

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

Time

Moscow Bombings: A New Cycle of Chechen Retaliation?

By SIMON SHUSTER / MOSCOW *Simon Shuster*
March 30. 2010

As the death toll from the terrorist attacks on the Moscow subway system climbed to 39 on Tuesday, public outrage turned away from the suicide bombers and toward the Russian government. Judging by history, the Kremlin may find it hard to show restraint when accused of cowardice and impotence by its own people, and it will likely react as it often has in cases like this: by renewing its crackdown on insurgents in the North Caucasus, a predominantly Muslim hub for domestic terrorism. But in an interview with TIME, the leading lady of the Caucasus resistance in exile warned that this will only fuel the insurgency there, dragging Russia deeper into a decades-old conflict in its most rebellious region.

Rusudan Giorgberidze, vice chairwoman of the Free Caucasus resistance movement, said she has little doubt that the Russian government intends to "tighten the screws" on the North Caucasus after top security officials blamed Monday's attacks on Islamist rebels from the region. (So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.) But that move, she added, will likely only spur a cycle of retaliation. "In the face of a regime that rules by increasingly persistent clampdowns and raids, a person who tries to defend himself does not think of himself as an insurgent. Excuse me, but that is simply a person acting in self-defense," Giorgberidze said by phone from Copenhagen, where she lives in exile along with many former fighters from the North Caucasus regions of Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. ([See pictures of the suicide bombings in Moscow.](#))

Her organization is led by Isa Munayev, a Chechen military commander who fought against the Russians during the two Chechen wars of the 1990s, which killed tens of thousands of people. Since then, the group has chosen nonviolent resistance from abroad as a way of achieving its goal of winning independence for the Caucasus. But they still maintain contacts with the leaders of the violent insurgency at home, including the fighters loyal to the Chechen warlord Doku Umarov.

Giorgberidze's perspective as a former resistance fighter and a woman has special relevance in the wake of Monday's attacks, which were carried out by two female suicide bombers who were linked in the Russian media to the notorious "black widows" of the North Caucasus. These are the women who have carried out a string of suicide bombings in Russia in recent years, most notably in 2004, when they struck two passenger planes taking off from Moscow, killing 89 people. They also took part in the Moscow theater siege of 2002 that claimed more than 100 lives. Their motivation, investigators say, is often revenge for the deaths of male relatives at the hands of Russian security forces. Giorgberidze, who renounces terrorist attacks against civilians as unjustifiable, said the pain these women have suffered over the years nevertheless gives them reason to resist the Russian state through violence. ([See pictures of Russia celebrating Victory Day.](#))

"[Russian security forces] are violent with us, and we have the right to act out in violence against them, to defend ourselves and our relatives. So this idea, this word *terrorist*, when it is applied to people fighting in the Caucasus, is an artificial word that was made up to discredit the resistance," she said. After describing how she took up arms in 1993 against Russian-backed forces in Abkhazia, a disputed region of Georgia, she added, "We lose our men and we choose to fight back. Does that make us terrorists?"

In the eyes of the Russian state and the international community, it certainly does if the attacks are of the kind Moscow experienced on Monday. Yet the vendettas that Giorgberidze described are widespread throughout the Caucasus, parts of which have been ruled from Moscow in one way or another for two centuries. That history of subjugation, along with the desperate poverty afflicting most of the region, helps explain the apparent ease with which insurgents have been able to recruit new fighters, both men and women. As a result, violent incidents in the North Caucasus jumped from 281 in the summer of 2008 to 470 a year later, according to the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. ([See "The Man Behind Russia's Deadly Train Blast."](#))

Perhaps most frustrating for Russia's leaders is that the conflict appeared to have ended last year in Chechnya. In April 2009, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev even abolished the "special security regime" in Chechnya, a move widely seen as marking an end to the prolonged Chechen conflict. Created by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin at the start of Russia's second invasion of Chechnya, in 1999, the special regime imposed curfews, roadblocks, spot searches and arbitrary detentions on local residents for 10 years in the name of security. After Medvedev's announcement, the state also withdrew some 20,000 federal troops and police officers from Chechnya.

However, peace didn't come to the entire North Caucasus - many insurgents simply moved over into the neighboring regions of Dagestan and Ingushetia, where terrorism attacks and assassinations continued. Then, last August, Umarov pledged to take the war to the Russian heartland, and in December he followed up on the threat, taking responsibility for a gruesome attack on a train from Moscow to St. Petersburg, which killed 27 well-to-do Russians, including three mid-level government officials. Yet the Kremlin still stuck to its normalization plan for the North Caucasus. For instance, Medvedev in January appointed a business-savvy outsider, Alexander Khloponin, to revitalize the region's economy rather than clamp down further on its insurgents.

The attacks on the Moscow subway system have made this policy look naive, and the pressure to change course is mounting. Even the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, a Kremlin-loyalist newspaper, ran an op-ed on Tuesday lamenting the government's inaction. "The shrapnel of rage is flying in every direction, not only against the killers - indeed, less against them - but against the leadership, which is not providing security," the paper said. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, head of the nationalist Liberal Democrats, agreed in televised remarks on Monday, saying that Russia must again "take under total control any region where the preparation of suicide bombers is possible." On Monday evening, the mourners who gathered for a vigil on Lubyanka Square, home of the FSB secret police and the site of one of Monday's bombings, also demanded action. "It's become clear that the people in power can't protect us, that no one is protecting us," Lyudmila Gvozdikova told *TIME* after tearfully laying carnations at a makeshift memorial.

Now even Medvedev, the country's leading liberal, has begun to take the tone of a belligerent, tweeting on Monday, "We have to continue fighting the terrorists without pleasantries, liquidating them without emotion or hesitation." This suggests that a new security regime could be on its way to the North Caucasus. Such a response could mark another turning point in the long-running conflict - and runs the risk of renewing a quagmire the government thought it was finally starting to escape.