

# The Caucasus: new 'afghansi' hotbed

by Joseph Brewda and Linda de Hoyos

Since 1994, the war in Chechnya has been raging, right in the center of the Caucasus. Not only has the Chechen independence movement been at war with Russia, but civil war has erupted within Chechnya itself, an autonomous republic within Russia. As of November 1995, the war had resulted in the deaths of 2,000 Russians, and 30-35,000 Chechens.

Most of the conflict has centered around Gen. Jokhar Dudayev, the self-styled president and strongman of "independent Chechnya." General Dudayev had held the highest rank of any Chechen in the Russian military. Specifically, Dudayev had led Air Force operations during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, where he introduced the tactic of carpet bombing of Afghan villages, women and children, and mujahideen. Today, he is leading a secessionist armed force against the Russian military. He confirmed, in a March 15 interview from his Chechen hideout with the British daily the *Independent*, that "Chechen fighters, who are Islamic, have trained in Afghanistan and Bosnia" with the Afghan mujahideen, whom Dudayev was fighting less than a decade ago.

What has made this inverse relationship possible? Former U.S. President George Bush may be able to supply some clues. In 1992, Dudayev, who had become the ruler of Chechnya in September 1991, visited the United States, Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, to muster support and funds for the Chechen cause. According to Saluddin Gugai, the Chechen representative in the United States who organized it, the trip was deliberately not publicized. In the United States, Dudayev was unable to meet with President George Bush, "but at least he did get to meet high-level people at the State Department. . . . George Bush and the Republicans were certainly more sympathetic to Chechen independence than Clinton."

From Washington, Dudayev flew to Houston, Texas, Bush's home base, where he had "three days of meetings with the oil companies," says Gugai. Although Dudayev was at first pleased with the offers coming from the U.S. oil multinationals, his representative noted that the promised largesse was not forthcoming.

That year, Dudayev also managed to meet British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who, according to Gugai, is "100% on our side, our most important supporter in Britain."

The same tour took Dudayev to Saudi Arabia. In a follow-up to that visit, Dudayev's major representatives in the United States met with Prince Bandar, the Saudi Ambassador to the United States and a friend of George Bush. "You know that

the Saudis gave \$10 billion to aid the struggle in Afghanistan," Gugai noted, "and they are trying to help Bosnia. They always follow the West's lead."

Parallel to the diplomatic forays, which are likely to have given the green light for the deployment of Afghan mujahideen into Chechnya, other negotiations were taking place. By the beginning of 1992, Dudayev succeeded in seizing the arsenal of the Soviet Armed Forces in Chechnya, and Russian authorities lost control over Chechen airspace. At that time, according to Russian sources, massive numbers of unauthorized flights from Chechnya began, taking drugs or other contraband to Turkey, Iran, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere.

Simultaneously, according to sources from several continents, the Chechen secessionists entered into cooperative pacts with a number of mujahideen field commanders in Afghanistan, whose military operations have for years been supplied by drug production and trafficking. The links for such cooperation lay in the KGB's close contact with the Afghan secret police (Khad), and also with the circles around Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum.

That the "Chechen mafia" is a key player in Central Asian, and especially Afghan drug-trafficking, is a recognized fact. According to Dr. Anton Surikov, a senior investigator with the Russian Feliks Research Group formed in 1991 to investigate economic crimes in Russia, the Chechen mafia is centered around the Melkhi clan and the Chechen Department of State Security, headed by a Melkhi, Sultan Geliskhanov. Among the insiders of the ring is General Dudayev's brother, Bek-Murzy.

According to some accounts, Afghan drugs are flown directly to Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, from airports in northern Afghanistan such as Akcha and Mazar e Sharif. There are also reports circulating in Central Asia that by 1994, the Chechen mafia had teamed up with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The Chechens supply Hekmatyar et al. with weapons, and are reportedly seeking to acquire the Stinger missiles from Hekmatyar that had proved to be the crucial Afghan weapon against General Dudayev's assaults during the Afghan war.

Hence, the route that takes Afghan mujahideen to fight for Chechen independence, is the same route that brings raw opium and cannabis from Afghanistan to Chechnya for refining and shipment, on its way to the Mideast and western Europe.

## Mere pawns in the game

The case of Dudayev is an excellent illustration of the depth of depravity and extent of criminality required to put into effect London's geopolitical designs against nations. London's propagandists even parade their encouragement of Chechen secessionism and military ventures as a defense of human rights!

Despite what must be a lucrative position, Dudayev is a mere pawn in a far bigger game. For years, analysts and pro-

filers orbiting around British intelligence have been happily predicting a Caucasian revolt that would destroy the Soviet Union. The premier warbler for this set is Prof. Alexandre Bennigsen of the Sorbonne, in Paris, where he was the protégé of the Sorbonne dean of orientology and a Sufi mystic, Louis Massignon. Bennigsen's daughter, Marie Bennigsen Broxup, has followed in his footsteps and is now editor of the British quarterly *Central Asian Survey*.

In his 1985 book *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union*, Bennigsen proclaimed that "the nearly 50-year-long Caucasian wars [of the nineteenth century] made an important contribution to the material and moral ruin of the czarist empire and hastened the downfall of the Romanov monarchy." Today, Bennigsen underscores, the Sufi brotherhood of the Caucasus remains a most potent weapon against Moscow: "In the particular case of the North Caucasus, Sufi orders have gained control not only over fundamentalist trends but also over all national resistance movements from the later eighteenth century to the present day. The Chechen-Ingush territory and Dagestan, was among the last Muslim territories to which the Sufi brotherhoods gained access, but once established there, Sufism played a prominent role. Today this territory is probably the one where organized mystic movements are the most dynamic and active in the entire Muslim world."

By the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Bennigsen's "analysis," elaborated and publicized by his daughter, had become standard fare among the boosters of various secessionist movements in the Caucasus. In 1992, the year Dudayev was receiving such encouragement from Thatcher, the Minority Rights Group of Britain, chaired by Sir John Thomson, former British ambassador to India and the United Nations, issued a report on the North Caucasus region, taking up Bennigsen's cause. The report pointed to, although not explicitly, the ripe ground for manipulation of the people of the region: "Many of the aspirations of the peoples of the region are contradictory and several forces play one group against the other. The region is witnessing a number of internal conflicts over territories and borders, with the struggle for sovereignty, and difficult relations with the central governments at the forefront. Complex internal claims and disagreements, coupled with a growing antagonism between the region and its political centers dominate the political agenda. The absence of constructive policies and political will to implement them have led in some areas to cruel open conflicts. Any new attempt to enforce solutions and ignore claims will add to the feeling of estrangement and feed nationalist tendencies both among North Caucasian peoples and among Russians. This contributes to a general feeling of uncertainty and insecurity in a region which could become subject to major turmoil and violence. The North Caucasus is therefore a region not only at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and of different cultural and political norms, but also at a distinct crossroads concerning its political development."

"In terms of minority issues, the North Caucasus is probably the one region in Europe with the highest potential for long-term conflict."

The Unrepresented Peoples Organization (UNPO) issued a similar analysis, written by Lord Ennals. After a "fact-finding tour" to Chechnya and nearby Abkhazia, Ennals wrote: "The Northern Caucasus region is of strategic importance to Russia. It is the gateway to the entire Caucasus, a region in which Russia wants to maintain a sphere of influence. . . . Russia has traditionally conducted a 'divide and rule' policy in the Northern Caucasus. Today, it appears that this policy is being revived in a significant way to prevent the various peoples of the region from forming a united front against Russia. A number of leaders of North Caucasus peoples—prominent among them the Abkhazians, the Chechens, and the Kabardians—formed the Confederation of North Caucasus Peoples in 1989. . . . Its objective is to unite the North Caucasus peoples. If Abkhazians, with the help of volunteers from the North Caucasus region, can show that an attack on such people cannot take place without serious resistance, this will discourage future attacks on any of the North Caucasus peoples."

The "Chechen Republic" was accepted as a full member of the UNPO as early as August 1991, and UNPO headquarters at The Hague is the "Chechen" international embassy. In October 1991, the UNPO had sent a team to monitor the "elections" in Chechnya. The UNPO team's report was printed in full in the *Central Asian Survey*.

The UNPO is enthusiastic over the Chechen cause. It has consistently demanded that Moscow negotiate with the rebels. In November 1994, it warned that "an act of genocide was being prepared against the Chechen nation." It said that "the cause of the Chechen desire for independence," undoubtedly echoing the words of "Daud Bey," "is consistent mistreatment of the Chechens, the Ingush, and other North Caucasian peoples by Russia." Echoing Bennigsen, however, the UNPO lauds "the various Sufi orders . . . which have been centers of anti-Russian (czarist) and anti-Soviet (communist) resistance."

In 1995, the UNPO sponsored the trip of General Dudayev's envoy Aslambek Khadiyev, to The Hague, where the UNPO "opened contacts with foreign governments" in Europe and the Middle East, and with the United States.

The Bennigsen-UNPO thesis was finding its way into official quarters. In January 1995, Harold Elletson, the advocate for Chechen secession in the British House of Commons, told *EIR* that the West would have to move rapidly to extend NATO eastward in response to Russian military actions against Chechen terrorists. Russia should no longer be granted soft loans, he said.

At the same time, NATO policy planners were adopting the view that continual war in the Caucasus was inevitable. A 1995 NATO study, *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, predicted that contested territorial claims among the autonomous republics of the Caucasus could only lead to continuous

strife. "Never before, since the turbulent period of 1918-21 which followed the fall of the Russian Empire, have conflicts raged with such deadly animosity. Old ethnic wounds have reopened, leading in some cases to sustained warfare, in others to ethnic strife punctuated by intermittent clashes."

President Clinton is the implicit target of the same war-mongering. A spokesman for Pax Christi, which works closely with Elletson, insisted to *EIR* that the main difficulty in stopping Russian "genocide" against Chechnya is the Clinton administration, because it classifies the war as a "Russian internal affair." It is "strongly opposed to use any kind of effective pressure on the Russian government to comply with its international obligations [regarding Chechnya], despite the strong leverage that presented itself when the IMF [International Monetary Fund] finalized a major loan to the Russian Federation in April 1995," the spokesman said.

### **Dudayev's rise to power**

Dudayev's rise to power does not exactly cohere with the democratic rhetoric of his foreign supporters. In November 1990, the Chechen Popular Congress, whose members largely favored autonomy within Russia, was formed, and the prestigious Dudayev was among its leaders. In June 1991, he was elected its leader. The Congress called for complete independence from Russia; those nationalists who favored less drastic steps were purged. On Sept. 1, 1991, Dudayev condemned the Chechen Supreme Soviet as illegitimate and declared himself Chechnya's ruler. His followers stormed the parliament building that day, and seized control of the Chechen Soviet later that week.

When Russian Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy called for disarming Dudayev's militias on Oct. 9, Dudayev ordered a general mobilization of all Chechens against Russia, and his allied Vaynakh Democratic Party called for "holy war." A "general election" in Chechnya on Oct. 27 brought Dudayev 90% of the vote, and Dudayev was quickly granted emergency powers by his rubber-stamp parliament.

At the same time, Dudayev declared full Chechen independence. No State formally recognized the entity, but various countries did sign treaties with Dudayev—Turkey, Germany, Japan, the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan.

From the beginning, Dudayev had been challenged by various Chechen clans and parties. In April 1993, he summarily shut down parliament and the constitutional court. Rebellious Chechen forces withdrew to the northwest, where they began receiving aid and supplies from Moscow. Civil war ensued. In June 1994, the Chechen opposition launched an unsuccessful bid to seize Grozny, a failure that soon led to direct Russian military intervention.

In early December 1994, Russian aircraft began bombing airfields and army camps in Chechnya. On Dec. 11, some 40,000 Russian troops entered Chechnya, but were badly defeated when they tried to take the capital in January. The Russian Air Force then began carpet-bombing Grozny, razing

the city to the ground and killing close to 25,000 civilians. The Russians finally took the ruined city and three others, as the war shifted to the mountains.

Despite a cease-fire in June 1995, and the Russian installation of a new government supplanting Dudayev as President in December, the war in Chechnya continues, characterized by bombings of Chechen villages by the Russian Air Force, in retaliation for guerrilla assaults on occupying Russian troops. The collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by the conditions set by British geopolitical war, has brought the career of General Dudayev full circle.

### **Georgia: the 'mini-empire'**

One of the most dramatic incidents of the Chechen war was the seizing of a hospital in the southern Russian town of Budyonnovsk by Chechen guerrillas, who held the patients hostage. When their demands for Russia to end the war were denied, the guerrillas executed eight patients, prompting a Russian assault on the hospital in which 120 people were killed. The Chechen adventure had been led by Shamil Basayev, one of Dudayev's top lieutenants. According to Pakistani press reports, Basayev had been trained with Afghan mujahideen in Pakistan. Before his exploits in the Chechen war, he had also led the "Abkhaz Battalion," a Chechen unit which had been formed to fight for Abkhazian independence from Georgia.

Georgia was a constituent republic of the Soviet Union, whose territory includes three separate autonomies: Abkhazia, Adjara, and South Ossetia. All entities had been divided on ethnic lines. In practice, all three autonomies were ruled by the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. From the point of its incorporation into Georgia by Stalin in 1931, Abkhazia had been subject to cultural extirpation. The Abkhazian language was banned, and Georgians settled in the enclave; today only 17% of Abkhazia is actually Abkhazian.

The Ossetians of Georgia are descendants of cruelly oppressed serfs who worked on Georgian feudal estates. During the 1918-22 Russian civil war, the Menshevik-controlled Georgians slaughtered the Bolshevik-sponsored Ossetians. In the early years of the Soviet regime, while Georgia was agitating for independence, the South Ossetians remained loyal to Russia, and in 1925, the South Ossetians called for reunification with North Ossetia, under Russian rule.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Georgia moved swiftly to create its own sovereign State. Abkhazia and South Ossetia followed suit, demanding nationhood, independent of Georgia. Georgia claimed the right to independence from Moscow based on the doctrine of "self-determination." Abkhazia and South Ossetia advanced the same principle against Georgia.

In 1989, the Abkhazians and Chechens formed the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus, in defiance of both Moscow and Tbilisi. The Confederation, godfathered by Dudayev, was a revival of the Mountain Republic conceived by Lord Curzon in 1918. All the North Caucasian mountain

## Lord Curzon stalks the Caucasus

“Chechens Pin Hopes on Pax Britannica,” was the headline of the Jan. 14 London *Sunday Telegraph* article filed by war correspondent Alan Philips, who had walked through Russian lines to interview Salman Raduyev, the son-in-law of Chechen leader Gen. Jokhar Dudayev and “chief hostage-taker.”

As Philips tells it, “In the foothills of the Caucasus mountains, there is still a touching faith in the power of the British Empire. Strange as it may seem, the hostage crisis in southern Russia is being played out against a background of hopes and fears of British intervention, as if Lord Curzon still held sway over the world.

“In the minds of the Chechen government, it is a certainty that Britain will come to their aid against the Russian enemy. When they seized 2,000 hostages in the hospital in the Dagestani town of Kizlyar in the early hours of Tuesday morning, one of the bearded militants said the raid would usher in a golden era of British rule in the Caucasus. . . .

“There is a folk belief that Britain will rule for seven years, after which a golden era of peace and prosperity will begin. . . . This belief dates from 150 years ago, when the Chechens were resisting the Russian army. British news-

papers were then filled with reports of battles for obscure mountain villages, as the Russians pressed on to threaten the Ottoman Empire and perhaps India itself. At the time, society ladies in England collected blankets to help the sturdy mountain-folk fight the czar.”

Despite the most fervent hopes of Chechen rebels, however, a British military expert on the Caucasus at the Sandhurst Military Academy’s Center for Conflict Studies, says there will be no military help for the Chechen cause coming from Britain. This is understood by the Chechen military, he explained. In fact, while visiting Chechnya in December 1995, he said, Chechen Chief of Staff Gen. Mashedov “told me personally, that ‘we are on our own, no one can help us.’ ”

But, Sandhurst’s case officer continued: “All we British can do to help, is to make public the information about what is happening there. It was the Russians who broke off the talks. They are going down a path to increased bloodshed. The Chechens have resisted the Russians for 250-300 years. They never accepted Russian domination. They’re a fiery-looking race—of course, not the bearded ones. But basically, they’re excellent horsemen, good rifle shots, they’re fleet of foot, they’re not a warrior race, they’re well-equipped with the martial arts.

“I see the Russians in for enormous trouble, as they get more and more stuck, as this thing goes on. In the longer term, what is building up, is great resentment among the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus.”

tribes supported the Confederation, as did the International Circassian Association, a diaspora organization based in Britain, Turkey, Jordan, Israel, and the United States. In August 1992, the Confederation, meeting in Chechnya, declared war on Georgia. Basayev raised his “Abkhazian Battalion” of volunteers and mercenaries to fight Tbilisi.

It was the Abkhazians who had first triggered the Georgian demands for independence. In March 1989, Abkhazian nationalists convened in the village of Lykhny and called for Abkhazian secession from Georgia, and its restoration as an independent state within the Soviet Union. The Abkhazian call prompted a convulsive wave of protest in Georgia, with rallies and hunger strikes that were finally put down by Soviet troops in April 1989. Soon, Georgia had announced its independence. The man riding the crest of the chauvinist wave was Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who, on Nov. 23, 1989, organized a 20,000-man march on Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian capital, to put down the Ossetian bid for secession. In August 1990, the Georgian Supreme Soviet declared that no regionally based parties could vote in upcoming national elections, effectively disenfranchising the Ossetians and Abkhazians. The Ossetians and Abkhazian Supreme Soviets forthwith de-

clared their secession from Georgia.

Gamsakhurdia handily won the October 1990 elections, and opened war against South Ossetia. First, a blockade beginning in December 1990, followed by a massacre of Ossetian civilians in Tskhinvali. Throughout the spring of 1991, as the Community of Independent States was taking shape, the tempo of Georgian and Ossetian clashes and massacres increased. By November, Gamsakhurdia called on “all Georgians who can carry a gun” to march on Nov. 23 on the South Ossetian capital.

The assault was averted by the military coup against Gamsakhurdia that put former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in power. Shevardnadze called a referendum for South Ossetia, but although 90% of the Ossetians voted for unity with North Ossetia within Russia, Georgia did not give way; the clashes continued. When Russia threatened to bomb Tbilisi in June 1992, a cease-fire was declared between Georgia and Moscow. But for the Ossetians, there was no settlement. By the end of the summer, 100,000 Ossetians, virtually the entire Ossetian population of Georgia, had fled to North Ossetia and incorporation into Russia.

If the Ossetian conflict passed by in relative obscurity, not

so the Abkhazian war, which was a *cause célèbre* for the British Foreign Office. In December 1990, secessionist leader Vladislav Ardzinba, a former department director of the Soviet Institute for Oriental Studies with specialization in ancient Anatolian cults, was elected chairman of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet. In July 1992, one month after the South Ossetian cease-fire, the Abkhazia Supreme Soviet ruled that the 1925 constitution, which called for only a loose treaty relationship with Georgia, was in force. The Georgia State Council declared the ruling invalid. On Aug. 14, the Georgian Army invaded Abkhazia and occupied its capital, Sukhumi. But after the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus declared war on Georgia that month, the Abkhazians began a successful rollback of Georgian troops.

The Confederation, with Chechnya's Dudayev at the helm, claimed the Russians were supporting the Georgian advance against Abkhazia. Their aid to Abkhazia was justified on the basis of a need to stop Russian imperialism. On the other hand, the region's Cossacks also joined the Abkhazian side; the Abkhazian fight against Georgia, the Cossacks said, was important to secure a Greater Russia. For its part, Georgia, which was recruiting volunteers and mercenaries from the Baltic States and from the Ukrainian UNA-UNSO organization, protested that the Abkhazians were operating on behalf of the Russians.

In fact, Russia assisted both sides. Russian military advisers helped draw up Abkhazian battle plans, and Russian-supplied jets were used to bomb Georgian-held Sukhumi. Gen. Pavel Grachov, Russian minister of defense, toured Abkhazia. Abkhazian leader Ardzinba arranged for the redeployment of a Russian airborne assault battalion from the Baltic republics to Sukhumi.

Russia also supplied the Georgian Army. At a press conference at the headquarters of the Transcaucasian Military District in Tbilisi in March 1993, General Diukov announced that his forces would continue to hand over weapons to Georgia as mandated by various Russian-Georgian agreements.

The Abkhaz, however, held the "joker" card—full support from the British "human rights" apparatus. In November 1993, Lord Ennals's UNPO became an official adviser to the Abkhazian leaders, helping the secessionists draw up a new constitution and representing the breakaways before the U.N. After Abkhazian emissaries met with British Lords Avebury and Ennals, a human rights campaign against Georgia was organized.

In July 1993, Georgia, Abkhazia, and Russia signed a cease-fire, which provided for the Georgian withdrawal from Sukhumi. On Sept. 16, Abkhazia broke the cease-fire, with the help of Russian mercenaries and North Caucasian volunteers. The Russian government took no action outside of condemnations.

On Oct. 8, 1993, Shevardnadze agreed to join the CIS, and signed a treaty the next day providing for the lease of Georgian military bases to Russian troops, and the deploy-

ment of these troops to guard strategic roads and railways. In December, his rival, Gamsakhurdia, who had tried to organize an insurrection against Shevardnadze in summer 1993, was murdered by unknown assailants. In February 1994, Georgia and Russia signed a Friendship Treaty which mandated the creation of five Russian military bases in Georgia, and the stationing of Russian border guards along Georgia's border with Turkey.