

TERRORIST, HOLLYWOOD AND THE THIRD WORLD WAR IN RUSSIAN PRESS

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Quick to call the events in the United States a "war", the Russian newspaper till the end of September did not always pay a careful attention at what was going on in America, and sometimes published some rather superficial analyses.

Not all Russian newspapers – and for the purpose of this paper we selected *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, *Izvestia*, *Novye Izvestia*, *Komsomolskaya pravda* and *Argumenty i facty* – were able to inform their readers the day after about what had happened when two planes containing passengers and kamikaze terrorists hit the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York, and a third plane hit the Pentagon building in Washington, killing several thousand people and causing terrible destruction. The broadsheets *Nezavisimaya gazeta* and *Izvestia* could give only short reports on what had happened and did not mention that the towers of the World Trade Center (WTC) had collapsed. *Novye Izvestia* did not report the events at all. One could assume that *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Izvestia* are usually sent to print early, by five o'clock, so that anything happening later than this would not be included in the edition. Following this argument, *Novye Izvestia* must have sent the edition to print even earlier, because the September 12th edition contained no reports on the event of the previous day. *Argumenty i facty*, a weekly magazine not known for its efficiency, reported on the tragedy in its September 12th edition. However, on September 12th the tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda* devotes its whole front

page to the terrorist attacks. In large lettering, the headline stated: "First on Kashirka, and yesterday in New York. Yesterday's shocking terrorist attacks in America have brought the planet to the verge of world war." In the background there were pictures of the burning WTC buildings, a plane about to hit the second tower, and rescuers carrying an elderly person named as the first victim of the catastrophe. *Komsomolskaya pravda* devoted another four pages – 2 to 5 – to the events. Across pages 2 and 3 ran the headline: "These aren't just terrorist attacks. The terrorists have unleashed the third world war." Page 2 carried the sub-heading: "Our correspondent in New York Andrei Baranov reports from the city sunk in smoke, blood and panic." On page 3 the headline read "Meanwhile in Washington the Pentagon flared up like a torch."

VARIOUS ANALYSES

Newspapers published not only reports on what happened in the USA, but also analysis, interviews with politicians and political scientists. All the newspapers tried to anticipate the consequences of the tragedy for America, Russia and the world. A summary of what the newspapers' coverage of the terrorist attacks and their consequences had in common would highlight the excitability and superficiality of the

opinion pieces. However, as well as describing the events, emotions ran high in straight news reports. Examples of such articles are "The controlled violence" by Daniil Dondurei in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (September 13), and "In the name of Allah" by Semyon Novoprudsky in *Izvestia* (same date). Mr. Daniil Dondurei believes that thanks to the cinema people have become inured to violence, but that what happened in America was on a more terrible scale than could have been imagined in any thriller. The author concludes by saying, "I don't think that there has been any radical re-evaluation of humanitarian values. Today we are facing an unknown reality, and we have to elaborate some criteria for understanding it ... We do not know how to behave in this new reality yet." Mr. Semyon Novoprudsky commented: "The series of unprecedented acts of terrorism in New York and Washington marked a substitution of the main world religion (...) Since September 11, 2001, Allah has become a supreme deity. Being split spiritually, geopolitically and morally, the Islamic world holds an explosive force, a passion (...), that changes and re-creates the worlds. Attacks on the East become an attack from the East."

ABOARD THE TITANIC

A certain emotional verbosity is apparent in many articles, especially in *Novye Izvestia*. In Otto Lacis's editorial published on September 13 under the headline "We

are six million aboard *The Titanic*”, the author counts the beginning of the twenty first century as September 11, 2001 and, by analogy, the beginning of the twentieth century as the sinking of *The Titanic*. In his article he recalls the USSR's aggression towards Afghanistan and much more. In other words, it is a sort of soviet verbal broth. On page 3 of the same edition an article by Sergei Gulyi appeared, under the headline "Oh, the marvellous new world". Photos accompanying the

unexpected. Little was written about Chechnya itself, but rather about terrorists without mentioning their nationality. During the first week after the terrorist attacks Chechnya was mentioned only once, in Michael Sidlin's article "New York, New York ..." in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. The author is convinced that Russia should take into account America's mistakes and move towards political adjustment in Chechnya. Maksim Yusin's article in *Izvestia* about

tacks in the USA were linked to Afghanistan and the newspaper concentrated on countries bordering Afghanistan. *Komsomolskaya pravda* treated the issue quite differently. According to it, all that happened was continued opposition between the Federation and Chechnya. The first page of the September 13th edition is indicative, with a huge headline stating "For New York! Pleased by the explosions in America, Chechen guerrillas saluted. Federal forces covered them with shell-fire." Articles appeared about Russia's warnings of the dangers of terrorism, and how as far back as 1999 Vladimir Putin had spoken about the necessity for the civilised world to work together in the fight against terrorism. Also on September 13th an article by Konstantin Gorokhov stated, "Moscow warned. The West listened and kept silent". Though no direct mention was made of Chechnya, it was clear what was meant. In the September 12th edition, in an article headed "The World War" the idea was expressed that war had started - not against any particular country, but against "terrorists, the Islamic bastards." The article was constructed on parallels with what is going in Chechnya.

“The Taliban destroyed Buddha and their World Trade Center. Different idols - one destiny.”

Novye Izvestia, 13 September

article showed a tremendous statue of Buddha destroyed by the Taliban, and the collapsing WTO buildings. The caption read: “The Taliban destroyed Buddha and their World Trade Center. Different idols - one destiny.” The emotional nature of the words "idols" and "have ruined" shows, at the very least, an absence of compassion for the victims of the tragedy. The caption's author did not think about the thousands lost. To him, the WTC towers are just stone symbols, or "idols". The article is slovenly from a moral point of view as well. Here is a quote: "Supermen are made of flesh too. The tear of an Iraqi or Palestinian child pleased at the shedding of blood by innocent Wall Street bankers is pure. These, and those like them, have been deprived of their fathers of on a massive scale. The symbols are destroyed, the idols are prostrate."

CHECHEN PARALLELS

One of the first questions asked by readers of the Russian press is what attitude will be taken to Chechnya and the Chechen problem in the light of the terrorist attacks in America. The answer was

Chechnya - "They came for Bin Laden. How, upon whom and when will America take revenge" - draws the following parallel: America attacks Afghanistan, like the Russian federals attacked Chechnya, after President Maskhadov shielded the Basaev gang following their intrusion into Dagestan. Chechnya was mentioned once more, in connection with a public opinion poll conducted by the All-Russia Centre for Public Opinion Studies on day after the terrorist attacks.

In an analytical article, Andrei Kolesnikov considers that a significant number of those polled felt pity for Americans, but not for America itself, in the same way that they pity Chechens but not Chechnya. On September 18 an article appeared that claimed a helicopter with two generals aboard had been shot down in Chechnya. The article was not directly linked to the terrorist attacks in America, but its headline juxtaposed the two events: "Inadequate answers. Russian leadership consults the USA, and a helicopter with two generals is brought down in Chechnya."

Novye Izvestia did not mention Chechnya at all. The terrorist at-

DOLLAR STAYED STRONG

"Serious" newspapers reported that America's economy had not been undermined, and that it was important the dollar has stayed strong. On September 13 and 14 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published statements by a number of economic experts, whose common opinion was that "no financial catastrophe has occurred". In *Izvestia* on September 13 an article headlined "The dollar is as alive as ever" appeared, meaning that despite a short-term crisis lasting one night in Moscow when exchange rates in exchange offices dropped

sharply, by morning the dollar has returned to a rate comparable with that before September 11. Commentators in all the newspapers casually but necessarily noted the similarity between the terrorist attacks and the plots of some Hollywood thrillers: "Hollywood courted disaster to America with its numerous movies and fantasies about transnational terrorist organisations," stated Yuri Bogomolov in "The whole world is violent" (*Izvestia*, September 13, 2001). *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Izvestia* published articles on the psychology of stress and how to behave in emergency situations. On the front page of the September 13th edition of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* an article headed "The terror" with the sub-heading "The consequences of catastrophes like that in America continue to grow, with mysterious and disproportionate force upon people" described how terror affects people, what people feel in the first minutes after an accident, and the different stages of a person's reactions.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

In *Izvestia* on September 14 there were a selection of articles containing advice on what people should do in the case of an airplane hijack, a fire in a multi-storey building, and how to remove the stress of accidents or terrorist attacks ("By rescuing others, you rescue yourself"). Articles were also published in which the dangers of terrorist attacks on Russia and Moscow were analyzed. They confirmed that these are impossible in Russia, as anti-aircraft defense facilities are immediately set at ready after "a non-authorized change of course by a plane". Similar articles on this were published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Izvestia* and *Komsomolskaya pravda* on September 13. *Argumenty i fakty* published an article

stating that possible targets of terrorist attacks in Russia may not be Moscow, but the Ural region, where the "Mayak" company produces the filling for nuclear weapons.

manders was from Saudi Arabian. In China there are seven millions Uygurs, whom the author ranked as separatists, including small children and the elderly. In short, there are a number of threats to the Central

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Here are some examples of analysis articles. In *Izvestia* on September 14 an article headed "The chain of circumstance" appeared, in which its author, Evgeny Krutikov, proved that if everything went according to the terrorists' plan, a nuclear war between the USA and Russia would flare up. On the same day *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published an article called "Five scripts" by Sergei Sokut. The article plots the probable different ways events could develop, among them a single nuclear attack, air and marine operations with limited targets, a large-scale war and special operations to capture key terrorist leaders. Articles by Igor Rotar can be considered analytical, however his analysis is rather superficial and poorly related to the terrorist attacks in America. For example, in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on September 14, he published an article headed "Central Asia: the next target for extremists". The author discusses the threats to countries in Central Asia, firstly "the international Islamic radical movement 'Hizb ut-Tahrir' founded in 1953 in Palestine". He then mentions "Uzbek Islamists", who carried out armed raids into Kyrgyzstan from Tajikistan, where they had been trained in the Karategin valley by an instructor from Pakistan, and where one of the Tajik opposition field com-

Asian population (especially in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) that existed prior to the terrorist attacks and will continue to exist.

Rotar's statement that "it seems that Tajik Islamists attempted to establish contact with their Chechen adherents," is typical of Russian journalistic analysis. For example, the beginning "it seems that..." is considered sufficient, so that the author can avoid having to take the trouble to support his statement with any argument. What it means is that Tajik Islamists have adherents in Chechnya, but the article contained no evidence as to why Central Asia should become the next target of extremists, thus rendering it unconvincing.

WHAT SUPPORT FOR THE US

In *Izvestia* on September 18 an article was published, in which its author, Semyon Novoprudsky analyses what countries would support the USA if they were to attack Afghanistan. According to this analysis, the USA could expect assistance from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan ("Which," according to Novoprudsky, "politically has no chance to refuse."), Japan and NATO. Mr. Novoprudsky made no suggestions as to whether Russia, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan would assist America. Turkmenistan, however, will uphold its neutrality, Pakistan will have to overcome the resis-

tance of its internal Islamist opposition, China will give only verbal support, and Saudi Arabia will only provide non-military support. All his assumptions are unsubstantiated. The author does not report any information or statements from political leaders, or analytical data based on which he came to the above conclusions. The reader is being asked to just believe Mr. Novoprudsky. However, as time has shown, his statements are not always true.

Newspapers not only covered the events or gave their pages over to commentary and analysis; they also published articles highlighting the background to the events, their preconditions and possible interre-

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lations. The publication of such information allows readers to interpret and understand the events more. For example, on September 13 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Komsomolskaya pravda* listed the organisations that behind the terrorist attacks (that day no one could know who was responsible for the

terrorist attacks). *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* presented a list of radical Islamic groups, gave their brief characteristics, and outlined some terrorist actions committed by these organisations. Those listed were as follows: "al-Qaida", the Islamic International Front of Struggle with Jews and Crusaders, The Army for Liberation of Islamic Sacred Objects, "Kharkat-ul-ansar", the Japanese "Red Army", the Taliban, "Lashkar-e-taiba", "Hizbollah", " Hamas", "Al gamaa al-islamia", and the International Islamic Front. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* supplemented the list with the Palestine Democratic Liberation Front. On September 18 *Izvesyia* published an article "Afghanistan: the decisive direction" describing when and whom Afghanistan had been at war with since the First British-Afghani war of 1838-1841.

LITTLE ABOUT AMERICA

The papers wrote almost nothing about how events were developing in America, especially about measures taken by the American administration. However, people learned about this, but mainly from comment pieces, rather than from news reporting. Almost nothing was written about Europe and the events developing there. Actually, *Novye Izvestia* published a few articles by its Parisian correspondent Yuri Kovalenko. One was about Osama Bin Laden's brothers living in Paris and Geneva, and the other was about the security measures undertaken in European air-

ports. Almost no comments about the actions of the Russian authorities appeared. A few activities were published in full, such as the short TV statement made by Vladimir Putin, and the decree about the one minute silence in remembrance of the victims.

BIN LADEN NOT INVOLVED

The events the Duma, and scandalous declarations by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy were presented without comment, though *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* gave Zhirinovskiy the opportunity to express himself alongside other politicians. In general, we can say that in connection with the terrorist attacks *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* wrote about Central Asia more than any other newspaper, and with a more profound knowledge of the subject. *Izvestia* and *Novye Izvestia* wrote more about the USA and Israel (mainly, by way of contrasting security systems in airports). *Komsomolskaya Pravda* was the only newspaper to predict a third world war. *Argumenty i facty* wrote almost nothing about the tragedy in USA. The newspaper presented the results of the traditional poll of politicians found in Russian newspapers. The results were given under the headline "Is this Bin's last gasp?" There was also an interview with Leonid Shabarshin, the former chief of the Soviet Foreign Intelligence Service, in which he confirmed that Osama Bin Laden was not behind the terrorist attacks, but a "new, as yet unknown, terrorist organisation".