

Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs

AT A GLANCE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 1999

Disbanded: 2015

First Attack: October 26, 2002: Riyadus-Salikhin collaborated with the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR) and the International Islamic Peacekeeping Brigade to attack Moscow's Dubrovka Theater. The groups held over 800 people hostage and threatened to kill them if the Russian Federation did not recognize Chechnya's independence. Russian security forces were able to free the hostages; however, around 130 hostages, all of the attackers, and SPIR leader Movsar Barayev were killed during the rescue attempt (170 Killed, unknown wounded).¹

Last Attack: June 10, 2011: Riyadus-Salikhin leader Butukayev authorized the murder of a former colonel of the Russian Armed Forces, Yuriy D. Budaev, in Moscow (1 killed, unknown wounded).²

OVERVIEW

Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs (RSRSBCM) was founded as a martyr brigade in 1999. Its mission was to establish an independent Chechnya and eventually an independent Islamic state in the North Caucasus. The group was known as one of the most lethal Islamist militant groups in the North

Caucasus in the early 2000's and played a prominent role in high-profile attacks such as the 2002 attack on the Dubrovka Theater and the 2004 Beslan school siege. Although it was largely inactive after 2004, Riyadus-Salikhin resumed attacks in 2009 after Caucasus Emirate leader Umarov restored it as a unit of the CE. After participating in various suicide bombings and other activities throughout the North Caucasus and Russia, Riyadus-Salikhin ceased to operate as a unit with the 2015 splintering of the Caucasus Emirate's leadership.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs (RSRSBCM), Arabic for "fields of righteousness," was an Islamic fundamentalist and jihad organization that sought to establish an independent Chechnya and eventually independence for the North Caucasus.³ The group arose in 1999 as Shamil Basayev, Chechen rebel leader and founder of the International Islamic Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB), sought to create a special battalion of suicide fighters to retaliate for the bombing of a Grozny market place by Russian security forces.⁴

To achieve Chechen independence, Riyadus-Salikhin built close relationships with other prominent North Caucasian militant organizations including the International Islamic Peacekeeping Brigade and the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR). It collaborated with these groups in planning small and large-scale attacks. Riyadus-Salikhin first became known publicly after the 2002 attack on the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow, for which the SPIR allegedly provided the group with leadership and personnel.⁵ The group also took credit for the December 2002 attack at the pro-Russian government headquarters in Chechnya, killing 80 people and wounding over 150.⁶ In November 2002, Basayev warned the states in the OSCE, EU, and NATO that their industrial, military, and strategic facilities in Russia were targets for future attacks on account of their purported pro-Russian stance.⁷

Riyadus-Salikhin was known as one of the most lethal Islamist militant groups in the North Caucasus after 9/11. It was allegedly the first organization in the region to launch a major hostage operation with a large suicide unit, consider radiological attacks, and post live videos of beheadings for blackmail.⁸

Riyadus-Salikhin, like other prominent Chechen militant groups, received most of its financial support from Al Qaeda.⁹ Osama bin Laden sent several hundred Arab militants to fight Russian forces in the North Caucasus and financial assistance to be used for training of gunmen, recruitment, and purchase of ammunition.¹⁰ This relationship was allegedly reciprocal; Basayev and Khattab are reported to have sent groups of Chechen fighters to Afghanistan in 2001 to train and fight with AQ brigades.¹¹

The group was largely inactive after 2004 and the death of Basayev in 2006. In 2009, Caucasus Emirate (CE) leader Doku Umarov restored Riyadus-Salikhin as a unit of the CE, allegedly operating under Umarov's direct orders.¹² Since its restoration, Riyadus-Salikhin has taken credit for several small- and large-scale attacks, notably the 2010 Moscow Metro bombings and 2011 murder of a former Russian Armed Forces colonel.¹³

The group likely also participated in the 2011 Domodedovo suicide bombing, which resulted in over 160 casualties.¹⁴ Riyadus-Salikhin operated as a unit of the CE until late 2015, when many top CE leaders were killed by Russian security operations or joined the new Islamic State regional affiliate, Vilayat Kavkaz.¹⁵

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Shamil Basayev (1999 to July 10, 2006): Basayev was a Chechen rebel leader and founder of both Riyadus-Salikhin and the IIPB. Prior to establishing Rayidus, Basayev was a deputy prime minister and influential field commander in the Chechen Republic of Icherkia (CRI); he was elected chairman of the Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan in 1998.¹⁶ Basayev was allegedly responsible for organizing several major attacks, including the 2002 Dubrovka Theater siege and the 2004 Beslan school crisis. He developed close relations with Al Qaeda through Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, co-founder of the IIPB. Basayev was killed by Russian security forces in 2006.¹⁷

Aslan Butukayev (July 2006 to 2015): Aslan Butukayev was the successor to Shamil Basayev. Under Butukayev's leadership, Rayidus-Salikhin launched several high profile-attacks, including suicide bombings of the Moscow Metro in 2010 and the murder of a former colonel in the Russian Armed Forces in 2011.¹⁸ Butukayev continued to lead Riyadus-Salikhin after the group's restoration by CE and served as a top CE commander in CE until 2015.¹⁹

B. NAME CHANGES

There are no recorded name changes for this group.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

There are no publicly available size estimates for this group during its operation from 1999 – 2006, nor after its restoration in 2009, as Riyadus-Salikhin began to operate under the Caucasus Emirate.

D. RESOURCES

Riyadus-Salikhin, like other prominent Chechen militant groups, received most of its financial support from Al Qaeda.²⁰ Osama bin Laden allegedly sent several hundred Arab militants to fight Russian forces in the North Caucasus. He also provided financial assistance to the militant groups to be used for training of gunmen, recruitment, and purchase of ammunition.²¹ After its restoration in 2009, Riyadus-Salikhin operated as a unit of the Caucasus Emirate and received most of its resources and training from this organization.²²

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

Riyadus-Salikhin primarily operated in Chechnya with some attacks in Russia. After 2009, the group expanded its operations to launch attacks in Ingushetia, Chechnya, Dagestan, and Moscow.²³

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

Riyadus-Salikhin was an Islamic fundamentalist and jihad organization that sought to achieve Chechen independence. It later expanded its mission to establishment of an independent Islamic state encompassing the North Caucasus. In the mid 2000s, largely due to outside influence and support from Al Qaeda, Riyadus-Salikhin adopted radical Islamism and the idea of global jihad.

Operating as a unit of the Caucasus Emirate, Riyadus-Salikhin continued to support global jihad and targeted anyone who opposed the mission of the mujahideen.²⁴

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

There are no recorded political activities for this group.

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

Riyadus-Salikhin targeted all those who opposed independence for the North Caucasus. It launched attacks and guerrilla operations on Russian forces, Chechen civilians, and pro-Russian Chechen forces. The group adopted a strategy of attrition and focused on inflicting high casualties against Russian forces.²⁵ Riyadus-Salikhin used suicide attacks, bombings, hostage-takings, and kidnappings for ransom to achieve its goals.²⁶ The group's most recognizable attacks, the Moscow theater hostage crisis in 2002 and the 2010 Moscow metro bombings, employed female suicide bombers, known as Black Widows.²⁷

Riyadus-Salikhin was known as one of the most lethal Islamist militant groups in the North Caucasus after 9/11. It was allegedly the first organization in the region to launch a major hostage operation with a large suicide unit, consider radiological attacks, and post live videos of beheadings for blackmail.²⁸

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

October 23, 2002: Riyadus-Salikhin collaborated with the SPIR and the IIPB to attack Moscow's Dubrovka Theater. The groups held over 800 people hostage and threatened to kill them if the Russian Federation did not recognize Chechnya's

independence. Russian security forces were able to free the hostages; however, around 130 hostages, all of the attackers, and SPIR leader Movsar Barayev were killed during the rescue attempt (170 killed, unknown wounded).²⁹

December 27, 2002: Riyadus-Salikhin leader Basayev claimed responsibility for two suicide bombings of the headquarters of the pro-Russian government in Grozny, Chechnya (80+ killed, 150+ wounded).³⁰

August 2004: Riyadus-Salikhin launched simultaneous suicide bombings on two Russian civilian airplanes headed for Volgograd and Sochi. All 90 passengers were killed in the attack (90 killed, unknown wounded).³¹

September 3, 2004: Riyadus-Salikhin founder Basayev masterminded a crisis in which militants took over 1,000 hostages, mostly children, at a school in Beslan, North Ossetia. Riyadus-Salikhin threatened to kill more people if Russia did not end its atrocities in Chechnya in the ongoing Second Chechen War. After a three-day siege, Russian security forces managed to enter the school and free about 700 of the hostages using heavy weapons (332 killed, 780 wounded).³²

June 23, 2009: Riyadus-Salikhin claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing of a presidential motorcade that severely wounded the Ingushetian president, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov (1+ killed, several wounded).³³

March 29, 2010: Directed by Caucasus Emirate's leader Umarov, two female suicide bombers from Riyadus-Salikhin attacked two major Moscow Metro stations (40 killed, 100 wounded).³⁴

August 29, 2010: Riyadus-Salikhin, operating under the CE's command, launched a suicide attack on the Chechen village of Tsentoroi, the hometown of pro-Russian Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov (16 killed, 24 wounded).³⁵

June 10, 2011: Riyadus-Salikhin leader Butukayev authorized the murder of a former colonel of the Russian Armed Forces, Yuriy D. Budaev, in Moscow (1 killed, unknown wounded).³⁶

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- UNSC "ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions List": March 4, 2003 to Present.³⁷
- U.S. State Department Designated Terrorist Entities: February 28, 2003 to Present.³⁸
- U.S. State Department Terrorist Exclusion List (TEL): December 2004 to Present.³⁹

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Riyadus-Salikhin, alongside other radical militant groups such as the IIPB and the SPIR, allegedly clashed with mainstream Chechen society, as its radical Salafi ideology conflicted with the moderate Sufi Islam followed by most Chechens.⁴⁰

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

Riyadus-Salikhin had a strong relationship with Al Qaeda (AQ) as its founder, Shamil Basayev, built a close partnership with AQ member Omar Ibn al-Khattab, co-founder of the IIPB. In March 1994, Basayev toured AQ training camps in Afghanistan and trained with AQ brigades in Afghanistan.⁴¹ After an October 1999 meeting between bin Laden and Chechen emissaries loyal to Basayev and Khattab, bin Laden sent several hundred Arab militants to fight Russian forces in the North Caucasus. He also provided financial assistance to the militant groups to be used for training of gunmen, recruitment, and purchase of ammunition.⁴² This relationship was allegedly reciprocal; Basayev and Khattab are reported to have sent groups of Chechen fighters to Afghanistan in 2001 to train and fight with AQ brigades. However, the extent of Chechen militants' involvement in Arab conflicts has not been verified.⁴³ Basayev also supported AQ's mission of a global jihad by allowing the group to operate training camps in the North Caucasus.

Riyadus-Salikhin collaborated with other militant groups in the region, including the International Islamic Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB) and the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR), to launch and threaten attacks against civilians and government targets.⁴⁴ These militant Islamic groups sought to obtain Chechen independence from the Russian Federation and the establishment of an Islamic state ruled by shariah law.⁴⁵ Riyadus-Salikhin allegedly drew many of its members and leaders from the ranks of the IIPB and the SPIR.

Riyadus-Salikhin had a complicated relationship with the secessionist government of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (CRI). While Riyadus leader Basayev served in numerous top positions in the CRI, after aligning with radical Islamists in early 1999, Basayev actively sought to undermine CRI President Maskhadov. Basayev also criticized Maskhadov's pursuit of a political settlement with Russia, instead advocating subversive action. However, Basayev rejoined the leadership of the CRI when he was appointed vice president in June 2006, likely bringing closer the operations of Riyadus-Salikhin and the CRI.⁴⁶ In 2009, Caucasus Emirate (CE), the successor organization of the CRI, restored Riyadus-Salikhin. Since then, the group has claimed responsibility for several high-profile attacks and allegedly operates under the orders of CE leader Umarov as a unit of the Caucasus Emirate.⁴⁷

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Al Qaeda exercised significant tactical and ideological influence over Riyadus-Salikhin. The militant group offered training for Chechen rebels in Afghanistan, funded training camps in the North Caucasus, and sent hundreds of its fighters to fight Russian forces in the North Caucasus. Due to its extensive ties to AQ, Riyadus-Salikhin expanded its goals from Chechen independence to pursuit of a global jihadist ideology.⁴⁸

MAPS

- North Caucasus

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