

Russian Ambassador to Israel: 'Israel Destabilizes More Than Iran'

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The famous definition of a diplomat as “a person who is sent abroad to lie for his country” fits perfectly Russian Ambassador to Israel Anatoly Viktorov. The report on his version of Middle East reality is [This is what happened to Griboyedov](#) at the hands of the Iranians:

On a hillside outside Georgia's capital Tbilisi lies the grave of Alexander Griboyedov, the literary giant, whose comic verse play Woe from Wit is still taught to schoolchildren in Russia. In addition to being a poet and playwright, Griboyedov was the Russian tsar's envoy to Persia in 1829 when he was slaughtered along with the staff of his

embassy by a mob enraged over a perceived slight against its customs and religion.

The two empires had just signed a peace treaty to end a war in which Persia had suffered a serious defeat. Feelings against the victors were still raw, needing only a spark to set them off. This came in February 1829, when two Christian Armenian women escaped from a harem and sought refuge in the Russian mission in Tehran. One of the terms of the unpopular treaty stipulated that Armenians in Persia were allowed to return to Russian Armenia, and Griboyedov refused to return them despite the shah's demands.

Contemporaneous accounts relate that a mob of several thousand irate Persians then gathered around the mission, at which point—too late—Griboyedov offered to hand over the escapees. One protester was killed by an embassy guard, further outraging the mob, which, incited by local mullahs, proceeded to storm the mission. Griboyedov and the few other diplomats with him bravely defended themselves but could do nothing against the onslaught. The Cossack guards were killed, and the rest of the mission, despite a valiant defense, soon followed. The [scene](#) became “a mass of dead, cut-up and beheaded corpses.” Griboyedov's body was desecrated and dragged through the streets of Tehran. Only when all was quiet did the guard force sent by the shah make its appearance.

This tale of Muslim fanaticism, brutality, and cruelty, will not be a surprise to visitors to this site. Perhaps Ambassador Anatoly Viktorov knows the story of Griboyedov's death; it took place in 1829, but it could have occurred yesterday. Does Viktorov recognize the “eastern people” (Vostochnii narod), who could be so easily whipped up into a murderous mob? One thinks of the two Israeli reservists, Yosef Avrahami and Vadim Norzhizh, who were driving in the West Bank in 2000, took a wrong turn, and ended up in Ramallah, where they were dragged

into the police station. There, they were beaten to death by Palestinian Arabs, some of whom had been passing by in a funeral procession. The two Israelis then had their bodies mutilated in all the unspeakable ways that can be imagined. One of their killers, Aziz Salha, proudly held up his bloodied hands at the window, while the crowd below shouted its ecstatic approval, and then their bodies were tossed out that same window, to be further mutilated by the Arabs on the ground. The killers were hailed as heroes by the Palestinian Authority.

Which brings me to the point Griboyedov – from beyond the grave – could make to his fellow Russian Ambassador in the Middle East, Anatoly Viktorov. Many of Griboyedov's lines in *Woe From Wit* have entered the Russian language as “winged words” known to every literate Russian. Here is one I am sure Viktorov knows well, which can be Englished as “Lie but know when to stop.”

Words to the wise, Mr. Ambassador. Winged words to the wise.

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