

Can Russia still outflank British war strategy in the Caucasus?

by Mark Burdman

Investigations by *EIR* indicate that the British foreign policy and defense establishment has initiated a highly dangerous and provocative two-pronged strategy respecting Russia's war in the Northern Caucasus. Both prongs of this strategy converge on one aim: to bring about the disintegration of Russia. The pursuit of this strategy, and its backing by the forces in the United States associated with George W. Bush and former U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, virtually guarantees the escalation of the Northern Caucasus situation into a strategic thermonuclear conflict over the months ahead.

On one level, leading British Establishment figures are insisting that a clear signal has been sent to the Russians, that they can have a free hand to do what they want against the Chechens, and that the British acknowledge the fact that Chechnya is part of the Russian Federation. These Brits are doing so, in the knowledge that the Russian military operation in Chechnya, as it is currently conceived and is being carried out, is untenable, and will blow up in Russia's face, somewhere down the line. Meanwhile, another cluster of Brits are vigorously pursuing a "Great Game" geopolitical policy for the Caucasus, including open support for Chechen independence, with the overtly stated object of isolating, containing, and damaging Russia.

In the first days of October, the evidence from the Northern Caucasus region itself, would strongly suggest that the Russians are walking into the trap set by the British game-masters and their U.S. co-thinkers. After weeks of insisting that the mistakes of the disastrous 1994-96 war in Chechnya would be avoided, and that a ground war would not be fought, the Russian leadership has dispatched an estimated 30-50,000 troops into northern Chechnya, in pursuit of a highly dubious aim of creating a "security zone" that would isolate the "Chechen terrorists" from the rest of the Russian Federation. Leading Russian military experts have denounced the strategy as "idiotic," "stupid," "absurd," and "ineffective."

The deeper problem, is that the present Russian government has no *positive* policy for the Northern Caucasus region as a whole, particularly in the areas of economic and infrastructure development. The Northern Caucasus is economi-

cally devastated, with unemployment rates often reaching 90%. If the current Yeltsin-Putin regime can't enunciate a positive policy, it may take a new government in Moscow to do the job.

In the present situation, it is no wonder, that one leading British defense expert, formerly an official adviser to the Thatcher government, said that a mood of *Schadenfreude*—glee over another's misfortunes—is spreading in the British establishment, over the "new Afghanistan" that the Russians seem to be heading into.

Kissinger and Brzezinski under attack

One welcome exception to the general trend toward calamity, is the statement made on Sept. 29 by one very senior Russian official, blasting former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Brzezinski as the effective conceptual architects of the attempt to destabilize Russia in the Northern Caucasus. This was done by Leonid Ivashov, Director of the International Cooperation division of the Russian Defense Ministry, in an interview with the Al Jazeera broadcasting network. Based in the Persian Gulf country of Qatar, Al Jazeera is the largest Arabic-language network in the world, with satellite broadcasts throughout the world.

Ivashov was asked, "Which international interests would benefit from targetting Russia in the Caucasus?" He responded by referring to "the old dream of the West, to pit Russia against the Islamic world. Mr. Kissinger has discussed this already, his dream of pitting Russia against the Islamic world. Meanwhile, Mr. Brzezinski has called the Caucasus 'the Eurasian Balkans.'" The latter refers to the insane Brzezinski geopolitical ravings, in his latest book, *The Grand Chessboard*, the which *EIR* has extensively reviewed (see, for example, Lyndon LaRouche, "Mad Brzezinski's Chessboard," *EIR*, April 2, 1999).

Ivashov said these individuals' strategies are representative of the "ambitions of influential forces and powers in the West," and are typical of those forces in the United States who want to use "the Islamic factor" to realize their ambitions in the Caspian Sea. Ivashov said that this shows that Russia is facing both "internal and foreign challenges"

in the war in the Caucasus. He further stressed that the “Islamist rebels” in Chechnya have nothing to do with Islam, or with Muslim nations, but use Islam as a “facade” to promote ideas “worse than those of the Nazis.”

Sources in a position to know have told *EIR* that Ivashov is a man of considerable significance in the Russian military-intelligence establishment, with a particularly astute knowledge of Western strategies and policies.

Ivashov has hit on the neuralgic point, of what is at stake in the Northern Caucasus, and in Eurasia as a whole. As *EIR* has stressed, Kissinger and Brzezinski, in their capacity as early leading figures in the then-newly created Trilateral Commission, were two of the prime initiators of the mid-1970s Trilateral strategy of playing an “Islamic card” in Eurasia, most obviously aimed at the then-Soviet Union, but also at other keystone countries of this part of the world. It was from that strategy, that the bloody Afghan war evolved, beginning in 1979. The policy then continued, under the direction of Vice-President George Bush, also a Trilateral member, as a function of the “Iran-Contra” arms-for-drugs policy. It is today being pushed with a vengeance, by the Bush-Brzezinski-Kissinger forces in the United States, and the grouping around former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom.

It is to be hoped, that other leading Russian figures will echo Ivashov, and that his charges will receive wide circulation, in Russia and abroad. As this publication has repeatedly stressed, one crucial flanking action that the Russians would need to take, to extricate themselves from an otherwise inevitable debacle, would be to “name the names” in London, Washington, and elsewhere, who are responsible for this.

‘Tens of thousands will die’

The evidence in hand so far, since Ivashov gave the Al Jazeera interview on Sept. 29, is that the Russian Presidency of Boris Yeltsin and the government of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin has decided *not* to make a big issue of the Anglo-American forces responsible for stoking the flames of war in the Caucasus. Leading Moscow think-tankers have told *EIR* that “total silence” will be maintained on this point, by the Yeltsin-Putin regime, who are instead fixated on “winning the war,” in the narrow military sense of the term.

Russian military strategy now, is focussed on seizing control of one-third of Chechnya, the entire area on the plains north of the Terek River, while maintaining heavy bombardment of vital infrastructure in Chechnya south of the Terek. Military spokesmen assert, that the operations north of the Terek would effectively seal off the remaining two-thirds of Chechnya from the bulk of the Russian Federation (while keeping in mind that all of Chechnya, legally, is part of the Russian Federation), and isolate the “Chechen terrorists.” While Russian military censorship precludes precise knowl-

edge of how vast the operation is, estimates are that some 30-50,000 troops are involved, having entered in from three directions, the west, north, and southeast.

Effectively, this is a partition scheme, justified by Russian strategists, in part, on the basis of the historical reality that this part of Chechnya was, until 1954, part of the Stavropol region, and then was “given” to Chechnya, by the Supreme Soviet.

The majority population of this area north of the Terek River is non-Chechen, namely, Cossack, Russian, and Ukrainian. One effect of the Russian military operations, has been to create a wave of Chechen refugees flowing south into “rump Chechnya,” this on top of a refugee flow of some 120,000 who have already fled to neighboring Ingushetia. These refugee flows are creating chaos in region already suffering from economic devastation.

The Russians have also declared a “Chechen exile government,” composed of discredited and unpopular Chechen figures who stayed outside, or fled from Chechnya during the last war. Up until now, all overtures from the moderately-inclined Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov for negotiations with the Russian leadership, have been summarily rejected by Putin. And, under pressure of the worsening military and social conditions in Chechnya, Maskhadov has increasingly begun to ally with, and rely on, rebel “Islamist” leader Shamil Basayev.

To put it mildly, there is no guarantee, first, that what the Russians are doing will be “successful” in the area north of the Terek River, nor that the fighting will not be extended south of the Terek. Maskhadov has avowed that he regards the area north of the Terek as “my homeland,” and that he will “never” surrender this area to Russian forces. On Oct. 5, he declared martial law over Chechnya, as part of a full mobilization of Chechen military capabilities. Maskhadov solemnly warned: “Although Russia will do everything it can to avoid another humiliating defeat, it is a pity that tens of thousands of soldiers, ours and Russia’s, will die.”

At the same time, on Oct. 5, Putin outlined Russian military objectives in these terms: “The operation to create a security zone has not been completed by any means. This is just one stage in this operation. But the ultimate aim is to fully destroy terrorists and their bases *throughout Chechen territory.*”

Leading Russian military experts are speaking out against the strategy. Alexander Zhilin, a military analyst for the *Moskovskiy Novosti* publication, said on Oct. 1 that “military strategy says that you should never, ever, initiate a ground operation with winter approaching. This is absurd and ineffective. From a military point of view it makes no sense.” He said that, over the next month, the weather will change, and cloud cover will hinder Russia’s ability to conduct air strikes and to give badly needed air cover to ground troops. According to Zhilin, Russian forces have three weeks, at the most,

to complete the operation before the weather starts working against them. "I am afraid that there are going to be massive casualties," Zhilin said, adding that while public opinion and media are more or less supporting the military right now, this will change as soon as heavy combat losses mount.

Speaking to *EIR* on Oct. 5, leading Russian military commentator Pavel Felgenhauer said, "Our military policy now in Chechnya is very, very stupid. From a military point of view, there is a certain logic of building a defense perimeter. But we have not enough troops, and we've made the defense perimeter smaller, to make it defensible. We are cutting the perimeter by 20%. Meanwhile, we are increasing the number of enemies we are fighting, fivefold. Most of the Chechens are now mobilized against us. To put it mildly, this strategy is not waterproof."

Earlier, on Oct. 1, Felgenhauer was quoted by the *Moscow Times* newspaper, calling Russian strategy "mass idiocy," and averring, "I don't understand Russia's military strategy. I am afraid that Russia is headed for a total military disaster."

British sadism and geopolitics

It is under such circumstances, that the British are manically pursuing their two-pronged strategy.

One leading British establishment figure, who is a Labour Party parliamentarian and Trilateral Commission member with close ties to the NATO structure and to the British Foreign Office, claimed during an Oct. 5 discussion, that "there is a *quid pro quo* with the Russians. After all, in the end, it was Russia which brought about the collapse of [Serbian leader Slobodan] Milosevic and ended the Kosovo war. Without them, there would have been a land war, and casualties. The truth is, Russia played a big role in Kosovo. Now, we are saying to them, 'You've got similar problems in your own back yard. Go to it.' You see the Russians, in turn, adopting Russian 'copycat-to-NATO' methods, quite consciously. We have to keep the Russians in line, and constructive. That is the price that has to be paid, to let them go ahead and do what they have to do in Chechnya. We can't be unhelpful."

In discussion with *EIR*, a leading British defense strategist, formerly an adviser to the Thatcher government, was much more blunt about what this "track" implied concretely: "I would think our policy is ruled by an element of cynicism, frankly. What we are effectively saying to the Russians is, 'Go ahead, chums, do what you're doing, and get hurt in the process!' Why do we have to bother to recognize Chechen independence? The Chechens are unreliable, and this whole Islamic card has severe limits. We already have Poland and Hungary sewn up, so why bother with Chechnya? We tell the Russians, 'You go in, and good luck!' Meanwhile, we are ready to feel *Schadenfreude*, when the Russians can't get those Russian kids out of the Chechen hills, in the months to come. They have a mini-Afghanistan in the making, so there's

no need for the extreme view, of open support for Chechnya. We can afford to strongly support the Russians in public, knowing what is most likely to happen to them."

Another well-connected British strategist, who works for certain agencies of the British Ministry of Defence as a resident geopolitician, insisted, during an Oct. 5 discussion, that the time is now ripe to actively resurrect, and pursue the 1919-20 strategy of British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon and geopolitical theoretician Sir Halford Mackinder, for building a "buffer zone" to contain, weaken, and ultimately destroy Russia.

He said, "As I see it, the current Northern Caucasus situation is almost the fulfillment of Mackinder's plan, submitted to the British government in 1920. It was supported by the Foreign Secretary, Curzon, who had appointed Mackinder to the post, which he occupied in 1919-20, of British High Commissioner to South Russia. But it was rejected by the British government at the time, unfortunately, on pragmatic grounds."

He went on: "Mackinder's conception was that it was essential for the stability of Europe, to form a buffer zone, along western Russia, extending from Finland, down through Belarussia, Ukraine, Georgia, and the Turkish border areas comprising the areas where the fighting is going on today in the Caucasus. He argued, that only by stimulating, and trying to facilitate the rolling back of the grip of the Bolshevik state, would there be true stability. If only the British government had had the patience to follow Mackinder's advice, and keep operations going in this region for a couple of more years, we would have been spared some of the horrors of this century."

This source said that "the West would be geopolitically astute to facilitate the creation of an independent Chechen state," without "pushing into the Russian heartland, which would be unmanageable for the West." He insisted that there was considerable support, privately, for such a Mackinderite-Curzonite approach, in various British defense and other circles. "All these ideas are now coming back with a vengeance," he said. "What is lacking is a public articulation of the policy approach."

The geopolitician who made this appeal, works under the aegis of the British Ministry of Defence, and is instrumental to a revival/reinvigoration of Mackinderite ideas inside the official British defense establishment. He insisted that elements of the approach are reflected in the British government's recently completed "Strategic Defense Review." He claimed that pushing this policy would cause "acute alarm" in Russia, and lead to a "counter-geopolitical response," especially as there is a growing "geopolitics thrust" in Russia.

What all this hysterically overlooks, is a Russian response not according to this profile, but a strategic/thermonuclear response, as LaRouche has been warning.