The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# Doctor's Arrest Underscores Strife in Dagestan

December 24, 2012



Dr. Shamil Gasanov, his wife and two children posing for a family photo at their home in Makhachkala, Dagestan.

The anesthesiologist was performing surgery when masked police burst into the hospital and arrested him, still wearing his medical clothes, leaving the patient lying unconscious on the operating table. Now Marat Gunashev faces charges of helping organize an attack by Islamic militants three years ago that killed the police chief in Makhachkala, their hometown in Dagestan.

His brother-in-law, fellow doctor Shamil Gasanov, was arrested in the same case, but he won't get his day in court. His decapitated body was returned to his relatives, who say they suspect police blew off his head with a grenade launcher.

Police say Gasanov was killed after opening fire on officers as they searched his apartment.

The doctors' case is part of an increasingly grim picture of violence and lawlessness in Dagestan, the epicenter of an Islamic insurgency destabilizing the North Caucasus. Human

rights groups accuse police and security agencies of fueling the violence through extrajudicial killings, abductions and other abuses as they carry out operations aimed at quashing the insurgency.

“Stories like this are shocking, but they’re not that shocking for Dagestan,” said Tanya Lokshina, senior Russia researcher for Human Rights Watch.

She said people are routinely arrested, often in effect abducted by men in plainclothes or wearing unmarked uniforms. In many cases, law enforcement officials then return the body to the families, claiming the dead were insurgents killed resisting a special operation. Even if families can produce witnesses to an abduction and evidence of torture, the cases are almost never investigated, Lokshina said.

More than 225 insurgent attacks have been carried out in Dagestan this year, killing 145 and wounding 280, according to Andrei Konin, the regional head of the Federal Security Service. Most of the victims were police and other officials.

There are no figures available for how many suspected militants have been killed this year in Dagestan, which has a population of less than 3 million. Throughout the North Caucasus, 194 militants have been killed and 235 more injured, according to Interior Ministry statistics.

Gunashev’s lawyer said both doctors were charged in the killing of the Makhachkala police chief, who died when his car was strafed with automatic weapons in February 2010. The doctors also were accused of having treated Islamic insurgents.

Kazanfar Kurbanov, director of City Hospital No. 2, where both doctors worked, said it was possible that Gasanov had provided medical treatment that the police saw as aiding the enemy.

“A sick man doesn’t have a sign saying he’s a bandit,” Kurbanov said. “We’re doctors. Our obligation is to help people.”

But he also said that Gasanov, a surgeon, had certainly operated on countless security agents wounded in the insurgency.

Both doctors come from educated, secular middle-class Muslim families, and their colleagues and relatives say they have no known connection to the insurgency.

Court documents list an anonymous woman as the sole witness in the case. Her identity and what testimony she gave could not be independently confirmed.

Law enforcement agencies have released little information about the case. Some relatives said they were afraid to speak out publicly, while fellow doctors said they had been warned not to talk to journalists. They spoke only on condition of anonymity.

On the morning of Nov. 28, Gunashev had just put a patient under anesthesia when law enforcement agents appeared in the operating room and took him away, refusing to allow him to finish the operation, the hospital director said.

Another hospital employee said the officers were in uniform but wore masks and refused to

identify themselves. The employee spoke on condition of anonymity, saying the health minister of Dagestan had threatened to fire any hospital staff who spoke out in support of Gunashev or Gasanov or talked to journalists.

Gasanov, meanwhile, was preparing to operate in another part of the hospital when a group of men came in and asked to talk to him outside, according to hospital employees. Thinking they were his patients' relatives, Gasanov left the hospital with them and was promptly bundled into a Ford minivan with dark windows and no license plate, the Novoye Delo magazine reported, citing an interview with his father, Sirazhuddin Gasanov.

Dagestan's police force would say only that Gasanov was killed after opening fire on officers as they searched his apartment. The federal Investigative Committee is in charge of the case but refused all comment. The local investigator referred questions to the regional office, which referred them to headquarters in Moscow, where a spokesman refused to comment.

Gasanov's father said he was staying at his son's apartment the evening of the arrest. He said he opened the door to find a large group of special forces agents and was taken in for questioning. After spending all night answering questions about his son's religious beliefs, Sirazhuddin Gasanov said he returned to the apartment in the morning to find blood, hair and skull fragments in the bathroom and the walls full of bullet holes, according to the Novoye Delo report.

Shamil Gasanov's body was handed over without his head, his relatives said. His father was quoted as saying the body was a bloody mess, with his son's knees and feet shot to pieces.

The father could not be located by The Associated Press. Phone calls to Gasanov's lawyer went unanswered.

Gunashev's relatives and lawyer said his apartment was searched the next evening, with armed, camouflaged agents taking up posts on every floor of the building. They said his 8-year-old daughter watched an agent rifle through her room, find nothing and shout "clear!"

Then another agent pushed the girl away from her toy chest and dropped 10 matchboxes into it. When he announced the discovery of "druglike substances" inside, the girl shouted, "That's not mine; you just put that there!" said Zaur Magomedov, the lawyer for Gunashev.

Gunashev has been ordered held without bail until Jan. 28.

**Related articles**:

- TV Journalist Slain in North Caucasus
- Police Bust Workshop Printing Fake Dollars in Dagestan
- Russian Weapons Designer Shot Dead on Street

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/12/24/doctors-arrest-underscores-strife-in-dagestan-a20428