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The Moscow Times

Moscow's new Afghanistan

Edward Lozansky

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Chechen terrorists have claimed responsibility for blowing up the Sayano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric power plant. A group calling itself Riyadhus Salihiyn has announced its plans for stepping up “economic warfare” against Russia with the primary targets being oil and gas pipelines, power plants and major industrial enterprises. While these allegations are considered “idiotic” by Russian officials, the threat of terrorism is real. The recent Nazran attack, as well as the now almost daily terrorist attacks in Ingushetia, Dagestan and in what seemed like a pacified Chechnya, suggest that the North Caucasus situation is rapidly reaching a boiling point. The “Afghanization” of the Caucasus has both internal and external causes. Unemployment, corruption, blood feuds, criminal standoffs and struggles between various local clans provide a fertile breeding ground for terrorism. The other contributing factor is the financing and supply of weapons from abroad. The terrorists have been backed by rogue foreign groups and governments, but to suggest, as Ingush President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov has done, that the United States, Britain and Israel gain from the instability in the region is irresponsible, to say the least. Making these kinds of statements does little to improve Russia’s relations with the West. All the countries on Yevkurov’s enemy list have experienced similar terrorist attacks at home, while in Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. troops face a near daily terrorist threat under more or less the same scenario as in Russia. For this reason, Russia and the West have no alternative but to pool their resources to fight this common global menace. A joint state-level U.S.-Russia group has been established to battle terrorism, but a single bilateral group alone is not enough to resolve the problem of global terrorism. Thus, today’s security agenda should be on a global scale and bring together the United States, Europe, Russia, other former Soviet republics, China, India and other countries. In this context, there must be closer cooperation between NATO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Since NATO has the most experience, it ought to take the lead in this initiative against global terrorism. Another reason NATO needs to be more active centers on the issue of self-preservation. Having achieved undeniable success in ending military confrontation between Western countries and saving Europe from the threat of communism, NATO has lost the central raison d’etre. NATO’s obsessive enlargement without a new, clearly defined mission is like

a real estate bubble. Given the growing threat of global terrorism, this bubble must not be allowed to burst. Instead, NATO could become a key element of the new international security structure, provided it plays its foreign policy cards right. Despite U.S. President Barack Obama's more cooperative approach to U.S.-Russian relations, there are some policymakers and advisers in Washington who still adhere to the strategic goal of further expanding NATO and weakening Russia's position in its traditional spheres of influence. But the fact that venerable foreign policy veterans such as former U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and others are increasingly in favor of integrating Russia into the European-Atlantic security structure speaks volumes about the potential for such a system. It is necessary to involve Russia in closer cooperation in creating a global security network. If these efforts bear fruit, the next step should be bringing major Asian powers into this network as well. The latest leaks from Washington suggest that one large obstacle in U.S.-Russian relations may be removed — the planned missile defense system in Central Europe. Now Prime Minister Vladimir Putin should respond in kind. When he delivers a major speech in Poland on Sept. 1, Putin should emphasize Russia's readiness to form an alliance with the West to defeat the common enemy of terrorism.