

NABBING THE D.C. SNIPERS ■ THE NEW HARRY POTTER

TIME

INSIDE THE MOSCOW SIEGE

RUSSIAN SPECIAL
FORCES COMMANDO
AFTER THE RAID



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**“I swear
by God we are
more keen
on dying than
you are keen
on living.”**

UNNAMED CHECHEN REBEL
IN A TV BROADCAST

BLOODY END: A Chechen rebel
killed by Russian forces lies
amid rubble inside the theater

Photograph for TIME by Anatoly Zhdanov—Komsomolskaya Pravda



SPECIAL REPORT THE MOSCOW SIEGE

By JOHANNA McGEARY and PAUL QUINN-JUDGE/MOSCOW

The Chechens who dared seize a theater in Russia's capital are put down, but their cause is on center stage. Inside the siege

ANYA ANDRIANOVA FIRST NOTICED THE STRANGE smell inside the theater just after 5:30 a.m. Like most of the other hostages and many of the Chechen terrorists holding them captive, she was sprawled across an auditorium seat trying to get some sleep. Alarmed by the odor, she spotted gas—eerily visible as it seeped through the air-conditioning vents and rose from the floor.

Terrified that the assault on the theater had begun, Andrianova's friend used her mobile phone to call Ekho Moskv'y's early morning radio show. "They are gassing us!" she screamed, her voice shrill with panic. "All the people are sitting in the hall... We beg not to be gassed!"

Taking the phone from her friend, Andrianova pleaded with the host: "We see it, we feel it, we are breathing through our clothes... Please give us a chance. If you can do anything, please do." A moment later radio listeners heard gunshots, and then Andrianova screamed: "That's it! We are all going to be blown up. Our government has decided no one should leave here alive."

But the gas was to be her salvation—the fast-acting sleeping agent was the secret weapon in the assault by 200 of Russia's elite Spetsnaz forces on the 50 Chechen rebels who had held more than 800 hostage in the Theater Center on Dubrovka for nearly three days. The gas, as yet unidentified, was pumped through the building's ventilation system and through holes bored in the auditorium floor by soldiers who had been tunneling beneath it since Day 1 of the standoff. As terrorists and hostages alike fell unconscious, several of the female guerrillas made a dash for the balcony but passed out before they reached the stairs.

After nearly an hour of sporadic gun battles, the Spetsnaz soldiers smashed through the theater's glass front at 6:23

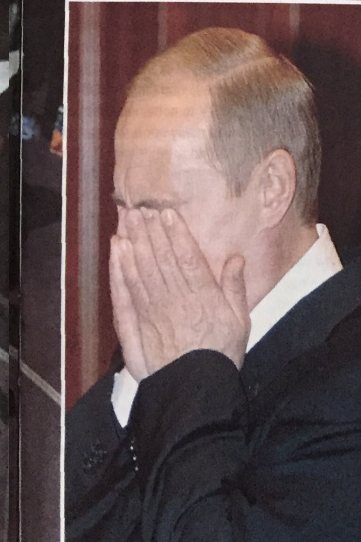
a.m., and seven minutes later blew open the doors to the main hall and poured into the auditorium. In a fierce firefight, the Russian special forces gunned down those terrorists who were still awake. Those who had succumbed to the gas, including most of the women who had explosives strapped to their waists, were executed in their sleep. "Our fighters simply shot them point blank," a member of the assault team told a reporter. "It's cruel, but when a person has 2 kg of plastic explosive, we didn't see any other way of neutralizing them." The floor was littered with bombs; the largest, containing 50 kg of TNT, was planted in the middle of row 15. Fortunately, none detonated.

The battles between the soldiers and terrorists continued in other parts of the building for more than half an hour. Some of the hostages who tried to escape during the fighting were strafed by Chechens posted at the exits. The terror group's leader, 27-year-old commander Movsar Barayev, was blown away in a second-floor kitchen area.

Shortly after 7:00 a.m., the three surviving rebels surrendered and were led

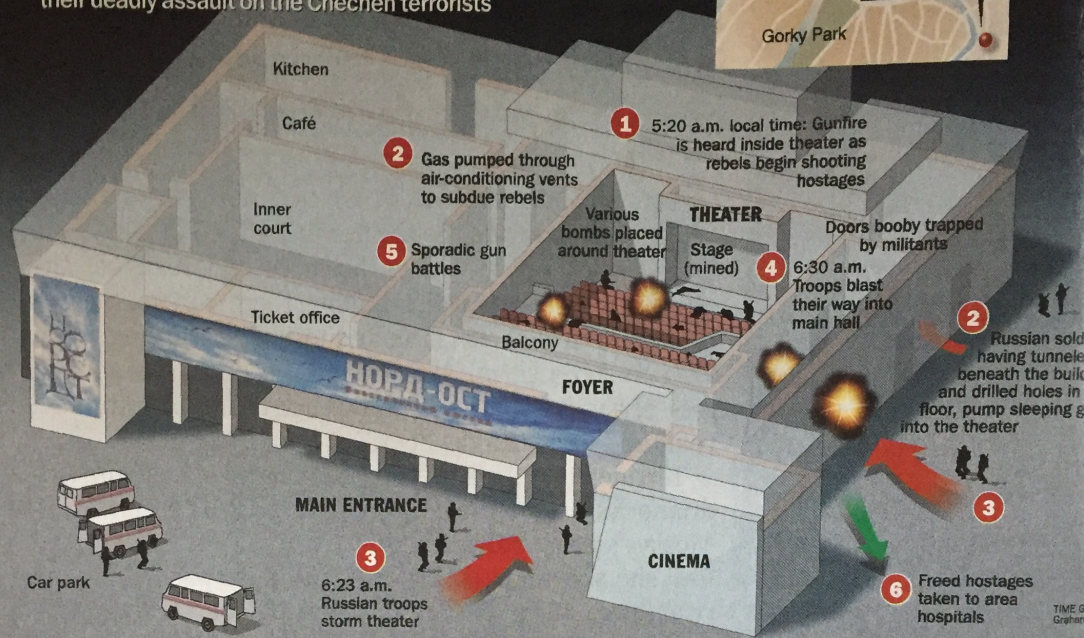
THE STORM: Charging into the theater, special forces, above, found women rebels knocked out by the gas, far left, but shot them anyway, left; Putin, below, receives the news of the commando raid's success

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ANATOLY ZHONANOV—KONSON SHAYA PRADDA FOR TIME; AFP PHOTO/POOL ITAS TASS; ANATOLY ZHONANOV—KONSON SHAYA PRADDA FOR TIME; AP PHOTO/NTV



ANATOMY OF A RAID

First sleeping gas, then the deluge—how Russia's elite Spetsnaz special forces launched their deadly assault on the Chechen terrorists



“Movsar Barayev came from a family of fighters feared for their cruelty. Those who knew him say he came to Moscow to die”

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE MARTYRED

About two months ago, Movsar Barayev disappeared from Argun, the war-shattered town southeast of Grozny where he was a Chechen guerrilla commander. People who asked after him were told that he had moved his base elsewhere. He may already have been in Moscow, working on the theater attack where he was killed last week, at 27, after seizing more than 800 captives.

Some of Movsar's comrades from Argun almost certainly were in Moscow early. The more than 50 people with him—who dubbed themselves the 29th Suicide Division—were a composite team, drawn from Movsar's own fighters and select members

of other Chechen units. The female members, who made up half the group, were probably intended to maximize the squad's potency, one Chechen well-versed in guerrilla tactics told TIME. It was no coincidence, he added, that the women were wearing explosive belts; as the most determined fighters—some widowed by the conflict—they may have been more willing than the men to blow up the building, and themselves.

Movsar may have lived longer than many other guerrilla commanders. His uncle, Arbi Barayev—a commander of the Islamic Special Units, feared as a fighter and hated as a hostage-taker who allegedly once oversaw the

capture and beheading of telecommunications workers—was only slightly older when he was killed in June 2001 in a six-day shoot-out with Russian forces, who displayed his body on TV to convince skeptics he was really gone. Movsar also had an aunt, Khava Barayev, revered by Chechen guerrillas for her suicide car-bomb attack on a Russian base in the family's home village of Alkhan-Kala. She was 19 when she blew up herself and two soldiers in June 2000. Those who knew Movsar well say his turn had come. “He came to Moscow to die,” says one Chechen associate.

The attack on the theater was meticulously planned, well funded (costing some

\$60,000, according to Chechens with a close knowledge of guerrilla operations) and, according to news reports, sanctioned by top Chechen commanders, including Shamil Basayev, one of the main Chechen rebel leaders. The rebels' titular head Aslan Maskhadov, who distanced himself from the siege, was probably not con-

sulted; most guerrillas feel he is irrelevant.

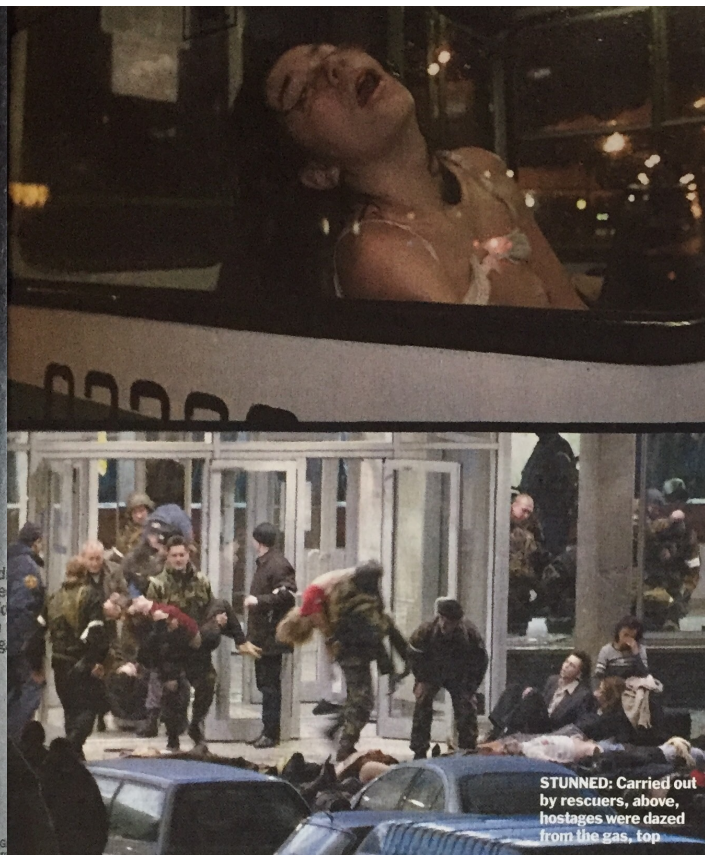
Planning a raid like this takes six to eight weeks, a Chechen close to the guerrillas says. Another Chechen with experience of such operations thinks Movsar's people brought in their weapons from Chechnya, since they wouldn't have wanted to undertake an operation like this

challenge for the rebels; Chechens are widely feared and disliked, and are frequently arrested for being in the city without registration. That's a problem easily overcome with cash to line policemen's pockets, however.

Movsar was close not only to his uncle Arbi but also to Khattab, the late Saudi-born guerrilla commander whom the U.S. claims represented Osama bin Laden in Chechnya. In an interview with the BBC, one of Movsar's men denied any link to al-Qaeda. Still, Movsar seemed to embrace that group's concept of martyrdom. At the start of the action, a rebel website quoted Movsar saying he was there “to die.” A colleague remarked, while Movsar was still in the theater, “These are the happiest days of his life.” —P.Q.-J.



MISSION OVER: Terrorist leader Barayev was gunned down on the second floor



STUNNED: Carried out by rescuers, above, hostages were dazed from the gas, top

away. Two were said to have escaped; another was seized as he tried to slip unnoticed into a crowd of journalists. Police later announced that they had also detained 30 “accomplices” in the area around the theater and in other parts of the city. It wasn't until some time after noon that the first estimates of the operation's grim toll became clear: more than 90 hostages had died, along with 50 rebels, but not a single Spetsnaz soldier had been killed.

A few hostages were able to stumble out of the building on their own, but most had to be carried by soldiers and emergency workers, who bundled them into waiting buses and ambulances that ferried them to hospitals across the Russian capital. Some 450 were said to have been treated. The gas attack had worked, but perhaps too well. According to press reports, some hostages in the theater had died from gas exposure. One source close to the Kremlin said the amount of sleeping agent used was five times the normal dose. “They're not saying what kind of gas they used,” the source says, “but they do say that they used too much of it to be safe.” Vladimir Ryabinin, a doctor at Moscow's Sklifosovsky Hospital, confirmed that 42 hostages were being treated for gas poisoning.

As the siege came to an end, a wave of relief and even euphoria surged across the state-controlled media—and President Vladimir Putin was suddenly the star. The man who had laid low for much of the week, making only a brief statement of defiance against “these provocations,” now donned a white doctor's coat to visit freed hostages at a Moscow hospital. Opposition politicians fell over themselves to declare their admiration for him. The message: this Putin—famous for his use of crude slang—can kick ass.

But the celebrations might be premature—and not just because of the shocking security lapses that had allowed the Chechen rebels to seize a theater just five km from the Kremlin (and that will likely lead to a major shake-up among Putin's security chiefs). The real issue was that the rebels had caught Putin in a big lie. He won the presidency in 2000 on a law-and-order platform and a promise to restore Moscow's grip on the rebellious republic of Chechnya, and for the past two years he has regularly claimed that the war there was all but over. But where he claimed victory, others saw quagmire, so more recently he has enforced a media

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blackout on Chechnya, concealing the dimensions of the stalemate. But the theater siege brought the cause of the Chechen rebels—desperate and more than willing to die for their separatist cause—right back to the Russian capital. "Putin behaves as if he has had a major victory," says the Kremlin source. "But some of his top aides believe that the theater seizure marked the total

the mostly Muslim Caucasus republic. Putin refused to yield. But once-complacent Muscovites were beginning to ask whether this war, like the one in Afghanistan, was worth the bloodshed. "This is the logical extension of what they have always been doing, sending our children to die senselessly," said playwright Mark Rozovsky, 65, as he waited for news of his

ing "We are Chechens!" and "We are at war here!"

A few actors and theaterworkers escaped through backstage windows as the guerrillas ordered the audience into silent submission. Olga Treiman, a barmaid at the theater who was later released because she was pregnant, heard a young woman arguing with the assailants in the orchestra pit. "One of the men shouted: 'Just shoot her!'" says Treiman. "I heard five rapid shots and a scream." The woman's body was brought out by a day later by two Jordanian medical doctors who were allowed into the building by the rebels.

In the first two days, the Chechen rebels freed 54 hostages, mostly children under 13. But more than 800 captives, including some 30 teens and some 75 foreigners, remained in the gang's hands. A third of the estimated 50 attackers were women, and, according to a spokesman for the FSB, Russia's internal security agency, widows of fighters killed in the long-running war; they were eager to sacrifice themselves for the cause. Shrouded in black except for their eyes, each held a pistol in

one hand and in the other, cables running into explosives-filled packets on their belts. Black-masked men carrying Kalashnikovs quickly wired plastic bombs to pillars, walls and seats; enough, they warned, to bring down the entire building if Russian troops stormed it. Only the terrorist leader Barayev defiantly bared his face.

Well before the Spetsnaz stormed the theater, spokesmen for the FSB were dismissing the rebels as drug-addled lunatics with no coherent plan. After the end of the siege, some reports claimed that the female rebels had alcohol on their breath and that

collapse of his three-year-old policy of claiming to have pacified Chechnya. It is totally clear now that the war has not been won, that it has spread to Russia, and that further hostilities on Russian soil—and in Moscow in particular—are inevitable."

As the siege at the Theater Center on Dubrovka in a grimy, Soviet-era neighborhood unfolded, the armed gunfighters, laden with explosives and showing every sign of determination, made only one demand. Russia must stop the war in Chechnya and withdraw its troops from

teenage daughter Sasha, a captive inside. "I don't want my daughter to die at 14." The crisis at the theater began just after 9 p.m. on Wednesday. After an intermission, theatergoers headed back to their places in the 1,100-seat auditorium for Act 2 of *Nord-Ost* ("North-East"), a popular musical romance following a passionate love story in Soviet days. Outside, two or three vehicles drew up and unloaded masked attackers in camouflage battle-

dress who burst into the building. Some fired into the air, while others raced onto the stage shout-

tral Asia. Dudayev wins the presidency and declares Chechnya's independence

1994 **BORIS YELTSIN** orders Russian troops into Chechnya after a Moscow-backed coup fails to oust Dudayev

1995 Russian forces drive Chechen rebels from the capital, Grozny, in

March. In June, guerrillas take 1,600 hostages at a hospital in Budennovsk in southern Russia. In a week-long siege at least 120 people die—many during bungled Russian assaults. The hostages are freed as the fighters return to Chechnya in a bus convoy with 150 people acting as human shields against Russian attack

1996 In January, Chechens seize 2,000 hostages at a hospital in Kizlyar in neighboring Dagestan. The rebels head home with about 100, but are trapped in the village of Pervomaiskoye, also in

Dagestan. Sympathizers in Turkey seeking to draw attention to the Chechen conflict hijack a Black Sea ferry, holding 242 people captive. All are eventually freed, and the hijackers surrender to police. In April, a missile strike kills Dudayev. Chechen offensives in August force Moscow to negotiate a truce; a peace pact in November grants de facto

independence and sets elections for January 1997

1997 **ASLAN MASKHADOV** elected Chechen President

1999 More than 300 people die in a series of apartment building bombings in Russian cities. Russian authorities blame the Chechens, though their guilt has never

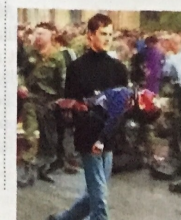


been proved, and then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin sends 100,000 troops to Chechnya for "an antiterrorist operation." His hard-line stance boosts his popularity ahead of presidential elections in March 2000

2001 In March, three die when Saudi forces in Medina storm a Russian jet hijacked by Chechens. In April, pro-Chechen gunmen hold 100 hostage for 12 hours in an Istanbul hotel before surrendering to police

2002 In May, a bomb planted by Chechen rebels kills 34 people at a Victory Day parade in

Kaspiisk, Dagestan. In October, Chechen guerrillas seize a Moscow theater, taking more than 800 captive. At least 90 hostages and 50 terrorists are killed when Russian forces storm the building



WORK DONE: As the operation ends, the soldiers take a break



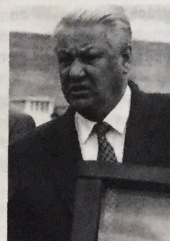
PREMISES SECURED: After knocking out the rebels, special forces soldiers unload their guns

TAKING THE WAR TO MOSCOW

Chechnya declared independence 11 years ago. Hostage taking, hijacking and bloodshed have been the rule—not the exception—ever since



1991 Secessionist leader **JOKHAR DUDAYEV** seizes control of Chechnya and calls elections. The uprising is the first since 1944, when Stalin deported almost the entire population to Siberia and Cen-



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snaz, the terrorists who struck in Moscow last week trained in another nearby theater in the hours just before the attack. The Kremlin is furious at the security lapses that allowed the attack to take place. One Putin administration official was quoted as suggesting that punitive action would be taken against top security officials, but that "it would be an untimely thing to do right now."

Putin has, predictably, linked the theater seizure to international terrorism. The takeover, he announced, was planned in

Moscow apartment bombings that killed more than 300. Though some doubted that Chechens were truly responsible, Russians rallied to Putin's promise that this time the army would destroy the rebellion for good.

Last week's siege proved that the rebels were alive and well. Though the Barayev group used the tactics of international terrorism, their aims were very different—independence from Russia, not an anti-Western jihad. But al-Qaeda and the Chechen guerrilla movements may well intersect. A Saudi-born associate of Osama

bin Laden named Khattab founded an organization to distribute money to the Chechen separatist cause. Khattab, who died earlier this year, reportedly assassinated by the Russians, arrived in Chechnya in 1995 when the first war against Russia was picking up steam. He was a close ally of Shamil Basayev, one of the most influential rebel commanders, whom Barayev mentioned several times last week as his leader. Thanks to Khattab's Gulf and Middle Eastern connections, he brought into Chechnya plenty of money and volunteers. In 1996, Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's top lieutenant, was arrested in neighboring Dagestan after he tried to enter Chechnya. He was said to have been looking for a new base.

Movsar Barayev may have wanted to become a great Chechen hero, but the impact of his actions on Chechnya could be

grim. Anti-Chechen feeling has now become a touchstone of Russian patriotism. Many Russians despise Chechens "blacks" who lie, cheat and steal, and regard their Islamic faith with suspicion. That sentiment was almost universal among the Muscovites gathered outside the theater last week. "We must round up all these black scum and tell the terrorists we kill 100 of them for each dead Russian," declared a burly, bearded man whose son was fighting in Chechnya. And instead of backing off in Chechnya, Putin will probably

step up military operations

there, despite his claim

that the Russians have al

ready won. Critics will be

marginalized, atrocities

tolerated even more easily

than they are now.

Putin's fear, of course,

is that some of Barayev's

comrades remain at large

in Moscow, plotting the

next attack. Discussing the

hostage seizure soon after

it started, one Chechen

who knew Barayev well

and shares many of his

views predicted the out-

come: Barayev would die,

there would be a wave of

revulsion in the West and a

crackdown on the thou-

sands of Chechens who live

in Russia. "But we don't

care," he added. Chechnya

has been abandoned by the

West, he explained; the

outside world is irrelevant:



ANXIOUS: Families of hostages wait at a hospital for news of their condition

"foreign terror centers" by the "same people" responsible for attacks like the recent bombing in Bali. That resonated well in Washington, where Putin has long argued he is fighting exactly the kind of radical Islamic terror that led to Sept. 11.

This may be smart politics, but it is bad history. The Chechens waged wars like this long before al-Qaeda, and will continue to do so regardless of how the war on terrorism turns out. This is homegrown terrorism, born in the ruins of Chechnya's cities and towns where a barbarous occupation has been unable to crush an equally savage campaign of secession. After a disastrous two-year war whose military humiliations and soaring body count nearly unseated then-President Boris Yeltsin, Russia withdrew in 1996, leaving Chechnya virtually independent. Russia stepped back in when Putin blamed Chechens for a series of 1999

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Movsar Barayev may have wanted to become a great Chechen hero, but the impact of his actions on Chechnya could be

"Any Russian who pays taxes and is silent over the war" is a legitimate target.

Young men and women such as these have the means, the ability and the will to attack again. They share with Barayev and his followers a very Chechen approach to the war. They are fighting not only for independence, but also because they feel there is no other way out. The attack on the theater had all the hallmarks of a typical Chechen operation: daring, ruthlessness, ambition and total lack of an exit strategy.

An exit strategy is something Putin conspicuously lacks too. After the euphoria surrounding this victory subsides, he faces the same problems that have beset his Chechnya policy since its inception: a demoralized and corrupt Russian military and the suicidal determination of the Chechens to win independence. —With reporting by Yuri Zarakhovich/Moscow