

Russian Federation: Attack on the Chechen parliament

On 19 October, several armed attackers broke into the government buildings in the capital of Chechnya, Grozny, and attempted to attack the Chechen parliament, killing at least three people and wounding at least ten more. The spectacular nature of this attack shows that its main aim was for propaganda purposes: a demonstration that the armed underground still has significant potential, and is able to attack even the best defended sites. The attack may be linked to a recent split among the guerrillas, and a fight for leadership between Dokku Umarov and Husein Gakayev.

The conflicting versions of the attack given by the Chechen interior ministry, Russian press agencies and the guerrillas' websites do not permit the exact course of the attack or the total number of casualties to be established. It seems certain that all the attackers died. This was the biggest terrorist attack in Chechnya since 29 August, when a unit of guerrillas attacked Tsentoroy, the family village of the republic's leader Ramzan Kadyrov. The propaganda effect achieved by the attackers was even stronger because the Russian interior minister, Rashid Nurgaliyev, was visiting the parliament during the attack.

It cannot be ruled out that the attack was an effect of the rivalry between the leader of the so-called North Caucasian Emirate, Dokku Umarov, and a group of commandants which renounced their loyalty to him at the beginning of October; the leader of this group is a certain Husein Gakayev. The attackers may just as easily have been Umarov's as Gakayev's men. In either case, the attack would serve to prove the leader's dominance within the armed underground. The attack contradicts Kadyrov's repeated statement that the guerrillas have been completely shattered, and are unable to undertake any more serious armed assaults. <Gór>