attack was to raise national and international attention to the cruelties, in their view, against the Chechens and Ingush. According to Shamil Basayev, Beslan would not be the only attack. Basayev promised further Beslan-like operations, if only, he explained, "to show the world, again and again, the true face of the Russian regime, the true face of Putin with his satanic horns so that the world sees his true face. In order to stop the genocide, we will stop at nothing" (Channel Four News, 2005). In fact, there were two sets of demands, that is, from the Ingush side and Chechen side (Tuathail, 2009, p.8). This argument is supported in an article by Plater-Zyberk (2004, p.2) in which it is pointed out that the hostage-takers demanded the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya, the release of terrorists that had been caught by Russian forces in Ingushetia and the combined

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<sup>6</sup> In Russia, a black widow is named a Shahidka, which means a female martyr.



demand of the immediate resignation of Vladimir Putin. The unrealistic demands eventually led to a shootout in which Russian forces killed the terrorists in a gunfire. During this battle, the terrorists did not seem to spare children, as they killed as many hostages as they could (Plater-Zyberk, 2004, p.5).

Basayev was determined to depict the Russians as evil and ignorant. In the article of Tuathail (2009, p.8), Shamil Basayev, pressed by Channel Four News in 2005, stated that “you must understand us correctly. We are at war. Russians approve of Putin’s policies. They pay their taxes for this war, send their soldiers to this war, their priests sprinkle holy water on their soldiers and bless their heroic duty, calling them ‘heroic defenders of the fatherland.’ And we’re just ‘terrorists.’ How can they be innocent? Russians are accomplices in this war. It’s just that they don’t all have weapons in their hands.” This statement by Basayev implies a strong feeling of revenge-seeking from the Chechen side against Russian targets as well as a justification of their actions by blaming the Russians in general. One could conclude that Basayev placed the responsibility for Beslan on the Russians.

### 2.4.3 Importance

The Beslan terrorist attack shocked Russian society as well the international community and was therefore marked as Russia’s 9/11. According to Uwe Kloessman, leading journalist from Der Spiegel, the Russian security forces were unable to cooperate with the police and army, which draws similarities from the 9/11 final report that basically concluded a lack of anticipation of the attacks and cooperation with one another (Kloesmann, 2005).

The Washington Post (2005) gained access to the official report, consisting of 60,000 pages, on Beslan which concluded that the Russian authorities were warned in advance that Chechen rebels were planning a hostage situation at the primary school in Beslan during the first classes of the year. However, local authorities ignored instructions despite several warnings by the Russian Ministry of Interior, which wanted to have tightened security at the school site. Following the findings of the report, there was only one unarmed policewoman stationed in front of the school when the rebels sieged the site. Alexander Torshin, chairman of the ‘parliamentary commission’ on Beslan, was cited by CBC News (2005), stating that “the counter-terrorist operation was plagued by shortcomings [...] Many law enforcement officers did not know how to act in an emergency situation.” In addition, Omelicheva stated that the tragedy in Beslan exposed the shortcomings in intelligence management as well as errors in the dissemination of public information (Omelicheva, 2012).

If one assumes that the report by the parliamentary commission is based on true facts and not an instrument for federal ministries and leaders to exculpate themselves, it might actually shed a different light on Russia’s counter-terrorism policy. It could imply that there might be a link between the ignorance, indolence as well as incapability of the local authorities and alleged inefficient counter-terrorism laws. However, Vladimir Ryzhkov, a Russian State Duma deputy from 1993 to



2007, was cited by the Washington Post (2005) stated that the report “is an attempt to put the blame on regional and local law enforcers and not on the leaders of federal ministries, who in my view bear responsibility for what happened [...] they didn't take preventive measures. They didn't check how their orders were being carried out.”

Interestingly, Beslan was certainly not the first hostage crisis in Russia. In 1995, Shamil Basayev seized a hospital in Budennovsk, located in Dagestan. At the end of the siege, Basayev and his forces were allowed to return to Chechnya while 147 hostages lost their lives (Forster, 2006, p.2). It seems that the Russian security services continuously fail to integrate previous experiences into new strategic policy and execution on the ground. I acknowledge the fact that every crisis has its own differences and complexities, but a certain level of preparedness and coordination can make the rescue operation or any form of prevention more successful. In the specific case of Beslan, one could argue that negotiations would have been a better instrument than the use of excessive violence by storming the school with heavy arms (Forster, 2006, p.3). Ideally, further research could expose the overall proficiency of the local authorities in regard to the counter-terrorism approach.

At first, the government was unwilling to accept the mistakes that were evidently made in connection with Beslan, but, in 2005, The Moscow Times wrote that Vladimir Putin accepted guilt for the Beslan tragedy and therefore wanted to revitalize the investigation in which findings would be used to reform police and security services (The Moscow Times, 2005). This statement by Putin implies that the security services were not able to protect its citizens and thus, at least, needed evaluation. Although Putin's statement suggested that Russia would seriously investigate the tragedy, Banovac *et al.* state that the authorities failed to do so (Banovac *et al.*, 2007, p.33). The most important factor has been the misplacement as well as the loss of significant evidence from the site. In addition, the authorities in charge failed to seal off the site, which is a requirement for proper investigation. In that regard, “there were no fences, no gates to keep visitors away” (Smith, 2004). Hence, an objective and thorough investigation seems to be impossible due to the significantly disturbed site. This is supported by the Russian journalist Voronov, who was present at the site during the siege and stated that “there was a whole crowd of officials, both local and federal, but no one managed anything. So, it's not really surprising that 10 years later the official version of the incident is full of obscurities and half-explained facts” (Voronov, 2014). Therefore, investigators are forced to rely on eyewitnesses who can be considered as somewhat unreliable. In an article by Natalia Wolchover, Dr. Wise, a forensic psychologist at the University of Dakota state that: “to fill in gaps in memory, the eyewitness relies upon his or her expectation, attitudes, prejudices, bias, and prior knowledge. Furthermore, information supplied to an eyewitness after a crime (i.e., post-event information) by the police, prosecutor, other eyewitnesses, media, etc., can alter an eyewitness' memory of the crime” (Wolchover, 2012). Evidently, these latter factors did not contribute to the

creation of decent circumstances for a thorough investigation. One could conclude that the Russian counter-terrorism authorities are, to some extent, unable to learn from similar events in the past. There seems to be a structural lack of efficient and clear policy, knowledge and action in regard to counter-terrorism combat.

In a quote, following Beslan, by Putin admits to the structural weakness of Russia and compares the terrorists to germs and Russia to a vulnerable body: “when a man is born, some disease-causing germs, some viruses appear almost immediately in his organism endangering his health. But if the organism grows strong and powerful then its immunity suppresses all these disease-causing germs and viruses. As soon as the organism weakens, they all flare up in a life-threatening disease. This is the way it happened with us [...] We need to put right the system of power in the country, we need to create an efficient economy, we need to revitalize the entire organism of Russian statehood and the political system” (Lynch, 2005, p.153). However, it seems that Putin encouraged the existing policy and legislation at that time and thought that it should be continued in order to “build immunity against potential ‘future Beslans’” (Lynch, 2005, p.154). This implies that Putin did not necessarily aim at a change in terrorism legislation in the aftermath. However, it does not mean that one may assume that there have not been any changes, reforms or new legislation in the aftermath.

In sum, the 1990s can be classified as a fluctuating and unstable period with multiple bilateral wars between Russia and Chechnya as key events. As a result, the relationship between Russia and Chechnya and other parts of the North Caucasus deteriorated. This fragile situation led to an outburst of terrorist attacks within the Russian Federation by Chechens, Ingush, Dagestanis and other North Caucasian ethnic groups. The historically complex relationship between Russia and its south-periphery has remained in contemporary times and is primarily manifested in terrorist activity. Apparently, this troubled relationship also impedes successful counter-terrorism policy. Russia started to experience a systematic and structural terrorism threat during the 1990s and onwards. Therefore, Russia’s definition of terrorism differs from that of the USA and the UK due to the specific threat of nationalism and Islam from the North Caucasus. The Beslan siege led to a great number of fatalities, injuries and traumas among the hostages, hostage-takers, Russian security services and families. The responsible authorities failed to prevent the siege and, despite the complexities, to handle the situation with care. Following the statements by Putin and his promises, new legislation, laws and security reforms were supposed to be implemented after Beslan to combat the great issue of terrorism. The following chapter will therefore specifically focus on existing and new or amended legislation and laws as well as reforms in the security services.

## Chapter 3 - Counter-terrorism policy

This chapter aims to demonstrate Russia's counter-terrorism policy prior to and after Beslan. In this case, the counter-terrorism policy includes legislation, laws and the role of Russia's security services. Section 3.1 analyzes the legislation and laws prior to Beslan in order to establish the basis for any post-Beslan changes. The following section, 3.2, analyzes the changes and newly implemented legislation and laws in the aftermath of Beslan. The 2006 law serves as the central point of focus due to its ostensible potential and importance. Section 3.3 analyzes the post-Beslan reforms within the Russian security services. Furthermore, this paragraph aims to explain the difficulties concerning the implementation of effective counter-terrorism policy by the Russian government. The sub-section 3.3.1, which covers the attack in Nalchik in 2005, aims to prove that the authorities are unable or unwilling to learn lessons from previous events. This sub-section also serves to demonstrate that the execution on the ground by the responsible security services has not significantly improved after Beslan. By analyzing the counter-terrorism legislation, laws and the security reforms, one is able to determine whether Beslan can be considered as an actual turning point in terms of Russian counter-terrorism policy and to what extent counter-terrorism policy has changed.

### 3.1 Legislation and laws in the 1990s

As this thesis partially focuses on counter-terrorism legislation, it is essential to analyze the lack of laws and the laws that were in place at that time in order to contextualize the two wars (Russia-Chechnya) and to create a comparison before and after Beslan. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet-Union, the first counter-terrorism law was implemented by the Russian government. This law was passed in 1993. This first counter-terrorism law basically represented a widening of the previously stated definition which now included practices such as the 'hijacking of airplanes'. It took another four years before a new Criminal Code was implemented which primarily provided punishment parameters for terrorists (Article 205). Terrorism as a crime was introduced in 1994 into the Russian Federation Criminal Code. In this specific year, 18 cases of terrorism were registered. This number increased to 327 cases by 2001 and further increased to 402 by 2002.

Four years later in 1998, a new counter-terrorism law, signed by Boris Yeltsin and named 'On the Fight against Terrorism' came into force and replaced the former law. This new law extended the previous law which now defined concepts like 'terrorist organization' and 'act of terrorism' while at the same time created 'the institutional framework of actions undertaken in this sphere, as well as the rights and obligations of citizens' (International Federation of Human Rights, 2009). According to Omelicheva, the 1998 law became the main pillar of counter-terrorism laws that were implemented in the 1990s (Omelicheva, 2009, p.4). The 1998 law, which includes 29 articles, is defined as follows:

“the legal and organizational basis of the fight against terrorism in the Russian Federation, the procedure for coordinating the activities of federal organs of executive power, organs of executive power of the Russian Federation components, public associations and organizations regardless of forms of ownership, officials, and individual citizens implementing the fight against terrorism, and also citizens' rights, duties, and guarantees in connection with the fight against terrorism” (Federal Law No. 130-FZ, 1998). As a framework, this comprehensive law covered the establishment of the agencies who became responsible for the fight against terrorism. The responsible federal agencies were the Federal Security Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Foreign Intelligence Service, the Federal Protection Service, the Defense Ministry and the Federal Border Service with the Russian government as the overarching responsible entity. Each agency was tasked with different responsibilities due to the difference in competences. This law created possibilities to legally fight terrorism and thus protected the state, society and the individual against terrorism by preventing, uncovering and stopping terrorist activity while at the same time minimizing the consequences of terrorism. Furthermore, the responsible agencies within in the counter-terrorist operation zone were now legally permitted to take necessary measures to prohibit the movement of vehicles on streets and highways, to check random individuals for identity documentation and to detain individuals if the necessary documentation was absent, free entry to housing, territory and premises of individuals and organizations and to detain suspects and to use certain means of communication for official purposes. Procedures concerning negotiations with terrorists have been created with this law that gave exclusive authorization for persons appointed by the leader of the operational staff (Federal Law No. 130-FZ, 1998). This law is thus rather broad without genuinely specific or more detailed measures to effectively combat terrorism. Therefore, although the law is conceived as the main pillar of counter-terrorism legislation in the 1990s, the 1998 law does not focus on the North Caucasus and Islam despite the intensified activity in that region. In the context of Beslan, this law inter alia focused on counter-terrorism operations<sup>7</sup>. This implies that counter-terrorism operational units or teams were aware of the procedures to take during a terrorist act or siege. However, the previous chapter elaborated on the failures of the operational units concerning the course of the Beslan event.

The implemented laws in the 1990s imply that there were laws in place that were gradually expanded with new definitions or amendments throughout the years. Although I acknowledge that counter-terrorism laws cannot eradicate terrorism as a whole for any state in the world, these new laws did not seem an obstacle for terrorists in rendering their activities.

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<sup>7</sup> Federal Law No. 130-FZ, 1998 – Chapter 3, articles 10 -16

### 3.2 Post-Beslan legislation and laws

As stated earlier, laws on counter-terrorism were implemented throughout the 1990s. Prior to the Beslan tragedy, the Russian government already implemented numerous laws. One can make a distinction in laws by subdividing the laws into [1] constitutional laws [2] primary legislation [3] and secondary legislation:

- 'Constitutional law:
  - Federal Constitutional Law No.3-FKZ On the State of Emergency (2001, as amended 2005).
- Primary legislation:
  - Federal Law No. 130-FZ on The Fight against Terrorism.
  - Federal Law No. 226-FZ on the Federal Security Service (1999 as amended 2011).
  - Federal Law No. 114 FZ on combating of extremist activity (2002 as amended 2008).
  - Federal Law No. 115-FZ on Countering Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism (2001 as amended 2004).
- Secondary legislation:
  - Presidential Decree No. 6 on measures to fulfill the resolution of the UN Security Council No 1373 adopted 28 September 2001 (2002).'  
(Legislationonline.org, 2013).

Besides the implemented legislation prior to 2004, the Russian government implemented new and amended laws after Beslan in 2004:

- 'Primary legislation:
  - Federal Law No. 114 FZ on Combating of extremist activity (2002 as amended 2008).
  - Federal Law No. 35-FZ on Counteraction of Terrorism (2006 as amended 2008).
  - Federal Law No. 218-FZ on amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation (2013).
- Secondary legislation:
  - Presidential Decree No. 1167 on Urgent Measures to Improve the Effectiveness of the Struggle against Terrorism (13 September, 2004).'  
(Legislationonline.org, 2013).

The Federal Law No. 114-FZ 'on combating of extremist activity' was adopted in 2002 and was amended in 2008. This law primarily reflects the combat of extremism which is defined as the:

“forcible change of the foundations of the constitutional system and violation of the integrity of the Russian Federation” (Federal Law No. 114 FZ). This law furthermore focuses on the international cooperation to fight extremism. The aspect of international cooperation in fighting extremism and combating terrorism is a significant departure from the laws and legislation prior to Beslan.

One may wonder whether the newly implemented legislation and laws can be linked directly to the actual event of Beslan. However, one can assume that the new counter-terrorism law of 2006 can explicitly be linked to Beslan. In Putin’s post-Beslan speech, he stated: “I think it is necessary to create a new system of coordinating the forces and means responsible for exercising control over the situation in the North Caucasus [...] we need to create an effective anti-crisis management system including entirely new approaches to the way the law enforcement agencies work” (Putin, 2004). Inter alia, the new 2006 law was therefore the outcome of Beslan. The draft of this law arose in the immediate aftermath of Beslan as a response to the tragedy. This draft had already passed its first reading in December 2004, but, according to Abdullaev & Saradzhyan, “due to widespread criticism, it took the authors a year and half to agree on the final text” (Abdullaev & Saradzhyan, 2006, p.197). The widespread criticism reflected the haste in which the Duma’s Security Committee established the draft in the aftermath Beslan. Furthermore, according to Abdullaev & Saradzhyan, “further delay was apparently due to the Kremlin’s inability to decide quickly which agency would take the lead in the anti-terrorist effort and how it would be organized institutionally” (Abdullaev & Saradzhyan, 2006, p.197).

The 2006 law is considered to be important as it should have represented a comprehensive piece of legislation that consisted of a broad range of preventive measures as well as policies aimed to protect infrastructure and Russian citizens from terrorist activity. The 2006 law is similar to the law of 1998 in terms of scope and structure. However, the newer law covers new aspects and takes a different direction which ostensibly created hopeful expectations. The 2006<sup>8</sup> law ‘Counteraction of terrorism’ consists of 27 articles. This new law established: “the fundamental principles of counteraction terrorism, the legal and organizational basics of preventing terrorism and struggling against it, of reducing to a minimum and (or) liquidating the consequences of manifestations thereof, as well as the legal and organizational basics of using the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in struggling against terrorism” (Federal law, No. 35-FZ, 2006). The conclusion can be made that the 2006 laws builds upon the 1998 law but with a more specific and detailed text. In contrast to the 1998 law, this new law furthermore covers international cooperation against terrorism; a revised organizational structure with the president and government of the Russian Federation as central decision-makers from the top, which means the responsibilities of operational staff are now

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<sup>8</sup> For more specific information on this 2006 law: *Legislationline.org – Russian Federation – Federal Law No. 35-FZ.*

appointed by the government rather than the operational staffs themselves; suppressing any form of terrorism in the air, in the inland waters, in the territorial sea and on the ground as well as a new greater role for the Russian armed forces and military units in counter-terrorist operations has been legitimized in the document. In addition, the legal regime of an anti-terrorist operation has been expanded, giving the government full control over telephone communication as well control over electronic channels in order to gain important information, banning and restricting of the sale of weapons, explosives and poisonous substances and improving of public order maintenance at the anti-terrorist operational zone.

Furthermore, due to this law, legal possibilities have been created to prohibit organizations in the Russian Federation who support or justify terrorist activity. The procedures concerning anti-terrorist operations have also tightened (Federal law, No. 35-FZ, 2006). This means that operational units are permitted to impose a 60-day clampdown in suspicious regions where a terrorist attack might be planned. The tapping of telephone conversations and restricting of communication are now legitimate within anti-terrorist operation zones. Hence, this 2006 law is more comprehensive than the 1998 law as it provides more instruments and possibilities for the responsible operational units to combat terrorism. Furthermore, according to Luchterhandt, from the faculty of Law at the University of Hamburg, the changes in the 2006 counter-terrorism law “relate to the re-distribution of responsibilities among the various executive branch agencies, including the military. Furthermore, the law defines the mission area for counter-terrorism measures and gives the executive branch broader rights to encroach on civilian life” (Luchterhandt, 2006, p.2). In other words, this law has tightened and streamlined the already existing regulations and expanded all instruments of repression. According to Hughes, professor of comparative politics at the London School of Economics and author of numerous books on Russian history and politics, this law not only criminalizes all forms of terrorist activity but also “inciting terrorism and the propaganda of the idea of terrorism, spreading materials or information promoting terrorist activity or justifying and approving of the necessity for such activity” (Hughes, n.d, p.296).

Although this law may have seemed a first important step in improving counter-terrorism policy in the aftermath of Beslan, severe criticism of this law arose and it is perceived to be a controversial law. The 2006 law failed to create a comprehensive law that would define prophylactic measures in order to effectively combat terrorism. Furthermore, this new law lacks measures to correct the problems revealed by the Beslan tragedy (Luchterhandt, 2006, p.3). Criticism of the 2006 law is supported by Omelicheva who states that the law has a negative effect on freedom of speech in Russia and the openness of debate concerning terrorism (Omelicheva, 2012). This is furthermore supported by Nichol, a specialist in Russian and Eurasian affairs, who argues that this law permits “police and other security forces to declare a ‘counter-terrorism operations regime’ in a locality and

to detain suspects for up to 30 days, search homes, ban public assemblies, and restrict media activities without any pre-approval by the courts or legislative oversight” (Nichol, 2009, p.12-13). In other words, the new law created possibilities for infringing on the basic rights of people.

Nevertheless, in spite of the widespread criticism, the law of 2006 is remarkable in contrast to previous laws because it is the first law specific to counter-terrorism. In the aftermath of Beslan, this new law defined terrorism as a multi-layered social phenomenon rather than as separate acts and methods of committing violence with political goals. The 2006 law was amended in 2008 and approved by Dimitri Medvedev and was adopted as Federal Law No. 321-FZ. The amendments reflected the abolition of jury trials for terrorist acts. Following the amendments, new cases of terrorism were henceforth to be decided by a panel of three judges.

In 2013, ahead of the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Vladimir Putin signed another law: the Federal Law No. 218-FZ ‘On amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation.’ This specific law actually builds on the previous Federal Law No. 114-FZ ‘on combating of extremist activity’ and can thus be linked to the Olympic Games in Sochi rather than to Beslan. Shortly before the Sochi Olympics, Russia was startled by two bombing attacks in two days (Aljazeera, 2013) in the city of Volgograd in southern Russia. Presumably, this law could not have prevented these attacks as it primarily covers legitimizing criminal liability for individuals or organizations who provide financial aid intended for the use of extremist or terrorist activity. Thus, this law creates freedom for detained persons if they are willing to share vital information about these practices to the authorities. According to the Kremlin, this law furthermore introduced “criminal liability for committing extremism-related crimes with the help of information and telecommunications networks, including the internet” (Kremlin.ru, 2014). However, by analyzing the previous laws, one could argue that this was already legitimate and possible. Therefore, the changes introduced by this law have not been that significant compared to previous laws.

Besides the 2006 law on counter-terrorism, the amendments in 2008 and the law of 2013 on extremism, further changes within the counter-terrorism legislation and laws seem to be absent in the aftermath of Beslan. The moderate changes in the legislation and laws pertaining to counter-terrorism policy are in line with potential or accompanying security reforms. The following section will therefore analyze and evaluate any reforms within the security services.

### 3.3 Security reforms

Besides the moderate changes in counter-terrorism legislation, the Russian security services have experienced reforms imposed by the Kremlin to a certain degree. Peter Forster, Ph.D. at Penn State University states that, after a tragedy, response is “influenced by broader political agendas, past experiences, and local events” (Forster, 2006, p.3). As stated in the second chapter on Beslan, the



capability of the Russian security services to handle the precarious situation of the siege proved to be rather poor. This not only applies to Beslan, but also to previous 'similar' events like the hostage situation in Budennovsk in Dagestan in 1995 and the hostage situation at the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow in 2002.

At the time of the siege in Beslan, it seemed to be widespread confusion about the responsibilities of the authorities that led to a chaotic response. Therefore, in the fight against terrorism, Putin sought to improve or, one could even argue, establish collaboration between the security services in the immediate aftermath of Beslan. In response to Beslan, Putin created a single command of joint operations to combat terrorism in the southern Federal District between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Federal Security Service (FSB), the Ministry of Defense and the Emergency Situations Ministry (de Haas, 2005, p.11). This could be considered the first step in the establishment of mutual coordination. At the same time, the lack of coordination in response to Beslan might therefore partially explain the chaotic response of the Russian security services during the siege.

The lack of coordination or leadership at the time of the 2004 tragedy can be linked to a broader context of a lack of coordination and leadership within the Russian Federation as a whole, which is structured in terms of 'the power vertical'. According to Monaghan (2012), the power vertical<sup>9</sup> is defined as "appointing loyal figures to important positions to implement policy decisions" which is associated for the most with the presidency of Putin between 2000 and 2008 (Monaghan, 2012, p1). The idea behind the power vertical is creating a strong team of leaders and accomplishing tasks that have strategically been set out.

However, the extent to which the power vertical is effective in practice in terms of implementing orders and instructions is questionable, especially with regard to security services, which is the focus of this thesis. The overall lack of coordination and authority within the Russian Federation might explain the problem of implementing effective counter-terrorism legislation and laws. Following Monaghan's argument (2012, p.4), the effort to establish a power vertical with the president as the central and most authoritative figure has been lacking due to a lack of an effective chain of command. One can assume that a dysfunctional chain of command at the top will further deteriorate at lower levels with regard to the implementation and execution of orders and instructions. In addition, if political positions are appointed by the president through personal links and loyalty, it would imply that this team of leadership would function and collaborate. However, despite Putin's effort to establish a strong government at the top, the mismanagement of the

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<sup>9</sup> Also known in Russia as the *siloviki*.

ongoing terrorist attacks seem to indicate a repetitive shortcoming in terms of overall coordination and leadership in Russian politics due to a dysfunctional chain of command.

There are several explanations for the failure of the power vertical. Following Renz, Putin sought to establish a government with former force-structure colleagues who lacked political experience (Renz, 2006, p.907-908). One must therefore question the capability of the newly appointed *siloviki* to implement and execute policy. Furthermore, according to Renz, “the rise in the numbers of such figures under the Putin leadership has been perceived as problematic particularly because of the expectation that the ‘military frame of mind’ and ‘military-style traditions’ shared by them would lead Russian politics into a more authoritarian direction” (Renz, 2006, p922). This argument is supported by Reddaway *et al.* (2004, p.4), who state that “the *siloviki* appear—as a loose, bureaucracy-based faction—not to have a leader or leaders, not to meet in even a semi-public way, and not to have any means of coordinating their goals and plans.” This showcases and suggests, in the broader context of Russian politics in general, the problems regarding implementing effective counter-terrorism policy. Post-Beslan terrorist attacks further confirm these problems. In the context of this research, it is evident that collaboration between the ‘siloviki’ is required to effectively combat terrorism, but this is apparently not the case.

Despite the weaknesses within the power vertical and within the Russian political system in general, Putin ordered the reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB in the aftermath of Beslan which led to the signing of ‘Decree 1167’. This decree focused on “urgent measures to increase the efficiency of the fight against terrorism” (Soldatov & Borogan, 2005, p.3). The reforms of the two departments were completed in 2005 and included:

- “The principle of management of counterterrorist operation in the North Caucasus;
  - The principle of management of actions of power structures involved in the resolution of subversive and terrorist actions in the region;
  - The principle of information gathering and analysis on the leaders of insurgents in the territory of the North Caucasus;
  - Tactics of special divisions in region”
- (Soldatov & Borogan, 2005, p.3).

The principles refer to a new structure of coordination. The question of whether these principles could be considered sufficient and effective could only be answered through the execution of the principles. The latter principles were accompanied by several other factors which have changed in the MoIA and the FSB, that is, in the sphere of the information exchange about the North Caucasus and the system of coordination. However, Soldatov & Borogan, two directors of the non-profit

research organization, Agentura, which deals with security and terrorism issues, argue that these changes were mainly 'cosmetic', since, for example, sub-departments in the two departments were in fact only renamed (Soldatov & Borogan, 2005, p.4). Therefore, substantial changes in the two departments only had a small impact. Another development in the aftermath of Beslan was the accession of former militants to the government of Ramzan Kadyrov who had recently declared that Chechnya was more open to the idea of being part of the Russian Federation.

Despite a modest degree of security reforms, Russia still lacks a comprehensive counter-terrorism policy that effectively combats terrorism and limits the growth of terrorism. The lack of a program of terrorism prevention and the use of excessive violence that Russia uses as primary means of fighting terrorism did not reduce terrorist attacks (Omelicheva, 2012). Shortly after 2004, in Nalchik<sup>10</sup> in October 2005, the security services again failed to carry out an effective counter-terrorism policy. I acknowledge that this attack was committed soon after Beslan, however, the Nalchik event has been one of the largest and most significant attacks in the North Caucasus after Beslan.

### 3.3.1 The attack in Nalchik

In October 2005, a group of an estimated 250 armed militants launched a number of attacks on the headquarters of the Federal Security Services, a police station and a number of other smaller agencies in the city of Nalchik (Dzutsev, 2012). The masterminds behind the staged attacks were inter alia Ilyas Gorchkhanov, Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev. The main motive of the attack was to overthrow the Kabardino-Balkarian government and, instead, to create an Islamic state. As a result of the attack, 35 members of the military and police were killed as well as 14 civilians and 92 militants. Besides the large number of casualties, the attack injured 129 servicemen and 66 civilians (Kavkaz-uzel.ru, 2012). The responsible authorities were thus unable to prevent the attack which led, again, to a large number of casualties and injuries. In an article by NBC news (2005), Putin said "it is bad that such bandit raids are still possible here, however, it's good that this time all the law-enforcement agencies worked in coordination, effectively and tough." This quote, if nothing else, highlights the fact that authorities failed in their counter-terrorism policy at Beslan. One could furthermore question this statement by Putin due to the high degree of casualties, injuries and the lack of attack prevention.

In addition, in a broader sense, this attack might have been an indicator that Putin failed to control the tense situation in the North Caucasus in the aftermath of Beslan. Interestingly, the Russian security services were informed about the terrorist attack in Nalchik by a captured militant

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<sup>10</sup> Nalchik is the capital city of the republic Kabardino-Balkaria. The republic is bordered by Karachay-Cherkessia, North-Ossetia, Russia and Georgia.

some days prior to the raid (McGregor, 2005). In addition, the majority of perpetrators were able to escape. Further, the coordination of Russian authorities was rather poor since every department of the security services started to fire at militants rather than executing a collective action plan. The attack in Nalchik was ill-prepared under the overarching lead of the 'Caucasian Front' which meant that the perpetrators were, in the end, under armed (Agentura.ru, 2011). Thus, in this perspective, the poor response of the security forces at Nalchik was neither an exception nor a desired improvement in the aftermath of Beslan. Yet again, the counter-terrorism policy conducted by the security services at Nalchik proved to be poor and highlights the lack of a learning system after Beslan in terms of coordination, anticipation, prevention and discriminate assessment of the situation (Forster, 2006, p5).

Therefore, the changes that were made did not seem to improve the overall ability to counteract terrorist attacks. However, to counterbalance, one could argue that it would be fair to allow Russia the necessary time that it apparently needs in regard to security reforms. In an article by *Russia behind the Headlines* (RTBH, 2014), Nikolay Silayev, senior researcher of Caucasian Studies at the University of Moscow states that: "in recent years, security services have stepped up pressure on the terrorist underground; many militants have been killed or detained." In the aftermath of Beslan, Shamil Basayev (in 2006), Doka Umarov<sup>11</sup> (in 2013) as well as Aslan Maskhadov<sup>12</sup> (in 2005) were assassinated by Russian troops, thus in that regard, the latter statement is to the utmost extent true. In 2005, in the aftermath of Nalchik, Putin also ordered severe military measures in the North Caucasus region. This led to truckloads of Interior Troops being stationed in the region, who were particularly tasked with patrolling through the neighborhoods around Nalchik. According to Siegel, a journalist from *The Moscow Times* (2008), the Interior Troops swept through the neighborhoods, which resulted in the disappearances of many young men.

In sum, the Russian government did implement several new post-Beslan Federal laws and amendments. At the same time, given the magnitude of Beslan, the changes within the counter-terrorism legislation have been minimal. In any case, legislation, laws and protocols are strongly related to the execution of practices by the responsible security services. Therefore, in terms of security reforms, Putin ordered several changes within the security services and military. Despite restructuring security departments, the nature of the power vertical under Putin suggests that it has not always been successful concerning getting things done in practice. The lack of a well-functioning power vertical evidently impedes the implementation of significant and effective counter-terrorism

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<sup>11</sup> The Chechen warlord Doka Umarov was the fifth President of the republic Ichkeria in Chechnya and the mastermind of several significant terrorist attacks in Moscow.

<sup>12</sup> Aslan Maskhadov was the leader of the Chechen independence movement as well as the third President of the republic Ichkeria in Chechnya. Maskhadov led the guerrilla resistance against Russian troops.

policy. Furthermore, the attack in Nalchik is an example that proves that the authorities are unwilling or unable to learn lessons from previous terrorist attacks. Despite Russia's overall efforts to combat terrorism in terms of legislation and security reforms, the question remains how these efforts have influenced the Russian public's perceptions in the face of reality. Hence, the following chapter will focus on the Russian public's perceptions of terrorism prior to and after Beslan, as well as the role of the Russian media rhetoric in influencing these perceptions.

## Chapter 4 – Counter-terrorism perceptions

This chapter demonstrates the public's perceptions of counter-terrorism and the rhetoric of the Russian media on terrorism. Section 4.1 focuses on the Russian media's portrayal of terrorism and counter-terrorism policy. By analyzing the rhetoric of the Russian media, one is able to determine whether the Russian government perceives its counter-terrorism policy as successful and effective since the Russian government influences public information through the media as it largely controls the majority of the media. Section 4.2 aims to analyze public perception of Russia's efforts to combat terrorism. Therefore, various graphs and polling data are used to analyze any changes in perceptions. The following section, 4.3, aims to link public perception to the actual facts and figures about terrorist incidents, injuries and fatalities in the timeframe between 1991 and 2014. Terrorist incidents prior to and after Beslan will be analyzed in order to highlight the distinction and changes.

### 4.1 The role of Russian media

Arguably, the media plays a significant role in the creation of a certain image and can therefore influence general public feeling. The media can also be considered an aspect of counter-terrorism policy in terms of providing crucial information to its citizens.

In a broader context, media rhetoric plays an interesting role in counter-terrorism policy. According to Simons, a member of the department of Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University, "one of the 'problems', which is by no means solely confined to the present situation in Russia, is the proximity of the mass media to society's establishment" (Simons, 2006, p.3). What does this mean in terms of the Russian media rhetoric and counter-terrorism?

One idea is that Putin, through mass media rhetoric, attempts to create unification among the Russians as a whole. After Beslan, the leading newspaper in Russia, *Izvestia*, "repeatedly discussed the steps that should be taken to secure the triumph of good over evil. The steps included reforming homeland security, introducing tougher antiterrorist laws, creating a bipartisan committee for parliamentary investigation" (Zaytseva, 2005, p.42). In newspapers, Putin was presented and depicted as the ultimate defender of the nation against terrorist threats and voices of criticism were directed to intelligence, local officials and special forces rather than to the president. Furthermore, *Izvestia* "described Russian unity and support for President Putin as a goal that should be achieved at any cost. In some instances, the journalists' arguments hardly followed any logical pattern and sounded like a magical incantation that was expected to bring positive results after numerous repetitions" (Zaytseva, 2005, p.43). In other words, post-Beslan articles in newspapers presented unity as the rhetorical cure for the Beslan tragedy. However, it was too simple to state that Russian unity was the solution to overcoming the terrorist threats and conflicts in the North Caucasus.

Another way the media influences public perception of counter-terrorism is through a continuous news stream in the mass media stating the success of the state's counter-terrorism approach and highlighting the Chechen threat. I acknowledge that newspapers, TV coverage and the internet in the Russian language could strengthen this argument, however, due to practical reasons, the focus of this thesis is on Russian mass media in English. Interestingly, the majority of rhetoric on counter-terrorism seems to focus on the 'Chechen conflict' with the 'War on terror' as the overarching concept. According to Russell, "Vladimir Putin has taken 'every opportunity' since 9/11 to present Russia's conflict with the Chechens as a component of the coalition's overall struggle with Islamic insurgents" (Russell, 2007, p.90). After the murder of Boris Nemtsov, the Moscow Times (2015) wrote an article with the headline: "Was Nemtsov Murder 'a Job for a Chechen?" The media's continuous focus on Chechens and Russian officials' rhetoric on Muslims as extremists and the need to suppress these threats led to changes in Russian society.

According to Abdullaev & Saradzhyan, "by and large, Russian society eagerly and uncritically welcomed these controversial public policies, which were advanced by the government claiming that they would contribute to stability and security in the country" (Abdullaev & Saradzhyan, 2006, p.199). This was and continues to be the counter-terrorism strategy conducted by the Kremlin and accompanying media to secure their positions and to justify the government's ostensible successful counter-terrorism approach. However, these claims can be considered cosmetic as the present situation has still not improved. Due to the Kremlin's intensified control of the media, the Kremlin rules out critical voices in the public debate and independent media on counter-terrorism. Creating a positive image domestically is not sufficient, however. Therefore, the TV channel 'Russia Today' was established in 2005; financed by state budget, this channel was created to promote a more positive image of Russia in the West. Both approaches seem valid in the context of a more aggressive rhetoric by the government and media rhetoric in the aftermath of Beslan.

#### 4.2 In the eyes of the Russian public

For this research, surveys serve as an interesting instrument to measure the perceptions of Russian citizens concerning the implementation of new laws that combat terrorism. Therefore, the 'Public Opinion Foundation' (FOM) conducted several surveys which were inter alia published in Russian Analytical Digest (2006) and asked Russian citizens whether they feel safe and whether they approve of the new counter-terrorism law that was implemented in 2006. Although surveys are primarily based on personal perceptions and influences by external factors such as the media, they nevertheless provide an interesting view of the general public's perception of terrorism:

**“Are you afraid of becoming a victim of a terrorist attack yourself?”**

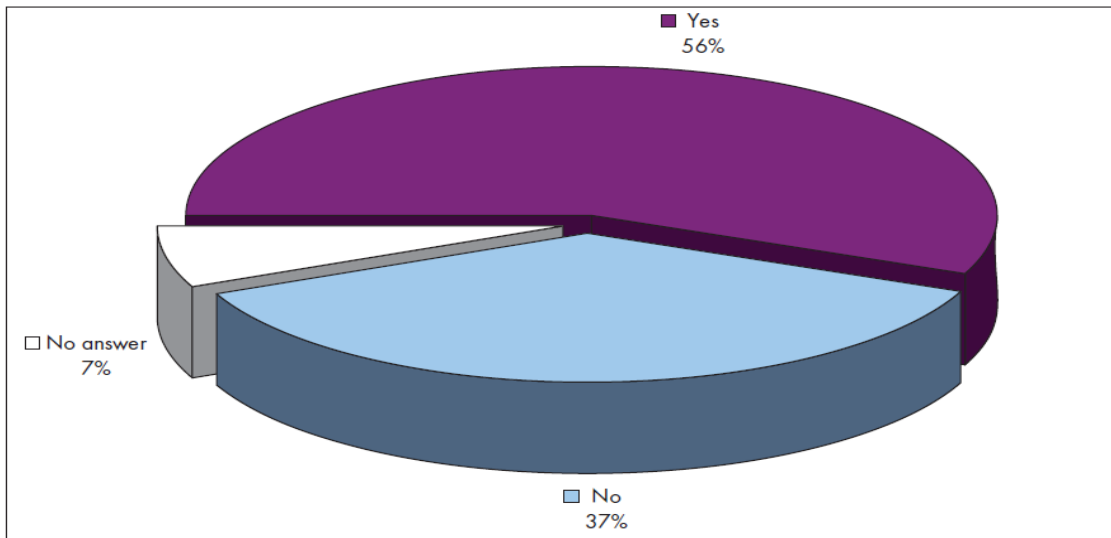


Figure 4: retrieved from the Public Opinion Foundation (2006)

Figure 4 reveals the fear of Russian citizens two years after the tragedy in Beslan. Although it remains difficult to link it specifically to the Beslan event, one can state that a vast majority, namely 56% of the respondents, were afraid of becoming a victim of a terrorist act at that time. According to the Levada-Centre (2012-2013), 48% of the respondents had ‘fear to some extent’ while 30% of the respondents were very afraid of becoming a victim of a terrorist act prior to Beslan. This proves that the perception of Russian citizens changed significantly in a more negative way after Beslan.

As the following table (figure 5), published in the Russian Analytical Digest (2011), shows, the fear of becoming a victim of a terrorist attack prior to Beslan has not significantly changed in the aftermath of Beslan.

**‘Are you afraid that you or people close to you could fall victim to a terrorist attack?’**

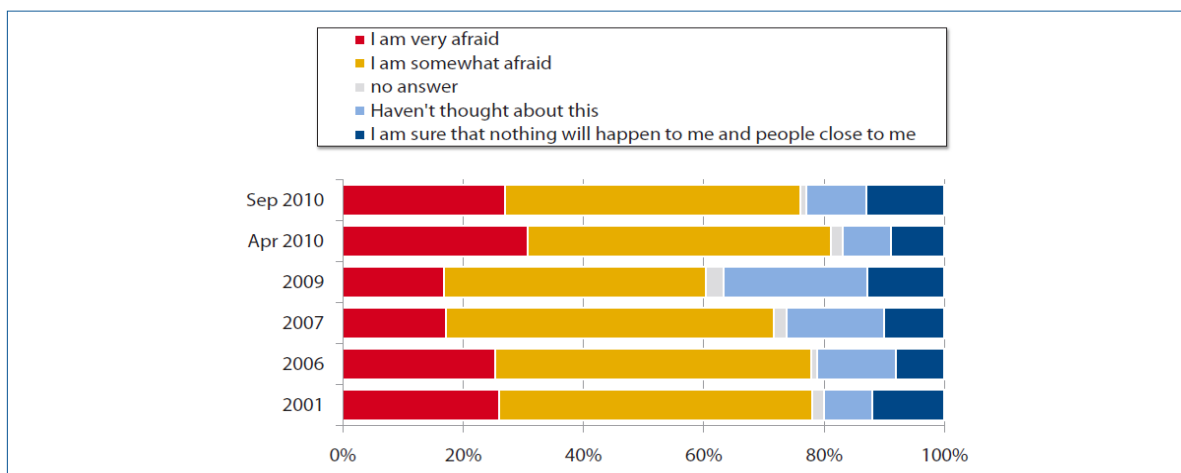


Figure 5: retrieved from VTsIOM (2010)



The table starts to fluctuate after 2006. It can be concluded that the level of anxiety augmented in the years after Beslan. The general public perception does not seem to correspond with the new and amended legislation as analyzed in the previous chapter. In other words, the newly implemented laws and legislation with accompanying amendments have not diminished the level of anxiety regarding terrorist threats despite a small decline after the 2006 law. What could explain this augmentation after 2009? The most obvious explanation would be the two major suicide bombings on the subway in Moscow in March 2010 that led to 40 fatalities and 100 injuries (Johnston, 2014). In addition, only two days later, two suicide bombings with 14 fatalities and 37 injuries followed in Kizlyar in Dagestan (Johnston, 2014). Another valid explanation, following the argument of Flood *et al.* (2012, p.39), is that “an important part of Putin’s case for strong leadership was, the determination to protect metropolitan Russia by containing the violence within the republics of the North Caucasus, where the most vigorous methods of counter-terrorism would be employed to pacify the region.” However, Putin has not been able to withstand terrorist attacks and “a continuing state of low-level insurrection in large parts of North Caucasus” (Flood *et al.*, 2012, p.39) might have led to distrust in the government and thus an augmentation of anxiety with regard to terrorist attacks.

Russian citizens also provided their opinion about the new counter-terrorism law that was implemented in 2006, represented in the figure below:

**‘Do you approve or disapprove of the adoption of the new counter-terrorism law?’**

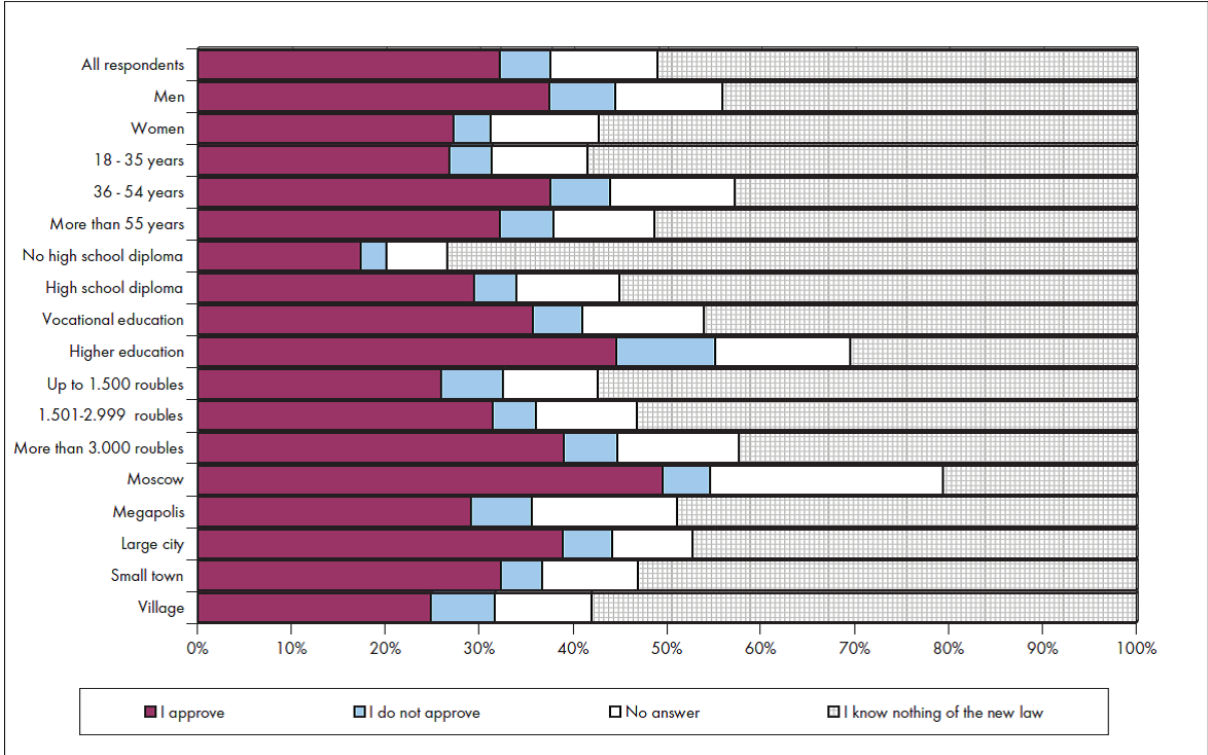


Figure 6: retrieved from Public Opinion Foundation (2006)

The graph above shows a large variety of responses regarding the approval or disapproval of the new counter-terrorism law. The graph shows that the people in Moscow and highly educated people are clearly in favor of the new law. In contrast, people with low education or no diploma at all are not in favor. Interestingly, a large group of respondents are not aware of the content of the law. This might be surprising given that Russia is subjected to serious and continuous terrorist activity. However, this could indicate an overall lack of interest, a lack of trust of the citizens in the overall efforts of the government concerning counter-terrorism policy or simply ignorance about this topic.

The following table (Levada-Centre, 2010-2011) shows the Russian public’s perception, between 2000 and 2011, of the Russian special services and the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ ability to protect Russian citizens:

**‘Do you think that the Russian special services and Ministry of Internal Affairs will be able to protect Russia’s population from renewed acts of terrorism?’**

	<b>2000 July</b>	<b>2003 July</b>	<b>2007 July</b>	<b>2009 August</b>	<b>2010 July</b>	<b>2011 March</b>	<b>2011 August</b>
Definitely yes	6	7	6	5	3	4	5
Yes, rather than no	31	22	41	40	27	25	33
No, rather than yes	37	44	33	31	42	43	40
Definitely not	19	19	9	9	13	14	12
Difficult to answer	7	9	12	14	15	15	10

Figure 7: retrieved from the Levada-Centre – in %.

The conclusion can be made that the majority of Russian citizens feels that the Russian special services and the Ministry of Internal Affairs are not able to protect them from terrorism in general. There has been a significant change in perceptions since Beslan. Apparently, the Russian respondents lost confidence in the Russian special services and Ministry of Internal Affairs, as the second and third row of the table reveals. This could be linked, again, to an outgrowth of the promises by the Kremlin in terms of security reforms and new legislation (policy) designed to combat terrorism in the (relatively) immediate aftermath of the tragedy. Only a significantly small percentage of respondents, fluctuating between 3% and 7%, believed that the Russian special services and Ministry of Internal Affairs were sufficient enough to protect Russia from acts of terrorism before and after Beslan. As time progressed, the table shows that the initial feeling of the citizens prior to Beslan prevailed. This could be the result of distrust in the Russian government by its citizens due to the lack of a well-functioning power vertical and its ability to combat the pressing issue of terrorism.

The following table by the same leading research organization in Russia (Levada-Centre, 2010-2011) reveals the perception of the Russian citizens in the years between 2004 and 2011 of the degree of truthfulness of the authorities related to Beslan:

**‘Do the authorities tell the truth about the events related to the Beslan hostage tragedy?’**

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011
All the truth	13	6	5	8	10	12	11
Only a part of the truth	56	53	50	51	50	52	48
They are withholding the truth	22	28	28	24	25	19	24
They are lying and shifting	5	7	8	6	5	5	5
Undecided	4	6	8	11	11	12	12

Figure 8: retrieved from the Levada-Centre – in %.

It can be concluded that the Russian citizens were generally suspicious about the truthfulness of the authorities in regard to Beslan. Over two-thirds of the respondents believed that the authorities were not fully honest in regard to the reports on Beslan. Hence, only a significantly small percentage—an average of 9%—of respondents believed that the authorities were telling the truth. In this case, the percentages remained rather steady which indicates that there has not been any form of improvement in the aftermath according to citizens. In a broader context, this might be the result of the misleading media rhetoric about the ostensible success concerning counter-terrorism policy by the government, as analyzed in section 4.1. From this perspective, the media—largely controlled by the Russian government—has a significant influence on public perceptions. One could argue that the actions and rhetoric by the government through the media resulted in the public’s overall distrust. I acknowledge the fact that these latter two tables only polled people up to 2011. However, these surveys by the Levada-Centre are the most recent surveys related to Beslan and its aftermath.

4.3 Terrorist incidents and victims 1991-2014

These surveys lead to the question of whether the public perception, as analyzed in section 4.2, is justified in relation to actual facts and figures on terrorism within the Russian Federation. One can make a distinction between terrorist incidents prior to Beslan and after Beslan. According to Robert Johnston, who created a statistical summary of terrorist attacks in Russia in the period between 1991 and 2014, the bombings of apartments, hijacking of busses, hostage takings, bombings of railway stations, car bombings and suicide bombings were clearly visible and even intensified in the 1990s which resulted in a great amount of injuries as well as casualties (Johnston, 2013). These events

primarily took place in the North Caucasus, in regions such as Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Stavropol, Ingushetia and Dagestan, although Moscow also experienced several major attacks. Prior to the turn of the century, the worst year, in terms of casualties and injuries, was 1999 in which 378 people were killed and 1,051 people were severely injured due to terrorist activity (Johnston, 2013). This was mainly due to an apartment bombing in Moscow which caused 130 casualties. Even though this list<sup>13</sup> of attacks is incomplete and the latter events were just a few examples, the list provides a good overview of all the terrorist attacks within Russia and specifically of the North Caucasus.

The following table (Global Terrorism Database, 2014) highlights the fact that terrorist activity did not diminish but rather increased, even though the incidents fluctuated throughout time:

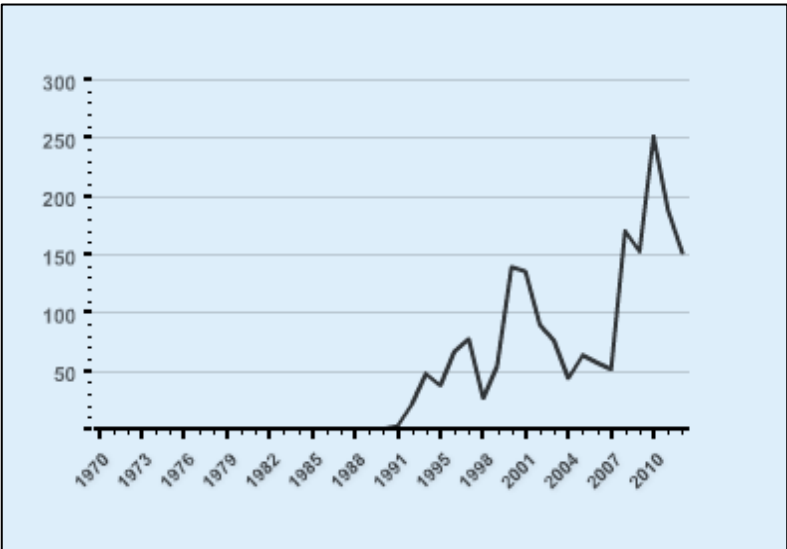


Figure 9: Terrorist-related incidents over time in Russia (Global Terrorism Database, 2014)

The Global Terrorism Database is a specific research organization that defines terrorism in their codebook as follows: “[1] the incident must be intentional [2] the incident must entail some level of violence or threat of violence [3] and the perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors” (Global Terrorism Database, 2014, p8). Although there was a small decline in attacks during the mid-1990s, the attacks started to increase in 1998. Interestingly, from 2000 to 2004, the number of incidents fell significantly. After Beslan, the attacks significantly started to increase again throughout the following years. Although it is difficult to measure the link between the laws in the 1990s and terrorist-related incidents, it could be concluded on the basis of the statistical list of terrorist attacks in Russia from terrorism databases that the laws that were implemented throughout the 1990s did not seem to reduce the terrorist attacks or terrorist activity in any case.

<sup>13</sup> For more specific information on this list: <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/terrorism/terr-russia.html>.

The following table of post-Beslan terrorist attacks and accompanying injuries and fatalities by Johnston (2014) aims to prove that the situation remained rather hopeless and that it justifies the generally negative perception and feeling of Russian citizens regarding terrorism and the efforts of the government to combat terrorism:

Year	Incidents	Killed	Injured	Annual rates per million population	
				Fatalities	Fatalities plus injuries
2004	11	625	995	4.36	11.29
2005	6	119	257	0.83	2.63
2006	3	25	49	0.18	0.52
2007	5	16	88	0.11	0.74
2008	8	35	111	0.25	1.04
2009	11	93	339	0.66	3.08
2010	22	154	557	1.10	5.10
2011	5	58	247	0.42	2.20
2012	3	16	123	0.13	1.20
2013	7	51	174	0.36	1.55
2014	4	13	5		

Figure 10: List of terrorist incidents in the Russian Federation (Johnston, 2014)

In the aftermath of Beslan, 74 incidents, which led to approximately 580 fatalities and 1,950 injuries have been reported. These attacks account for Russia as well as the North Caucasus. According to the list of terrorist attacks within the Russian Federation, the attacks were relatively minimal in the four years following Beslan, despite a high degree of fatalities and injuries in 2005. The attack in Nalchik, as described in section 3.3.1, accounts for a large part of these statistics. However, terrorist attacks increased around 2009 with attacks in Nazran (Ingushetia) and Lykoshino (Tver) as the most significant attacks. The year 2010 stands out in regard to two major bombings in the subway in Moscow that resulted in 40 reported fatalities and 100 injuries. In 2011, the most significant attack was the suicide bombing at Domodedovo airport in Moscow. Another notable fact from this table is the high degree of injuries and fatalities that accompany each incident, indicating that terrorists are successful in carrying out their attacks.

In this regard, the changes in the counter-terrorism policy in terms of legislation, laws and security reforms can be considered relatively ineffective. However, I acknowledge that legislation, laws and their proper execution in practice do not necessarily guarantee complete safety and prevention. Although official statistics on terrorism prevention after Beslan are absent, this list aims to prove that terrorist activity remains to be a daily threat within Russia and especially in North Caucasian republics. This is supported by Cohen (2012, p.1), a Senior Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies at The Heritage Foundation, who states that: "Russia's Northern Caucasus is turning into one of the most volatile, lawless regions in the world and a hotbed for international terrorist activity in spite of decades of Russian military operations and repeated assurances from the Russian government that peace has been achieved." Thus, the future reduction of terrorist activity within the Russian Federation is considered to be unlikely. Ideally, further research on this specific topic could provide better insights into the Kremlin's present and prospective approach to pacifying the North Caucasus.

In sum, Russian media rhetoric on terrorism focuses primarily on the evil side of the North Caucasus and its ethnic groups and on the ostensible success of the Russian government in eradicating terrorism. This rhetoric does not seem to correspond with the reality; renewed counter-terrorism legislation has for the most part been a failure, indicated by the augmentation of terrorist activity after Beslan. Furthermore, as an overarching conclusion on the polling data, the Russian citizens seem more anxious of becoming victim of renewed terrorist attacks in the aftermath of Beslan. The 2006 law reflects mixed feelings among citizens. In any case, Russian citizens are not unified concerning the efforts of the Russian government and its counter-terrorism legislation. In a broader context, the majority of Russian citizens believe that the security services and Ministry of Internal Affairs are unable to protect them from renewed terrorist activity. Hence, the majority of Russian citizens remain afraid of terrorist activity and have little trust in the newly implemented legislation, laws, security reforms and the truthfulness of information on tragedies provided by the authorities. This proves that the overall situation has not improved since Beslan. Terrorist incidents with significant fatalities and injuries still flourish within the Russian Federation despite Russia's efforts to combat terrorism. The following and final chapter provides an overall concluding answer to the question of whether Beslan can actually be considered a turning point concerning counter-terrorism policies and public perceptions.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This thesis focused on Russia's counter-terrorism policy and public perceptions in the aftermath of the 2004 tragedy in Beslan with the central research question: *was Beslan a turning point in Russia's approach to counter-terrorism?* Based on my research and personal interpretation, I can conclude that the changes within Russian counter-terrorism policy have been minimal and that public perceptions have not improved and even deteriorated. Therefore, the event of Beslan is not to be considered a major turning-point in counter-terrorism policy, which is surprising considering the magnitude of Beslan.

Prior to Beslan, the 1990s were a fluctuating and unstable period marked by multiple bilateral wars between Russia and Chechnya which deteriorated their relationship. This fragile situation led to an outbreak of terrorist attacks within the Russian Federation by Chechens, Ingush, Dagestanis and other ethnic groups in the North Caucasus. The historically complex relationship between Russia and its south-periphery is ongoing and is primarily manifested in terrorist activity. Russia started to experience a systematic and structural terrorist threat during the 1990s and onwards. This has impeded successful counter-terrorism policy. Significant attacks in the 1990s and early 2000s by North Caucasians preceded Beslan, but it is certain that Beslan remains one of the prominent human tragedies in Russia's recent history.

The Beslan siege led to a great number of fatalities, injuries and traumas among the hostages, hostage-takers, Russian security services and families. Based on the research, the Russian and local authorities failed to carry out effective counter-terrorism policy concerning Beslan. In spite of the implemented legislation, laws and security measures of the 1990s and early 2000s, the attack has not prevented or solved terrorist issues in a decent and effective manner. This suggests that counter-terrorism policy can be classified as non-effective and that the authorities have been ignorant of and reluctant to the threat of terrorism. Ignorance and reluctance seem to flourish within the Russian security services as the history of attacks and counteractions has proven. This is enhanced by the attack in Nalchik in 2005. Like Beslan, this attack led to a serious number of fatalities and injuries. The local authorities were aware of the upcoming attack, yet failed to handle the situation well. In a broader sense, it seems that the power vertical in Russia is unable or unwilling to cooperate in order to implement effective policies. This might, for a large part, explain the minimal and ineffective changes after Beslan.

Ten years after Beslan, the situation concerning terrorism within the Russian Federation remains hopeless. The minimal changes in counter-terrorism policy have not been sufficient to reduce terrorist activity. Instead, terrorist attacks still flourish within the Russian Federation and it seems that the authorities are unable to control the volatile situation. In 2006, a new law on counter-

terrorism was adopted and implemented. This new law seemed to be an important step towards improvement but criticism of this law started to emerge soon after its implementation. The 2006 law basically replaced the old 1998 law, only specifically focusing on counter-terrorism and counter-terrorism measures. Further, responsibilities among counter-terrorism services were re-distributed. However, according to many scholars and experts, this law failed to set out comprehensive and effective counter-terrorism policy. This law furthermore created possibilities of infringing on the basic rights of people. The law was amended in 2008, but these amendments only dealt with the prosecution of terrorists and the abolishment of jury trials; new cases of terrorism have since been decided by a panel of three judges.

Changes in legislation and laws pertaining to counter-terrorism have evidently been accompanied by security reforms. The effectiveness of legislation, laws and protocols is strongly dependent on practical execution by the responsible security services. It has become clear throughout this thesis that the Russian counter-terrorism security services continuously fail to carry out effective counter-terrorism policy. However, there have been moderate changes and reforms in this sector in the aftermath of Beslan. Vladimir Putin sought to establish better collaboration between the responsible security services and created joint counter-terrorism operations. However, as with the new legislation and laws, the security reforms were also criticized. According to experts, the majority of reforms are 'cosmetic' with old departments simply being renamed. Despite several important assassinations of prominent militant leaders by the Russian security services in the aftermath of Beslan, Russian authorities seem to be unable to learn lessons from previous terrorist attacks. This can be linked to an overall problem with the siloviki and the implementation of policies in general.

The Russian media is rather biased and is primarily controlled by the government; it depicts the North Caucasians as pure evil and the Russians as good. This strategy creates a false image of both parties. The Chechens and other ethnic groups within the North Caucasus feel that their terrorist acts are justified due to the aggressiveness of Russia within this region. Thus, improved relations with Russia and the south-periphery are considered to be bleak, which is a partial explanation for non-successful counter-terrorism policy. In general, Russian public perceptions of terrorism and the counteractions by the Russian government were rather positive in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy in Beslan. However, this perception rapidly shifted towards a generally negative perception. The majority of Russian citizens remain afraid of terrorist activity and have little trust in the implemented legislation, laws, security reforms and the authority's information regarding tragedies.

In general, the changes in the counter-terrorism legislation, laws and security services can be considered minimal. These modest changes in combination with the ongoing terrorist incidents and



accompanying injuries and fatalities justify the generally negative perception and feeling of the Russian citizens towards terrorism. Thus, Russia seems to be the architect of its own misfortune in relation to ongoing terrorist activity and non-effective counter-terrorism policy.

Ideally, further research could reveal other insights or more specified research on this topic. One could, for instance, focus on other regions within the Russian Federation like Moscow and southern Russia rather than the North Caucasus. Finally, it might be interesting to further focus on Putin's policy regarding the North Caucasus.

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