

## **Chechnya's Homemade Weapons Fuel War**

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Rebels are using improvised and home-made weapons to continue their guerrilla war.

On a chilly day at the beginning of April a short young man wearing a black jacket, jeans and knitted cap pulled right down to his eyes walked briskly through Grozny's central market. He went up to two Russian officers who were buying cigarettes and beer at a small mud-spattered kiosk.

The young man suddenly pulled out a short-barrelled gun from under his jacket and opened fire on the unsuspecting Russians. Then he dropped his own gun next to the dead bodies and quickly pulled the gun of one officer out from its holster, grabbed a submachine gun lying next to the other and disappeared into a nearby side-street.

When Russian and Chechen security officials arrived at the scene some time later, no one could describe for them what the killer looked like. The only evidence they found was the abandoned Chechen-made Borz – or Wolf – submachine gun.

The Chechen-manufactured Borz is one of a number of weapons, made, reconfigured or repaired in Chechnya, which enable enemies of the Russian military and the pro-Moscow Chechen police force to continue their fight at very low cost. The net result is that even if the Russian authorities were to manage to stop the theft of weapons, or their trade and sale to the rebels, a substantial arsenal will remain in their hands.

The 9-mm submachine gun Borz is an ideal weapon for sudden attacks. It is a small compact gun, whose lightness and ease of use makes up for its poor technical quality.

“This submachine gun has quite poor tactical and technical features,” said Major Anatoly Medvedev, an officer for the Russian intelligence service, the FSB, in Chechnya. “The 9-mm bullets from the Makarov pistol, which the Borz uses, are too powerful for the steel from which the gun's barrel is made and wear it out quickly. After shooting two or three cartridges, a Borz simply begins to ‘spit’ the bullets out.

“Nonetheless, I would describe this gun as ideal for saboteurs and killers. It has entirely fulfilled its purpose as a weapon used by paramilitary groups of a partisan type. It has a fantastic rate of fire, and once all the bullets have been fired it can simply be thrown away. As far as I know, a Borz costs very little in Chechnya, about 100 US dollars, and its production requires little effort or expense.”

The Borz gun was first produced in 1992 in Grozny's Krasny Molot factory by the order of the first Chechen president. General Jokhar Dudayev, who personally received the first manufactured weapon bearing the number, 0001. Industrial production of the gun soon stopped due to the lack of good-quality metal and the outbreak of war in 1994. But the homemade manufacture of these weapons has continued up until recently.

Vladimir Semchenko, head of the science department at Moscow's Central Army Forces Museum of Russia, told IWPR that the main military museum of the country has several Chechen Borz submachine guns in its collection, “One of them was given to our museum as a gift by General Gennady Troshev [who formerly commanded Russian troops in Chechnya]. The exemplars of this gun that we have differ from one another both in their technical features and in appearance, which indicates that they were homemade.”

Adlan Musayev, who used to work at the Krasny Molot factory, said that “only several hundred” Borz guns were produced there but it had spawned many more copies.

Homemade weapons have helped Chechen rebels fight on, particularly in the second conflict that began in 1999. The fighters do not have heavy weaponry but are extremely skilful at fashioning whatever comes to hand into battle arms.

Their guerrilla warfare relies heavily on mines and explosives. Lacking conventional mines, they use unexploded mines and rockets. Sometimes they simply surround the rockets with explosive and blow them up. Often they heat the unexploded weapons over fire and obtain liquid explosive, which they pour into containers, to which they then add metal bolts, nuts and nails to create shrapnel.

The Russian high command, and especially its main spokesman Ilya Shabalkin, has frequently said that its soldiers have found medical syringes at captured militant bases and used this as proof that many fighters are drug addicts. However, it appears that most of these syringes are being used as detonators for mines. De-miners can detect metal objects but do not pick up the presence of plastic syringes.

The guerrillas are also skilled at reusing captured weaponry. Major Medvedev said they had found a heavy machine gun in a militant base in Vedeno in southern Chechnya which had been removed from the turret of an armoured vehicle. “Even those officers who had served in many conflict zones were amazed at what they saw,” he said.

“The fighters put it on a rotating tripod, fixed bicycle handlebars to it, and connected the mechanism of electric trigger to an ordinary battery. As a result they turned it into a very powerful, compact and convenient gun, which is as good as factory-made ones. As the saying in Russia goes, ‘Necessity is the mother of invention!’”

Twenty-three-year-old Iznaur, who fought in the platoon of the famous Chechen commander Hamzat Gelayev, whose death was recently confirmed, reveals another source of weaponry.

“Turning a drive shaft from a KAMAZ truck into a mortar doesn’t take much effort,” he said. “You just need to solder a medium-sized nail to one end of the shaft, and your mortar is ready! All that’s left is to stick it into the ground and you can start shooting. We had several such mortars in our platoon.”

Attempts by pro-independence president Aslan Maskhadov to produce arms in the inter-war period of 1996-9 also created a stock of weaponry that is still being used. Weapons were produced mainly in Grozny at some of the workshops of the half-destroyed Krasnyi Molot and Elektropribor factories and in the third largest city in Chechnya, Argun. The Argun factory mainly produced mortars and grenade launchers.

An FSB officer in Chechnya, who wished to remain anonymous said, “According to our information, before they invaded Dagestan in the summer of 1999, the units of Shamil Basayev and the Arab fighter Khattab received over 250 such mortars and about a thousand auxiliary grenade launchers, which had been manufactured in Argun. Also, in Grozny, Makarov pistols were being made on a territory of a former tram depot. Components were purchased at military factories in Russia.”

Even today in Chechnya one can buy Makarov pistols, refashioned from gas pistols for between 100 and 150 dollars. Makeovers that have an “Ossetian” barrel from North Ossetia are the most popular with the buyers. They are just one part of an arsenal of weaponry that is fuelling the continuing violence in Chechnya.

Ufalt Dudayev is a pseudonym of an independent Chechen journalist.

**Location:** Stavropol  
Russia  
North Ossetia  
Ingushetia

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