

# The Politics of Terrorism in North Ossetia

## Self-determination and Imperial Politics

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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The monstrous deliberate slaughter of over 330 parents and children in the Beslan school gymnasium by Chechen terrorists is not as the BBC claims a “tragedy” but a vicious criminal act.

To understand the nature of the conflict between the Russian state and the Chechen terrorists it is important to focus on the socio-political forces and issues in dispute. For the bulk of the US and European media the issue is the “self-determination” of the Chechens. But who and what does the “self” refer to ? With the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, both in Russia and in the Baltic, Balkan and Caucasian states criminal gangs allied with corrupt members of the former Soviet apparatus seized and pillaged public resources controlling the economies and state apparatus. Gangsters became billionaires and billionaires contracted assassins to eliminate rivals, competitors and any regulatory authorities who questioned their practices. According to Paul Klebnikov the recently assassinated editor of the Russian edition of Forbes Magazine one of the most brutal of the vicious gangs operating in Moscow was the Chechen mafia. Allied with Russian billionaires and through them with the Russian security system they accumulated large fortunes which they laundered via Western banks and through their extensive networks with their operatives in Chechnya. Any Chechen who protested or questioned the Chechen mafia was quickly eliminated. For the Chechen mafia operating in Russia, Chechnya was the “home base” the sanctuary to which they could always find a safe haven. The Chechen mafia was instrumental in financing arming and providing military cadres and leaders to the Chechen “independence movement”. What was at stake was the creation of a mafia fiefdom controlled by gangsters, warlords and Islamic fundamentalists.

Writing of the First Chechen War (1994-96), Paul Klebnikov wrote:

“The Chechen War was a gangster turf war writ large. Chechen organized crime groups in Moscow and other Russian cities maintained subsidiaries in their ancestral homeland. Chechnya was a key transit point in the Russian narcotics trade and the Moscow-based gangsters sent a large part of their profits back to the homeland. The same Russian officials and security officers who patronized Chechen organized crime groups in Moscow also patronized the Chechen government by allowing (it) to appropriate millions on tons of Russian oil at little or no cost” (Godfather of the Kremlin, Harcourt 2000, page 40).

Klebnikov went on to point out that the Chechen warlords and gangsters received their arms from corrupt Russian army commanders and security forces (page 41). To the question of who are the political forces of self-determination in the case of Chechnya, the answer is the

gangsters, warlords, and extremist terrorists, like Shamil Basayev, Salman Raduyev and fundamentalists like Movladi Udugov. Between 1995-97 the notorious Russian oligarch, Boris Berezovsky, maintained a close relationship with these Chechen warlords (Klebnikov, page 261). Today they both share a common and absolute hostility to President Putin and his attempt to control crime and pillage.

Chechen warlords sought to gain a semblance of “legitimacy” for their fiefdom by provoking a conflict with Russia and securing US and European support. From the end of the 1980’s, but particularly after 1991, the CIA gave the highest priority to fomenting the break up of the Soviet Union by financing and arming local separatist movements. The first wave of break-ups took place in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Georgia. Washington and London were not at all concerned about whether the new leaders were Islamic fundamentalists, ex-Stalinist autocrats, or Mafia gangsters the important issue was to destroy the USSR, and undermine Russian influence throughout the Caucasus and South Asia. Following the “independence” of these former Soviet republics, the US especially moved in to create client regimes, signing oil contracts and building military bases. “Self-Determination” was a transitional slogan toward rapid incorporation into the new US hegemonic zone. Russia under US client ruler Yelsin acceded to all these US acquisitions “advised” by gangsters, mafia billionaires and the most corrupt “oligarchs” in recent history.

The US empire, having succeeded in the first wave of client acquisition, moved further to foment a second wave to include other Russian autonomous territories, even closer to strategic centers of the Russian state. Chechnya was a choice target for historic reasons. During the US-sponsored Islamic uprising and invasion against the secular reform-minded Afghan republic in 1989, Washington teamed up with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other Muslim states (including Iran) to recruit, finance and arm tens of thousands of Muslim Fundamentalists from all over the Middle East, North Africa, Southern Caucasus and Southern Asia. Numerous “volunteers” from Chechnya fought in Afghanistan against the Afghan government and its supporters. The US achieved a pyrrhic victory in Afghanistan: it severely weakened the decaying Soviet state, but created tens of thousands of well-armed and trained fundamentalist network. While one sector of the Islamic forces went into opposition to the US in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere another group lent itself to US imperial strategy in the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and Russia.

Thousands of Afghans fighters from the Fundamentalist armies went to Bosnia, where they were armed and financed by the US to fight against the Yugoslavs and in favor of a separatist state under US tutelage.

Many writers on the left ignored the presence of these “volunteers” who were in the frontlines in ethnic purges of Serb enclaves and who detonated a terrorist bombing in a major market in Sarajevo to focus Western opinion on Serb “genocide”. Following the successful dismemberment of the major regions of Yugoslavia and the division of the new “mini-states” into US and European clients, the US moved toward adding a new regions to the empire. Washington and Europe backed the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army, first with financing, training and arms and later by declaring war against the remnant of Yugoslavia. Chechens participated with the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army, a widely recognized terrorist group that was classified as ‘criminal’ by Interpol prior to becoming a Washington client. The KLA was financed from several “internal sources”. In part it derived funds from its control over the drug routes from South Asia and the Middle East and in the large-scale trade in sex slaves. Later it raked in dollars and euros from the brothels in ‘liberated’ Kosovo. Above all it stole land, businesses and personal property from the expelled Serb

population and stole billions of dollars from Western aid. Under Nato protection, the KLA ethnically cleansed over 200,000 residents who were not ethnic Albanians and became a de-facto client state living off of Western handouts and with all of its factories and mines shut. The US contracted Halliburton to build huge military bases in Southern Europe, Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan all of which were US battlegrounds where Washington had sponsored separatist movements under the guise of 'self-determination'. These are all now being converted into client states.

Chechen separatists developed close working relations and terrorist skills working with the US and Western Europe in all of these conflicts and became the beneficiaries of US diplomatic, political and military support (via Saudi Arabia). Like the Kosovars, the Chechen leaders came out of a mafia-financed network, which uses nationalist rhetoric to cloak gangster rule.

Throughout the 1990's to the present, the West has backed the Chechen terrorists even as they draw heavily on support from Moscow gangsters and Islamic fundamentalists. Their leaders embrace a "rule or ruin" policy, refusing any status except to separate from Russia and become a US client. For the US, a victory for the Chechen terrorists would become a springboard for further dismemberment of Russia throughout the Caucasus.

The Chechens combine the violent tactics they learned in controlling gangland activity in Russia with the terrorist practices of the Afghan war which targeted female rural school teachers and medical workers for beheading, throat slitting and the skinning of 'Communist' captives alive. Their current practice of placing of bombs in theaters, airplanes, apartment complexes and the horrible killing and maiming of hundreds of school children and their parents and teachers has a bloody, US-sanctioned precedent. The Chechens combine the worse of the Mafia and Islamic fundamentalists' cold-blooded murder of innocent victims to establish theocratic warlord rulership.

## **Western Policy**

In response to the Chechen terrorist assaults, all the Western mass media continued to refer to them as "nationalists", "militants", "rebels" and as legitimate representatives of the Chechen people, even after they had massacred the school children. In the immediate aftermath, all the print and electronic media, from the BBC to the Guardian, to Le Monde, New York Times etc. criticized the Russians for failing to negotiate with the terrorists even as the terrorists were murdering children and even after they had set off explosives maiming innocent kids. Nothing captures the profound media commitment to empire and backing for the dismemberment of Russia than its support of the terrorists in the midst of mass murder. The most primitive and craven support for terrorist demands in the midst of national grief and international outrage finally provoked the Russian state to react with indignation and for some of the media to temporarily downplay its support of the terrorists and the breakup of Russia.

The Russian media was no exception. Most of the privately owned media and commentators yearn for the return of the Yeltsin period of servility and enrichment and seek to discredit and destroy the Putin regime. Many of the billionaire oligarchs have close working relations with the Chechen leaders, especially Boris Berezovsky. The oligarchs and their pundits in the Russian media echo the Western political and media line of blaming the Russian security forces rather than the Chechen terrorists. Eyewitness survivors provide vivid accounts of

bombing and killings prior to the Russian rescue operations thus putting the lie to the Western cover-up for the terrorist action.

In England the British government provides asylum to a major Chechen terrorist leader sought by Russian authorities. In the United States, one of Chechnya's separatist leaders, Ilyas Akhadov, was given asylum last August, largely through the efforts of "American Committee for Peace in Chechnya" chaired by Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and Reagan's Secretary of State Alexander Haig principle backers of the Fundamentalist invasion and destruction of the secular Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980's. Brzezinski's life-long obsession has been the total dismemberment of Russia and its reduction to a feudal enclave controlled by the West via local oligarchs, warlords and gangsters like those he backs in Chechnya. Brzezinski and his neo-conservative colleagues in the National Endowment for Democracy the civilian face of the CIA awarded this terrorist 'spokesman' a research grant, including a monthly allowance, medial insurance and travel expenses.

Anglo-US governments and their "political fronts" provide sanctuary to the Chechen terrorist leaders as part of their strategy to sustain a war of attrition against Russia and especially Putin using the Chechen people as guinea pigs. The outcome of Chechen independence would most likely resemble Kosovo a client state, with a big US military base, run by gangsters and warlords, trafficking in drugs, sex-slaves and military contraband and deeply involved in fomenting separatist terror along Russia's southern border namely the Republic of Dagestan (which is multi-ethnic and close to the oil and gas rich Caspian Sea). The enemy of Russia is not an autonomous Chechen Republic but a terrorist gangster-run state, controlled by US and British security forces, aimed at further dismembering Russia and destroying Putin's efforts to reform the Russian state.

One of the possible unanticipated consequences however is that the terrorist slaughter and maiming of hundreds of children and parents in Beslan's public school, may give Putin the chance to get rid of all the security officials left over from the Yeltsin regime. It may force Putin to create a new efficient security regime capable of breaking up the gangs and gangsters (Chechen and otherwise) who have financed the terrorists. More important he will have to realize that Anglo-US imperialism is not a partner against terror but an accomplice of terrorists in their mission to fragment Russia and destroy its public authority.

## **Conclusion**

To understand Washington's application of the principle of "self-determination" of nations requires a critical class perspective of the concept. Washington applies it in cases like Kosovo and Chechnya where it controls the client forces, despite their political illegitimacy their use of terrorist methods. For the Anglo-American empire builders "self-determination" is used as a slogan to dismember adversarial states, and convert the new mini-entity into an enclave or military base and political client.

The fundamental question that needs to be raised prior to the issue of self-determination is what is the nature of the political and social forces supporting self-determination are they part of a national project or are they mere puppets of an imperial power struggle. Chechnya illustrates the latter, while Iraq and Palestine represent cases of independent national struggles against colonial occupation. The rather mindless support of many on the left of the Kosovo and Chechen gangsters under the principle of "self-determination" without any prior analysis of the context and politics reveals their mediocrity and worse their servile

submission to imperial propaganda.

The question of the day is Anglo-American global imperial expansion directly through colonial wars and indirectly through surrogate “separatist” terrorists. The mass murder in Chechnya should at a minimum, provoke some critical re-thinking of the issue of what is involved in the Chechen War, who are its backers and who stands to benefit.

In the United States the principle backers of the Chechen “separatists” are the same neo-conservative Zionists, who promoted the invasion of Iraq and are unconditional backers of Israel and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians: Perle, Wolfowitz, Ledeen, Feith and Adelman among others. The pro-Chechen ‘left’ travels with strange comrades!

The dual standards which the US and Europe apply when evaluating terrorism is most blatantly evident in the case of Chechnya’s terrorist leaders. Ilyas Akhmadov was awarded asylum in the US despite the fact that Russian security investigators claim they have evidence of Akhmadov’s ties to Chechen terrorist leaders, Aslan Maskhadov and the notorious Shamil Basayev. Britain has granted asylum to Akmed Zakayev a spokesman for Maskhadov and a “Cultural Minister” of his ‘opposition government’, as the terrorist network is referred to by their sponsors. Maskhadov has sent Umar Khabuyev to France, Apti Bisultanov to Germany , among other ‘ministers at large’. The Western regimes demonstrate that when it comes to pro-Western Chechen terrorist there is no crime even the mass murder of over 150 children which is sufficiently brutal to warrant extradition.

Western regimes’ dual policy toward terrorism is informed by the question of whom the terror is directed against. It is a myth to speak, as Washington does, of worldwide struggle against terror. Washington and Europe in the past and in the present support terrorist groups in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Chechnya as they supported them in the 1980’s in Nicaragua, Mozambique and Angola. For Washington, the issue of terror is subordinated to a more basic question: Does it weaken the enemies or opponents of empire? Does it lead to future military bases? Can the terrorist groups be recycled as client regimes? For the past 13 years the US and Europe has been instrumental in fomenting separatist movements in the former Soviet Union, Russia and Yugoslavia, which practice terror and violence to secure their aims. It is only recently that President Putin has come to realize that there is no end to imperial expansion short of Red Square. His co-operation with Washington in fighting terror directed against the US (Al Queda) has not resulted in reciprocal support for Russian efforts to defeat terror in the Caucasus. The big question is whether Putin is willing or able to have a complete reappraisal of Russian foreign policy especially a reappraisal of US-Russian relations, which is central to the Kremlin’s struggle against terror.

Finally one may ask why do so many apparent “progressives” and “leftist intellectuals” parrot the US imperialist line of “self-determination” for Chechnya? Is it ignorance of the social forces in Chechnya? Do they simply decontextualize terrorist acts and impose abstract principles out of slovenly intellectual habits? Or are they simply bending to pressure by their right-wing colleagues to “consistently support ‘self-determination’ everywhere”? Whatever the case these pro-imperialist toadies are incurable: Even in the midst of Chechen mass murder of harmless children in Beslan, they blame...the Russians for not surrendering to terrorists’ demands. Did any of these progressives and principled leftists condemn Bush after 9/11 for not negotiating and rewarding Osama Bin Laden? Of course not! They supported Bush’s “war on terrorism” even when it involved invading and occupying a foreign country. Why then the reticence in supporting Putin’s effort to stamp out terrorism within the boundaries of Russia? Can it be that the progressives have more in

common with their imperial rulers than they care to admit, especially when it comes to questions of war and peace, terrorism and self-determination?

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