

THE NORTH CAUCASIAN PRESS ABOUT TERRORISM

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All extremist organizations rely on aggressive and deliberate scare tactics to achieve their aims. They seek not so much to procure propaganda effects or unlikely concessions from the authorities as to have a social and psychological impact on society as a whole. They concentrate on discrediting the power-wielding structures to undermine public confidence in them, achieve greater

sociopolitical disintegration, and widen the gaps within society. Their main aims, however, are to teach people to fear them, plant feelings of depression in their minds, and deprive people of confidence in their own future.

The attempts to use the media to achieve these aims naturally run counter to the state and the law enforcement structures' efforts to use the media to prevent terrorist acts and their tragic results. The dichotomous trends intertwine to form one single information core and actualize the role of the press and the Internet publications, making them markers of information-psychological warfare in people's minds.

The Northern Caucasus, which has become a zone of terrorist risks, found itself in the center of the information warfare waged by the terrorists and the federal and local power bodies. The press of the North Caucasian republics, territories, and regions can potentially influence the local population in view of the high prestige the press traditionally enjoys there.

I have analyzed 29 printed and Internet publications (the latter normally are not regarded as part of the media) of Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, the Stavropol Territory, and Rostov-on-Don. The terrorists are using the Chechen sites Kavkaz.org., Chechen.press, Kvestnik.org., as well as the newspapers *Chechenskaia pravda* and *Chechenskoe obshchestvo*. Even though their information resources are found abroad, according to my sociological poll, Russian society takes them for locally-based media well-informed about the current developments in the Caucasus. They use a lot of military terms, such as frontline, military operation, checkpoint, sharpshooters, bombardments, etc. The language of the above-mentioned Internet publications is highly expressive and tends to present assessments rather than facts. The texts abound in such words as surprise attacks, cold-blooded murder, bloody war, firmness and courage, pitiless and cruel battle, and verbs such as destroyed, annihilated, ruined, etc.

This is done to create an atmosphere of hysterics and revenge and to present Russia as a "sinister and blood-thirsty monster." Those who run the sites deliberately concentrate on the war to disseminate aggressive and militarist sentiments among the local people and present Russia as the main enemy and a source of terrorist threat in the Caucasus. This makes the rhetoric question of journalist M. Taramov of the Kvestnik.org site very logical: "Why should the Chechens, who enjoy the moral support of the absolute majority of countries and peoples around the world and who are waging a just war against the colossal Russian Barbarian, limit their means and instruments while defending themselves?" Absolutization of the national-liberation struggle suggests that terror is one of the approved methods. Language, as an indicator of sociocultural tension, plays an important role in the process.

Syntax is used to raise the tension by using several consecutive interrogative sentences; the authors are aware of the fact that the human mind (or subconscious) operates in frame structures to which all information is adjusted.

An analysis of the Chechen sites reveals that the terrorists think in militaristic terms, that practical considerations rub shoulders with emotional and mystical imagery; their texts are dominated by motives of vengeance abounding in dichotomous oppositions, strong mythological reflexivity of speech, and dual standards in their social and linguistic practice. The 2003-2004 publications demonstrate a trend toward more frequent use of religious terms of the Wahhabi and Qutb types. This probably testifies that the Chechen separatists and terrorists have embraced a different ideological paradigm, which is indirectly confirmed by much larger circulation of such opposition Chechen newspapers as *Put islama* (The Way of Islam) and *Khalif* (Caliph).

An analysis of the local press has revealed several variants of information tactics. One of them can be conventionally called "still waters." These publications cite facts and present official approaches; sometimes they offer concise descriptions and versions of terrorist acts; they carry no analytical material and organize information in short notes. The following newspapers prefer this tactic: *Kabardino-Balkarskaia pravda* (Nalchik), *Den respubliki* (Cherkessk), *Novoe delo* (Makhachkala), and *Molot* (Krasnodar). They stick to official and businesslike phraseology.

There are local publications that offer legal assessments of terrorist acts, which they treat as crimes. They pay much attention to the trials of terrorists, commentaries offered by officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Federal Security Service, and details of counterterrorist operations. Their texts abound in legal terms and juridical assessments of the described events. These newspapers obviously condemn terrorism and offer their moral assessments of terrorist acts. At the same time, the newspapers point out that the victims of terror should not be forgotten; they invite psychologists to give practical advice on how to overcome the fear of terrorism. The following newspapers have opted for this tactic: *Daghestanskaia pravda* (Makhachkala); *Priazovskiy krai* (Rostov-on-Don), *Delovoi Kizliar*, and *Vecherniy Stavropol*.

There are newspapers that work for religious (Muslim) readers. They lay the blame for terrorism on the ideology of Wahhabism, which they describe as the main threat to public safety. They are *Serdalo* (Ingushetia), *Assalam*, and *Islamskiy vestnik* (Daghestan). The titles of their articles are eloquent enough: “Raby sobstvennogo umozakliuchenia” (Slaves of Their Own Ideas); “Wahhabizm—ideologiya, nesushchaia zlo” (Wahhabism—Ideology of Evil) (M. Movliev and Z. Isaev, *Serdalo*), “Ot Wahhabizma do terrorizma odin shag” (There is One Step from Wahhabism to Terrorism) (Kh. Gurazhiev), and “Islam protiv ekstremizma” (Islam Against Extremism) (M. Vyshegurov, *Severniy Kavkaz*). Significantly, these and similar publications pay much attention to religious tolerance.

There is another group which strives to show terrorism as a complex and multilayered system. They give much space to serious analysis. For example, the article “Rekviem ideynomu terrorizmu” (Requiem for Ideological Terrorism), which appeared in *Daghestanskaia pravda* on 23 January, 2004, analyzed how contemporary terrorism developed into one of most effective foreign policy instruments used by the U.S. and transnational financial-economic groups. Its author Guria Murklinskaia wrote that the collapse of the bi-polar world resulted in complete deideologization, marginalization, and commercialization of terrorism. To confirm her view she cites al-Qa‘eda, a semi-virtual organization set up by the American special services, as an example. She is convinced that it succeeds mainly because it has chosen the role of a worldwide *agent provocateur*. The author has pointed out that Osama bin Laden hits the TV screens every time a successful terrorist act is carried out anywhere in the world if the United States needs to justify its preemptive strikes. By demonizing al-Qa‘eda and by giving it money, the United States is successfully exploiting another American provocative myth—Huntington’s clash of civilizations theory—to strengthen its worldwide position by setting up its military bases in all corners of the world.

The above suggests that the military of the United States and NATO, while exploiting terrorist provocateurs and the slogan of protecting Western civilization, have not only assumed the role of a worldwide policeman, but are also pursuing concrete economic aims by trying to establish American control over the major oil-rich regions. She believes that the current stage of America’s counterterrorist efforts can be compared with America’s active anti-drug struggle of the 1990s. It turned out, however, that U.S. bogus organizations and America’s military presence in various parts of the world allowed it to control the major drug producing centers and the drug trafficking routes. The author is obviously concerned that America’s permanent counterterrorist struggle may produce similar results.

This article is very typical of the media which reflect the political interests of strong state power and are resolved to ideologically mobilize the population in the context of an anti-American patriotic wave. In other words, terrorism is presented as an alien force resolved to undermine Russia’s national security and as an instrument used to brainwash the world community on a global scale. At the same time, the problem is being discussed outside the context of the Northern Caucasus and Russia’s counterterrorist struggle. The subject seems to be divided into international and domestic aspects, the latter being removed from the common denominator, by which Guria Murklinskaia means commercial terrorism, which came to replace its ideological variant. The author, however, does not regard this delimitation as fundamentally important. On the whole, its anti-American message notwithstanding, the

article is an attempt to analyze the evolution of terrorism, which, however, decreases the readers' negative assessment of terror.

B. Prokhorov's article entitled "Rossia sidit na Chechne, kak iog na gvozdiakh" (Russia is Sitting on Chechnia Like a Yogi on Nails), which appeared in February 2004 in No. 6 of *Severniy Kavkaz*, produces a different impression. The very title is paradoxical enough: it activates the chaotic "Dionysian" impulses of an information impact, while the text itself is brimming with negative emotions. It was the February 2004 blast in the Moscow underground that prompted the article, yet it says nothing about the tragedy. In the same way the author expressed neither his compassion nor condolences to the victims; and he said nothing about the need to close ranks in the face of the catastrophe. He opposed Moscow and the rest of the country, which sounded blasphemous. Here is a typical excerpt: "The grief is made even worse because of what I call 'Moscow nastiness': 'blacks' will be stopped and searched much more often; the 'people of Caucasian origin' will have to pay many more bribes. Moscow is still Moscow: it strives to protect itself without giving a damn about the rest of Russia. Meanwhile, people in Stavropol, Volgodonsk, Buinaksk, Vladikavkaz, and Daghestan think differently. They are compassionate, yet it is not them who appear on TV screens as the 'voice of the people.' This and other political talk shows are dominated by those eggheads who have already brought the country to civil war. Each blast produces a volcanic eruption of idle talk which sounds like ritual scoffing at another mountain of dead bodies." The author could hardly conceal his irritation when he wrote that two months later the national press seemed to lose interest in the blasts in the suburban trains in the Northern Caucasus in Kislovodsk. B. Prokhorov seems to be dissatisfied with the state structures: "Unprecedented measures create nervousness, but no security. Everybody knows this. The authorities have demonstrated their impotence and uselessness." He is convinced that the law enforcement bodies, army, and entire power system are corrupt, incompetent, and impotent in the face of terrorists. It seems that the author would prefer to use force and forget about democracy. He sees Chechnia as a General Governorship ruled by the military with the widest possible administrative powers. This requires a strong state power which Russia lacks, says he.

The author is obviously a xenophobe; he refuses to tolerate the Chechens. He writes: "Whether we like it or not, we are all different. There are Ingushes and Ossets, Adighes and Karachai, Cherkesses and Avars, Lezghians and Kumyks—all of them are 'people of Caucasian origin,' they are all temperamental southerners. Why did the Chechens flood the Caucasus in blood? Was it predetermined or not? The time has come to ponder on this and dot the i's." The second question is obviously a rhetorical one: he knows the answer. He sees the Chechens as ferocious and blood-thirsty enemies with folk customs that he describes as "brutal and savage, inherited from old times and approved by all." Some of his deliberations sound strange in the 21st century: he has revived the colonialist ideology which juxtaposed the "values of civilization" to "primitive barbarians." He goes on to remind the reader that under Soviet power, the city of Grozny was a large industrial center, a cozy and hospitable city with marvelous theaters and libraries, a magnificent museum, higher educational establishments, and research institutes. Some 10 km away from it, in a small village, men could dispose of their sisters and daughters as they saw fit; blood feud was an everyday norm and a feat; crime was approved, while there were slaves in nearly every household. Neighbors were well aware of this—some even envied the slave-owners. B. Prokhorov concludes: "Those people were living in the Middle Ages and nobody could do anything about it." He goes on to say, however, as if following the best traditions of Stalinism, that "Stalin's repressions brought the people to the summit of civilization, while 'independence' pushed them back down to the 'folk traditions,' which turn people into wild beasts." This and similar publications serve no useful purpose—they intensify ethnic tension and terrorist intentions.

This is provocation: the author is pushing readers toward extremist action; his psychological pressure is designed to affect the youth, the most aggressive and credulous population group. "We have no tears left to weep over the victims; we have spent our human fury. We have scads of patience,

though. The dream of our American 'friends' has come true—there is no longer a 'new community of people—the Soviet people.' Let's congratulate ourselves! After surviving 70 years of totalitarianism, we have consumed enough freedom to make us want to throw up! At long last 'we have become aware of our country.' What are your feelings? We finally feel that we are not 'mere cogs in an inhuman machine,' but a herd with rights. Yes, we are a herd, let me say this!" These inspiring words will ignite many "hotheads" wishing to prove that they are not a herd. They will not resort to peaceful means—they will unleash terror against "people of Caucasian origin." Deliberately aggressive and vulgarized publications play into the hands of those political forces that have chosen terrorism as their instrument. This and similar publications show that the terrorists have managed to influence the public through the media.

All regional analytical publications resolved to support the state in its antiterrorist struggle concentrate on international aspects.

In his article "Uroki Dubrovki" (The Lessons of Dubrovka), which appeared in the newspaper *Stavropolskie gubernskie novosti* on 22 November, 2002, Evgeni Satanovskiy drew parallels of strategic importance between the situation in Russia and that in the Middle East. He used Israel's experience to convincingly demonstrate that the withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnia would not stem terrorist attacks—it would intensify them. To support his prediction, he argues that Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip raised another wave of terror in Israel; for ten years now the Palestine Authority and its Administration have been unable to reach stability in order to control its own territories. This is true of Chechnia as well: in the three years that followed the Khasaviurt agreement, it proved unable to rule itself. Evgeni Satanovskiy offers the following conclusion: "Wider Palestinian independence created more civilian deaths. People died at the hands of terrorists. This is a well-known fact: there are people able to create a state and there are others who can fight for independence by shedding blood—their own and other people's. Having discovered that they cannot knock together a state—they are unable to do this—they go on with what they can do, fighting." A casual observer may take these for xenophobic and chauvinistic views, yet a more careful analysis reveals that the author did not mean nations (Palestinians or Chechens). He was referring to the adepts of terrorism and confirmed extremists. Terrorism, writes he, is not a product of ethnic features or religious convictions of the entities of terrorist activities—it is born from the political ambitions of terrorist leaders resolved to extend the limits of their power by playing on people's ethnic sentiments and religious feelings.

Evgeni Satanovskiy's firm support of the state is not cheap patriotic talk designed to lure the masses. His ideas are purely rational and rooted in common sense and Russia's recent experience. He is out to demonstrate that terrorist anarchy is much worse than military administration: "No matter how displeased we are with our own state power, we should never forget that the war against terror can be either won together with the state or lost together with the future. Nobody has any future in a state of triumphant terrorism." These are not his personal views—this is a reflection of what politically aware people concerned with public security think about the state and its efforts to make the country a more secure place. At the same time, the author failed to provide the exhaustive analysis of the Nord-Ost crisis a reader would expect to find in the article; he obviously never intended to sort out the domestic causes of the Dubrovka terrorist act.

In her article "Vysshiaia mera demokrati" (The Highest Degree of Democracy), which appeared in the *Stavropolskaia pravda* newspaper on 12 February, 2004, V. Lezvina examined the problem of state vs. terror and the role the public can play in fighting terrorism. She insists that it is state power and the law enforcement bodies which should stem terror. As a firm supporter of a strong state, she accuses the power structures of being excessively biased toward democratic principles and Western human rights organizations. Ms. Lezvina is convinced that the right to live in safety is one of the basic human rights, yet she does not suggest that the law enforcement bodies should receive more power—

they have enough of it. She writes about the impotence and irresponsibility of the bureaucrats, especially those at the top of the pyramid of power who prefer to look for scapegoats at the grass-root level. The author is skeptical, if not ironic, about the idea that the problem of terror can be resolved by democratic means—in fact, she does not believe in democracy, which, she says, breeds irresponsibility. Ms. Lezvina is very much concerned about the possibility of the “highest degree of democracy” Russia is striving to achieve turning into a death sentence for the people of the Stavropol Territory and other areas in the region if it is not placed on the firm foundation of an effective law enforcement system based on the strictest responsibility of all its levels from the grassroots up to the top crust. This metaphor is rooted in the sentiments and hopes of hundreds of thousands of those who have found themselves in the zone of terror.

An overall view of the Caucasian media which cover the subject of terrorism reveals six common features: they are convinced that the impotent and irresponsible power-wielding and civilian structures have failed to protect the local people against terror; they consider the foreign political aspects of the problem; no one cares enough to analyze the domestic sources and causes of terrorism; they believe that the state should formulate and carry out effective counterterrorist policies; the media have identified the tendency of opposing the center in an indirect way—it is most obvious in the Stavropol and Rostov press and is much less obvious in the Dagestani, Osset, Ingush, and Kabardino-Balkarian press; the media are skeptical about a possible democratic settlement of conflicts which breed terrorist acts.
