Death at the Stadium

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August 2015
The explosion at the VIP stand in Grozny’s Dinamo stadium occurred at 10.35 on 9 May 2004, after the official part of the Victory Day celebrations was over. Those killed included the head of Chechnya, Akhmat Kadyrov; the chairman of the Chechen State Council, Husein Isaev; two guards; a local journalist and an 8-year girl. More than 60 other people were injured, including Colonel General Valeriy Baranov, commander of the Joint Group of Forces in the North Caucasus, who was next to Kadyrov. He was seriously injured and had his left leg amputated in hospital.¹

Information and Disinformation

So, what do we know about the explosive device? The official investigation claimed its design was simple: it had been assembled from a 152-mm artillery shell and the power of the explosion was equivalent to approximately 1 kg of TNT. According to one report, the bomb had been built into the concrete framework beneath the central stand during renovation of the stadium, which had been completed shortly before the incident.

Those who investigated the scene confirmed that the charge was in the concrete beneath Akhmat Kadyrov, between his seat and that of Husein Isaev. This section was torn apart by the explosion. A similar shell that had failed to detonate was allegedly found further down the stand. The inspectors surmised that “it had been built into the concrete framework of the stand next to the first shell but had failed to detonate and simply been thrown out by the explosion.” A similar statement was made by the Chechen Security Council’s secretary, Rudnik Dudaev: “The explosive device had earlier been built into one of the stadium’s concrete structures in anticipation of a leader of the Chechen Republic appearing there.” One day after the bombing, however, the Chechen Interior Minister Alu Alkhanov cast doubt on the claim that the bombs had been planted during the repair work completed on 7 May. He stated, “Forensic analysis of samples of construction materials from the site of the explosion suggests the shells had been placed there long before. I will go so far as to say that they were most likely laid last year.” But what kind of forensic analysis could have been carried out in a single day?

It was also reported that immediately after the explosion two, perhaps three, unexploded devices had been discovered at the stadium and defused. One was said to have been embedded alongside the one that exploded, while another was a 1.5 litre bottle full of plastic explosive with a timer set to 12.05 hrs, which had failed to detonate.

Another account in circulation suggested that the saboteurs had not been targeting Akhmat Kadyrov specifically but had merely intended to commit a terrorist attack at noon, irrespective of who was on the stand. The bottle of plastic explosive was to go off 5 minutes later among the crowd while victims of the first explosion were being evacuated. Yet another account, offered by Kommersant newspaper which said it was quoting FSB sources, claimed there had been 3 IEDs, laid shortly before the celebration:

“One was set to go off at 10.35, another at 12.30, and the third at 15.30 hrs. They were most probably laid 2 weeks ago as building work at the stadium was being completed. They knew that sooner or later Kadyrov would appear on this stand as there is no other location for similar large-

¹This paper was written for the Russian Service of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. It can be accessed at, Nesterovich, Y. ‘Smerti na stadione’, svoboda.org, 26 July 2015, available at: http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/27153109.html
scale festivities in the city. The plan was evidently to carry out a series of explosions, one after the other, to cause mass panic. One device, without a casing, did explode. The power of the explosion has not yet been established but was approximately the equivalent of 5 kg of TNT. They knew what they were doing by laying it in concrete. Firstly, not all metal detectors are capable of detecting a mine without a casing; and secondly, the concrete in this situation would itself function as casing, only several times more effectively. When causing an explosion, concrete is the most lethal weapon for use against a live target."

There are many inconsistencies in this story. The shell had not, in fact, been stripped of its cover, which meant a metal detector could have registered it, and in any case there are other effective ways to detect explosives and devices. If the assassination had really been as described, with an explosive equivalent to 5 kg of TNT, the number of casualties would have been vastly greater. In reality, this was a precise, targeted explosion. The experts mention precise times, so the charges had fuses with timers. That means they must have been put in the place immediately before the event, not cemented in a year beforehand.

A few days later, on 13 May 2004, another unexploded bomb was found at the stadium: a powerful charge of sticks of TNT, enhanced with bolts and metal offcuts. Are we really to believe that an outsider was able to place four explosive devices in a stadium guarded round the clock? And that the only one that went off happened to be under Akhmat Kadyrov’s seat? A classic sabotage technique is to place one genuine explosive device along with others whose purpose is merely to be found and send everyone off on the wrong track.

Neither at the time nor later has anyone described the kind of detonator used or how it was set off. With a timer? Using wires? Or by radio control? Citing an officer named as “Vaha” in the head of Chechnya’s security service, Kommersant reported that the IEDs had not needed a timer, electronic or mechanical, because they had been installed a considerable time previously and were detonated manually. A “channel in the concrete” led to the terrorist and “wires in it were attached to the devices”, so “the perpetrator had only to connect them to the contacts of ordinary batteries which, in the crowded conditions, was relatively straightforward.” The same informant advised it had been impossible to detect the bombs because they “were walled into reinforced concrete and, because of the steel mesh, were invisible to a mine detector.”

Really? Would someone have laid a mine to await its time, in the hope that neither it nor any wiring leading to it would be discovered during maintenance and reconstruction of the stadium, or periodical engineering reconnaissance inspections? In the hope that the explosive would not get damp, the fuse would not corrode, the batteries would not go flat and, crucially, that the target for whose benefit all this was being arranged would come to the stadium at the right time and sit in the right place? Also that at the right time and in the right place there would be a resistance fighter with a remote control in his hand ready to press a button or connect batteries to contacts after observing that the target was sitting in just the right seat?

That terrorist would have been needing just too many “fortunate” coincidences. And besides, do we really need to hypothesize about coincidences in the face of the fact that a bomb exploded precisely under the head of Chechnya, its explosive power calculated so exactly that there were almost no “collateral” victims? Did the resistance fighters really have specialists capable of such
DEATH AT THE STADIUM

calculation and planning? And if they did, would they have undertaken such a delicate and improbably risky “job” instead of just blowing the whole stadium sky high?

A far more plausible explanation is that this was a classic black operation, carried out with precise timing on the basis of precise information about the daily routine of the head of Chechnya, his schedule for that day, and the timetable of his visit to the stadium. How would that be possible without involvement of the intelligence services and intelligence information? The then deputy prosecutor-general, Sergey Fridinsky, made it clear the investigation should look for a mole in the immediate entourage of the head of Chechnya because, “an outsider could not possibly have prepared this terrorist act and activated the explosive device.” Chechen Chief Prosecutor Vladimir Kravchenko too said he could not rule out the possibility that the perpetrators had accomplices within the head of state’s entourage and among those charged with ensuring security at the event. For him the crucial question was, how could explosives have got into the stadium? Indeed, how could an IED have been planted in such a high security area? Obviously the stadium and stand would have been thoroughly checked by Kadyrov’s bodyguards, members of the intelligence services, and sappers from the engineering reconnaissance units of the Joint Group of Forces immediately before the event. This, indeed, was confirmed by son Ramzan Kadyrov in an interview with Kommersant in which he said, “The stand was thoroughly inspected and subjected to engineering reconnaissance.”

Who, come to that, could even have known for sure that Kadyrov would be at the stadium on 9 May, given that there was no plan for him to be there? He was supposed to return from Moscow only on 10 May. According to Rudnik Dudaev, not even all members of the government knew the president would put in an appearance at the Grozny stadium on 9 May. Plans were changed at the last moment. Akhmat Kadyrov was due to take the salute at a military parade at Severny Airport and was being driven there when, already en route to the Russian federal forces’ base, he diverted to the stadium. Who advised him to change his route? Who sat him not just in the VIP stand but right on top of a bomb? Why did Akhmat Kadyrov permit his son, responsible for his security, to stay behind in Moscow during a holiday when all the security services are sure to be on red alert for possible assassination attempts?

Shortly after the attack, Shamil Basaev claimed responsibility, declaring, “Our mujahideen, as part of Operation Retribution, successfully completed Special Operation Nal-17 and carried out the Sharia court’s sentence in respect of the traitors to their nation and apostates from their religion, Kadyrov and Isaev.” However, as the government’s Rossiyskaya gazeta was quick to report, citing sources in the intelligence services, “operational information has been received that Basaev and Maskhadov are verbally, through their people, making it known to Kadyrov’s family that they are willing to swear on the Quran that they had absolutely nothing to do with the assassination of Akhmat-hadji.” The same newspaper reported the head of the FSB’s Chechnya Directorate, General Yury Rozhin, commenting dismissively on Basaev’s statement, observing that there had been many claims relating to the attack on 9 May and that “Basaev’s claim of involvement in the incident is being checked, but it is not the only one.”

We may note that, neither before nor after, did Chechen resistance fighters carry out any act of sabotage of such complexity. Finally, Ramzan Kadyrov, in an interview on 19 May 2004 for Argumenty i Fakty, poured cold water on the suggestion of any involvement in his father’s murder
of the Chechen separatist leaders, Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basaev, adding, “There are other forces. We know who they are.”

Assuredly, Akhmat Kadyrov had no shortage of enemies on both sides of the “front line”. It is a moot point on which side there were more.

The Battle for Black Gold

In autumn 1999, when the second Chechen war was just beginning, the belligerent Russian army generals were on very good terms with Akhmat Kadyrov, and in spring 2000, when the Kremlin was deciding whom to nominate as head of its Chechen administration, the military raised no objection to his appointment. Already in the summer of 2000, however, they did a complete about-turn and started urging the Kremlin to depose Kadyrov. In October 2000, Ruslan Khasbulatov exclaimed in bewilderment, “Kazantsev, Troshev and others literally demanded Kadyrov should be appointed, but now they are equally insistent he must be removed. Have they no conscience?”

By early 2003 the confrontation had become a crisis. A group of highly placed military men addressed a document to the Russian president with their analysis of the situation in Chechnya and their prognostications. The message was simple: Kadyrov must be removed immediately because he was a far more dangerous separatist than ever President Dkhokhar Dudaev had been. Kadyrov’s armed groups were a threat to Russian federal forces.

The gold-braided gentlemen omitted to mention that their conflict was not over political or military principles, but because of divergent economic interests. The parties had failed to share out the illegal oil business, “the pipeline”. The generals could not openly mention their claim to a share of the illegally extracted and refined oil, although it was they who provided “protection” for this lucrative sector.

If in the winter of 1999 and spring of 2000, having gained nominal control over the greater part of Chechen territory, the military were actively destroying “samovars”, illegal mini-oil refineries, from the summer of 2000 this campaign was suddenly abandoned and the number of samovars began rapidly increasing again. Ruslan Hasbulatov stated in 2001 that if, prior to the second war in Chechnya, there were about 1,000 mini-refineries, then by 2001 there were already 4-5,000. By the most conservative estimates, the revenue from this illegal oil refining was in the region of $3 million a year. In April 2001, the head of Grozneftegaz, Baudin Hamidov, said Chechen oil was being pirated with the connivance of the military, and that the situation in the oil industry had barely changed since the suppression of the resistance fighters: “Before the start of the Russian ‘counter-terrorist operation’, we had practically ceased oil extraction: all the oilfields had been seized by generals of resistance brigades who ignored Maskhadov’s orders. Today the same thing goes on under the protection of federal Russian generals.” The head of Grozneftegaz revealed the going rates in April 2001: “An army escort for a convoy transporting pirated oil to the republic’s border costs 50,000 rubles. Further negotiations are required at the Dagestani, Ingush and Russian border checkpoints.” News bulletins, for instance from the Russian Interior Ministry, were full of reports

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3 Trud, 29 August 2003.
DEATH AT THE STADIUM

of the destruction each day of 10-15 illegal mini-refineries, but the only ones closed down were those trying to get by without army "protection".

Akhmat Kadyrov drew attention to this problem on 10 August 2000, saying he wanted to see control of Chechen oil extraction delegated to his administration. On 3 October he stated unequivocally that 51% of the shares of Grozneftegaz should be held by the republic, with the revenue applied to social needs. Quoting him, the Stavropol PAN News Agency added, “Everybody knows that in Chechnya today numerous mini-refineries controlled by, among others, Russian generals are producing ‘home-refined’ petrol from pirated crude oil.”

In October 2000, Interfax published an interview with Akhmat Kadyrov, in which he announced he had “issued a decree that no oil tanker is to leave the republic without the signature of the head of administration of the Chechen Republic.”

This was tantamount to a declaration of war: not a single oil tanker, legal or illegal, moved anywhere at that time without an army escort! It is clear why the Russian generals now began demanding Kadyrov’s removal. In response, Kadyrov started rapidly expanding his armed forces in order to ensure, among other things, that the head of Chechnya could gain control of the oil.

For a while the battle for black market oil was conducted under the rules traditional for a fight between bulldogs under a carpet: bureaucratic intrigue in Moscow offices resulted in corpses ejected from the carpet. In Chechnya, business rivals were simply shot. When the army decided to tighten the screws on Kadyrov in 2000 by destroying his little unofficial refineries in Gudermes, the operation failed, and “cost one Russian colonel his life.”

Freezing out Kadyrov

Spring 2001 saw the conflict come into the open. On 11 April, Kadyrov was outspoken about the “oil problem”, apparently in the aftermath of a major rumpus in the Kremlin. He gave his version of events two and a half years later: “On one occasion, at a meeting of the Security Council where the oil question was being discussed, I said, ‘Vladimir Vladimirovich, we restrict the movement of transport after eight o’clock at night, and that is the signal for high jinks as oil tankers, escorted by armoured personnel carriers, take to the road.’ Putin asked, ‘Are you trying to say the military are stealing oil?’ I said, ‘I am not trying to say anything beyond what I have just said. The oil tankers sail through checkpoints with a military escort.’”

On 14 April 2001, immediately after this outburst by the head of Chechnya, Vladimir Putin surprised everybody by flying to Chechnya on what was officially described as a “working visit”. After meeting the heads of regional and village administrations, he went on to give the security forces a sharp dressing down, ordering them to put a stop to the pirating of oil no later than 15 May. According to journalist Sanobar Shermatova, Operation Chechen Oil, although instantly implemented, “was a mere Punch and Judy show, as the campaign against misappropriation of oil was conducted by the army itself.”

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6 PAN Stavropol, 6 October 2000.
7 Interfax, 12 October 2000.
8 Yury Shchekochikhin, Zabytaia Chechnya [Forgotten Chechnya], Moscow, 2003, p. 179.
9 Kommersant, 7 October 2003.
In autumn 2001, the military evidently decided to go on the offensive, and rumours were persistently spread through the media that Kadyrov would shortly be removed from office on a charge of embezzling funds from the sale of oil. After that, no more was heard in public about Kadyrov’s claims to the oil until the next communique from the front line of battle on 17 January 2003. At this point Kadyrov’s deputy, Usman Masaev, reported that over the past three years some six million tons of oil had been produced in Chechnya, of which two million had been pirated. The value of the misappropriated oil exceeded the total grants to the republic from the federal budget.

Kadyrov’s attack was now no longer only on the military but also on the federal Rosneft oil corporation, which had de jure control of all Chechnya’s oil wealth. On the eve of the March 2003 referendum on the Chechen constitution, Akhmat Kadyrov launched a fierce attack on Rosneft, complaining:

“The directors of Rosneft are not giving proper consideration to the interests of the Chechen Republic. Exploiting their monopoly on the extraction and sale of oil, they ignore the interests of our community and fail to invest in social projects in the republic. They have not built a single service station in Chechnya, let alone hospitals, schools or other facilities.”

Kadyrov went on to say that the republic’s future autonomous status would enable it to keep revenue from the sale of oil within the country: “This is our oil. We should have a 100% stake in oil extracted in Chechnya, and be able to export and make full use of our own natural resources.”

That was only the beginning: Kadyrov’s administration insisted that it alone should be in control of the production and sale of oil, and that this should be a sine qua non for agreement on the delimitation of powers between the federal centre and the Chechen Republic. Moreover, in order to market its oil Chechnya would need its own foreign commercial representation. “We will need a representative, or a section in the embassy, or our own commercial representative offices,” Akhmat Kadyrov declared in July 2003 because, “if there is oil in our country, it should be used for our needs. Our oil can attract investment to the republic.”

Kadyrov spoke out even more confidently after he was elected president of the republic on 5 October 2003. In his first “presidential” interview for Kommersant, he repeated that the Russian army was pirating oil, and said that after his inauguration he would be getting to grips with the situation. He went on to explain what he meant: Rosneft held a 51% share in Grozneftegaz, which meant that Chechnya, with its 49% stake, “has no control of anything.” Moreover, he complained, Rosneft contributed not a ruble to the budget.

A few days later, the head of Chechnya reiterated his demands about the oil and oil revenue, adding that he would shortly be travelling to Saudi Arabia to seek investment. Given that the Saudis were regarded at that time as manifestly sponsoring resistance fighters, we can imagine how that went down with the top brass of the army. Had they carried out their “anti-terrorist operation”, at the cost of thousands of lives on both sides, in the process reducing the republic to a pile of rubble,

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13 Quoted from Ezhenedel’nyi zhurnal, No. 19, 2004, p. 8.
only to end up with the country in the hands of Saudi “investors”? Nevertheless, in January 2004 Kadyrov flew to Saudi Arabia, and it was announced that he would be discussing not only investment, but also delivery to Chechnya of mini-oil refineries. Was that not a clear indication that Akhmat Kadyrov was intending to break Chechnya’s energy dependence on Russia?

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. On 17 October 2003, the Chechen State Council declared the republic both a “free economic zone” and an “economic, social and environmental disaster area of the Russian Federation”. At the same time, they adopted a directive that all revenues from the extraction and processing of oil and gas should remain in the country and that, accordingly, Chechnya was establishing “a national fuel and energy corporation to manage the extraction, processing, transportation and sale of oil and gas, and also to manage the enterprises of the fuel and energy industry.”

The initial shock in Moscow was so great that no attempt was made to hide it. The response was articulated through the lips of federal Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov who, at a meeting of his board, stated that the “oil industry of the Southern Federal District is largely under the control of organized crime and remains a source of finance for armed bands in Chechnya.” Kadyrov’s retort was predictable: he repeated that it was the federal forces themselves who were pirating oil in Chechnya.

The conflict had to be sorted out by President Putin. On 14 November 2003, Kadyrov had a meeting with him at which, according to Kadyrov, he was intending to discuss “a plan for priority measures to halt the illicit trading of oil.” There is no reliable record of what was actually discussed, but later that day at a press conference in ITAR-TASS Kadyrov again stated uncompromisingly that all Chechnya’s oil revenues should stay within its borders “to restore a republic wrecked through no fault of its people.”

After that, Kadyrov made speeches on the oil issue almost daily. By early 2004, he was demanding not a 51% stake in Grozneftegaz but a full 100%, and later even put forward a demand for payment for the transition of gas from Russia to the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) through Chechnya. At this time he also demanded that his administration should be in control of all military operations. In April 2004, the Russian-approved president of Chechnya quarrelled publicly about oil with Vladimir Yakovlev, the presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District, and on 22 April the Chechen State Council sent Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov a missive full of complaints about Rosneft.

Akhmat Kadyrov did not confine himself to words, and his actions were energetic and effective. His determination to clip the wings of Rosneft in Chechnya involved some nifty footwork. Grozneftegaz, a Rosneft subsidiary, was subjected to a campaign of attrition as its enterprises were dismantled. Grozneftegaz’s equipment was owned by the Chechenneftekhimprom (Chechen Oil and Chemical Industries) Federal State Unitary Enterprise, and the Grozny administration invited tenders to sell that property to private interests. As a result, plants were simply dismantled and exported. One of Chechenneftekhimprom’s main assets, the Isherskaya Production and Distribution Service, which ensured uninterrupted collection and transportation of oil, was sold off. In January 2004, court

bailiffs seized all the assets of Chechenneftekhimprom, citing debts said to be owed by Grozneftegaz to little-known firms called Kreking [Cracking] and MID.

There were other bones of contention. Akhmat Kadyrov constantly accused the military of crimes on a massive scale, and demanded that they should be investigated by the Interior Ministry, the FSB and the Prosecutor General's Office. In June 2002, he promised to take the law into his own hands if Colonel Yury Budanov, accused of the abduction and murder of a Chechen girl, were to be acquitted or pardoned. In October 2003, the head of Chechnya demanded the withdrawal of federal troops from Chechnya, and that any remaining should be permanently deployed to the mountains. He also threatened that his police force would fire on any “stray armoured personnel carriers.” In April 2004, at the above-mentioned meeting with Presidential Envoy Yakovlev, he angrily castigated the military, demanding an explanation for an air raid on the hill village of Rigahoy in which a woman and all five of her young children perished. On 30 April 2004, Kadyrov expressed outrage that a jury had acquitted Captain Eduard Ulman, under whose command six Chechens were massacred. Five days before his death, Akhmat Kadyrov said in an interview for Russia’s NTV that he intended to set up a commission to investigate the causes of the war in Chechnya.

We can see that Kadyrov had crossed swords with many people, quite apart from the Chechen resistance fighters, his former comrades-in-arms in fighting the Russian army in the first Russo-Chechen war. Most prominently, he had angered the Moscow “oil generals” and a whole gang of army generals in Chechnya who, in “the pipeline”, had discovered a source of fabulous riches ripe for plundering. He could not retreat without compromising the interests of the local elite who supported him in Chechnya, but one man on his own does not an army make.

Certainly, he could put pressure on his gold-braided competitors by appealing to the Kremlin and, given the serious shortage of major pro-Russian figureheads in Chechnya, Vladimir Putin had no one else to turn to. The generals for their part could not move openly against Kadyrov in defence of their unprincipled selfish interests. They did, however, have other means at their disposal for dealing with a turbulent Chechen leader.

“The investigation has been completed.” Time to move on?

Today it is difficult to remember quite how many times the “competent authorities” announced the detention or killing of the latest supposed perpetrators and organizers of Kadyrov’s assassination. Those arrested invariably obliged with “admissions of guilt” before quietly disappearing. During the six months following the murder there were at least eight such confessions, but when, on 26 January 2005, RF Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov was asked at a meeting of the Federation Council how the investigation was progressing, he spread his arms wide, shrugged and said, “Unfortunately, it is not yet possible to report anything.”

But then, in January 2008, Ramzan Kadyrov stated that all those complicit in the murder of his father had been eliminated. “The person who took responsibility for the murder has been eliminated as have all those who were implicated. As for what the prosecutor’s office is up to,” he said in an interview for Ekho Moskvy (Echo of Moscow) radio station, “that is of no interest to

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9 Kommersant, 7 October 2003.
DEATH AT THE STADIUM

anyone. I as a Chechen, as a Muslim, as the son of my father have done what was needed to ensure none of those people are alive today."

It is unclear who Kadyrov was referring to. Only Shamil Basaev claimed responsibility for the assassination, and did so in several statements and interviews, but no real evidence of his involvement has been forthcoming. Likewise, we have never learned the names of any of those said to be the actual perpetrators. And what exactly is meant by "those implicated"? It also remains unknown whether the search for possible organizers and perpetrators of the killing extended beyond the ranks of resistance fighters.

Then, almost a year and a half after Ramzan Kadyrov himself had sought to close down the topic of his father’s murder as having been exhausted, in April 2009 there was a sudden announcement from the Investigatory Committee of the Southern Federal District Prosecutor’s Office that the suspended investigation into Akhmat Kadyrov’s death was being reopened. After a delay of two years, it was revealed that the case had only been suspended in April 2007 because not one of those arrested or suspected of the crime was still alive. Whether any of them had even existed, apart from the self-proclaimed organizer of the deed, Shamil Basaev, remains a mystery.

The case was reopened after a statement by Ramzan Kadyrov that Sulim Yamadaev, former commander of the Vostok battalion, had been involved. On 28 March 2009, Yamadaev was assassinated in Dubai. The Dubai police suspected people close to Ramzan Kadyrov, including Adam Delimkhanov. Then, on 6 April 2009, Ramzan Kadyrov made a surprise announcement that he had “hard evidence that Sulim Yamadaev was implicated in the murder of my father. Throughout this time, work has been proceeding to consolidate the legal validity of this evidence and take measures to bring him to justice.”

Wait a minute! In January 2008, Ramzan Kadyrov said he had already “dealt with” all those involved in his father’s death. Where had the evidence incriminating Sulim Yamadaev been then which, according to Ramzan Kadyrov, had been being worked on? And how, after all this, can anyone give the least credence to the official account of the terrorist incident at the Grozny stadium?

It is worth dwelling briefly on Sulim Yamadaev, who so belatedly figures in this murder case. Yamadaev and his brothers fought in the first Chechen war on the side of the separatists, as did Akhmat Kadyrov. After the second war started, he defected to the federal side, as did Akhmat Kadyrov. Indeed they did so synchronously and even in concert. In September-October 1999, Kadyrov, jointly with the Yamadaev brothers, who were resistance field commanders, announced his readiness to take up arms against Wahhabi Islamists, declared the Gudermes and Kurchaloy districts of Chechnya a “Wahhabism-free zone”, and refused to take part in the new war against Russian federal forces.

Subsequently, unlike Kadyrov Senior, Sulim Yamadaev not only did not fight the Russian troops but collaborated closely with them. Shortly after the assassination of Kadyrov, he enrolled at the Frunze Military Academy in Moscow and was awarded the rank of lieutenant-colonel of the Russian armed forces. In 2005, he was awarded the title of Hero of Russia by a secret decree. What had he done to deserve that? The secrecy of the decree indicates, of course, that the reason for awarding it was secret. Sulim Yamadaev only came into conflict with the powerful Kadyrov clan a few years after Akhmat Kadyrov’s death, on graduating from Frunze Academy. Before that, as far as is known,
there were no conflicts between them, perhaps because Kadyrov Senior’s authority during his lifetime was unchallengeable. Were these conflicts a power struggle? Probably. If so, the Yamadaevs were the losers and had to leave Chechnya. After that, Sulim Yamadaev transferred his loyalty entirely to the federal armed forces. In August 2008, he took an active part in the battle against Georgia for Tskhinvali in South Ossetia as a company commander of the Vostok battalion attached to GRU military intelligence. His last appointment was as deputy commander of the GRU’s Taganrog brigade.

Even the seemingly unbreachable protection of the GRU did not save Yamadaev from the wrath of Kadyrov Junior. Evidently aware that he could not feel safe in Russia, in August 2008 Yamadaev retired into the reserve of the Russian armed forces and shortly afterwards emigrated to the United Arab Emirates. In September 2008, in a highly audacious contract killing in the centre of Moscow, his brother Ruslan was murdered a few hundred metres from the White House. Some six months later, on 30 March 2009, in the underground garage of a closely guarded luxury residential complex in the heart of Dubai, death at the hands of hitmen caught up also with Sulim Yamadaev.

Was this Ramzan Kadyrov’s revenge for the death of his father? Or was that just a pretext for settling scores with a dangerous rival in the struggle for power in Chechnya? If Ramzan Kadyrov was sincere and Yamadaev was involved in the assassination of Akhmat Kadyrov, who in May 2004 stood behind the future Hero of Russia and lieutenant-colonel of the GRU?

As for the Russian investigatory authorities, finding themselves in a discreditable situation, they had no option, after Ramzan Kadyrov’s claim on 6 April 2009 of Yamadaev’s involvement, but to announce resumption of the official investigation. Already on the evening of 16 April, however, representatives of the Investigatory Committee of the Russian Prosecutor’s Office announced cancellation of the resumed investigation into the the death of Akhmat Kadyrov.

It later transpired that their superiors on the Board of the Investigatory Committee of the Russian Prosecutor’s Office for the Southern Federal District had cancelled resumption of the investigation on the grounds that it was without merit and premature.
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