

The ashes of Chechnya and the jewels of the British Crown

by Roman Bessonov

The title of the article is the author's allusion to the title of Andrzej Wajda's film, "Ashes and Diamonds."

It is becoming a rule that any visit of the British royal family to Russia coincides with a catastrophe. The queen's visit in October 1994 fell in between the banking crisis masterminded by Vladimir Gusinsky's Most Bank, and the beginning of the massacre in Chechnya. Princess Diana arrived at the Russian capital shortly after the capture on June 14 of hostages by a Chechen force in Budyonnovsk, Stavropol Territory, shook the country.

The Russian liberal mass media chatter that the princess was eager to visit Russia for a long time, but Buckingham Palace would not let her go before the queen herself (whose visit took place last winter). In any case, the British Crown chose a very specific time for her voyage, coinciding also with the opening of the Halifax summit and new war preparations in former Yugoslavia.

The princess, accompanied by Vice Premier Yuri Yarov hovering around her as an obedient servant, visited the Bolshoy theater and the Tushino pediatric clinic that is under her patronage. I wonder if she was aware, talking with the children, that some other children in the same Russia, were waiting for death at the hands of Chechen commandos, in the hospital at Budyonnovsk. Reporting the princess's arrival, Gusinsky's NTV program sighed with sincere regret that "Lady Di," as they called her gently, was left unnoticed by the Russians whose attention is drawn to the events in the Stavropol region. Poor thing!

The British connection of the tragedy in Budyonnovsk was really left unnoticed. Not a single analyst attempted to link the terrorists' actions with events in the world arena. The blood spilled in the Caucasus during the 1990s has a strong smell of oil. The events in Budyonnovsk are no exception.

A new sacrifice to the idol of oil

A week before the tragedy in Budyonnovsk, the Russian and international media reported on a new oil-extraction consortium for exploiting Caspian Sea shelf deposits. A new oilfield called Karabakh (same as the war-torn Armenian province) and discovered later than the Guneshly, Chirag, Azeri, and Shakh-Deniz that are controlled by the British Petroleum-led consortium, is to be shared by the Russian

firm Lukoil (32%), Italy's Agip, Pennzoil of the United States, and the GNKAR State Co. from Azerbaijan.

Even more important, the new consortium announced plans to ship oil from Azerbaijan through Chechnya and Stavropol Territory, to the port of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea, according to Interfax. Of course, the Russian transit route could not satisfy the organizers of the older project, which plans transshipment through Turkey.

Thirdly, Turkey was most annoyed by another Russia-originated project, discussed at the same time, for a Bulgarian-Greek oil pipeline from Burgas to Alexandropolis, which would deliver Baku (Caspian Sea, Azerbaijani) and Kazakhstan oil to the Adriatic Sea, bypassing Turkish territory. This project appeared after Turkey increased the tax for passing through the Bosphorus. At the same time, this project could compete with the Odessa-Brody-Novopolotsk-Ventspils version, an oil route from the Black Sea to the Baltic, which seems to have been designed rather for creating an Arc of Crisis than for transporting oil (see *EIR*, April 28, p. 60; May 5, p. 35).

Then, in a recent interview, President of Lukoil Vahid Alekperov mentioned that "his" oil was to be transported to "Germany, Bosnia, and other countries." British strategists had to be annoyed at being listed as just an "other country," especially after Germany and Bosnia.

The easiest way to disrupt Lukoil's plans was to create such tension in the Chechen-Stavropol direction, that any business there became impossible. And the best person for fulfilling the terrorist assault was Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev's most trained commando, Shamil Basayev.

Basayev's record

Shamil Basayev is well known in the Caucasus. He is particularly infamous in Georgia, as leader of the Abkhazian riots that swept the Georgian troops from Sukhumi in 1992, reducing the wonderful health resort into ruins. He is a fanatic who is able to fight for any side under an Islamic banner. Like much of the Chechen elite, he studied in Moscow, enjoying the equality in access to education that existed for national minorities in the Soviet Union.

Basayev had come to Abkhazia as a representative of the Confederation of the Caucasian Peoples. At the time, Abkhazia was dominated not by its President, Vladislav Ard-

zinba, but by the underground Tesiyev clan, a mafia family based in the part of Cyprus occupied by Turkey.

Since late 1994, anti-Georgian attitudes have again been provoked in Abkhazia. The so-called "national intelligentsia" issued papers and leaflets from which one could easily guess the background of the events: Some British professors, as well as United Nations authorities, suddenly started supporting Abkhazia against Georgia. In May, a Congress of the "Abkhaz-Abazin people" was held in Turkey. So-called "anti-fascists" from Moscow tried to provoke the opposite side, organizing the Armenian, Kurdish, Bulgarian, and Greek diaspora in Moscow against Turkey.

So, Russian sources are right when they note that the tragedy in Budyonnovsk was well prepared. It's been in preparation for a long time, since the very first projects of Black Sea oil transportation were discussed and calculated. And this is not the last tragic episode in the region, irrespective of the outcome of the talks between the Russian officials and Chechen militants.

Chechnya: wastebasket of careers

Unfortunately, the violently anti-American and pro-Serbian, often misled activists of the Russian opposition are right, when they say that the Chechnya question is widely used against Russia in the West. But inside Russia it is also used, against politicians who formerly had some connections with Dudayev's regime.

The Chechnya disaster not only contributed to a mood of hopeless despair and left thousands of families homeless, led to a mass rejection of military service, and fed the rage of orphans who can make up a new generation of terrorists, thieves, and beggars. It has also greatly boosted Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's political career.

We know how much the Russian oil trading elite was interested in the war in Chechnya. But that is evident for specialists, not the common people. They never saw the prime minister either appealing to combat Dudayev's troops, nor defending the Chechen people from the cruelty of the Russian Army. He managed somehow to say almost nothing on the subject of the war.

Some other politicians, lacking "apparatus experience," appeared to be too self-assured to use the Chechnya disaster for their personal needs openly. It was clear that Gen. Pavel Grachov, minister of defense, would gain no popularity as an unsuccessful warrior, also sharing responsibility for the equipping of Dudayev's forces with Russian arms. But Yegor Gaidar and Grigori Yavlinsky also gained nothing from opposing the "intervention" of the Russian troops. After the tragedy in Budyonnovsk, the public attitude toward backers of Dudayev, on both the right and the left, is likely to worsen. Kovalyov and Yushenkov, human rights advocates for the Dudayevites and members of Gaidar's parliamentary faction, could try to save the authority of the liberal leaders if they went to Budyonnovsk and succeeded in negotiations with the

terrorists. But this risky business is not for them. Probably they prefer to wait till the Russian hostages are murdered, and then accuse the Russian leadership through Radio Liberty.

Gen. Aleksandr Lebed's resignation was officially announced only after Basayev's commandos captured the civilians in Budyonnovsk. No doubt Grachov wanted to remind Russians of Lebed's anti-war rhetoric in November 1994, when the ambitious commander of the 14th Army was running for minister of defense.

Two other generals, also ambitious and evidently eager

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to run for the Presidency, Yevgeni Shaposhnikov and Boris Gromov, can obviously "thank" Dudayev for their personal political failures. Gromov demonstrated his preference for his career over the national interest, when he opposed Grachov in November 1994; he was also exposed as an instrument of the Most Bank group, which was promoting him as an alternative to Grachov. Shaposhnikov, who became the liberals' candidate for the Presidency thanks to the efforts of Aleksandr Yakovlev and Galina Starovoitova, was accused of selling arms to Dudayev, together with former Prime Minister Gaidar. These accusations were put forward by Sergei Shakhrai, a person no less responsible for the crisis in the Caucasus, but smart enough to shift his support to Chernomyrdin just in time.

Yuri Luzhkov, mayor of Moscow, was obliged by Dudayev's threats of terrorism in the Russian capital to turn anti-Chechen. He ordered measures to be taken for reinforcing security in Moscow. But General Kulikov, commander-in-chief for the Chechen operation, repeats again and again that Dudayev is still getting financial support from Gusinsky's Most Bank, and the Gusinsky-Luzhkov relationship is familiar even to a Muscovite who does not read papers. The banking group's headquarters are in the building of the Moscow mayoralty!

Yakovlev, the "perestroika architect" in Gorbachov's Politburo, and his close associate, ex-State Secretary Gennadi Burbulis, can say goodbye to their political prospects. Burbulis was one of those who brought Dudayev to power, which he confessed himself last November; Yakovlev, as chief of the Ostankino TV Company, was too critical of the President

during the autumn 1994 government crisis, and he was exposed by *Rossiyskaya* as participating in Luzhkov's conspiracy against Yeltsin. Not quite believing in his failure, he invited recently fired (also for backing Luzhkov) Federal Counterintelligence Service Gen. Yevgeni Savostianov to the congress of his newborn Party of Social Democracy. After this, even the advocacy of presidential chief of staff Sergei Filatov could not help him. In icy tones, the President "advised" him to choose between a political and an administrative career. It was already clear he would lose both, and he did.

The career of another major TV official perished in early June. Bella Kurkova, the most prominent liberal mouthpiece of the early 1990s, head of the St. Petersburg TV Company, successfully hid her corruption under violent anti-fascist demagoguery until recent weeks. But after Chernomyrdin became leader of the "party of power," with the creation of his "Russia Is Our Home" political block this spring, she was first deprived of the state property which she got accustomed to use as her own, and then fired. Her weeping in Chernomyrdin's office was in vain. Her last attempt to avoid dismissal was a visit to General Korzhakov, head of the President's Security Service. This didn't help her, but it made clear for everybody that for many years she got unofficial support from the state structure she attacked most of all—from the former KGB.

Analysts attribute her long-awaited removal to overly overt sympathy for Gaidar and to Chernomyrdin's plans to use the St. Petersburg TV channel for his own party purposes during the election campaign. This does not, however, explain President Boris Yeltsin's indifference to the only TV company chief who has always been loyal to him. Again, the Chechen trace is the only possible explanation. In the early 1990s, Kurkova, too, actively promoted the first leadership of independent Lithuania, who now support Dudayev; and last autumn, the St. Petersburg TV journalists admired too much Sergei Kovalyov, and whined about human rights violations by the Russian Army. Aleksandr Nevzorov, the famous TV reporter and Orthodox patriot fired by Kurkova in late 1993 for supporting the Supreme Soviet of Russia, now issues his weekly program on the Ostankino channel, encouraging the Russian Army in Chechnya. Kurkova was not clever enough to call Nevzorov back to her company, which might have saved her better than weeping before Chernomyrdin and Korzhakov.

So, Chechnya has become a sort of banana peel on which a vast group of Russian politicians stumbled, carrying their political parties into the mud as they were falling themselves. Except for Chernomyrdin and State Duma leader Ivan Rybkin, only a small group of prominent politicians, including Shakhrai, Nizhny Novgorod Gov. Boris Nemtsov, and Federation Council Chairman Vladimir Shumeiko, appear able to maintain their balance. But Shakhrai's Party of Unity and Accord has collapsed, torn by the ambitions of Aleksandr

Shokhin, Konstantin Zatulin, and Vyacheslav Nikonov, and discredited by the corruption of Sergei Stankevich, and the two other mentioned politicians are not party leaders.

The only party not likely to lose popularity because of the Chechen situation, aside from Chernomyrdin's "Russia Is Our Home," is the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The Communists chose a complex and delicate approach to the Chechen events, never supporting Grachov but neither promoting Dudayev. They succeeded in gaining influence in the new Chechen administration, demonstrating their concern for the Chechen civilian population. Communist leader Gennadi Zyuganov had an advantage in this respect, in his informal relations with former Communist Party of the Soviet Union officials, including former first secretary of the Chechen-Ingush CPSU Committee, Doku Zavgayev, and his comrade from Karachay-Circassia, now its President, Valeri Kokov. The last CPRF Congress was attended also by a prominent ballet dancer of Chechen origin, Makhmud Esambayev.

The tragedy in Budyonnovsk promises successes for the Communist Party in upcoming parliamentary elections, in the rest of the country as well. Even before the tragedy, in early June, the elections of the district heads of the administration in the Lipetsk region revealed a typical tendency for the Russian provinces. Eight newly elected officials out of 18 were CPRF members, five more were supported by both CPRF and Communist Workers' Party (RKRK) district committees, and five more officials claimed their support for the Chernomyrdin's "Russia Is Our Home." It is remarkable that not only liberals but also Aleksandr Rutskoy's Orthodox patriots, and Agrarians (in the rural districts!), totally failed in these local elections. One can expect that the failure of the Stavropol authorities to prevent the militants' penetration into the region would change the balance in favor of the "party of common people" against the "party of power."

The likely outcome of the December 1995 elections is becoming clearer and clearer. The obvious success of the Communists is a natural result of the "shock therapy" and "shock national policy" of the Russian leadership, due to the efforts of the International Monetary Fund, British-manipulated liberal idiots who had promoted Dudayev, and geopolitical interests that made the Caucasus a battlefield. Still, the mass media will blame not the British Crown, but rather the U.S. President for the victory of the left forces in Russia. And the British Crown, gaining profit from every Russian tragedy, will try to make more jewels of the Chechen ashes.

Sources

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