

British target Caucasus to stop Eurasian Land-Bridge

by Konstantin George

A relatively small, but extremely crucial link in the Eurasian Land-Bridge was almost severed when, on Feb. 9, a professional attack was staged against Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze. En route to his residence at about 11:15 p.m., his column of seven cars was ambushed by 10 to 15 men, firing grenade launchers and automatic rifles. Two bodyguards and one attacker were killed, and four bodyguards critically wounded. Shevardnadze narrowly escaped assassination because the car he was in was an armored Mercedes, with many classified special features, given to him as a present by the German government after a previous attempt to assassinate him in August 1995.

The attack provided dramatic confirmation of warnings by Lyndon LaRouche that the smaller and relatively weaker states of the Caucasus and Central Asia would be targeted by British interests, either directly or through the use of derivative operations, to wreck the Eurasian Land-Bridge by eliminating its weaker links.

The attack on Shevardnadze came only a week after the President of neighboring Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosian, was forced to resign on Feb. 3, amid a bitter power struggle. Despite the intentions of many anti-Ter-Petrosian players involved, the situation has the potential to precipitate a renewal of the bloody Armenia-Azerbaijan war over the Armenian-inhabited territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Through these developments in Georgia and Armenia, the entire region of the Caucasus has become a potential major flashpoint. The Caucasus' "other half," the ethnic patchwork quilt of the Russian North Caucasus, including the currently de facto independent Chechen republic, has been a constant cauldron of instability in which, at any time, the relatively low-intensity troubles could rapidly escalate into major bloodshed.

Hangin' by a thread

In Georgia, there is simply no alternative to bloody chaos than the 70-year-old Shevardnadze, who has been President since 1992. Had Shevardnadze been killed, Georgia would have degenerated into an armed conflict among various clans, interests, and parties. This view of the danger is shared by all domestic Georgian political forces, regardless of how much they may hate each other, or, for that matter, Shevardnadze.

The murder of Shevardnadze would have eliminated Georgian territory from any role in the Eurasian Land-Bridge for a long time. The role of Georgia in the Transcaucasus section of the Land-Bridge is crucial, because, alongside Russia, it is Georgia which forms the key link between Europe and Central Asia. Georgia connects Turkey with Russia to the north; and with Azerbaijan, to the east; and from there, via the Caspian Sea, into Central Asia. The Armenia-Azerbaijan war over Nagorno-Karabakh (which has been "on hold" since a precarious cease-fire was instituted in 1994), has disrupted any other overland route through the Transcaucasus, linking Europe and Turkey to Azerbaijan, the Caspian, and Central Asia.

An act of 'international terrorism'

In a nationally televised address after the attack, Shevardnadze declared that the attack was "a manifestation of international terrorism. I do not see in my country any real forces which could have organized such a terrorist act. This is a second attempt [referring to the August 1995 attack] not only to blow up the President, but to blow up Georgia as well." Recently, Shevardnadze had publicly declared that Georgia's policy would center on its role in what he termed the "heart," or crucial link in a "Eurasian transport corridor." His view that Georgia, precisely because of its Eurasian corridor development orientation, its key role in future oil pipelines, in short, its overall vital geostrategic position, would become the target of "very powerful [international] forces," was, as far as it went, on the mark.

In the same broadcast, Shevardnadze stated that "very powerful forces are interested in a different solution to the question linked to the transportation of oil through Georgia," although he was careful to stress that oil as such was not the only explanation behind the assassination attempt. Again, not referring to anything inside Georgia, he said: "An evil spirit is in the air which dreams of turning everything upside down in this country in order to bring back the era of gangs and armed groups." This was a pointed reference to the first three years of his Presidency (1992-95), during which he ruled in a precarious balance of power with precisely such armed gangs, including one led by the Mkhedrioni paramilitary forces of Dzhaba Ioseliani, and one led by then-Defense Minister

Tengiz Kitovani. In 1994, Shevardnadze had Kitovani imprisoned, and after the August 1995 assassination attempt, Ioseliani was also imprisoned.

At the local level, the August 1995 assassination attempt was organized by Igor Georgadze, then Georgia's security service chief. Georgadze fled to Russia, and now lives in a villa near Moscow, well protected by bodyguards. Repeated requests by Georgia for his extradition have fallen on deaf ears in Moscow. This background is important to understanding the current situation, because Russia's safe-housing of Georgadze has created a reflex suspicion in Georgia that any attempt against Shevardnadze is automatically "made in Russia."

There is hope that such suspicions can be defused. Russian President Boris Yeltsin responded instantly to condemn the attack on Shevardnadze, and said on Feb. 11, while in Rome on a state visit to Italy: "We [Russia and Georgia] will jointly fight against the hydra of terrorism. I have already given instructions to Russian security forces." And, regarding Shevardnadze, he said: "We are old friends. I tried to instill courage in him, so that he feels stronger, and can fight these attacks and those behind them."

Shevardnadze noted how Georgadze leads "a nice life and is guarded by bodyguards in his villa" near Moscow, to imply, without naming Russia as such, that Russia is suspected of being responsible for the latest attack. The Georgian Parliament went further, voting up a resolution calling for Georgian Interior Ministry troops to block all Russian military bases in Georgia, as rumors swept the country that the assassination team had fled to a Russian military base, from which it was flown out of Georgia. One mitigating factor in this climate was that, when a Russian passport was found on the body of one of the attackers identifying him as an ethnic Chechen from Daghestan, the Georgian Interior Ministry, to its credit, quickly pointed out that such evidence was a deliberate false trail, because no assassin would be carrying his real passport.

A Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty report on Feb. 11 from Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, stated that "the Georgian commission formed to investigate the attack has established that V. Djangaliev, the Daghestani Chechen [said to be the person] killed by one of Shevardnadze's bodyguards, was a member of the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus, and had fought as a volunteer in the force the CPC had sent to support Abkhazia in its war against Georgia in 1992-93." Proof of CPC involvement would provide the first direct lead to a British operation, because the CPC, through its interface with the Unrepresented Peoples Organization, is one of the prime vehicles for British-run separatism in Eurasia.

There is a distinct possibility that a force operating from Russian territory may well have been involved. However, to call a British-origin derivative hit attempt a "Russian" operation, would play directly into British hands, conveniently stirring up additional trouble in the Caucasus. First, Moscow's control over the volatile North Caucasus ranges from scant to

non-existent, and this area contains nests upon nests of British-directed "ethnic" terrorist groupings. There are already more than enough points of dispute between Georgia and Russia, including the continued de facto Russian occupation, in the guise of a peacekeeping force, of the Georgian region of Abkhazia, and the Russian military bases in Georgia, which were forced on Georgia in 1994 as part of the price for ending the war in Abkhazia.

In the wake of the attack on Shevardnadze, calls are mounting for the elimination of Russian military bases in Georgia.

Armenia and Azerbaijan

The situation in the Transcaucasus was already extremely volatile even before the attack on Shevardnadze. In Armenia, Ter-Petrosian's resignation was preceded by a wave of forced resignations of his closest supporters, beginning with Yerevan Mayor Vano Siradeghian on Jan. 29, and including Armenia's Foreign Minister, Central Bank head, and Parliament Chairman Babken Ararktsian, marking a revolution in the country's political landscape. The backdrop to the purge was Ter-Petrosian's shift, starting last September, to accept an internationally imposed solution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over the Karabakh region. Under this scheme, Armenian forces would have to withdraw from most of the Azerbaijani territory seized during the 1992-94 war.

Ter-Petrosian's shift, under British-led international pressure, brought, for the first time, a large bloc from the hitherto united ruling Republic Party into alliance with the opposition, in joint opposition to any sell-out of Karabakh. This is the opposition which was wrongfully denied power in the 1996 elections rigged by Ter-Petrosian. Now they have been joined by forces from the ruling party, including the "Karabakh lobby," led by Prime Minister Robert Kocharian and Interior Minister Sarkisian, both of whom are from Karabakh. Kocharian was President of Karabakh during 1993-97, before becoming Armenia's Prime Minister.

Armenian Presidential elections are set for March 15, with some of the candidacy questions unclear. For example, Kocharian cannot run, under the Armenian Constitution, because, coming from Karabakh, he is still technically a citizen of Azerbaijan. Beyond the volatilities inherent in the Armenian power struggle, real danger lies in the potential reaction by Azerbaijan, and its international backers, starting with Britain, to the events in Armenia. Through the heavy British representation in the international oil consortium operating in Azerbaijan, London exercises significant leverage in Azerbaijan.

This is the danger in the Armenian developments. Many of the Armenians involved in the de facto coup against Ter-Petrosian and a sell-out of national interests, acted out of patriotic motives. Their success, however, could be judoed by events beyond Armenia's control, leading to a resumption of hostilities with Azerbaijan. The victim, to the delight of London, would be the Eurasian Land-Bridge.