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The north Caucasus

Murder as problem solver

Russia could find that it is getting more than it bargained for



EVEN by Russia's recent bloody standards, it was a brazen killing. Magomed Yevloyev, the editor of an opposition website in Russia's north Caucasus territory of Ingushetia, was detained by the police as he arrived in Nazran on a flight from Moscow on August 31st. Within minutes he was dead, having allegedly tried to seize a policeman's rifle and been shot in the head. His body was dumped outside the region's main hospital.

The Ingush authorities say they are investigating an accidental death but nobody takes this seriously. There were reports that Mr Yevloyev quarrelled with the region's president, Murat Zyazikov, who was on the flight. Ingushetia's interior minister, Musa Medov, is said to have personally supervised his arrest. Memorial, a Russian human-rights group, called the killing a "demonstrative and cynical crime" and "act of state terror".

For the past 17 years, the north Caucasus has been Russia's poorest and most violent region. Now Russia's war in Georgia may have triggered a new cycle of repression and resistance. The focus of concern is not so much Chechnya, which is in a state of precarious calm thanks to the local strongman, Ramzan Kadyrov, well known for his use of both violence and bribery to crush opponents. Chechnya's immediate neighbours to the east and west are now the ones to be worried about.

Dagestan is increasingly ungovernable and violent. A leading opposition politician, Farid Babayev, was murdered last year. This week a journalist, Abdulla Alishayev, died after being shot by unknown assailants. Ingushetia itself is close to boiling point. Many Islamist militants decamped there from Chechnya and 70 policemen have been killed this year. The authorities are waging a dirty war of reprisals in which civilians are the main victims. Memorial estimates that there were 40 extra-judicial killings in Ingushetia last year.

[Ingushetiya.ru](#), Mr Yevloyev's website, had become a rallying point for opposition to the president, an ineffectual ex-KGB officer installed by Moscow. It riled Mr Zyazikov with a campaign called "I did not vote", collecting 90,000 signatures to disprove the official boast that 98% of Ingush had voted for the Kremlin's party in a near-universal turnout at last year's parliamentary election.

Russia's victory in Georgia looks rather different to the Ingush who were the losers in a small nasty territorial conflict with North Ossetia in 1992. As a result of this thousands are still unable to go home. Many resent what they see as Moscow's overt patronage of the mainly Christian Ossetians, now reinforced by the recognition of an independent South Ossetia. "We need to ask Europe or America to separate us from Russia," cried an Ingush opposition leader, Magomed Khazbiev, at a protest against the killing of Mr Yevloyev that was later broken up by the police.

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