My greetings to you and your comrades, Ilyas! The cassette you sent me reached me and I listened to it. Also, a little earlier I received a cassette from Akhmed Zakayev and listened to what he said.

The real situation seems to me to be like this: the Russians have withdrawn some troops. In Dargo they had a brigade—lousy jerks who were equipped with up to a thousand armored units, and they completely withdrew this deployment. Then, between Urus Martan and Tanghi-Chu the 245th regiment had been stationed and they withdrew that regiment—at least, it looks so. Then, there are rumors regarding the withdrawal of one more brigade of the security forces in Kurchaloy. In other places they’re relocating the commandant’s offices, and the OMON. Some are taken away, others are brought in—there’s some movement there.

It seems to me it is because, according to the Istanbul summit, time is running out for flank reductions of troops and weapons in the Northern Caucasus, and also, very likely, material equipment isn’t in the shape it used to be.\(^1\) Then, the events in the Central Asia, Afghanistan. If, suddenly, they also would need troops, I don’t think that they have other such especially combat-ready detachments. It seems to me that the situation is dangerously explosive there. They know that keeping a large quantity of troops won’t do them any good. By no means.
Then, what they’re doing around me is like this: they have focused on communications; as soon as I make a phone call, after ten to fifteen minutes they launch an artillery strike. Number two: … [beginning of this sentence inaudible] they have literally organized a hunt for the relatives of the men in my entourage: bodyguards, guards, the chief of the guard, the commander of the Presidential Guard. For example, Ilyas Talkhadov\(^2\) [God bless him!]: they kidnapped his 80-year-old father just at the moment when he was praying. There’s absolutely no doubt that they had beaten him to death, and still no one knows where the corpse is, although eight or nine months have passed. He has disappeared without a trace.

Then, Akhmad, the commander of the president’s guard from Aleroy, they hunted for his father, but he was hidden at one place, and small children from his house, ten- and twelve-year-olds, were hidden in different places. Finally, they [the Russians] blew up his house totally. Also, they blew up the house of the chief of one of the battalions of the president’s guard, where I had found shelter. Then they captured the 75-year-old father of Shaa from Gansolchu—the commander of my guard. He disappeared without a trace, and as of today nothing is known about his whereabouts. Shaa’s house was blown to smithereens and everything inside was burned to ashes.

Many our commanders, as far as I know, three or four of them, their wives were seized and taken away right out of their homes. Nothing is known about their whereabouts, or whether they’re alive or not. They seize women right in their homes and take them away. If there’s a younger brother they kidnap him and take him away, if there’s a father, they seize him and take him away. The only condition: when he [the fighter] comes, we’ll let you go. These are the punitive actions they’re practicing. Accordingly, the generals and these officers, who have got used to this money and are making a lot of money too, they, most likely, are sort of a deterrent. In what respect? Their troops are here … Even if nothing happens, and even realizing that none of their plans will work, they just want to gain a month or two [more in Chechnya].

Here’s what I wanted to say in this respect: these generals too, these servicemen say to Putin: “Let us stay here another two months, and we’ll do a hell of a job, we’ll capture all of them, it’s easier for us to operate in winter.” Perhaps, Putin’s heard it a dozen times. Perhaps, he knows perfectly well that they won’t do anything this winter. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he’s heard that more than once, however, it seems to me, that he doesn’t dare tell his servicemen