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**THE CAUCASUS EMIRATE RETURNS TO THE ‘FAR ENEMY’?: THE ‘NEVSKII**

## EXPRESS' BOMBING

The past two years have seen a gradual and substantial escalation in the capacity and audacity of the Caucasus Emirate's mujahedin. The CE has focused on carrying out jihadi terrorist operations across the North Caucasus against both the local 'apostate' regimes and the occupying forces of the Russian 'infidel' – that is, the 'near enemy' – rather than striking against the 'far enemy' in Moscow and other Russian regions. After over a five-year hiatus in attacking civilians, CE amir Doka Abu Usman Umarov declared in April that the mujahedin would no longer be avoiding civilian casualties. He justified attacking Russian civilians on the basis of their support for Moscow's counter-insurgency efforts and policies towards Islam, and stated that the CE would bring attacks to all of Russian territory.<sup>1</sup> On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, the CE claimed responsibility for the November 27<sup>th</sup> bombing of the high-speed luxury Moscow - St. Petersburg train 'Nevskii Express.' If the CE's claim is to be believed – and the CE does appear to be the perpetrator – then this marks the promised return of jihadi attacks on the 'far enemy,' specifically Russia's Moscow and St. Petersburg elites and infrastructure across the country. This shift could have implications for international security as well.

### The Attack

The November 27<sup>th</sup> attack on the Nevskii Express claimed the lives of 27, wounded nearly one hundred, and rendered a handful of passengers missing, as of writing. The Nevskii Express is an expensive, high-speed, luxury passenger train that shuttles large numbers of federal and St. Petersburg officials and business people back and forth between Moscow and St. Petersburg, especially around weekends. Among the casualties were six foreigners and two important Russian officials: head of the recently created state roads company, and former federal senator, St. Petersburg government official, and legislative assemblyman, Sergei Tarasov, and head of the Federal Reserves Agency, Boris Yevstratkov. For the first time, the CE has succeeded in killing federal officials.

The initial explosion detonated 5.0-5.7 kilograms of TNT under the train as it passed over at 197 kilometers per hour during peak travel time on a Friday night. Preliminary testing of explosive traces discovered that the charge was an improvised device combining plastic explosive, TNT, and ammonium nitrate wrapped in plastic and buried underneath a rail. A second device, planted near a telegraph pole was detonated by a mobile telephone, but malfunctioned as investigators arrived at the scene on Saturday afternoon. Although no one was seriously hurt, the second explosion was clearly intended for the official investigators. In fact, head of the General Prosecutor's Investigations Commission, Alexander Bastrykhin, received a mild concussion and was hospitalized along with several other officials in St. Petersburg.<sup>2</sup> According to the head of

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon M. Hahn, "Sheik Said Abu Saad Buryatskii: New Basaev of the Caucasus," *IIPER*, No. 1, November 3, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Viktor Myasnikov, "Rel'sovyi dzhikhad," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 4 December 2009, [http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2009-12-04/1\\_jihad.html?mthree=1](http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2009-12-04/1_jihad.html?mthree=1); and Roland Oliphant, "Blood on the Tracks - The

the St. Petersburg department of Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry, Leonid Belyaev, the terrorists' plan was to blow up two trains. The Nevskii Express and the ER-200 train bound from St. Petersburg were scheduled to pass each other at the bombsite.<sup>3</sup> This and the isolated location of the bombing reveal the attack's intent to maximize civilian casualties.

### **The CE and the Perpetrators**

The CE is the only non-state extremist organization in Russia that can claim a demonstrable record of possessing the capacity and willingness to carry out mass, high profile terrorist attacks. No Russian nationalist or neo-fascist organization has ever demonstrated such a capacity or carried out anything besides attacks on individuals, with one exception. A group of unaffiliated nationalists was suspected in the bombing of the Moscow-Grozny train in June 2005. The neo-fascist group, 'Combat 18', apparently posted a claim of responsibility for the new attack on the Nevskii Express on a neo-fascist website. The group has not responded to the Russian authorities' and media's rejection of its possible involvement. Nationalist websites reported previously that Combat 18 had claimed responsibility for planting a hoax explosive in the St. Petersburg metro on November 14.<sup>4</sup> This hardly reaches a level close to the Nevskii Express attack, and it is unlikely those planning the attack would want to draw the authorities' attention in the days prior to a major strike. The extremist neo-fascist group 'Peresvet' has declared war on the Russian authorities and claimed responsibility for several minor attacks; claims that have not been substantiated or even seriously discussed by any other source. Peresvet's declarations and claims of responsibility, however, have been sent to and posted on the CE site *Kavkaz tsentr* with links to the originals.<sup>5</sup> Although the involvement of 'Peresvet' and/or other neo-fascist groups cannot be written off outright, as shown below, almost all indications point to the CE's mujahedin as the perpetrators.

It is very likely that the CE is the publisher of the Nevskii Express attack, but the specific author remains a mystery. On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, five days after the attack, the CE issued a statement claiming responsibility for the bombing. It claimed the attack had been organized and carried out by a "special diversionary group" "within the framework of a number of terrorist attacks planned and successfully carried out on a series of strategically important objects of Russia, in execution of an order of amir of the Caucasus Emirate Doka Umarov."<sup>6</sup> The CE and amir Umarov announced back in April that not only would this year be "a year of offensive all across the territory of Russia," but they would also be attacking Russia's economic infrastructure. The

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Professionalism of the Attack Suggests Islamist Terrorists from the North Caucasus Have Struck Deep Inside Russia Once Again," *Russia Profile*, 30 November 2009, [www.russiaprofile.ru](http://www.russiaprofile.ru).

<sup>3</sup> Myasnikov, "Rel'sovyi dzhikhad"; and Nabi Abdullaev, "Chechen Rebels Claim Nevsky Express Bombing," *Moscow Times*, 3 December 2009, [www.themoscowtimes.com](http://www.themoscowtimes.com). The Express, however, was delayed slightly and arrived at the detonation point late.

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Borisov, "ROAR: "Breach of the antiterrorist defense," *Russia Today*, 30 November 2009, [www.russiatoday.com](http://www.russiatoday.com).

<sup>5</sup> "Russkie natsionalisty ob'yavili voinu Rossiiskoi Federatsii," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 13 August 2009, 10:06, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/08/13/67340.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/08/13/67340.shtml); and "Boevaya gruppa NC 'Peresvet' vzyala na sebya otvetstvennost' za unichtozhenie SKP v Kuntsevo," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 27 August 2009, 18:22, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/08/27/67655.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/08/27/67655.shtml).

<sup>6</sup> "Kavkazskie modzhakhedy zayavili ob uspekhnoi diversionnoi operatsii protiv 'Nevskogo ekspressa'," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 2 декабря 2009, 00:01, [www.kavkazcenter.net/russ/content/2009/12/02/69466.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.net/russ/content/2009/12/02/69466.shtml)

December 2<sup>nd</sup> claim of responsibility for the Nevskii Express attack indeed made this point: “As has been warned several times previously, the command of the Caucasus Emirate made the decision at the spring Majlisul Shura to bring the diversionary war to Russian territory along with the active execution of attacks on infrastructure of the occupiers on Caucasus territory.”<sup>7</sup> In September, the CE’s Ingushetian mujahedin called on all CE mujahedin to target economic objects and infrastructure: “We call on all our brother mujahedin across the Caucasus Emirate **and outside its borders** (my emphasis) to accentuate their focus specifically on economic sabotage attacks, since their infrastructure objects are not protected.”<sup>8</sup> This attack fulfilled both these stipulations. It was an attack both deep in the Russian heartland at a location between its central and northern capitals and one against an important element of the Russian elite’s transport infrastructure. However, this was far more than an attack on infrastructure.

A similar attack occurred on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007, when the same Nevskii Express was bombed not far from the spot of the recent attack. This bombing was less destructive, injuring a total of 30 passengers. Shortly after, a ChRI field commander, Said-Yemin Dadayev, who also claimed to be the deputy amir of the late Chechen terrorist Shamil Basaev’s suicide-bombing brigade ‘Riyadus Salikhin’, phoned Aslan Ayubov of Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe’s Russian-language service ‘Radio Svoboda’ to take responsibility for the attack. However, at that time this unit was thought to be defunct, given Basaev’s demise in July 2006.<sup>9</sup> Since RS is and was a suicide-bombing martyrs’ brigade and because the Nevskii Express attack was not a suicide bombing, there is some reason to doubt this claim. The dubious nature of the RS claim of responsibility for the 2007 attack and the fact that RS has not claimed responsibility for the 2009 Nevskii Express bombing suggests it was not involved in either incident.

In 2007, Russian authorities charged ethnic Russian mujahed and former Russian military man Pavel Kosolapov with organizing the Nevskii Express attack on CE amir Umarov’s orders. Kosolapov was born in Volgograd on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1980, and studied at the Engineering School of the Krasnodar High Military High Command and the Rocket Forces’ Rostov Military Institute. Charged with stealing from a fellow cadet, Kosolapov was discharged in 1998. He returned home where he met a group of Chechens with whom he absconded to Chechnya in 1999. He then converted to Islam and joined the militants. Kosolapov trained with the notorious Shamil Basaev and Arab amirs Abu Umar and Abu Dzeit, and specialized in attacks on transportation targets. He is reported in turn to have trained two Kazakhs, Yerkingali Taizhanov and Azamat Tolubei, to carry out transportation attacks. Reportedly, Kosolapov, another ethnic Russian Maksim ‘Muslim’ Panar’in and the Kazakhs proceeded to carry out a series of attacks approved by Basaev. In addition to the 2007 Nevskii Express bombing, Kosolapov and company have been charged or suspected by Russian law enforcement with involvement in several 2003 bus stop explosions in Krasnodar and carrying out multiple bomb blasts in 2004, including

<sup>7</sup> “Kavkazskie modzhakhedy zayavili ob uspezhnoi diversionnoi operatsii protiv ‘Nevskogo ekspressa’”.

<sup>8</sup> Umarov’s April post-shura statement and “Novostnoi press-reliz,” *Hunafa.com*, 21 September 2009, 11:11, <http://hunafa.com/?p=2081#>; and “Vilaiyat G’alg’aiche: Press-reliz boevykh operatsii, 22 September 2009, 09:57, <http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/09/22/68144.shtml>

<sup>9</sup> “Self-Described Chechen Rebel Says Group Bombed Train,” *RFERL*, 15 August 2007; Musa Muradov, Sergei Mashkin, and Aleksei Sokozin, “Terroristy vyshli na ‘Svobodu’,” *Kommersant*, 16 August 2007, [www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=795761](http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=795761); and “V Chechne pogibli dvoikh voennosluzhashchikh,” *Radio Svoboda*, 6 February 2007, 13:39, [www.svobodanews.ru/content/news/376337.html](http://www.svobodanews.ru/content/news/376337.html).

attacks on the Mineralnye Vody electric train in Kislovodsk that killed 47, a market in Samara, bus stops in Voronezh, and near Moscow's 'Rizhskaya' metro station.<sup>10</sup>

*Vedomosti* reports that Russian MVD Rashid Nurgaliev was referring to Kosolapov when he said that a man with red hair and about forty years old (a description that fits the 39-year old Kosolapov) is suspected in the new attack.<sup>11</sup> Russian security officials claimed he had been seen working at one of the farms in the Central Federal District, but did not report when he was allegedly seen.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the U.S. government's Russian-language service published an article quoting Russian experts who questioned whether Kosolapov is still alive, referring to him as possibly a "phantom."<sup>13</sup>

Days later, however, two articles by Kosolapov were posted on various Russian-language jihadi websites. He denigrated statements by Russian officials and speculation by some Russian media sources that the CE did not execute and even lacked the capacity to execute such an attack. He did not explicitly claim responsibility for the attack for either himself or the CE.<sup>14</sup> In the second article, Kosolapov implied that the CE was behind not only the Nevskii Express bombing, but also the August 17<sup>th</sup> destruction of the Sayano-Shushenskii Hydroelectric station ("the largest in Eurasia"), recent explosions at the arms depot in Ulyanovsk and the "largest natural gas storage facility in Europe located in Stavropol, and even the recent fire that killed some one hundred nightclub-goers in Perm last week, noting all these occurred on Fridays, the traditional Muslim day of prayer. He closed with an apparent warning about December 11<sup>th</sup>: "We wait till next Friday."<sup>15</sup>

The bomb used in the 2007 and 2009 Nevskii Express attacks are reported to have been identical in their technological design and level of sophistication, and they detonated at nearly the same

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<sup>10</sup> Anatolii Shvedov, "Vzryv na 'Pavletskoi' organizoval russkii," 14 January 2005, 10:48, [www.izvestia.ru/incident/article1009259/](http://www.izvestia.ru/incident/article1009259/); Dmitrii Sokolov-Mitrich, "Russkii bin Laden," 21 January 2005, 20:21, [www.izvestia.ru/incident/article1043323/](http://www.izvestia.ru/incident/article1043323/); Aleksandr Shvarev, "Brat'ya po terroru," *Vremya novostei*, 17 January 2005, [www.vremya.ru/2005/4/51/116235.html](http://www.vremya.ru/2005/4/51/116235.html); Aleksandr Shvarev, "Sled Kosolapova," *Vremya novostei*, 13 January 2005, [www.vremya.ru/2005/2/51/116029.html](http://www.vremya.ru/2005/2/51/116029.html); Ivan Sas, Andrei Serenko, and Mikhail Tolpegin, "Patrioticheskoe litso terrorizma," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 27 January 2009, [www.ng.ru/events/2005-06-17/1\\_terrorizm.html](http://www.ng.ru/events/2005-06-17/1_terrorizm.html); Ivan Sas, "Terror na kazhdoi ostanovke," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 27 January 2009, [www.ng.ru/events/2005-01-27/6\\_terror.html](http://www.ng.ru/events/2005-01-27/6_terror.html); Yelena Vlasenko, "Pavel Kosolapov – fantom ili terrorist?," *Svoboda News*, 1 December 2009, 17:46, [www.svobodanews.ru/content/article/1892381.html](http://www.svobodanews.ru/content/article/1892381.html); Aleksey Nikolskiy, Vera Kholmogorova and Aleksey Nepomnyashchii, "Pervyi terakt epokhy Medvedeva," *Vedomosti*, 30 November 2009, [www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article/2009/11/30/220126](http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article/2009/11/30/220126); and "Does Nevsky Express Crash Signify A New 'Railway War'?" *Itar-Tass*, 30 November 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Nikolskiy, Kholmogorova and Nepomnyashchii, "Pervyi terakt epokhy Medvedeva" and David Nowak, "Russian train toll hits 26; Police release sketch," *Associated Press*, 30 November 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Natalia Korchmarek, "Terror vozvrashchaetsya," *Trud*, 30 November 2009, [www.trud.ru/article/30-11-2009/232874\\_terror\\_vozvrashchaetsja.html](http://www.trud.ru/article/30-11-2009/232874_terror_vozvrashchaetsja.html).

<sup>13</sup> Vlasenko, "Pavel Kosolapov – fantom ili terrorist?"

<sup>14</sup> See Pavel Kosolapov, "Konkurs na versiyu 'Ne kavkazskii sled'," at *Milleti-Ibrahim*, 3 December 2009, 14:28, <http://milleti-ibrahim.com/ru/2009-11-08-09-44-20/2009-11-08-10-12-42/121--l-r.html>; *Kavkaz tsentr*, 3 December, 18:30, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/12/03/69487.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/12/03/69487.shtml); and *Azerijihadmedia*, 4 December 2009, 2:58, <http://jixad.tk>, accessed 4 Dec 09, 20:33 PST.

<sup>15</sup> Pavel Kosolapov, "Podozhdem do sleduyushei pyatnitsy," *Milleti-Ibrahim*, 7 December 2009, 17:43, <http://milleti-ibrahim.com/ru/2009-11-08-10-10-29/123-2009-12-07-17-50-02.html> and *Kavkaz tsentr*, 7 December 2009, 22:27, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/12/07/69558.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/12/07/69558.shtml).

minute of the day and at nearly the same place, less than 100 kilometers apart.<sup>16</sup> That the 2007 attack occurred in the month of August might also point to the Caucasus jihadists. The summer and particularly the August period are the peak of the mujahedin's 'hunting season.'

There is a possible Ingushetian connection to the Nevskii express bombings. Two Ingush from Ingushetia, Salanbek Dzakkhiev and Maksharil Khidriev, were arrested and charged with supplying the explosives Kosolapov allegedly used in the 2007 attack. Two days before the 2009 bombing at their trial, Khidriev admitted his involvement in the attack.<sup>17</sup> The newspaper *Trud* reports that the Ingush bought more explosives for Kosolapov than he used in the 2007 explosion and that Russian law enforcement was unable to locate the remaining TNT. Kosolapov may have hidden the remainder and used it in the recent attack.<sup>18</sup> Thus, a previous attack on the same train, at nearly the same time and place, and in which the same bomb methodology was used seems to trace back to Umarov, the CE, Kosolapov, and Ingushetia.

There is another possible Ingush connection, specifically to the 2009 bombing. Days before the bombing, an ethnic Ingush from Ingushetia, who recently arrived from France, was arrested in Moscow. He was charged with planning terrorist attacks and for his involvement in past attacks, including a 2007 assassination attempt on Chechnya president Ramzan Kadyrov.<sup>19</sup> In addition, one aspect of the CE's claim of responsibility for the attack might indicate a tie to notorious CE operative Sheikh Said Abu Saad Buryatskii, who has carried out most of his operations in Ingushetia and is closely tied to the CE's self-declared Velaiyat G'ialg'iache (Province of Ingushetia). The claim asserted that more than 30 were killed and at least 80 were wounded. The terrorists most likely would be in no position to make such a count.<sup>20</sup> Buryatskii made a similar assertion in a video regarding the August 17<sup>th</sup> truck bomb attack on the Nazran MVD station, suggesting perhaps a Buryatskii trademark.<sup>21</sup> On December 9<sup>th</sup>, the Ingushetia-based Buryatskii all but made an explicit declaration of his leading role in Riyadus Salikhin, stating his deep involvement in this past summer's RS-led suicide bombings across the North Caucasus and pledging: "I am left only to promise the infidels that while I am alive I will do everything possible so that the ranks of Riyadus Salikhin are broadened and new waves of mujahedin go on martyrdom operations."<sup>22</sup> Should Riyadus Salikhin claim responsibility for, or otherwise be shown to have been involved in the recent Nevskii Express attack, then Buryatskii's involvement can be surmised as well. It cannot be excluded that Buryatskii, Riyadus Salikhin, and Kosolapov's group joined forces in organizing and executing the attack.

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<sup>16</sup> Myasnikov, "Reil'sovyi Dzhikhad" and "Does Nevsky Express Crash Signify A New 'Railway War'?", *Itar-Tass*, 30 November 2009; and "Putin: podryv zheleznoi dorogi v Dagestane analogichen krusheniyu 'Nevskogo ekspressa'," *Kavkaz-uzel*, 30 November 2009, 23:59, [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162584/](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162584/).

<sup>17</sup> Aleksandr Baklanov, "Badalov priznaniem Khidrieva v podgotovke podryva 'Nevskogo ekspressa'," *Kavkaz-uzel*, 30 November 2009, 19:33, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162575/>.

<sup>18</sup> Korchmarek, "Terror vozvrashchaetsya."

<sup>19</sup> "V Moske zaderzhan urozhnits Ingushetii, podozrevaemyi v podgotovke teraktov," *Kavkaz uzel*, 25 November 2009, 09:39, [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162383/](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162383/).

<sup>20</sup> "Kavkazskie modzhakhedy zayavili ob uspeshnoi diversionnoi operatsii protiv 'Nevskogo ekspressa'," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 2 December 2009, 00:01, [www.kavkazcenter.net/russ/content/2009/12/02/69466.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.net/russ/content/2009/12/02/69466.shtml)

<sup>21</sup> Hahn, "Sheik Said Abu Saad Buryatskii: New Basaev of the Caucasus."

<sup>22</sup> Said Abu Saad (Buryatskii), "Istishkhad mezhdou pravdoi i lozh'yu," *Hunafa.com*, 9 December 2009, 1:01, <http://hunafa.com/?p=2514>.

Russian authorities and media have been reporting that the suspected operatives who actually carried out the recent Nevskii Express attack included three men and a woman. Two of the three males could be of Slavic origin, according to the developed profiles, and one was of typical Caucasus appearance; this would be consistent with Kosolapov's involvement and his modus operandi.<sup>23</sup> The group reportedly occupied an abandoned home and was seen by local resident in the nearby town of Khmelovka taking photographs of the rail line. Also, according to Russian authorities and media, witnesses from Novgorod ran into two men in a car with Moscow plates asking about the new 'Sapsan' high-speed train soon to run on the same route as the Nevskii Express and where the bridge over the line is located. One of the inquirers wore a red wig and hid his face. This could have been Kosolapov or, less likely, someone trying to impersonate him. The Northwest Federal District MVD has distributed a likeness of four people from the Caucasus who came to the region claiming to be visiting a relative in a local prison but who never visited the prison. A letter from the relative in prison was found less than 100 meters from the attack site. The authorities have found fingerprints, DNA samples, and car parts near the abandoned Khmelovka home during the still ongoing investigation.<sup>24</sup>

This is hardly the first railroad bombing in Russia, and the recent pattern of railroad attacks might suggest a connection to the CE's Dagestani units. Kosolapov could have been involved in some of them, including the December 2003 explosion and derailment of the Mineralnyi Vody electric train in Kislovodsk that killed 47 passengers and the May 2004 explosion and derailment of the Vladikavkaz - Moscow train. More recently, there were at least eight railroad bombings in the months preceding the Nevskii Express attack. All of them occurred in the North Caucasus; seven of the eight occurred in Dagestan.

#### RAILROAD BOMBINGS SINCE THE APRIL 24<sup>th</sup> 2009 SHURA:

- \* June 25 – Makhachkala (Dagestan)-Astrakhan line – train derailed, no casualties.
- \* July 7 – Makhachkala, Dagestan – no casualties.
- \* July 24 – Makhachkala-Khasavyurt line, Dagestan – 1 woman killed, 5 people injured.
- \* August 27 – Makhachkala-Astrakhan line – train derailed by 5 kg. of explosives, no casualties.
- \* September 18 – near the Karabulak station, Ingushetia – no casualties.
- \* October 25 – Dagestan between Makhachkala 1 and 2 stations – rails damaged, no casualties.
- \* November 13 – Dagestan, the Moscow-Baku line – no casualties.<sup>25</sup>
- \* November 26 – Dagestan, North Caucasus Railroad near Tarki station and Makhachkala.<sup>26</sup>

None of these attacks have been claimed by neo-fascist groups. Nor have they been claimed explicitly by any CE combat jamaats or special operational groups, but they have been reported on their sites, implying a claim or a hope that its units carried them out and soon will report so. Russian authorities and media rarely report the possibly jihadi origins of some of these attacks.

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<sup>23</sup> "Po podozreniyu v podryve 'Nevskogo ekspressa' zaderzhany urozhentsy Chechny i Azerbaidzhana," *Kavkaz uzel*, 6 December 2008, 12:37, [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162788/](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162788/).

<sup>24</sup> Viktor Myasnikov, "Rel'sovyi dzhikhad."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "V Dagestane na zheleznoi doroge proizoshol vsryv," *Kavkaz uzel*, 26 November 2009, 20:02, [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162444/](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162444/).

Three days after the November 27<sup>th</sup> Nevskii Express bombing, Dagestan was hit with its seventh train bombing in recent months. Like most recent rail attacks, it produced no casualties. Premier Putin claimed this attack was very similar to the Nevskii Express attack.<sup>27</sup> If the CE is behind many of these attacks, this might suggest that one of the Dagestan's jamaats, such as the notorious Jamaat Shariat, might have been involved in the Nevskii Express attack.

The professionalism, timing and semiotics or messaging, and targetting strategy connected to the attack also suggest the Islamo- rather than Russo-fascist pedigree of the attack. Reports suggest the level of technical expertise that the forensics are revealing is high, pointing to experienced CE's operatives like Kosolapov, the RS and/or Buryatskii. Similarly, the professionalism exhibited by the logistics of the attack, including the sophistication of the device and the deployment and mode of detonation of the second explosion of the attack noted above, suggests the CE mujahedin's capacity, experience, and tactics.<sup>28</sup>

The timing of the attack also points to the jihadists. It occurred on the important Muslim holiday of animal sacrifice 'Kurban Bayram' (Il al-Idkha in Arabic), which was loudly heralded on the CE's affiliated sites – Ingush, Chechen, Dagestani, Circassian (Kabard, Cherkess, and Adygei) and Alan (Karachai and Balkar) alike.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in taking responsibility for the assassinations of two high-ranking police officials in Dagestan on the day before the Nevskii Express attack, the CE's 'Jamaat Shariat' in Dagestan called the two assassinations its own "sacrificial killings" in celebration of Kurban Bayram. They cited an unidentified episode that comes down to Muslims through history about an unidentified Muslim ruler who once took an unidentified human or animal "unclean one" and cut off his head, while crying: "This is my sacrificial killing for Allah."<sup>30</sup> Such thinking could very well have been in the mind of the perpetrators of the Nevskii Express attack.

On the day before the attack, a recently self-declared ethnic Russian jamaat named 'Muvakhkhidun ar-Rusi', who has claimed a series of other attacks, warned it had planned an operation to be executed on the Muslim day of sacrifice, the next day.<sup>31</sup> Earlier, it claimed responsibility for Buryatskii's August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009 attack on the Nazran MVD building that killed 25 and wounded 160.<sup>32</sup> Given Kosolapov's ethnic Russian background, it cannot not be entirely excluded that Muvakhkhidun ar-Rusia is infact Kosolapov's project and these unlikely claims could have been part of a disinformation campaign designed to misdirect Russian security agencies as Muvakhkhidun prepared the Nevskii Express attack.

The targets of the attack also correspond to the CE's targetting strategy of recent years. As mentioned above, this rail route was largely populated by elite passengers from Russia's first and

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<sup>27</sup> "Putin: podryv zheleznoi dorogi v Dagestane analogichen krusheniyu 'Nevskogo ekspressa.'"

<sup>28</sup> Myasnikov, "Rel'sovyi dzhikhad" and Oliphant, "Blood on the Tracks."

<sup>29</sup> see *Hunafa.com*, *Kavkazcenter.com*, *JamaatShariat.com*, and *Islamdin.com*

<sup>30</sup> "Pozdravleni Dzhamaata 'Shariat': 'eto nashe zhertvoprinoshenie,'" *JamaatShariat.com*, 27 November 2009, 15:17, [www.jamaatshariat.com/ru/content/view/370/29/](http://www.jamaatshariat.com/ru/content/view/370/29/).

<sup>31</sup> "Muvakhkhidun ar-Rusi' vzyala na sebya otvetstvennost' za diversii v Ulyanovske i na Stavropole," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 25 November 2009, 10:45, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/11/25/69355.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/11/25/69355.shtml)

<sup>32</sup> Hahn, "Sheik Said Abu Saad Buryatskii: New Basaev of the Caucasus."

‘second’ capitals. In other words, it clearly targeted Russia’s Muscovite and Petersburg elite; an extension of the CE’s strategy of targeting the local North Caucasus civilian elite through assassinations using snipers, IEDs, and drive-by shootings extant for years. The location of the attack, in an exceedingly inaccessible portion of forest along the rail line, was designed to maximize casualties in the jihadist manner. It took medical and law enforcement units an hour and a half to reach the scene, and in the interim many of the wounded bled to death or died of shock and trauma.<sup>33</sup> The second explosion, that occurred as the General Prosecutor office’s investigators arrived, was in line with the CE’s recent *modus operandi* of secondary explosions to target response teams and its special focus on killing high-ranking and rank-and-file *siloviki*. Oddly enough, much of the CE’s claim of responsibility focused on the attack’s targeting of infrastructure: “Today we are implementing attacks on electricity lines and oil and gas pipelines. There are many operations in the development stage. We state that we are doing everything possible to even more actively spread Jihad on Russian territory with the goal of undermining its economy so that Russia does not have the opportunity to use the Caucasus as its fuel base.”<sup>34</sup> This may have been an attempt to draw attention away from the direct targeting or collateral killing of civilians.

## Implications

For Russia, several implications of this attack seem clear. The CE operations will continue to target *siloviki*, the ruling local and federal elites, the civilian population and transport, and other infrastructure. The CE claim of responsibility for the Nevskii Express attack justified the Nevskii Express bombing and future attacks yet to come that kill and wound “the population of Rusnya” (derogatory term for ‘Russia’) much as Osama bin Laden and other jihadists do, by designating civilians as “facilitators of the Russian government.” At the same time, their claim of responsibility promises that they will try to avoid civilian casualties in accordance with amir Umarov’s orders, it reserves them the right “to carry out adequate combat operations against the ‘civilian’ population of Russia” “if (the Russian leadership) does not put an end to the murder of peaceful Muslims of the Caucasus Emirate and does not cease the activity of ‘death squads.’”<sup>35</sup> As noted previously, Umarov justified attacks on civilians in his April post-Shura declaration, as did Buryatskii in his statement on the August 17<sup>th</sup> truck bomb attack that destroyed entirely the MVD building in Nazran, Ingushetia and inevitably wrought civilian casualties.<sup>36</sup> This continues a long-standing pattern of confusion or intentional ambiguity and deception regarding this policy on the part of the Caucasus jihadists.<sup>37</sup>

The CE claim of responsibility also noted: “This year several intelligence-diversionary groups were prepared and dispatched by the mujahedin command deep inside Russia for carrying out operations on the enemy’s territory. Since the result and consequences of these operations

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<sup>33</sup> Myasnikov, “Rel’sovyi dzhikhad.”

<sup>34</sup> “Kavkazskie modzhakhedy zayavili ob uspeshnoi diversionnoi operatsii protiv ‘Nevskogo ekspressa.’”

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon M. Hahn, “The Caucasus Emirate’s Summer 2009 Suicide Bombing Campaign,” *IIPER*, No. 3, November 30, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia’s Islamic Threat*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 89-90.

brought enormous economic harm to Russia, we will continue work in this direction.”<sup>38</sup> This statement seems to refer to more than just the destruction of 400 meters of track and the three supports holding the electric rail line’s power network or even the rather limited damage cause by this year’s other attacks on railroads and trains.<sup>39</sup> It seems to refer to the claim by the CE’s Riyadus Salikhin that it carried out an attack on the Sayano-Shushenskii hydroelectric power plant and dam complex in the Siberian republic of Khakassia. It may also imply CE involvement in the explosions at the Ulyanovsk arms depot and the Stabropol gas storage facility implied by Kosolapov. Russian authorities and media have largely ignored this version of the catastrophe at the hydroelectric plant, which killed 70 and wounded over 100 when the damn ruptured. According to official and media accounts, the incident was as a result of a mechanical and/or human error. IIPER has not concluded that the CE was behind the Sayano-Shushenskii tragedy or the arms depot and gas storage explosions. But neither this nor the possibility that nationalist or even criminal groups were behind the Nevskii Express bombing should be entirely excluded. However, the bulk of the evidence so far suggests the CE was behind the train bombing.

In his annual national call-in conference a week after the attack, Russian Premier and former President Vladimir Putin acknowledged in a response that jihadi terrorism remained a serious threat in Russia. He warned that the vigilance of “all society” was necessary to defeat jihadism: “I’d like to stress that each and every one has to realize the threat, which has been with us for years, has to be vigilant and pursue large-scale preventative work.”<sup>40</sup> With the CE apparently returning to mass, high-profile terrorist attacks on infrastructure in and around Moscow and other large cities, then the gap between the state and the people in Russia bodes poorly for effective counter-terrorism. The state’s, in particular its law enforcement agencies,’ reluctance to discuss this or any other subject openly with the public is bound to reduce public vigilance. For example, the paucity of the various Russian state and state-controlled television stations’ coverage of the Nevskii Express attack in the following hours and first days was striking.<sup>41</sup> Lacking society as its partner in counter-terrorism efforts, the state is more prone to rely on heavy-handed and often less effective methods, leading to human and civil rights’ violations.

Politically, the risk of excessively repressive counter-terrorism methods escalating in intensity combined with further successful jihadi attacks would play into the hands of the hardline siloviki, scuttle President Dmitrii Medvedev’s fragile reform agenda, and facilitate Putin’s return to the presidency.

Another important implication of the attack impinges not on Russia but on the U.S.-led war on jihadism. The increase in railroad attacks and the escalation of their effectiveness and audacity, might mean that the CE unit(s) carrying out these attacks could be preparing additional attacks on rail lines that are part of the more northern of the two routes in the northern distribution network in Afghanistan. This network, which opened a few months ago, transports supplies to

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<sup>38</sup> “Kavkazskie modzhakhedy zayavili ob uspehnoi diversionnoi operatsii protiv ‘Nevskogo ekspressa’.”

<sup>39</sup> Myasnikov, “Rel’sovyi dzhikhad”

<sup>40</sup> “V.V. Putin prinyal uchastie v spetsial’noi programme ‘Razgovor s Vladimirom Putinym’,” 3 December 2009, 12:00, [www.premier.gov.ru/events/4255.html](http://www.premier.gov.ru/events/4255.html).

<sup>41</sup> Arina Borodina, “Tragediya Nevskogo Ekspressa na ekrane televizora,” *Kommersant*, 2 December 2009, [www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=1284663](http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?DocsID=1284663).

U.S. and NATO troops in the region. This route begins in the port of Riga, Latvia and continues through Russia and Central Asia to Afghanistan. Its northeast Russian leg runs not very far from the Nevskii Express rail line. In addition, at least on Azeri jihadi site championed the Nevskii Express attack, raising the specter of jihadi attacks on oil or gas pipelines bringing supplies West, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.<sup>42</sup> Recent years have seen several cases of CE jihadists entering Azerbaijan, Azeri jihadists fighting with the CE in the North Caucasus, and Azeri jihadists attacking Azerbaijani security forces, especially in northern regions of Azerbaijan bordering Dagestan.

Although neither the CE nor its predecessor organization, the ChRI, have attacked Western targets, it must be borne in mind that the CE and its amir Doka Abu Usman Umarov have declared jihad against the West, and one of the CE's leading terrorist operatives, Sheikh Said Abu Saad Buryatskii has promoted the same idea.<sup>43</sup> The Nevskii Express attack (not to mention the Sunzhenskii Dam catastrophe if the CE was involved) seems to signal that the Caucasus jihadists have lengthened their reach considerably. It remains to be seen whether its reach extends to Western and global targets inside (or outside) Russia.

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<sup>42</sup> "Kavkazskie modzhakhedy zayavili ob uspeshnoi diversionnoi operatsii protiv 'Nevskogo ekspressa,'" *AzerJihadMedia*, 2 December 2009, <http://jixad.tk>, accessed Dec 3, 2009, 00:12, PST.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon M. Hahn, *IIPERs*, No. 1, 2, and 3.