

## Case Study: Chechnya

In 1994, Chechen armed separatists launched a military-style campaign designed to drive Russia out of Chechnya, a southwestern region of the Russian Federation. The Chechens claimed to be fighting for freedom from an oppressive regime that prevented them from practicing their religion—Islam—and that offered no hope for the future. The Russian government considered them to be terrorists. In response, the Russian military used its weapons against civilians, killing more than ten thousand and displacing half a million people.

A peace treaty was reached in 1997, but fighting resumed between Russian troops and Chechens in the fall of 1999. President Vladimir Putin defended Russian military action in Chechnya, claiming that foreign Muslim terrorists were fighting alongside the Chechens and using Chechnya as a base to launch terrorist attacks against Russia.

Furthermore, the Russian government blamed the Chechen rebels for a series of September 1999 bombings of Moscow apartment buildings that killed several hundred. These incidents provoked a strong Russian military response, including airstrikes against several Chechen towns and Grozny, the capital city. In October 2002, Chechen separatists took eight hundred people hostage at a Moscow theater. In the government's rescue attempt, 129 hostages and all the hostage-takers were killed. The separatists also took hostages in a school in Beslan, Russia in September 2004 where close to 350 people were killed.

1. Are the Chechen separatists described above terrorists or freedom fighters? Why?
2. Was the way that Chechen separatists used force legitimate or justifiable? Why or why not?