
US 'provoked Russia-Georgia war'

By Bridget Kendall
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Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov has accused the United States of emboldening Georgia to start a war in the Caucasus to test Russian resolve.

Mr Kadyrov, who is a keen supporter of the Russian government, said Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, had been dancing to Washington's tune.

But he said that Russia had responded decisively during last month's conflict and shown it was the stronger power.

Mr Kadyrov made the remarks in a speech at the presidential palace near Grozny.

After 1999 we found a common language with Russia and now we'll stay in the Russian Federation Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov

The newly constructed complex outside the Chechen capital comes complete with a private race course, artificial lake and miniature mountain, as well as Mr Kadyrov's personal zoo of panthers, leopards and bears.

The wild beasts, he said, had a calming influence on him, and he liked to talk and play with them in his spare time.

'Testing ground'

Although the small Russian republic of Chechnya has waged two brutal wars in the past 15 years against Russia, and Mr Kadyrov's father, Akhmad, fought as a field commander before switching allegiance to the Kremlin.

The 31-year-old leader was adamant that the republic was now loyal to Moscow.

Therefore, Russia's recent decision to recognise the independence of two other breakaway regions in the Caucasus, the Georgian enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, would not reopen the question of Chechen independence, he said.

Mr Kadyrov confirmed that Chechen units and paramilitaries had fought with Russians against Georgians in South Ossetia last month.

"We Chechens are obliged to be on the front line with Russia because we are warriors, and we know what war is," he explained.

But he also went further to accuse the US of using the Caucasus as a testing ground to challenge Russia's resolve.

Mr Kadyrov claimed Georgia's President Saakashvili had been dancing to the US government's tune, and that through Georgia the US had provoked a confrontation.

But he said that Russia had responded decisively and shown the US that it was the stronger power.

'Common language'

President Kadyrov also said he was not worried that escalating tensions in the neighbouring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan could again destabilise

Chechnya.

"After 1999 we found a common language with Russia and now we'll stay in the Russian Federation," he said.

He added that after 1999 - the start of the second war with Russia - Chechens had realised they were being manipulated by foreign powers and had become a target from criminals from outside Chechnya who were largely responsible for the lawlessness and acts of terrorism of the time.

Mr Kadyrov said a turning point had been the death of the rebel Chechen commander, Shamil Basayev, in 2006, allegedly the mastermind behind numerous large scale terrorist attacks.

The president said he had greeted the news of Basayev's death as a cause for celebration, but had been sad he had not been able to wreck vengeance on him personally for the thousands of deaths he had caused.

Rebuilding Grozny

As for Chechnya's prospects now, he said Moscow was helping to finance an intense programme of reconstruction to bring peace and prosperity to the republic, and that funds were so plentiful it was difficult to spend them.

Already, the centre of Grozny, once a mass of ruins after repeated bombardments during the war years, has been completely transformed.

A giant mosque now dwarfs Grozny's central square, surrounded by parks of flower beds and fountains. New five- and nine-storey apartment blocks line some of the main streets.

Although behind them you can still see ruins of war-damaged houses left without windows or roofs, and bomb craters, now overgrown with grass and small trees.

President Kadyrov said he was now trying to persuade Chechens who had fled during the war years to return, including the former actor and prime minister of the rebel government, Akhmed Zakayev.

Mr Zakayev is currently resident in London, but is wanted by the Russian government on terrorism charges.

President Kadyrov however described Mr Zakayev as a valuable artist who would be welcome to return to help revive Chechnya's cultural heritage.

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