

Berezovsky Blames Putin For Chechen War

Author: [Thomas de Waal](#)

Ex-Moscow political mastermind suggests to IWPR that Russian president precipitated the Chechen conflict and is now seeking to escalate it.

The former Kremlin "grey cardinal" Boris Berezovsky has accused Moscow's intelligence services - and by extension President Putin - of deliberately triggering the second Chechen war.

In an October 30 interview with IWPR in London, where he now lives in exile, Berezovsky also blamed the president of stepping up Russia's military campaign in Chechnya, following the recent terrorist drama in Moscow in which at least 120 hostages died.

Berezovsky condemned the detention earlier that day of his friend Akhmed Zakayev, special representative to Chechen separatist leader, Aslan Maskhadov. He saw it as a sign that Putin had abandoned any hope of a political settlement in Chechnya.

Zakayev was arrested in Copenhagen, on the request of the Russian authorities who are seeking his extradition. He is Maskhadov's main negotiator in the West and had repeatedly condemned the attack on the Moscow theatre.

"I believe that Putin has taken the decision not to follow the peace process," Berezovsky, who now works out of an office in Savile Row in the West End, told IWPR. "Putin has taken the decision to solve this problem militarily. It doesn't have a military solution, even if the army was stronger, if the intelligence services were stronger, that's still no solution to this problem. And why are the Russian authorities concentrating attention on Zakayev? It's a signal that they don't want to talk to Maskhadov."

Berezovsky characterised Zakayev as a "consistent supporter of the peaceful evolution of events" whom he had known very well since 1996 and had kept up with ever since.

Berezovsky now blames the Russian intelligence service, the FSB - and by extension Putin himself - for the two key events that helped bring the new Russian leader to power in 1999-2000 and Russia's second military campaign in Chechnya: the intervention by Chechen warriors in Dagestan in the summer of 1999 and the apartment block bombings in Moscow and Volgograd in September of that year, that killed 300 people and were blamed on Chechens.

The businessman says that he was warned several months in advance by sources in Chechnya, that Chechen warriors were planning to intervene in Dagestan. When Berezovsky reported this to the then prime minister Sergei Stepashin, Stepashin told him that he "had known about this for a long time".

"I believe that [the Chechens] were specially and deliberately provoked [to attack Dagestan], knowing that they were not very clever and that they would submit to the provocation," Berezovsky said.

As for the apartment block bombings in September 1999, Berezovsky is one of those who believes that it was the work not of Chechen militants but of the FSB.

"The information which I possess suggests that [Putin] knew about the blowing up of the houses in

Moscow," he told IWPR. Asked whether that meant that Putin knew in advance, Berezovsky said, "I think that he knew in advance."

These allegations raise a mass of questions. After all, in 1999, Berezovsky was at the peak of his power and arguably more powerful than Putin himself. Indeed, he was one of those who helped bring the new man to power.

Berezovsky, a soft-spoken mathematician, had been a leading figure in Russia since 1994, who made strategic investments in the car business, television, the state airline Aeroflot, oil and - finally and most importantly - politics. He won the reputation of being the supreme Russian political operator, who consistently manoeuvred the Kremlin administration out of crises, while strengthening his own position and financial interests.

Asked why, if he now believed these serious claims dating back to 1999, he knew nothing at the time, Berezovsky replied that the alleged plot was the work not of his own circle in the Kremlin, but of Putin's team "on the other side," in other words the future president's friends in the FSB.

Last year, Berezovsky fell out with Putin and fled to London. He faces an ever-growing list of criminal charges and accusations against him. A week ago, a former minister in the Chechen government, in an interview with *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, even accused him of having links with the Taleban.

Berezovsky laughingly dismissed this. "There are people who are virtually accusing me of being part of the terrorist act in Moscow," he said. "In Russia people accuse me of all mortal sins. But why was a single accusation not brought to a conclusion, not proved?"

Berezovsky's links to Chechnya are perhaps the most mysterious element in his extraordinary biography. He had a Chechen deputy manager in the Logovaz car business he started in 1990, but says the first time he went there after the end of the Soviet Union was in 1996. In 1999, he was elected to the Russian parliament from the nearby republic of Karachai-Cherkessia, with the support of its leader Vladimir Semyonov, who has close links to Chechnya.

His relations with two Chechen militants, the notorious warrior Shamil Basayev and the Islamic ideologue Movladi Udugov, are especially enigmatic. Berezovsky confirmed that he had provided two million dollars of his own money in 1998 for Basayev to build a cement factory in the Chechen village of Chiri-Yurt.

As for Udugov, that link provides one clue as to why the British government has reason to be grateful to him. He points out that it was he who managed to secure the release in September 1998 of the two British aid workers, Camilla Carr and Jon James, who were being held hostage in Chechnya.

"On the request of the then [British] ambassador in Russia Mr [Andrew] Wood, I used my relations with Zakayev and with Movladi Udugov and appealed to them with a request for them to find out where these people were being held and to help in their release," Berezovsky said.

Udugov is now believed to be resident in one of the Gulf States and is being linked to the most militant form of Chechen extremism. Berezovsky said that they no longer kept in touch.

Berezovsky's plans are constantly changing. He has recently made what he calls a "tactical alliance" with his former enemies in the Communist Party against President Putin. But he also said teasingly, "You can't say that all bridges are burnt with Putin."

And were there any further revelations to come about his years in the Kremlin? Berezovsky was deadpan. "I'm not keeping anything in my pocket," said the former Russian political mastermind.

Thomas de Waal is IWPR's Caucasus Editor.

Location: Caucasus
Stavropol
South Ossetia
Russia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/berezovsky-blames-putin-chechen-war>