

The Last Warning

Russian analyst Roman Bessonov looks at Russian society and the challenges to its leadership, in the wake of the Beslan school massacre.

A crowd of people at a blood donation station; not a soul in line at the airport's booking office; an old war movie on TV, for the first time in three years; a shrill voice on the radio, warning that the Civil Defense Service is testing the emergency warning system; the following measured strikes of the metronome. "This is war," said the head of state.

A death toll of 326 persons, including 157 children (according to the preliminary casualty figures), on top of the 90 victims of two airplane bombings a week earlier and nine dead on the street outside a Moscow subway station, is enough to knock entertainment programs off the air, and to make use of the silence for thinking. The past half year, not only this latest tragedy at School No. 1 in Beslan, North Ossetia, provides ample pretext for learning lessons. To do so effectively, one should start at an earlier point in time.

Volodya and Magomed

"The citizens of North and South Ossetia should find a common language with the progressive circles of Georgia. South and North Ossetia should be integrated into a single entity, in the framework of the Georgian Confederation. As the Russians will inevitably have to pack their luggage and get out of the Caucasus, this goal of unification is to be regarded as beneficial for the fight to liberate the Caucasus, and, moreover, as a natural and urgent objective."

Those words appear in a pamphlet, entitled *The Gazavat*, authored by one Magomed Tagayev, currently a prisoner in Makhachkala, Dagestan, in the Russian North Caucasus. He was arrested several months ago, after surreptitiously returning from Turkey, where he had undergone rather brutal treatment at the hands of representatives of Aslan Maskhadov, the fugitive Chechen leader. And no wonder: In one of his books, Tagayev expressed disgust at the fact that Maskhadov's son is "residing in a luxurious villa in Malaysia," while ordinary Chechens, badly injured in the war to secede from Russia, are begging in the streets.

This unusual author, whose writings smash traditional views of the situation in the Caucasus and its background, was born in 1945 in the highland district of Botlikh, Dagestan, which includes the *aul* (village) of Gunib, where the besieged Imam Shamil, an ethnic Avar, was besieged by the troops of Alexander II's Russian Army in 1859.

In police reports, Magomed Tagayev is regularly men-

tioned as "one of the leaders of the Wahhabites." From his texts, however, it is evident that he has hardly read a single book of the so-called Wahhabite theologians. Moreover, his concept of a Caucasus Confederation as an independent state, is based on a notion of mutual understanding among peoples of various religions, inhabiting the area. He hates only one of the Caucasus nations—the Armenians, whom, along with the Americans and the Russians, he considers to be serving as "instruments" of a global "Zionist" conspiracy.

Tagayev's sympathies changed during the late 1990s. He still regards Gen. Jokhar Dudayev, the ex-Soviet officer who declared Chechen independence in 1991 and was killed by a remote-controlled missile strike in 1996, as "the hero of the Caucasus," and he compares Chechen separatist field commander Shamil Basayev with Ernesto Che Guevara, as a revolutionary hero. But some other top regional bosses have disappointed him: Not only Maskhadov, but also, in particular, the Khachilayev brothers, who appeared to be fighting for the liberation of the entire Caucasus, but turned out to be merely instruments of some Moscow clans.

In one of his interviews, Magomed confesses that his original views were remote from his present romantic idea of the independent Caucasus Confederation. His first political experience dates back to 1957, when he was 12 years old. "In newspapers of that time, there was a campaign against Iosif Stalin," he says. "I felt that the attack against Stalin was not just, and I wrote some posters like 'Long Live Stalin!'" Tagayev laughs.

Ironically, shortly before the 2004 Presidential elections, a journalist from *Smena*, a St. Petersburg daily paper, interviewed a number of people who in the 1950s had attended a school in Baskov Lane, and found out that some of them, at the same age (in 1961, the year of the famous 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [CPSU], which launched full-scale "destalinization"), had drawn similar posters and secretly hung them out the window of a loft. This group of Leningrad "hooligans," according to the author, included a boy named Volodya Putin.

Putin, after graduating from Leningrad State University, joined his country's State Security Committee (KGB), while Tagayev was expelled from high school and found himself in jail, specifically in the famous Perm camp, in the company of liberal dissidents. The one young man was brought up on the



Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on Sept. 6, in a moment of silence for the victims in North Ossetia. Putin's words to the nation on Sept. 4, after the events in Beslan, "would seem to serve as a mobilizing impetus for the intelligence and the military community. But they don't." So far, the agencies of the state have been bogged down in institutional reforms based on dubious axioms.

instructions of KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov; the other on the writings of the emigré Chechen writer Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov.

Surprisingly, the obedient serviceman and the insurgent ex-student still had something in common in their views. Andropov, even after being elevated to a top position in the CPSU, remained in touch with two Soviet dissidents, namely Roy Medvedev and Mikhail Gelfer, and politically protected the Moscow circle of young Bukharinists, including Anna Larina and Yuri Larin, the widow and the son of disgraced CPSU functionary Nikolai Bukharin, who had tried to oppose Stalin. Andropov's best disciple in the party ranks, the heir of an expropriated rich farmer from Stavropol Territory—Mikhail Gorbachov—became the last General Secretary of the CPSU, and prepared the economic preconditions for the collapse of the U.S.S.R., under a modern-day version of Bukharin's motto, "Enrich yourselves!"

Vladimir Putin's biographers, particularly the St. Petersburg political scientist Alexei Musakov, have emphasized that under Andropov's leadership, the Soviet KGB became an independent political entity, ideologically opposed to the CPSU Politburo. According to Musakov, Putin directly took up the legacy of Andropov. Indeed, immediately after his appointment as Prime Minister, Putin ordered the reinstatement of a memorial plaque, commemorating Andropov, on the front of the former KGB headquarters.

Under the Carpets and Around

Similar views of Andropov's historical role may be found in the writings of retired KGB colonel Yuri Lyubimov, former Soviet station chief in London and a leading liberal figure in

the ranks of retired intelligence officers in the late 1980s. A decade later, however, Lyubimov developed his conception in a Dostoevskian manner, declaring that the real purpose of Andropov's efforts to undermine the CPSU was to "lead his country through purgatory, in order to reshape the minds of its people and inspire a rebirth of the nation."

Other former colleagues of Andropov are less enthusiastic about his ideas and practice, considering them to be very controversial and based on some sophisticated combination of Bukharin's right-wing socialism, modern information theory, and occult teachings. Some months ago, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published revelations from a former KGB serviceman, who explained his decision to defect and emigrate, as due to a strange practice of homosexual orgies, introduced—on orders—at high levels of Soviet intelligence.

A former KGB agent, describing the practices of one circle of Moscow intellectuals, fond of Oriental philosophy of a neo-Buddhist kind, featured a number of sophisticated and exotic experiments, combining sexual perversions with attempts to revive dead people in cemeteries. The author of the report, appearing in the *Megapolis Express* tabloid, mentions the names of two participants, who are currently quite popular in leading Moscow intellectual circles: Alexander Dugin and Geydar Jemal. The St. Petersburg faction of the same circle, concentrated around musician Sergei Kuryokhin, shared the interest of his Moscow friends in the biography of Baron Ungern von Sternberg, a Buddhist turned White Army general, who was eventually executed by the Bolsheviks in Mongolia. In 1995, Kuryokhin organized a concert dedicated to his favorite philosopher, the occultist Alistair Crowley.

In 2002, the St. Petersburg film director Alexander So-

kurov received the top prize at the annual all-Russian film competition, for his movie "The Taurus," which depicts the death of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov-Lenin in the most naturalistic detail. The average viewer could feel nothing but nausea at the pathophysiological depiction of the paralyzed body, losing any ability to speak and to move. But the unnatural excitement of the movie's promoters in the top circles of the artistic elite, made clear that the director, heir to the worst existentialist practices of the late Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky, was favored "at the very top"—in the Kremlin.

The irrational anti-Communist propaganda that marches across the TV screen and pains millions of aged people, who spent decades of their lives in the implementation and protection of what they associated with the nation's mission, could have been inspired by some direct disciples of Andropov, or perhaps by the President's trainers in judo, or both. The effect, in this case, is more important than the cause. The lost paradigm, rejected with fanatical force, leaves a vacuum in people's heads, which is filled with garbage from the TV screen. The names of young World War II heroes are erased from Moscow street-signs and from the memorial plaque at the Tauride Garden in St. Petersburg. Ask a Russian or Ossetian child who his favorite fictional character is. The common answer will be: Harry Potter.

General Irrelevance

Western experts, regardless of their attitudes towards Putin and how he deals with terrorism, agree on one point: Russia's intelligence and law enforcement bodies, despite their recent experience in the Caucasus, were strikingly unprepared to deal with the terrorist capture of the largest school in Beslan. And the renowned *Izvestia* essayist Irina Petrovskaya, who monitors and compares coverage of the same events in various mass media, diagnosed the irrelevance of the state-run TV channels, which seemed unprepared for the gun-battle that unfolded on the third day of the terrorist assault. The author was especially irritated by the fact that neither Russian TV correspondents nor ordinary citizens were allowed to approach the scene of the massacre.

Actually, irrelevance could be diagnosed in practically every sphere—in the misled and excited conclusions of ordinary Muscovites, as well as in the minds of renowned specialists.

Public rallies held in Moscow and St. Petersburg on Sunday, Sept. 5, under the motto of condemnation of terrorism, produced a schizophrenic impression on the average spectator. Vasili Lebedev's 1941 anthem, "Stand Up, Great Land!" sounded in dissonance next to Bulat Okudzhava's ballads, designed for listening rather in a dissident's kitchen, than in a square. Anti-American speeches by veterans were followed by an appeal from movie director Alexei German to repent for Stalin's crime of deporting the Chechen people in 1943, which, allegedly, is the major reason for terrorism in the Caucasus. German's apologetic repentance, however, concluded

with his appeal to re-establish the death penalty.

Most of the remarks made by famous and career-making political analysts in the press and electronic media were as irrelevant as the staged expressions of public indignation. The authors contradicted not only one another, but themselves. A number of them could not pass up the opportunity to push their own political and corporate agendas, exploiting the massacre in Beslan for materialist private purposes. While Stanislav Belkovsky insisted that political technologists (excepting himself?) should depart from Russian politics, Gleb Pavlovsky insisted on the opposite. Irina Hakamada, co-chairperson of Rightist Alliance Party, started her speech with a pathetic, "We, the opposition—," while the leftist pravda.ru website accused Vladimir Putin of oppressing the Communist politicians in Krasnodar, and concluded that "Putin should step down."

One after another specialist in geopolitics pointed to the possibility of renewed fighting between North Ossetia and Ingushetia, referring to the fact that some of the organizers of the June 2004 raid on Ingushetian government institutions had been jailed in Beslan, as well as to the interest of the current Georgian government in a "strike in the back" against North Ossetia, because of the latter's alleged active support for Georgia's breakaway autonomous district, South Ossetia.

Meanwhile, a huge public rally in Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia, not only condemned the terrorists, but demanded the resignation of North Ossetian President Alexander Dzasokhov. This development was completely missed by the renowned experts.

Like the hero of Ivan Krylov's fable, the experts were focussed on the ants, but they failed to notice the elephant. Only one, retired general Leonid Ivashov, quoted in *Izvestia* (whose editor has now been forced to resign for publishing too graphic pictures of the suffering in Beslan), emphasized that the army of Caucasus terrorists is expanding every day, because of terribly high unemployment in the region and the humiliation of the local citizens, who witness the luxurious life of Russian oligarchs, as they themselves travel to Moscow to earn money in menial, off-the-books jobs for employers who include the owners of luxury dachas.

The striking poverty in the North Caucasus, the arbitrary rules of local criminals, and the impoverishment of the majority of the local population, including skilled workers, engineers and scientists, have been depicted in numerous eyewitness reports. Abdurashid Sayidov, an activist in the political campaign for Boris Yeltsin in 1990, desperately wrote from Makhachkala five years later: "While industry has collapsed, the directors of enterprises ride in luxurious Western autos; education is barely surviving; scientists and scholars spend their summers planting onions in local fields."

Magomed Tagayev's account of events in this same period, is similar: "The professions, which were regarded as honorable, have lost their value. The pride of the people of the highlands has become a laughingstock. The official Sufi

clergy behave like the former Party bureaucracy, and make friends with the same gangsters. No wonder the Fundamentalists are becoming so popular. . . .”

The Origin of the ‘Fundamentalists’

A short-sighted Boris Yeltsin, addressing Russian soldiers and security servicemen before the miserably unsuccessful anti-terrorist operation in Pervomayskoye, Dagestan, in January 1996, boasted that his “36 snipers” would be able to solve the problem. With personnel picked up from the once powerful KGB, mostly from the “parquet” Ninth Directorate, he was completely unaware of the fact that Pervomayskoye was the major center of printing and distribution of revolutionary Islamic literature.

The list of the so-called Wahhabite books, published and spread by the republic’s unemployed intelligentsia, is dominated not by the books of Mohammad al-Wahhab, but by the prison writings of Egyptian Islamic scholars, jailed by President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

For President Nasser, the Soviet Union was an influential international power in opposition to the British colonial forces and their legacy, and he dealt with the Soviet leader at that time, CPSU General Secretary Nikita Khrushchov. He hardly knew that the General Secretary was independent politically, but not ideologically. Khrushchov was very fond of Lord Bertrand Russell, whose views on religion were ostensibly similar to his own. Russell declared that religion must be replaced by science.

One of the Egyptian revolutionaries who had once supported Nasser, but was thrown in jail and ended his life on a gallows in 1966, also read the books of Bertrand Russell. This person, Sayed Qutb, viewed his writings much more critically than did the CPSU General Secretary. He had his own view of the meaning of religion—not only Islam—for mankind. He also knew that the socialist experiment, planted by Khrushchov’s U.S.S.R. in a number of African countries, was a complete failure.

The “reactionary” theologian believed that the moral degeneration of the West had resulted from the degeneration of the Christian clergy, an argument he supported with many examples. He was convinced that Islam, on the contrary, could solve the problems which the Christians failed to solve: in particular, the contradiction between faith and science, as well as between science and nature. His independent mind and broad self-education allowed him to find valuable and human features in all the monotheistic religions. At the same time, he sincerely believed in a future world ruled by the principles of Islam.

Qutb’s own political experience, as well of that of his co-thinkers, had driven him to conclude that the U.S.S.R. of his time was “a global colonial force, just like the United States,” and that “the era of the White Man has come to an end.” These particular conclusions, made in the terrible heat of a merciless post-colonial Egyptian jail, were later reproduced not only by



Former KGB Chairman and Soviet President Yuri Andropov, who oversaw the Soviet intelligence services, where Putin made his first career. The mixed legacy of Andropov’s KGB included interaction with British intelligence agencies, involved in destabilization of the North Caucasus.

sincere followers, but by the most sophisticated neocolonialist agencies, seeking to exploit revolutionary Islam as an instrument for their globalistic purposes. This exploitation was initiated with the first battles in Afghanistan—a war into which the U.S.S.R. was dragged by the same Politburo members, who later brought Mikhail Gorbachov into the top position.

Nikita Khrushchov never guessed that his supposed co-thinker, Lord Russell, was not quite an atheist. Russell’s biographies cite his high appreciation of Alice Bailey’s “Esoteric Christianity,” over which he screamed, “That is a good religion!” This view was probably shared by the publishers at the Lucis Trust’s affiliate in Moscow, which translated the complete works of Mrs. Bailey into Russian in 1998.

In that very year, the romantic Magomed Tagayev became focussed on the materialistic issue of Caspian Basin oil, as a guarantee for the political viability of a Caucasus Confederation. “The decisive events in the Caucasus will start in the next year,” he predicted, probably basing his optimism on news he received from his “young friend Shamil Basayev.”

The grapes of wrath were ripe. The machine of manipulation was ready, as well. In August 1999, paramilitary troops, headed by Shamil Basayev and his brother-in-arms from Jordan, known as Emir Hattab, invaded Dagestan from Maskhadov-ruled Chechnya. At first, Maskhadov did not approve of the intervention. But somebody higher up probably knew better than he did, how Maskhadov was to act.

The first war in Chechnya (1994-96), sparked by the debate over routes for the export of Caspian oil, made a great impression on many in the Islamic world, but not on the pres-



Warlord Shamil Basayev (left) launched a new phase of the North Caucasus conflict in August 1999, when he and the Jordanian guerrilla named Hattab, sent paramilitary troops to invade Dagestan from Chechnya. Anglophile “oligarch” Boris Berezovsky (right) held shadowy negotiations with the Chechen guerrillas at that time, and now works with Chechen separatist figure Akhmad Zakayev in London, where they both live in exile.

ent top authorities of Qutb’s organization, the Muslim Brotherhood. They woke up, for some reason, only after the second war, which started in 1999 from inside Chechnya. The top authority of the former revolutionary party, Yusef al-Qaradawi, now safely functioning as a major propaganda force in the radical Sunni (Salafite) community, safely resides in Qatar. On April 18, 2004, he declared the war in Chechnya “the best *jihād* in the world.” This happened shortly after the assassination of a Salafite disciple, former Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, in Qatar, and the counter-assassination of Chechnya’s President Akhmad Kadyrov.

The election of Kadyrov’s successor, Alu Alkhanov, was approved by the League of Arab States, but received a negative reaction from the United States government. In a U.S. election campaign, it has become customary for the major oligarchic candidates and their teams to demonstrate their toughness before the ghost of that former geopolitical enemy, the Soviet Union. The relevant task force is traditionally composed of a subversion facility, a human rights-speculating facility, and a slander facility.

The Price of the Challenge

In a revelation published in *Versiya* weekly on Sept. 6, occultist Alexander Dugin’s crony Geydar Jemal declared that “the combination played, in order to elevate Vladimir Putin to power,” started with a deal struck by oligarch Boris Berezovsky and warlord Shamil Basayev. Allegedly, Basayev was promised the post of President of an independent Chechnya, in exchange for ceasing the warfare in Dagestan.

The version could be easily bought by Western experts, especially in Germany and Italy—but not in the United States, Britain, and France, where the national intelligence services are aware that Putin had one really serious rival in his bid for

the post of President of the Russian Federation. Until early December 1999, Boris Yeltsin had not rejected the option of naming Alexander Voloshin, then-head of the Kremlin Staff, as his successor. French intelligence agents, who identified Alexander Voloshin with Shamil Basayev at a villa on the Côte d’Azur, allegedly belonging to arms trader Adnan Khashoggi, did not notice any Vladimir Putin there. At the same time, the personal connections between Voloshin and Boris Berezovsky were an open secret.

A month before Yeltsin’s decision to select Putin as his immediate successor, Berezovsky hastily arranged to run for the State Duma from the Caucasus republic of Kara-

chay-Circassia. Commentaries at that time explained Berezovsky’s behavior as based on fear of disgrace in the Kremlin, and a desire for parliamentary immunity. This fact could be forgotten or underestimated by Western experts, but not by such well-informed persons as Geydar Jemal.

The disgraced oligarch, after the flop of the prophecies of an oncoming collapse of Putin’s regime in Russia, which Berezovsky has regularly issued during the three years of his exile in Britain, intended to play a decisive role in resolving the stand-off in Beslan. His Chechen partner, Maskhadov’s former deputy and current self-appointed “personal representative,” the also London-exiled Akhmad Zakayev, hurried to say, shortly after the massacre, that Maskhadov had intended to visit the place and play a crucial role in reaching a “compromise” with the terrorists. The conditions of the compromise were obvious from a number of other reports: They suggested the transformation of the area of both Ossetias (North Ossetia in Russia and South Ossetia in Georgia) into a “zone of international peacekeeping operations.” Were portable brothels supposed to arrive there, as well as to Kosovo in the Balkans?

On Sept. 7, Berezovsky’s *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published a proposal for the partition of Chechnya into a southern “highland part” and a northern “plains part.” This option is quite familiar to the readers of another Berezovsky paper, *Kommersant*, where it was advertised in 1997—as a commercial proposition—by Baku-based Chechen “financier” Khozhakhmed Nukhayev, earlier known as a top Moscow gangster, but highly respected by Britain’s Lord Alistair McAlpine, the former top fundraiser for Margaret Thatcher’s Tory party, later turned crony of the late Sir Jimmy Goldsmith. In the first week of September, this name appeared in the Russian press in a criminal context, once again:



The British connection: Baroness Margaret Thatcher, during a meeting in London in 1998 with Chechen separatist leader Aslan Makhadov (left) and Chechen “financier” Khozhakhmed Nukhayeve, earlier known as a top Moscow gangster.

Moskovsky Komsomolets’ intelligence-linked author Alexander Hinstein ascribed the death of American journalist Paul Khlebnikov to one of the heroes of his last book—Mr. Nukhayeve.

Hinstein’s piece contained some other details, seemingly related more to the shadow economy, than to shadow politics. He mentioned links between Nukhayeve and top figures from Yukos Oil, who crossed paths at the Port of Novorossiysk, controlled by the former Moscow gangster until 1998 (this information earlier appeared in other mass media).

The 1997 project for a Caucasus Common Market, designed in London and involving Nukhayeve’s secretary Maciej “Mansur” Jachimczyk, was supposed to involve family members of Georgia’s then-President Eduard Shevardnadze and the ruling Aliyev family of Azerbaijan, along with Aslan Maskhadov, who visited London for talks on this matter. Bezovsky’s involvement in the project was documented in a number of detailed Russian and foreign reports at the time. A year later, however, the British side, too impressed with the decapitation of a group of British engineers kidnapped in Chechnya, pulled out of the project, while the Krasnodar Territory government cleaned Nukhayeve’s influence out of Novorossiysk.

Meanwhile, Yukos was supposed to play a serious political role in the 2003 Russian State Duma elections, purchasing one political party after another. The company’s advocates visited Moscow one after another, including not only the zealous anti-anti-Semite Congressman Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), but also Sir Henry Kissinger and the father of today’s President of the United States. Persons from the same circle, especially James Baker III, were also very interested in the situa-

tion in Georgia.

On Sept. 1, when Vladimir Putin had to cancel his visit to a school, because of the unprecedented terrorist assault on the one in Beslan, he was faced with a clear and open challenge—either a concession with far more serious consequences than Budyonnovsk in 1995 (when Basayev’s forces seized a hospital), with a Caucasus Common Military Zone in the place of the Caucasus Common Market, followed by extension of the same pattern into the Transdnestr area of Moldova, and western Ukraine; or, an operation with the forces available to him at the moment.

He viewed this assault as a challenge of war. The choice of the enemy to attack Ossetia was interpreted by him most seriously, and correctly: The Ossetians had historically been the most faithful allies of the Russians in the Caucasus. He could not look weak in the eyes of this small people, the best warriors of the Russian Empire and the best sportsmen of today (nine gold medals were won by ethnic Ossetians at the 2004 Olympic Games). And he could not betray them, since in the threatened scenario of Ossetian-Ingushi interethnic strife, they were supposed to be exterminated. That was impossible.

Caught in Disarray

Russian experts, producing a headache with their TV chattering immediately after the gun-battle in Beslan, missed one more “elephant”: the coincidence of the terrorist assault with two political events of global significance.

On Aug. 30, Putin hosted German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French President Jacques Chirac at his Summer residence near Sochi on the Black Sea. This summit had already been postponed once, and nearly failed again, due to

the kidnapping of two French journalists, held hostage and threatened with execution in Iraq.

And on Aug. 30, the Republican Convention would open in the United States, and approve the nominees for President and Vice President. The question of the Vice-Presidential nomination appeared not to be settled. In early August, *Izvestia* reported that the Republican Party might select Sen. John McCain (Ariz.) or the ex-Mayor of New York City, Rudolph Giuliani, instead of Dick Cheney.

When McCain, visiting Latvia on Aug. 21, called for the overthrow of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka, Putin commented in ironical tones, with Lukashenka standing beside him in Sochi: "There are many senators, but there is only one Belarus." Giuliani, on the other hand, was awaited in Moscow. Upon his arrival, Russian TV channels seemed to be complaining at the coincidence of the terrorist act with the arrival of this guest, who had just failed to be nominated. Quite possibly, it was wondered, the series of terrorist acts in Russia were supposed to, and did, influence the oligarchy's final choice of the Republican candidate for Veep.

Had the Kremlin's choice of playing a tactical game, associated with particular power figures in Washington, blown up in the most brutal terrorist act in post-Soviet Russian history? The only captured terrorist who remained alive in a chaotic and bloody rescue operation, appeared to be a personal body-guard of Shamil Basayev.

On Sept. 4, President Putin confused experts and observers with his address to the people, which referred not to the international community of Islamic terrorists, not to al-Qaeda, not to the "legacy of September 2001," but to evil intentions of outside forces, interested in the disintegration of Russia:

"In general, it has to be admitted that we have failed to grasp the complexities and dangers of the processes taking place in our own country and in the world. In any event, we were unable to react to them adequately. We showed weakness. And weak people get beaten up.

"Some people would like to tear off a juicy morsel from us, others are helping them do it. Helping, on the assumption that Russia, as a major nuclear power, is still a threat to them. And therefore this threat should be removed.

"Terrorism, of course, is only an instrument for achieving such goals."

These words, spectacularly deviating from the traditional mantra of anti-terrorist demagoguery, correspond to the feelings and thoughts of a majority of the Russians. These words would seem to serve as a mobilizing impetus for the intelligence and the military community. But they don't. The series of terrorist assaults has caught the Russian "enforcement" bureaucracy in the midst of a sluggish and murky reform, which is a riddle even for the top cadres. None of the deputy heads of Federal Security Service (FSB), in particular, is sure that he will not be replaced without any explanation. Simi-

larly, the military community is anxious about the decision to change the "Prussian model" of command, in which the General Staff has played a decisive role, into an "American," or some other model.

The top national figures of the Defense Ministry, the Internal Affairs Ministry, and the FSB were not visible at Beslan until after the tragedy. Lack of coordination among law enforcement bodies, in such a state of uncertainty, was quite natural.

Watch the Feet!

The number of police at Moscow metro stations on Sept. 4 was thrice greater than the day before. The celebration of Moscow's anniversary was scheduled, and though Mayor Yuri Luzhkov was forced to cancel most of the events, the police naturally expected some provocations such as clashes between Russian youngsters, calling themselves by the English-origin term *skinkhedy* ("skinheads"), and local market traders of Caucasus origin. This pretext for the alert coincided with another: Putin's return to Moscow from Sochi.

For six months, the Moscow Mayoralty has been in a nervous state. A number of investigations, initiated by top Kremlin agencies, pointed to a new political offensive from the Kremlin against the city leadership of Moscow. In such games, Russian youngsters with the foreign name of "skinheads" have repeatedly been used to undercut the authority of the popular Mayor.

The first effort to get rid of Luzhkov was staged in 1999 by a group of imagemakers, headed by postmodernist painter Marat Gelman, famous for baking a cake in the form of Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin's body in the Mausoleum. The effort failed, but Gelman was elevated to the high position of a deputy general director of the now state-owned ORT TV. The campaign against Luzhkov at that time could be explained by his political alliance with ex-Premier Yevgeni Primakov, one of that time's potential contenders for the Presidency. This time, no immediate political reasons were obvious. "It appears irrational," a Moscow official told me.

Nor was there an explanation for the massive political campaign against former St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir Yakovlev, during his second term in 2000-04. Like Luzhkov, he had the legal right to be elected once again, but instead was appointed Vice Premier, responsible for transport and infrastructure. Then, in this year's reorganization of the government, that post was completely eliminated, despite Putin's own repeated, public recognition of the significance of infrastructure.

The government's 2005 budget has reduced allocations for transport and infrastructure, though it was Putin who had initiated the construction of Primorsk Port, a necessary alternative to Novorossiysk.

At the same time, reform of the social system has eliminated, in particular, benefits for the families of people unjustly

oppressed in the past—including the World War II-era deportees from the Caucasus. (See “Russian Economy: A Leap in the Wrong Direction,” *EIR*, July 30.) That includes thousands of Ingushi and Chechen families, for whom those benefits had served as vital means of survival. (Also eliminated were benefits, previously provided to regular blood donors in Russia!) This fact was also completely ignored by the experts, speculating on the background of the terrorist act in Beslan.

During the Summer, Russian papers were still full of speculation: Which regional governor would be the next one forced out without explanation? Meanwhile, a former gangster was elected Mayor of Vladivostok.

Politicians, too, have tried without success to guess the moves and intentions of the Kremlin. Many loyal politicians wanted to support economist Sergei Glazyev in his Rodina (Homeland) project, which garnered 9% in the December 2003 State Duma election. A few months later, the loyalists were jerked back. This time, it seemed that Kremlin was going to split the Communist Party. Still, the delegates to the costly alternative party congress found themselves a political non-entity, leaving their sponsors in a fury.

With his jerky style of management and decision-making, which sometimes seems to depend on which side of the bed he gets up on, Putin has multiplied the number of his enemies in administrative, business, military, and intelligence circles. Meanwhile, court players have learned to manipulate Kremlin cadre decisions. It is very simple: Just spread a rumor that Mr. Ivanov or Mr. Petrov is dreaming of the post of President.

Before Saying ‘B’

In his Sept. 4 address to the Russian people, President Putin uttered some words, which were later interpreted in diametrically different ways. What does it mean to take measures to improve the country’s integrity, after the elimination of entitlements that made it possible for millions of people to travel from one region to another? What does it mean to say that the country’s “transitional economy” does not match “the conditions and the development of our society and political system”?

Speaking of the need to mobilize the nation in the face of danger, the President used the term “civil society,” most familiar to Russians from the lexicon of George Soros. No wonder the organizers of the public rallies mixed patriotic and human right slogans into a mish-mash, leaving an ordinary citizen more bewildered than mobilized.

Meanwhile, after saying “A,” the President is now obliged to say “B,” as otherwise his phrases, which did resonate in the hearts of many Russians, will just be left hanging in the air, along with other questions addressed to him by people who still believe in him and are still potentially ready to mobilize, but need a clear and encouraging common formula of mobilization. Slogans like “Walk together!” don’t work any longer. Thousands of people, who decided to donate their

blood to the victims of Beslan, are a more valuable force than the entire immense cadre machine of the United Russia political party.

Putin referred to the complexity of global problems, which the nation has failed to grasp. Undoubtedly, he was speaking on his own behalf. During a certain period, he would spend a lot of time in London, accompanied by his family. Later, his flirtation with Tony Blair came to an end. His apparent trust in George W. Bush, after the Beslan tragedy, is clearly undermined. These disappointments may either clear the pathway to a sovereign view of the world, or leave the leader of Russia in a helpless state of internal split.

In a number of cases, Putin has seemed to be possessed of some kind of an instinct, which allows him to sense danger without rational explanation. In other cases, an error of instinct, such as last Spring’s session with fanatical proponents of the Cato Institute’s economic deregulation agenda, leads him to massive and practically irreparable mistakes.

A national strategy cannot zig-zag from one sympathy to another. It cannot be based upon mere considerations of control or the ephemeral loyalty of the Duma majority. It would require self-liberation from the mixture of ideological garbage, left over from grandfather Andropov’s suitcase. It would require recognition of some basic definitions, some axiomatic assumptions, that make it possible to draw a picture of the future that inspires confidence and can be radiated to the whole nation, including such maybe decent, but tragically misled people as the prisoner in Makhachkala.

Tactical decisions are worthless. Advice from power rivals is useless. The “PR product” of the politologists is meaningless. Time, which is valuable, can’t be wasted any longer. The tragedy of Beslan is the last warning.

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