

A REPORT OF THE CSIS  
RUSSIA AND EURASIA  
PROGRAM

# The North Caucasus

RUSSIA'S VOLATILE FRONTIER

## *Authors*

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Matthew Malarkey  
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# THE NORTH CAUCASUS

## RUSSIA'S VOLATILE FRONTIER

*"Two enemies can't get along under one roof." —Chechen proverb<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

The tragic terrorist bombing at Moscow's Domodedovo International Airport on January 24 of this year resulted in 37 dead and 180 injured. This event brought the danger of growing instability in Russia's Northern Caucasus region to the center of attention for Russians and foreigners alike and marked the third terrorist attack on major Russian transit infrastructure in a period of 15 months (Nevsky Express train between Moscow and St. Petersburg in November 2009 and the Moscow Metro bombing in March 2010). Doku Umarov, a self-styled jihadi of Chechen origin, has claimed credit for all three attacks and promised more in his quest to bring the growing violence in the North Caucasus to the heart of Russia, with the message that nobody is safe in Russia.



Source: Peter Fitzgerald, commons: User:Pmx, [http://wikitravel.org/upload/shared/6/63/Southern\\_Russia\\_regions\\_map2.png](http://wikitravel.org/upload/shared/6/63/Southern_Russia_regions_map2.png).

While in the 1990s and the first half of the new century's first decade, violence in the North Caucasus was primarily based in Chechnya, in the last several years the levels of violence and terrorist attacks have increased dramatically in the neighboring republics of the North Caucasus and beyond. For example, in 2010 alone, the number of attacks in Kabardino-Balkaria increased five-fold, and on February 18, 2011, two attacks at the Mt. Elbrus ski resort resulted in three deaths and the destruction of the resort's cable car system. In July 2010, the Baksan Hydro-Electric power plant was attacked. And while Kabardino-Balkaria has been especially under siege recently, this kind of increased violence has spread to Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, etc.

Clearly the Russian government's efforts to stabilize the region are failing badly. The establishment of a new North Caucasus Federal District in January 2010, headed by the former governor of Krasnoyarsk, Alexander Khloponin, has not proven effective, and the situation continues to

1. "Два врага под одной крышей не уживаются."

deteriorate. While the influence of Islam is certainly growing and the region suffers from miserable socioeconomic conditions, most of the insurgents choose violence in response to the brutal and often deadly interactions with Russian security forces experienced by them and their family members and close friends. The problem is further compounded by the fact that this insurgency is locally based and is disunited.

Increasingly the North Caucasus region is becoming less integrated with the rest of the Russian Federation and displaying many of the traits of an unstable frontier zone seen in other parts of the world such as the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) in Pakistan on the Afghan border. Likely the Kremlin would be more or less satisfied as long as the instability in the North Caucasus did not spread to other regions of Russia, but already this is happening. And with the plans to hold the winter Olympics in 2014 in neighboring Sochi, the increasing instability of the North Caucasus takes on a more international dimension.

April 2011 will mark the two-year anniversary of the Russian Anti-terrorist Committee's announcement of the cessation of counterterrorist operations (*kontrterroristicheskaya operatsiya*, or KTO) in Chechnya. At the time of the announcement, the decision was largely understood to signify an apparent improvement in the security situation in the Chechen republic following a decade-long insurgency, and it was also believed to signal the Kremlin's desire to further normalize the region through restoring and developing its economic and social structures.<sup>2</sup> In this light, it appeared that Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin had finally accomplished that which he declared on assuming the presidency in 1999, "My mission, my historic mission—it sounds pompous, but it is true—is to resolve the situation in the North Caucasus."<sup>3</sup> However, in the year following the cancellation of KTO in Chechnya, the number of incidents of violence in the Chechen Republic as well as in neighboring Ingushetia and Dagestan rose in comparison to the previous 12 months.<sup>4</sup> The year after the cancellation of KTO, 292 people were killed. Moreover, as a result of terrorist attacks and acts of sabotage, 685 people in Dagestan were killed or wounded in 2010. A local KTO regime in Dagestan was introduced that year 22 times. In Ingushetia, local KTO regimes were proclaimed seven times in 2010. For the first time in the Caucasus post-Soviet existence, a big hydroelectric power plant (Baksan, Kabardino-Balkaria) was targeted by terrorists in July 2010. That year local KTO regimes were introduced in Kabardino-Balkaria twice. There are daily attacks on police, kidnappings and abductions remain a frequent occurrence, regional government officials are attacked, human rights activists are targeted, and the insurgency appears to be spreading and intensifying its attacks—all of which suggest that the situation is far from under control. Indeed, the fact that Putin appointed himself as head of the Russian government's commission for the socioeconomic development of the North Caucasus in December 2010 illustrates the Kremlin's failures to bring the region peace and stability, which have deteriorated to such an extent that President Dmitry Medvedev has even labeled it as the most serious threat facing the Russian Federation.<sup>5</sup>

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2. "Russia 'Ends Chechnya Operation,'" BBC News, April 16, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8001495.stm>.

3. Quoted in Natalia Gevorkian, A.V. Kolesnikov and Natalia Timakova, *Ot Pervogo Litsa* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), p. 133.

4. Matthew Malarkey and Lucy Moore, "Violence in the North Caucasus, Spring 2010: On the Rise Again?" CSIS Human Rights and Security Initiative, [http://csis.org/files/publication/100513\\_Violence\\_in\\_the\\_North\\_Caucasus\\_Spring\\_2010.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/100513_Violence_in_the_North_Caucasus_Spring_2010.pdf).

5. Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, The Kremlin, November 12, 2009, <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/5979>.



To best face and contend with the known and emerging threats in the North Caucasus requires an informed picture and understanding of what is going on in the region. This report sheds light on some of the important trends that are taking place and in turn raise awareness of the most salient issues affecting the region today. It will then promote practical approaches that can be taken both in Moscow and in the West to better and more effectively address and alleviate the deteriorating situation in the North Caucasus.

This report is based on a remarkable conference, “The North Caucasus: Russia’s Tinderbox,” held at CSIS in Washington, D.C., November 30–December 1, 2010, which brought Russia’s leading experts on the Northern Caucasus, including several from the region, together with leading U.S. experts for in-depth discussions. (The conference agenda and a list of participants can be found in the appendix.)

## No Longer Just a Chechen Conflict

Russia’s decision to intervene in Georgia in the “hot August” of 2008 signified that it was prepared to take on the role of the Caucasus’s guarantor of security and stability. The irony of this, however, is that for the best part of the last decade Russia has been unable to contend with the insurgency that has brewed within its own southern borders. Still, Russia’s South Caucasus policy is understandable because destabilization of the South Caucasus (especially taking into account the impact of the South Caucasus conflicts on the Russian domestic security agenda) would provoke new instability within an unstable region.

In the years following the war, the republics of the North Caucasus appeared to be heading toward the same instability and insecurity once solely associated with Chechnya. Indeed, contrary to popular belief that the insurgency in the region is Chechnya-centered, from August 2008 onward, the levels of violence recorded in Chechnya were either less than or equal to the violence levels in its neighboring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan; indeed Chechnya’s numbers even dropped below those of Kabardino-Balkaria in 2010. And though the situation in Chechnya is by no means secure or resolved, the vast majority of the incidents of violence in the North Caucasus over recent years have been taking place outside of the Chechen Republic.

The greatest increase in instability following the Russia-Georgia War was witnessed in Ingushetia, one of the region’s smallest republics in terms of size and population, and the situation deteriorated to such an extent that the Kremlin dismissed its widely unpopular appointee, Murat Zyazikov, from the post of Ingush president and installed Yunus-bek Evkurov in his place. Evkurov promised to reign in and reform the hugely corrupt security forces that acted with utter impunity in the republic and provide tangible improvement for the long-suffering people of Ingushetia. However, the republic remains plagued by violence and insecurity, and only did the number of attacks begin to fall substantially following the capture of Emir Magas in June 2010 and the reorganization of the Ingush *jamaat*<sup>6</sup> that followed.

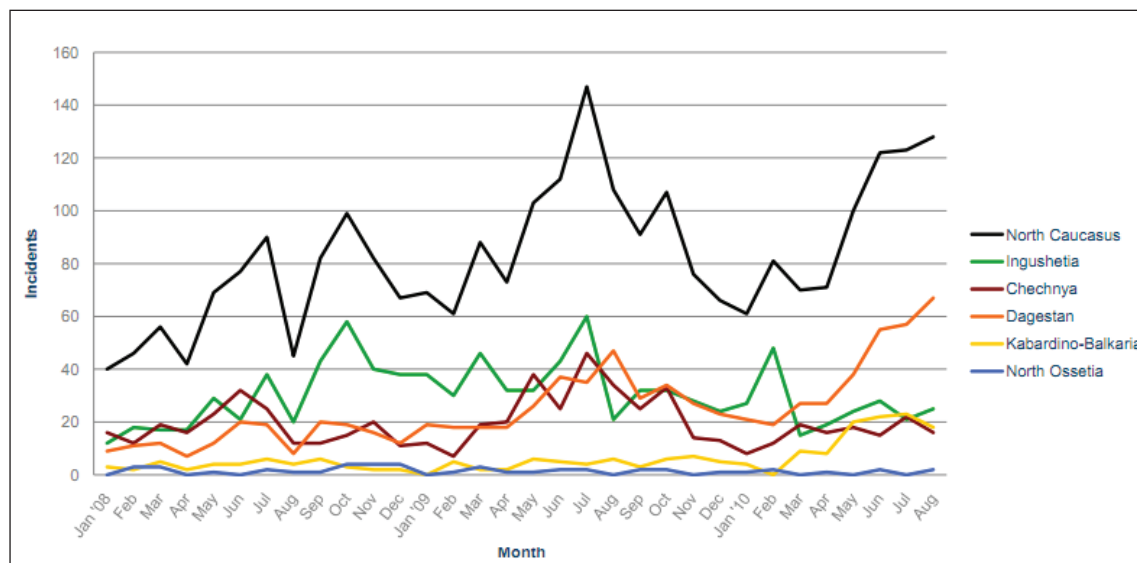
Indeed, since Emir Magas’s arrest, Dagestan has become the region’s hotbed for violence, with an Islamism-driven insurgency fueling the insecurity. Unlike in the other republics of the North Caucasus, where factors such as nationalism and secessionism play a more significant role in fueling the insurgency, the violence in Dagestan is considered to be almost entirely incited by gross

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6. *Jamaat*—a group of radical Islamic insurgents.



**Figure 1. Incidents of Violence in the North Caucasus, January 2008–August 2010**



Source: Matthew Malarkey and Lucy Moore, “Violence in the North Caucasus, Summer 2010: Not Just a Chechen Conflict,” September 2, 2010, <http://csis.org/publication/violence-north-caucasus-7>, p. 5.

poverty, cases of police brutality and religious intolerance. Moreover, persistence and intensification of the attacks in Dagestan imply that a resistance movement has become embedded in the republic. As was the case in Ingushetia, the Kremlin’s response to the declining situation was to announce the dismissal of Mukhu Aliev and the appointment of Magomedsalam Magomedov as his successor, although since the latter’s introduction, there appears to have only been trifling success in tackling the unrest and curbing the violence.

In an attempt to more effectively contend with the mounting resistance in Dagestan, Moscow is replicating the Chechen model of establishing locally manned units to fight the insurgents. It is believed that they will have multifaceted purposes—ranging from creating jobs to indoctrinating potential insurgents with pro-Russian ideology—and it is not yet known whether, as in Chechnya, they will allow amnestied fighters to join their ranks.<sup>7</sup> In any case, the reaction to this move is mixed, with some believing that this indigenous unit will engender widespread local backing and be able to fight more effectively through utilizing such support. On the other hand, others raise concern that this unit will be ineffective at fighting a guerrilla insurgency and could utilize the same heavy-handed tactics of the Russian security forces, which will only lead to greater resentment among the local population.<sup>8</sup>

The security situation in Kabardino-Balkaria, arguably once one of the most stable of North Caucasus republics, has deteriorated exponentially in 2010. The timing of the rise in violence is associated with the death of Anzor Astemirov, head of the local *jamaat*, in March 2010. Astemirov believed in a policy of maintaining a latent insurgency to prevent Russian intervention and

7. Valery Dzutsev, “Suicide Bombings and Attacks on Infrastructure Increase Volatility in Troubled Dagestan,” *North Caucasus Analysis* 11, issue 5 (September 16, 2010), Jamestown Foundation, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=36872](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36872).

8. Ibid.

the potential breakup of the republic. His successor Asker Dzhappuev has subsequently taken a more violent approach, resulting in a surge of attacks that has led to the official recognition of Kabardino-Balkaria as one of the least secure republics in the North Caucasus by the end of 2010.<sup>9</sup> Like Kabardino-Balkaria, the Stavropol region has also been affected by the spread of violence in the North Caucasus, though to a considerably lesser extent. The shoot-outs and explosions that are becoming a far too frequent occurrence in the area appear to be fueled by ethnic unrest.<sup>10</sup>

Not only have we seen a quantitative rise in the number of incidents of violence in the North Caucasus in recent years, we have also witnessed a qualitative rise as insurgent groups across the region have begun attacking military and security targets, while increasingly instigating attacks against economic, industrial, and political targets. Attacks against hydroelectric power plants in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan and brazen assaults on the Chechen Parliament in Grozny and on Tsenteroi—the hometown of Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov—appear to have destroyed Kadyrov’s image of a secure and prosperous Chechnya by exposing his vulnerability and calling into question the illusory nature of the republic’s stability. Such attacks against high profile targets have once again drawn the attention of the world’s media to the scale and scope of the intensifying insurgency in the North Caucasus.

## Ethnic Nationalism, Not Ethnic Secessionism

Unlike the Chechen aspirations for independence from the Russian Federation in the 1990s, there is little evidence to suggest that the violence occurring across the North Caucasus today is driven by secessionist goals. The legacy of two secessionist wars in Chechnya remains fresh in the memory, and there appears to be a tacit recognition that the republics of the region could not function as independent states. Indeed, it is arguably in the interest of the republics to remain under the Russian economic and security umbrella. It is also worth noting that the quasi-independence that Chechnya did achieve from 1994 to 1999 only served to create a power vacuum of authority in the republic, which saw it deteriorate into a “failed state” that negatively impacted its neighbors. Ethnic secessionist movements have thus become subdued and receive little popular support in today’s North Caucasus.

Ethnic nationalist movements, on the other hand, appear to have achieved a second wind and are becoming an increasingly more potent force in the region. Unlike past secessionist movements, these nationalist forces do not espouse anti-Russian rhetoric nor are they striving for independence from Moscow. Instead, they are in reaction to, and are fueled by, such modern-day sociopolitical grievances as underrepresentation in legislative bodies and disputes over land. In Kabardino-Balkaria, despite the attempts of President Arsen Kanokov to decrease dependence on Moscow and address the widespread disparity between ethnic groups, there is an increasing nationalist edge to the recent instability.

Ethno-nationalist movements are also gaining traction in Ingushetia and North Ossetia with the ongoing failure to resolve the status of the Prigorodny District. A couple of factors have caused the issue to resurface in recent years. First, some analysts have contended that Russia’s Au-

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9. Нургалиев: уровень террористической угрозы растет в Дагестане и КБР,” РИА НОВОСТИ, November 18, 2010, [http://www.rian.ru/defense\\_safety/20101118/297968385.html](http://www.rian.ru/defense_safety/20101118/297968385.html).

10. Andy Potts, “Shoot-out Stokes the Tensions in Russia’s South,” *Moscow News*, November 29, 2011, <http://themoscownews.com/russia/20101129/188238348.html>.

gust 2008 intervention in Georgia and its subsequent recognition of the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have reignited ethno-nationalist discourses about the lack of settlement over the Prigorodny, an issue about which the Ingush have long harbored historical grievances against Moscow.

The Ingush, like the Chechens, were deported en masse during the Stalin era. However, on being permitted to return to their homelands in the 1950s by Khrushchev, the once Ingush territory of Prigorodny had been resettled by ethnic Ossetians. The Ingush, therefore, have been determined to reclaim the region, believing that they had been prevented from resettling in their rightful lands. The situation ultimately deteriorated into a brief conflict in 1992 that resulted in forcing most of the Ingush in Prigorodny to flee to Ingushetia. In an attempt to bring the situation under control, Russian federal troops were introduced, yet it is widely understood that the Kremlin took an overtly pro-Ossetian stance on the matter. Indeed, once the conflict came to an end, Russian president Boris Yeltsin declared that Prigorodny would remain part of North Ossetia.

Evkurov's stance that Ingushetia would not contest Prigorodny as part of North Ossetia but would insist on the right of Ingush refugees to be allowed to return to their homes was received with discontent among some in Ingushetia. They contended that he was too soft on the issue, conceded too much to the Ossetians (and Moscow), and thus did not represent the interests of the people. Prigorodny remained an unresolved standoff, and there has been negligible improvement on the ground for refugees who were forced to flee during the conflict.

There have been overt fears that potentially destabilizing events, such as the Beslan siege and the recent suicide bombing of a market in Vladikavkaz, might cause the situation to escalate to the next level, and although these events did not result in conflict, there is concern that as tensions increase a future event might indeed result in another war. Indeed, there has been a noticeable shift by the Ingush *jamaat* as it has adopted increasingly more nationalist rhetoric for its struggle in order to appeal to and win the support of the local population. Some analysts believe that a resolution of the Prigorodny dispute would aid in the pacification of the ethno-nationalist movement in Ingushetia and North Ossetia and potentially deprive the insurgency of one of its primary tools for recruiting frustrated and alienated young people. In turn, Prigorodny, another indicator of Moscow's inability to ensure security and a contributing factor to unrest in Ingushetia and North Ossetia, deserves greater attention in Moscow and the West.

## Olympics

The second, and certainly more overt, motivation arguably behind the recent rise in ethnic nationalism is the decision to host the upcoming Winter Olympics in Sochi, which may have reignited latent ethno-nationalist sentiments and aspirations among Circassians. The decision to hold the Games, set to take place in 2014, in Krasnaya Polyana has raised intense debate. That region, for Circassians, represents their historical homeland and the site of the last battle of the Caucasian War, in which in 1864 they were overwhelmingly defeated by imperialist Russian troops and ultimately "ethnically cleansed" from their lands by the Russians—none of which Moscow has ever acknowledged. Circassians have thus lobbied for the Games to be moved, arguing that it is insensitive to host them in Krasnaya Polyana, particularly in 2014, the 150th anniversary of the final battle. There have been calls from the Circassian nationalist movement to break up the unified republic of Karachay-Cherkessia into separate ethnic republics, which, though unlikely to happen, would almost certainly trigger a division of Kabardino-Balkaria as well. With the

Olympics attracting a world audience, it will become increasingly more difficult for Moscow to suppress the Circassian nationalist movement as more and more attention starts to focus on the region.

Unlike Moscow, Tbilisi has taken up the Circassian cause and lobbied against the Games' location. However, Georgian motives are viewed skeptically, as Tbilisi is aware that the Games will positively affect its breakaway region of Abkhazia and is only attempting to expand the divide between the Abkhaz and Adygs. As such, the Saakashvili regime is thought to be destabilizing the North Caucasus through policies that permit residents of the North Caucasus visa-free travel to Georgia.

The 2014 Winter Olympics have ignited latent ethno-nationalist sentiments, and there is mounting apprehension among some observers that in the buildup to the Games, a new wave of violence, instability, and insecurity, characteristics usually associated with the eastern republics of the Caucasus, might now affect the western Caucasus. Indeed, the recent bombing of a train and the repeated discovery of weapons caches in the Sochi region could indicate the emergence of a novel insurgency movement, further reinforcing the fear of a united insurgent front across the entirety of the North Caucasus.<sup>11</sup>

## A Kaleidoscope of Islams

### Growth

Although Islamic influences are by no means novel in the North Caucasus, since the 1980s Islam in the area has undergone a renaissance, spreading throughout the region. Today, it is possible to label the North Caucasus an "Islamic region" as Islamic influences have penetrated deeper into society and dramatically redirected it toward an Islamic way of life. One of the driving forces behind this growth of Islam has been its rising popularity among the younger generations, a trend evident across the region. To some observers, this increasing popularity is not a cause of concern because the type of Islam that the majority of the youth in the North Caucasus follow is one that is based on moderate teachings, has no ethnic flavor, and preaches Islam without borders or sectarianism. And in a society where much of one's civil liberties and means of expression have been curtailed; where there is gross disparity of wealth and corruption, high levels of unemployment, and poverty; and where radical preachers espouse inflammatory interethnic messages, this moderate brand of Islam that promotes egalitarianism and tolerance has been widely adopted.

### Geography of Islam

Just as the North Caucasus is home to many ethnic groups, it is also representative of numerous Islamic movements. Hanafi Muslims are predominantly concentrated in the north-west, whereas Sufis are mostly found in the north-east. Nevertheless, the increasing growth of Islam is diversifying its geographical makeup, shifting it away from traditional roots. For example, tranquil and latent Islamization is taking place in the north-western part of the North Caucasus, particularly

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11. "Дело о подрыве железной дороги в Краснодарском крае возбуждено по статье 'терроризм,'" Интерфакс, November 21, 2010, <http://www.interfax.ru/politics/news.asp?id=165863>; "Недалеко от Сочи найден тайник с оружием," Кавказский Узел, December 29, 2010, <http://southdistrict.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/179035/>.

among the youth in Karachay-Cherkessia and the Stavropol district, which will ultimately transform the demographic context of that part of the region in years to come.

## Politicization of Islam

As Islam comes to play a more dominant role in societies across the North Caucasus, it increasingly becomes a political tool. Kadyrov has used Islam to consolidate his grip on Chechnya by engendering a common Chechen, Islamic identity. It is also increasingly utilized in multiethnic Dagestan, where various Islamic movements are growing. Indeed, Dagestani society has become sharply divided between the ultra-secular and the ultra-religious, with both sides sharply rejecting the other. The labels of “good” and “bad” Islam have been applied to certain creeds, with traditional Sufi Islam understood as the “good” Islam and Salafism the “bad.” Sufi communities, consequently, have traditionally encountered little resistance and could easily penetrate and engage on all spheres of society—business, politics, media, etc.—which has enabled them to hold and wield influential positions of power. Salafis, who profess themselves to be “true” Muslims and are considered the most radical in terms of their traditional views, have in the past faced greatest discrimination and persecution for their religious beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, an important transformation is presently taking place in the North Caucasus, though most evidently in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan, as the Salafi movement is gaining in popular support and is increasingly accepted into mainstream society.<sup>12</sup> In Dagestan, for example, Salafis have started to bring their businesses to downtown Makhachkala and are not hiding their Salafi identity. In this light, we can no longer talk about the social rejection of Salafis in the region, as their influence and beliefs are becoming increasingly more accepted in the mainstream and their numbers increase. The Islamization of political and economic structures, thus, represents a worrying trend as religious beliefs are increasingly interwoven into the fabric of society. And as the region becomes more Islamicized, there is concern that the societies there will increasingly resist attempts at modernization and reform, thus becoming less and less integrated into the rest of Russia.<sup>13</sup>

## Sharia Law

One potential consequence of the increasingly Salafi influence in the North Caucasian society is the possible introduction of Sharia law, which is a notion that is gaining support in the region among all Islamic sects and generations. Indeed, many young people, disenfranchised by the failures of society and the state to provide opportunity for them, consider Sharia law necessary in order to address the socio-political problems that the region faces as well as to the moral and spiritual needs of local societies. In fact, there are already young Muslims in the region that adhere to Sharia laws—they pray five times a day, observe halal foods, and abstain from alcohol—and are already very politically active, promoting their interpretation of Islam. Moreover, Sharia law has affected the economic activity of the region, where trade is conducted according to Islamic law: taxes are not paid to the local or federal governments; *zakat*<sup>14</sup> is collected instead. Thus, considering its appeal among the youth, the notion that Sharia could be adopted as the law of the

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12. “39% опрошенных жителей Кабардино-Балкарии проявляют симпатии к ваххабизму,” *Caucasus Times*, May 31, 2010. <http://www.caucasustimes.com/article.asp?language=2&id=20224>.

13. Jim Nichol, *Stability in Russia's Chechnya and Other Regions of the North Caucasus: Recent Developments* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service for Congress, 2009).

14. *Zakat*—the compulsory giving of a set proportion of one's wealth to charity.

land must be taken seriously as these young people will one day be the future leaders and scholarly elite of the region.

The prospect that Sharia law will be established in the North Caucasus raises concern among many analysts because, as is evident from present Sharia enclaves, societies observing this Islamic code of law can become significantly isolated from the rest of society and the region as a whole. And, as such, this might only further serve to entrench the sense of alienation and ‘other’ felt by people of the North Caucasus from Moscow, and this is particularly important considering that the people of the North Caucasus are gradually orienting themselves away from Moscow and European Russia towards the Middle East. Indeed, this is already happening across the region, and it is most extreme in Dagestan, where the Kremlin is proposing the establishment of Islamic education centers in order to prevent the teaching of potentially disruptive creeds of Islam and limit the cultural drift towards the Arab world.

## Islam in the Rest of the Country

As in the North Caucasus, the Muslim communities in the rest of Russia are diverse, not only in terms of ethnic makeup but also in terms of their numbers and piety. The Islamic communities in the Urals and the Volga region also have their own unique branches of Islam, which are coming under increasing pressure from Salafi elements. In Tatarstan, for example, official Islam is based on both traditional Sufism and the indigenous modernizing trend of Jadidism since the nineteenth century and is known for its opposition to Salafism. Salafi elements, however, are becoming ever more prominent in the republic.<sup>15</sup>

## Modernization of Islam

Given the growth and diversification of the spread of Islam in the North Caucasus and Russia more broadly, some observers have posited that it is necessary to present a “moderate” or “European” Islam, such as practiced in Turkey, as a viable alternative. This, however, is a naïve policy as it grossly underestimates the indigenous nature of these ideologies in the societies of the North Caucasus. It is a thankless task, therefore, to oblige the Muslim communities to reform and modernize their interpretation of Islam. Rather, what is needed is to concentrate on “modernizing” the individuals and integrating the North Caucasus into the Russian Federation socially, politically, economically, and culturally. Until the Kremlin better assimilates the peoples of the North Caucasus into Russia, the tendency for the people in the region to turn away from Moscow in preference of the Middle East is likely to continue.

## A Real or Virtual Jihad?

One of the consequences of the increasing impact of the Middle East in the North Caucasus has been the growing influence of the notion of jihad, which was originally introduced into the region during the Chechen wars through the likes of Ibn Al-Khattab and other foreign fighters that took up the cause for Chechen independence. The influence of jihadist ideologies promoted by the

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15. “Russian Operations in Tatarstan Eliminate Militant Islamist Cell,” *Terrorism Monitor* 8, issue 45 (December 16, 2010), Jamestown Foundation, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=37288&cHash=de0a1aa3b2](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=37288&cHash=de0a1aa3b2).



foreign fighters radically altered the nature of what began as a secessionist struggle for Chechen independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union into a guerilla war fought under the green flag of Islam. Following the deaths of such prominent rebel leaders as Khattab and Shamil Basayev, the latter of which organized the Dubrovka Theater (2002) and Beslan School (2004) sieges, the Islamic insurgency appeared to lose momentum, and the levels of violence in the North Caucasus consequently decreased as the Chechen nationalist movement lost momentum.

In 2007, the insurgency in the North Caucasus appeared to undergo a revival when Doku Umarov, the so-called president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, resigned from his position and declared himself the head of the newly formed Caucasus Emirate<sup>16</sup> and united the North Caucasus under an Islamic state based on Sharia law. It is at this point that the insurgency in the North Caucasus arguably joined the global jihad. The Caucasus Emirate took Umarov's authority well beyond Chechen borders and united the *jamaats* in all the republics of the North Caucasus under the entity of the Emirate, and since its establishment there have been annual increases in the levels of violence as the Emirate's armed resistance intensifies its operations to liberate the 'Muslim lands' in the Caucasus and the broader region.

To garner support for his pan-Caucasian jihad, Umarov intends to organize the Caucasus Emirate into the context of the global jihad by using anti-Western slogans and rhetoric and drawing parallels to his "brothers" in Saudi Arabia. Some experts, however, question Umarov's role as an Islamic leader, noting that he makes elementary mistakes when speaking and writing in Arabic and when reciting verses of the Koran. In reality, Umarov is a field commander and by no means an ideologue, but by presenting the Caucasus Emirate as part of the global jihad and fighting on behalf of the ill-treated and misrepresented in society, he has created a powerful mantra that young, disaffected people find appealing. Through it he is able to attract wider support and more recruits to his cause, expanding the emirate's militant actions across the region. The Caucasus Emirate, thus, appears to have a populist message and arguably enjoys some support among the local populations of the North Caucasus. However, the conjecture that there is a link between the Caucasus Emirate and the global jihad—namely, al Qaeda—is something that has yet to be substantiated. Internet resources representing the Caucasus Emirate continually link its movement to the global jihad through incorporating al Qaeda-related rhetoric, symbols, and doctrine. Yet, al Qaeda appears to have not yet incorporated the North Caucasus into part of its global jihad. There are no acknowledgments on al Qaeda websites when Chechen leaders are killed, and claims that al Qaeda combatants have fought in the North Caucasus or people for the North Caucasus fought alongside al Qaeda elsewhere in the world have not been proven.<sup>17</sup>

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16. In June 2010, the U.S. State Department designated Umarov as a terrorist; Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Designation of Caucasus Emirates Leader Doku Umarov," U.S. Department of State, press release, June 23, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/143564.htm>. Sergey Markedonov, *Radical Islam in the North Caucasus: Evolving Threats, Challenges, and Prospects* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2010).

17. Jamestown Foundation, "The Caucasus Emirate: A Strictly Home-Grown Movement," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, issue 182 (October 8, 2010), <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic,463af2212,463af2532,4cb2a7e82,0.html>. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic,463af2212,463af2532,4cb2a7e82,0.html>. For more information on al Qaeda and the insurgency in the North Caucasus, please consult Gordon Hahn, "Trends in Jihadism in Russia and Central Asia, 2010," Monterey Institute of International Studies (January 13, 2011), [http://russiaotherpointsofview.typepad.com/files/kavkazjihad\\_montrep\\_iiper\\_32\\_jan\\_2011.doc](http://russiaotherpointsofview.typepad.com/files/kavkazjihad_montrep_iiper_32_jan_2011.doc); and Bryan Glyn Williams, "Allah's Foot Soldiers: An Assessment of the Role of Foreign Fighters and Al-Qa'ida in the Chechen Insurgency," in *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder*, ed. Moshe Gammer (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 156–178.



Although it appears unlikely that Umarov's cause is part of a global jihad, his network remains a significant force. Challenged by the North Caucasus mountainous geography, as well as Russia's security forces, Umarov's control over the network is limited. Standardization and cooperation among groups across the militant movement are minimal. Aware of the limit on his control of the respective groups, Umarov has established the norm whereby the individual *jamaats* may carry out "small" attacks of their own volition, but significant missions have to receive the approval of the emirate's leadership. The *jamaats* also appear to be financially self-sufficient, drawing funds locally through racketeering and collecting *zakat* from the local population, thereby increasing their independent nature and weakening Umarov's influence over them. Although the decentralized forces challenge Umarov's authority, the disconnected character of these groups makes it more difficult for Russian security to link and track them.

In August 2010, Caucasus Emirate leadership was thrown into crisis when Doku Umarov resigned from his position, then reclaimed it days later. Accounts of what happened and in what order vary, but a group of prominent Chechen emirs clearly broke away from the emirate and revoked their oaths of loyalty to Umarov, who still enjoyed the support of the non-Chechen *jamaats*. Causes behind the split range from the dilution of support, supplies, and funds away from Chechnya to the disillusionment of the nationalist wing of the Chechen insurgency, which could now widen its appeal to fellow nationalists and others disenfranchised by the current trajectory of the Caucasus Emirate. In any case, the split represents a significant loss for Umarov because he not only lost the support of the Chechen emirs, who played an influential and effective role in the insurgency, but the pan-Caucasus movement suffered a symbolic fracture.<sup>18</sup> Although the levels of violence in Chechnya have decreased in the months since the leadership was thrown into crisis, the split appears to have had little effect on the emirate's ability to carry out attacks in the remaining republics of the North Caucasus. Indeed, Alexei Malashenko, a prominent Russian scholar on Islam and the North Caucasus, even suggested that the schism may in fact exacerbate the security services' abilities to fight the insurgency as the identity of the enemy becomes increasingly unclear.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from the split in its leadership, the emirate also suffered the arrest of Emir Magas and the deaths of Astemirov and Said Buryatsky in 2010. Indeed, the latter was an effective political ideologist and propagandist who was committed to the global jihad and had a large online following. Buryatsky's death in March represented the neutralization of a salient threat and a victory for the security services. Despite these setbacks, Doku Umarov appears to have successfully established a network of jihadist *jamaats* throughout the North Caucasus that has demonstrated its increasing ability to carry out operations throughout the region and further afield. Moreover, the emirate's choices of targets, which have included critical infrastructure, the Chechen Parliament, and the March 2010 suicide bombings in the Moscow metro system, appear to reflect its ability to strike strategic targets and emphasize the weakness of local security forces in preventing such attacks.

Although its role in the global Islamic jihad and its link to such networks as al Qaeda is debatable, the Caucasus Emirate poses a genuine threat to Russian, and indeed Western, security. The

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18. Jamestown Foundation, "Factional Divisions Within the Chechen Separatist Movement," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, issue 190 (October 21, 2010), [http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,THE\\_JF,COUNTRYNEWS,4cc1471b2,0.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,THE_JF,COUNTRYNEWS,4cc1471b2,0.html).

19. Dmitry Florin, "Jemal: split in 'Imarat Kavkaz' will help power agents in fighting Chechen militants," *Caucasian Knot*, October 22, 2010, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/14912/>.

Kremlin should be concerned by the scope and scale of the threat posed by the Caucasus Emirate, which poses a threat not only to the North Caucasus, but to wider Russia—especially if the jihadist movement infiltrates Islamic elements in the Ural and Volga regions, which were also declared fronts of the emirate’s jihad in 2004. And with Umarov’s group already demonstrating that it is capable of striking at the heart of Russia and with the Sochi Olympics fast approaching, there is real potential that nationalist and jihadist groups will use the Games as an opportunity to promote their causes in front of a national and international audience.

## Return of the Suicide Bomber

Suicide bombings are a tactic employed by the insurgents because they are a graphic way of demonstrating the weaknesses and limitations of the Russian security forces. They also serve the purpose of instilling great fear in the mind-set of the Russian public as they add a new dimension of desperation to the insurgency that is hard for many in the rest of Russia and the West to fathom. The tactic of suicide bombing was at its height in the years following the end of the second Chechen war and became a dramatic visual manifestation of the ongoing Chechen struggle for independence. In this period, suicide bombers were almost exclusively women from Chechnya who had joined the insurgency following the death of a relative during the fighting or at the hands of Russian security forces—thus they became known as “black widows.” However, following the Beslan school siege in 2004, the tactic of suicide bombings dissipated. It is arguable whether this was due to the sudden loss of support of many who were originally sympathetic to the Chechen secessionist cause but considered Basayev’s suicide siege on a school had gone “too far” and expressed his moral bankruptcy. Others suggest that the suicide bombings may have declined as a result of Basayev’s death in 2006. Perhaps it was due to both. In any case, the use of suicide bombers all but disappeared from the North Caucasus before striking again in 2008.<sup>20</sup>

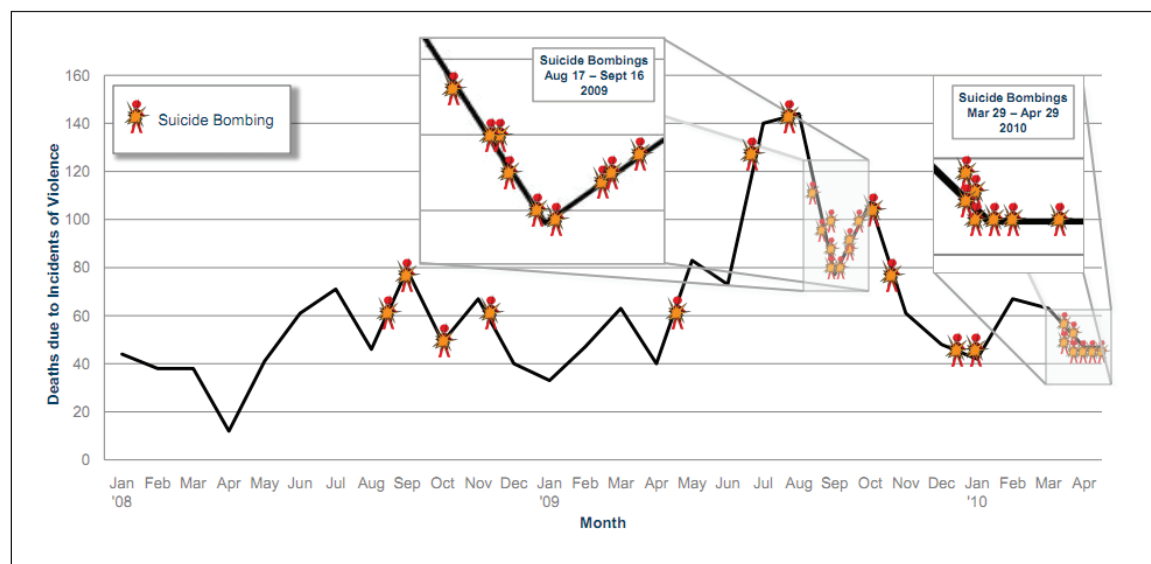
Over the course of 2009 and 2010, suicide bombers (mostly males) struck with more frequency and have most commonly been used to target police and security services in the region. All the same, when two women blew themselves up on the Moscow metro system in March 2010, an immediate fear among many was that this attack signaled a revival of suicide bombing. The two bombers, like Chechen black widows before them, were related to men who fought for the insurgency, but instead these women were from Dagestan.

This return to the suicide tactic has been largely attributed to the Caucasus Emirate, which was reported to have revived the Riyadus-Salikhiin suicide brigade originally established by Shamil Basayev. Despite Buryatsky’s death in early March 2010, suicide bombings have continued across the North Caucasus and in Russia, with a suicide bomber most recently killing 36 people at Moscow’s Domodedovo Airport in January 2011. The resurgence appears to indicate the increasing threat posed by radical jihadist groups in the region. Thus, it is now overtly clear that suicide bombings are no longer exclusive to Chechnya, Chechens, or females, and the tactic, like the insurgency, has spread across the North Caucasus and beyond.

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20. For more in-depth data on recent trends in suicide bombings in the North Caucasus, see Malarkey and Moore, “Violence in the North Caucasus, Spring 2010.”

**Figure 2. Suicide Bombings in the North Caucasus, January 1, 2008–April 30, 2010**



Source: Matthew Malarkey and Lucy Moore, “Violence in the North Caucasus, Spring 2010: On the Rise, Again?” May 13, 2010, [http://csis.org/files/publication/100513\\_Violence\\_in\\_the\\_North\\_Caucasus\\_Spring\\_2010.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/100513_Violence_in_the_North_Caucasus_Spring_2010.pdf), p. 16.

## Entrenched Norms Fomenting Violence

Despite accusations by Kadyrov, Evkurov, and Konokov that blame the destabilized situation in the North Caucasus on foreign influences, it is widely accepted that much of the unrest stems from the climate of violence, impunity, and fear in the region. In addition, socioeconomic and sociopolitical troubles, such as economic disparity, unemployment, lack of political expression, and corruption among others, almost certainly play a part in fermenting the unrest and contribute to the sense of frustration and social alienation that many people in the North Caucasus experience. Nevertheless, it is argued that socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors are not enough to drive someone to the forest. Rather, it is widely understood that what has driven many to join the insurgency was a “trigger experience”—be it police harassment, abuse, and intimidation or a personal experience of violence at the hands of the security services. This event, or series of events, is thought to play the primary motivating cause behind one’s decision to join the insurgency. All the same, it is also important to note that different factors play different roles in the different republics. For example, religious intolerance at the hands of the security forces is more likely to drive a young man to flee to the forest in Dagestan, whereas lack of political expression or ethno-nationalist grievances, which would be less salient in Dagestan, might play a more prominent role in Ingushetia or Kabardino-Balkaria.

Once in the forest, these young men are appealed to by charismatic radicals who offer them not only the chance to avenge their wrongs, but a lifestyle that is pure of the ailments of the society that they abandoned on joining the insurgency. This form of Islam preached by the jihadis, therefore, provides an exit ideology through which one can escape the despair of their civil lives. However, whether or not these young men ascribe to the doctrine of Islam that is preached, or if

they seek only the chance to fight the establishment, is debatable and is something that requires greater attention and research.

In any case, the consensus among analysts is that the role of Islamic jihad in attracting fighters to the insurgency should not be underestimated, especially in light of the Caucasus Emirate's influence apparently spreading beyond the North Caucasus. But there is also strong agreement that the pan-Islamic agenda preached by the Caucasus Emirate is not the sole, or even the main, factor behind the consistent numbers in the insurgency. Rather, a multifaceted series of factors caused by widespread failings and abuses of the state have created fertile ground for the insurgency to swell its numbers.

## Socioeconomics

Although a severe lack of reliable data complicates any attempt to accurately measure the region's economic output and official statistics present a picture far from reality on the ground, it is still possible to interpret some trends within the unreliable data, provided that the methodological processes remain consistent. And in the case of the North Caucasus, official statistics illustrate that ten years of recent growth have resulted in an improving economic situation, with Krasnodar and Rostov faring particularly well. Indeed, in many of the republics of the region, the growth exceeds the national average for the rest of Russia.

## Shadow Economy

Federal budget expenditures make up the bulk of the republics' economies. These budget allocations from Moscow, which are strong indicators of current stability and security on the ground, allow us to assess the situation in the region. Until 2009, Chechnya was receiving the largest share of budgetary income from Moscow, but following the increasing unrest in Ingushetia, the federal government has begun diverting more of its resources to Chechnya's neighboring republic, which symbolizes the Kremlin's recognition of the emerging threat from Ingushetia. In any case, Stavropol's declining economy and the deteriorating security situation in Kabardino-Balkaria will almost certainly be factored into calculations for its future budget allocation from Moscow. As a result, more money will likely be directed away from the more stable republics, such as Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygea. Nevertheless, a lagging Russian economy and the reallocation of resources elsewhere in recent years have meant that the Kremlin has been experiencing more constraints in its ability to subsidize the North Caucasus. As such, apart from Ingushetia, all of the republics had their budgets cut in 2010, with Chechnya's budget decreasing by 20 percent, despite region-wide increases the previous year.<sup>21</sup> And, as a result of government subsidies, both Ingushetia and Dagestan have experienced economic growth.

Despite the primary sources driving the economic growth in the North Caucasus, there are also basic money flows in the region principally from household and agriculture incomes. The recreation and retail sectors are developing positively. The modern ski resorts developed in Kabardino-Balkaria are popular among many young Russians, and there are money flows from labor migrants, particularly important for Ingushetia and Dagestan and to a lesser extent the republics in the western Caucasus. Nonetheless, the shadow economy in the North Caucasus is

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21. Северо-Кавказский федеральный округ, [http://openbudget.karelia.ru/budnord/russian/fo\\_sevkav.htm](http://openbudget.karelia.ru/budnord/russian/fo_sevkav.htm), [http://openbudget.karelia.ru/budnord/russian/fo\\_sevkav.htm](http://openbudget.karelia.ru/budnord/russian/fo_sevkav.htm).

substantial—be it the shoemaking industry, illegal brandy production in Dagestan, or illegal vodka production in Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, and Karachay-Cherkessia. Moreover, the informal Lyudmila Market on the outskirts of Pyatigorsk acts as a key point for the trade and distribution of goods in the Stavropol region and sees billions of rubles pass through it each day. In short, because of the region's large shadow economy, local and federal authorities fail to receive taxes on trade and commodities, and this has become the established norm in the region.

In the short term, the policy of heavily subsidizing the republics of the North Caucasus has helped to stimulate economic growth, particularly those receiving healthier portions of the government allocations. Although corruption does result in large portions of the money being embezzled, some of the money does reach intended targets, and the people of the region have benefited. This process of buying political stability cannot be understood as a practical long-term policy for the Kremlin in dealing with the situation in the region, but, at present, the region certainly would be worse off without such a model.

## Unemployment

The Kremlin appears to appreciate that it is necessary to address the high levels of unemployed youth in the North Caucasus, and the influx of finances from Moscow has helped ease the rampant unemployment levels nearing 30 percent in some republics, with the aim of decreasing the tension and stabilizing the region's volatility. In Chechnya and Ingushetia, in particular, the unemployment rate spiked more than 50 percent from 2007 to 2009.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Putin's policies of centralization have only added to the economic disparity in the region, which, though evident across the entire Russian Federation, grates particularly heavily—especially in the wake of hardships endured during recent years of conflict—with the people of the North Caucasus, coming as they do from traditionally egalitarian cultures.

## New Waves of Migration

The waves of migration across the North Caucasus following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s were largely spearheaded by the worsening security conditions as the region became embroiled in conflict. Most of these hundreds of thousands of migrants fled to ethnic-Russian regions in the south of Russia, with the Krasnodar and Stavropol provinces being the most popular destinations. After hostilities ended, the rates of migration decreased, and the populations of some areas—particularly Stavropol and Rostov—began to decline as a result. Nonetheless, many migrants opted to settle rather than return to their war-ravaged homelands. Natural attrition among locals coupled with the high birth rates of the people from the North Caucasus, the demographic picture in the region began to drastically change. Once predominantly monoethnic areas have become increasingly multiethnic, and this changing demographic makeup of some communities has led to an increase in tension and hostility between ethnic groups.

In two examples, migratory patterns have probably contributed to conflict in the eastern part of Stavropol, where tensions are escalating between the local population and the Chechen minority, and Mineralny Vody, where locals are in a struggle with Vainakh, Dagestani, Karachay, and

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22. Natalia Zubarevich, "Northern Caucasus Republics," Powerpoint presentation given at the CSIS conference, "The North Caucasus: Russia's Tinderbox," in Washington, D.C., on November 30–December 1, 2010.

Circassian migrants. The federal government, however, has thus far appeared to be reluctant to provide communities affected by ethnic tensions with any assistance or support toward integrating migrants into local society. As a result, the monoethnic settlements that are established live in isolation from other ethnic groups in the local community, which only serves to further isolate and insulate ethnic groups from each other and potentially only further entrenches a sense of otherness in younger generations. This will likely encourage intolerance and division in the years to come. It should be noted, however, that this lack of integration of migrants into Russian society is not only a problem for Kuban, Krasnodar, or Stavropol, but an issue that the whole of the Russian Federation faces as migrants continue to leave the North Caucasus in search of better opportunities.

In addition to the mass migrations from the North Caucasus, there has also been an exodus of ethnic Russians and Slavs from all of the region's republics, with the sole exception of Adygea. Although this migratory process is not a novel one—it began decades ago—it has left the region with negligible numbers of ethnic-Russians. In Ingushetia, for example, ethnic Russians are now estimated to comprise a mere two percent of the population. And some have even gone so far as to argue that the exodus of ethnic Russians from the North Caucasus has contributed to the hostilities that erupted in the region, as the presence of ethnic Russians was considered to have provided a stabilizing influence and helped manage the ethnic tensions, thus avoiding open conflict.

## Economic Migration

Migration has not only affected the ethnic demographics of the North Caucasus, it has also affected the economic makeup of the region, which can essentially be divided into two groups—labor deficient and labor excessive. The former, which consists of Stavropol region, Krasnodar, and Rostov, has experienced healthy rates of economic development, while the latter, including the republics of the North Caucasus, has experienced quick demographic growth and a dearth of employment opportunities resulting in a significant share of the young population unemployed. As a result, young people in the labor excessive republics are thus driven to seek work and opportunities elsewhere, most commonly in other parts of southern Russia. At the same time, there is a migratory trend that is seeing young ethnic Russians leaving the labor-deficient regions in search of better economic opportunities elsewhere in Russia.

Thus, while they may have receded over the last decade and the principal drivers, which are now economic, are no longer security-driven, migratory processes still play a significant role in the socioeconomics and sociopolitics of large parts of the North Caucasus. They have greatly altered the demographic character of the region and may have led to or further exacerbated areas of tension where ethnic groups compete for scarce resources. Until the young people see more incentives to stay and make a living in their own republics, they will continue to migrate to other parts of Russia. Without the necessary modernization of economic conditions, future generations will continue to migrate to other parts of Russia as the brightest and most determined continue to seek out better opportunities, and the subsequent brain drain will ultimately lead to a vacuum of educated elites and reduce the region's chances of developing and modernizing.

## Resettlement Program

In an attempt to counter brain drain, reduce unemployment, and encourage modernization, in December 2010 the Kremlin announced its strategy for the development of the North Caucasus



until 2025. Part of this new approach is to encourage internal migration within Russia, with the unemployed in the North Caucasus settling in inner Russian regions while skilled Russian workers head in the opposite direction. Such policy signals Moscow's recognition that modernization is needed to improve conditions in the North Caucasus, but it also betrays the Kremlin's inability to address the situation in the region. Moreover, some observers were quick to note that, despite suffering from chronic unemployment, inhabitants of the North Caucasus might be reluctant to resettle in Russia when their quality of life is, arguably, currently better than that of inhabitants in other parts of Russia. Indeed, despite the North Caucasus being the most violent region in Russia, it is also debatably the safest area for those from the Caucasus.

## Divide, Rule, Subsidize. And Stabilize?

### Creation of the North Caucasus Federal District

In January 2010, the Kremlin announced the establishment of the North Caucasus Federal District (SKFO) which includes all the republics of the North Caucasus except Adygea. In doing so, Moscow has separated the North Caucasian republics from the Southern Federal District and united them under one federally administered district. The explanation behind this move was that it would allow for better focus to be paid to addressing the shared problems across the republics of the North Caucasus. However, this decision could also be seen as an attempt to improve the effectiveness of Moscow's financial support to the North Caucasus, and ultimately a step toward establishing the region's financial independence from Moscow, which has become particularly urgent considering that Kremlin funds are becoming increasingly stretched due to economic constraint and its costly development projects. Some observers, nevertheless, believe that the establishment of the SKFO was an attempt by the Kremlin to isolate the troublesome North Caucasus from the rest of southern Russia—especially with the Winter Olympics fast approaching. This is part of Russia's strategy to stress that Sochi is not the North Caucasus, but is rather the south of Russia, attempting to counter predictions about the likeliness of violence at the Olympic Games.

### Khloponin

To head the SKFO, the Kremlin appointed Alexander Khloponin, the former governor of Krasnoyarsk. His proven track record as an effective manager would enable him, Moscow hoped, to stimulate modernization by encouraging economic investment and promoting development in the North Caucasus. Indeed, his appointment was popularly received in some circles because it signified that the Kremlin had understood that simply appointing an ex-military general was not the route to solving the deteriorating situation in the region. Furthermore, Khloponin's appointment underscored that the situation could more effectively be addressed through cutting unemployment and providing greater opportunities for young people than through military means alone. Khloponin was believed to be the man to bring about such goals. Since his appointment, however, the economy has hardly shown any significant signs of improvement and the security situation has in fact deteriorated, which has likely discouraged potential investors and made Khloponin's task of modernizing the North Caucasus a thankless one.

The businesses that do exist are plagued by pervasive corruption, and a lack of federal and legal support structures and securities further discourage potential investors. Moreover, the Krem-



lin's system of government subsidies creates further barriers to modernization, and local elites are likely to be reluctant to amend that status quo given that they receive such vast sums that can be embezzled. As such, some observers have contended that the establishment of the SKFO will in fact exacerbate the already glaring problem of widening income disparity in the region because it establishes another layer of potentially corrupt bureaucrats. With increasing bitterness and contempt, there is an increasing potential for violence.

Despite the inherent obstacles facing him and his apparent lack of initial success, in 2010 Khloponin announced an ostentatious project to develop ski resorts in five of the republics of the North Caucasus, though he later replaced it with smaller, more local projects.<sup>23</sup> The nature of the endeavor and his subsequent retreat on it illustrates just how out of touch Khloponin is with the situation on the ground, and it also expresses how little clout he carries in the region. In fact, it is suggested that some of his development projects have been severely hindered by his inability to exert control over the security forces and persuade local leaders to cooperate with him. Indeed, by not openly expressing discontent so as to appear loyal, Kadyrov is understood to have tacitly expressed his intent to ensure that Chechnya will remain outside of Khloponin's sphere of influence. Khloponin thus wields negligible power in the North Caucasus, and local elites simply bypass him and address their concerns directly to Moscow. The patron-client system of governance that the Kremlin has established to stabilize the region in fact hinders Khloponin from being able to carry out his development and modernization, a directive from the Kremlin.

## Principal Agent Problem

For the past two centuries, Russia has relied on a patron-client system to deal with unstable regions. This policy functions by first selecting local elites that Moscow can work with and then giving them Kremlin-backed authority by declaring such agents as the de facto independent and legitimate powers on the ground. And one can see a number of mechanisms representative of such a patron-client system in place today in the North Caucasus; the federal government provides massive subsidies to the republics, the Kremlin employs United Russia as a mechanism to control local elites, and Moscow wields the power of appointment and dismissal over local leaders. This policy system, however, presents multiple problems of governance and arguably further aggravates latent tensions and grievances in the region.

As illustrated by the case of Murat Zyazikov, who was deeply unpopular as Ingush president, there is a chance that the wrong agent might be selected, one who would garner little authority, legitimacy, or respect in the republic. This potentially risks leaving the republic in a worse condition, obliging Moscow to appoint a successor. There is also the chance that the chosen agent might move beyond the mandate originally established and actually become a part of the problem. Or, an agent who becomes too popular or insolent can even look to cut ties with the federal center and claim de facto autonomy. Kadyrov, whose popularity in Chechnya is certainly questionable, is a clear example of a Kremlin-appointed leader over whom Moscow appears to be losing control. Nevertheless, the Kremlin seems prepared to tolerate the Kadyrov regime, which is characterized by impunity and brutality, because it has successfully quelled official Chechen secessionist claims.

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23. Vladimir Putin, "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting in Sochi to discuss the economic and social development of the North-Caucasian Federal District," Government of the Russian Federation Official Site, September 6, 2010, <http://premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/12037/>.

Indeed, in the eyes of Moscow elites, this policy of centralization has been an effective and successful means of governing and has ensured Russia's territorial integrity.

However, while such a system of governance can provide, albeit limited, security and stability, it does not address the sources of the unrest and violence, and if anything exacerbates them. In the absence of any democratic participation, it prevents the people of the North Caucasus from being able to influence who their rulers are and creates a further disconnect with Moscow. Such social and political alienation, as well as the inability to self-govern, is thought to intensify latent grievances with the local and federal government and could arguably underlie the frequent attacks committed against government officials. Indeed, some experts have posited that the Kremlin appears to be prepared to tolerate such violent abuses rather than permit the people to govern themselves. But the present *modus operandi* to govern the North Caucasus is fundamentally incompatible with any modernization and Europeanization projects that Russia might undertake.

## Frontier Management

The patron-client system of governance for the North Caucasus, and the disconnect it creates between the people and Moscow, represents the wider attitude of Russian elites, cultural commentators, and policymakers toward the region. Their rhetoric depicts the North Caucasus as a far-off frontier beyond the Terek and Kuban rivers on Russia's southern border. This tacit implication that the region is a frontier incapable of self-governance and not a part of "real" Russia is symbolically expressed by the fact that the SKFO is governed from both Rostov-on-Don, its *de facto* military and security center, and Pyatigorsk the capital city of the New District. This attitude, however, is a particularly hazardous one as it also predisposes the "frontier" to behave and function like a frontier—i.e., a space separate from the rest of the country. Unlike borders, which act like barriers, frontiers are fluid places that allow the migration of peoples and the flows of trade and communications both internally and externally, creating linkages with other regions as well as neighboring states. Russia's treatment of the North Caucasus as a frontier and its use of a centralized system of governance have combined to increasingly turn the region's population away from Moscow toward its southern Caucasian neighbors and beyond. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Georgia has even begun an outreach policy to the republics in the North Caucasus as an attempt to increase Tbilisi's influence over the region. However, most worryingly, the people of the North Caucasus have increasingly turned toward the religious influence of the Middle East.

The notion of a frontier also implies a space where the state faces problems of governance due to, among other things, widespread violence, the absence of functioning political institutions, and the lack of the rule of law. In such places, therefore, the police and military take central stage as the primary federal tools to administer and control the region. However, such mechanisms toward territorial management must be applied deftly to work effectively. In the North Caucasus, however, the Russian security organs simply appear bereft of any required deftness to effectively stabilize and secure Russia's southern border. Instead, the Russian security forces in the region, renowned for their heavy-handed and brutal tactics, are thought to exacerbate the instability of the region.

Further, the idea of the North Caucasus as a frontier presents the region as a different cultural space from the rest of the country, implying that its inhabitants are not Russian—perhaps even "un-Russian"—in a cultural, political, and national sense. Representing the region as a different cultural space has further entrenched the sense of "other" when thinking of people from the North

Caucasus. And this sense of isolation and alienation is surely something that the insurgency in the North Caucasus appeals to when recruiting disenfranchised young people to join their ranks.

In the short term, the strategy of frontier management, and the patron-client tool of governance that is crucial to it, ensures that Russian territorial integrity is not compromised, but it results in the alienation of the population in the North Caucasus and poses a more dangerous long-term policy problem. Indeed, some observers even go so far as to contend that frontier management poses a more perilous problem than secession because, while secessionist conflicts either end in independence or there is a military solution, frontier management does not have such easily defined end-points. In terms of an external perspective on alleviating the situation in an unruly frontier region, while the international community has policy tools at its disposal during a secessionist crisis (i.e., UN, aid, military intervention, etc.), it lacks the necessary mechanism to address destabilized frontiers—an example of which is the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan. In this light, an unstable frontier remains in the prerogative of the state. And in the case of the North Caucasus, the international community is reliant upon weak institutions in the Russian Federation to effectively deal with not only pressing concerns afflicting the North Caucasus, but issues that have greater international consequence, such as arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and Islamic terrorism. Indeed, there should be concern that the frontier itself may expand like a spreading cancer and exacerbate the broader impact.

## A Series of Conflicts

Despite the attempts of the Caucasus Emirate to portray a united jihad across the North Caucasus, it is clear that what is happening in the North Caucasus is not a unified region-wide conflict but rather a series of local conflicts stemming from local problems. It is highly unlikely, for example, that insurgents who attacked a police checkpoint in Makhachkala are motivated by the exact same causes as those who attacked a hydroelectric power plant in Kabardino-Balkaria. All the same, to address the violence and instability in the region, the Kremlin has adopted policies that have regionalized the problems that the republics face, expressed most overtly by the establishment of the SKFO. Such policies, however, convey a fundamental lack of understanding of the causes the violence in the region and illustrate a lack of deftness in contending with the instability and insecurity. It is imperative, therefore, that policy-makers in Moscow understand that much of the violence can only be tackled on the local level. Yet, it is only through a top-down policy reform that issues at the local level will adequately be addressed. And by resolving local problems, it is possible to argue that the government will be depriving the insurgency of much of their ideological appeal, thereby decreasing the number of young men going to the forest and weakening the insurgency.

## Light at the End of the Tunnel?

The trends that have been discussed make it overtly clear that the situation in the North Caucasus is markedly different than it was a couple decades ago, even five years ago. Although there has been an increase in ethnic nationalism in recent years, there have been no outright claims for secession from the Russian Federation and the threat of another civil war appears to be an exaggeration. Nevertheless, as current migratory patterns persist, ethnic tensions have the potential to ignite ancient or new conflict between ethnic groups. It is necessary, therefore, to introduce policies of integration and cooperation in order to alleviate social tensions from boiling over. Indeed, one

means of achieving greater stability and security is through the development and modernization of the North Caucasus, which are both presently stifled by the Kremlin's policy tools to govern the region. It is also crucially important to recognize the growing role of Islam in the region and understand that its influence will continue to increase in future years as it gains in popularity among the region's youth. But it is also imperative that policy-makers recognize that it is detrimental to associate an increasingly conservative Muslim society with a rise in violent, radical Islam, as this only serves to disenfranchise what is a growing proportion of the region's population and plays right into the hands of the emerging region-wide insurgency.

## Problem Management, Not Problem Making

At present, the situation in the North Caucasus has deteriorated to such an extent and become so acute that there appears to be no immediate way to alleviate the problems of governance, identity and security. In Western and Russian policy circles there is an impatient determination to rectify the situation as soon as possible. While this is a noble, and ultimately arduous, task, it is also one that offers no immediate solution, and it is imperative that it is understood that no “quick fix” tool or policy exists. Rather, in order to best address the problems afflicting the North Caucasus, what is needed are long-term, calculated policies and reforms that promote and encourage development and modernization. Such reforms and policies, however, are impossible to implement in the North Caucasus if they are not implemented across the Russian Federation, and Moscow needs to recognize that many of the issues faced in the North Caucasus are fundamentally issues experienced by other parts of Russia. Therefore, not until the application of development and modernization policies across Russia will many of problems afflicting the North Caucasus, which are understood to be significant contributing factors behind the recruitment of young men and women to the insurgency, be addressed.

In order to encourage and stimulate modernization and development across the North Caucasus and Russia as a whole, we need to support the young, motivated and energetic people who are willing to manage and carry out this daunting task. However, in order for these future managers to be successful, it is imperative to bring the North Caucasus out of its isolation from the rest of Russia and the West by promoting cross-education exchanges (especially with academic centers in Russia), through supporting SMEs, and by encouraging programs like the International Rescue Committee, which leads projects that build schools and improve infrastructure facilities in the region.<sup>24</sup> Most saliently, it is essential for Russia and the West to acknowledge that they share common goals relating to the North Caucasus, and it is vital that there be open and transparent dialogue between the two sides in order to effectively work together—for only this manner of cooperation and common effort will deliver tangible results in the North Caucasus.

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24. International Rescue Committee, “The IRC in the Northern Caucasus,” <http://www.rescue.org/where/northern-caucasus>.





## APPENDIX

# CONFERENCE AGENDA AND PARTICIPANTS LIST

### The North Caucasus: Russia's Tinderbox

Held November 30–December 1, 2010, at the  
Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C.

## Agenda

November 30, 2010

**10:00–11:45      Overview of the Situation in the North Caucasus**

An overview of the situation in the North Caucasus that will provide a framework for the entire conference with significant focus on myths and realities of the situation as well as the external influences on the region.

**Sergey Markedonov**, CSIS

**Alexey Malashenko**, Carnegie Moscow Center

**Charles King**, Georgetown University

**12:00–1:15      Lunch**

Keynote Speech: **Brian Glyn Williams**, University of Massachusetts–Dartmouth  
*Author of “Allah’s Foot Soldiers: An Assessment of the Role of Foreign Fighters and Al-Qaeda in the Chechen Insurgency”*

**1:15–2:45      Socioeconomics and Demographics in the North Caucasus**

An overview of the demographic and socioeconomic changes in the North Caucasus and look at private sector activity in the region as a means of determining the sustainability of the North Caucasus.

**Natalia Zubarevich**, Independent Institute for Social Policy

**Yuri Efimov**, Department of Sociology and Political Science, Stavropol Agricultural State University

**3:15–5:00      The Rise of Islam in the North Caucasus**

An assessment of the rise of Islam in the North Caucasus and its implications for the ideology and actors in the region.

**Akhmet Yarlykapov**, *Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology*

**Gordon Hahn**, *Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIIE)*

**5:15–7:00**      **Cocktail Reception**

## December 1, 2010

**9:00–10:45**      **Causes and Implications of Nationalism/Extremism in the North Caucasus**

An overview of the causes and implications of nationalism and extremism in the North Caucasus, looking at new movements and the drivers of these ideas.

**Alexander Skakov**, *Russian Institute for Strategic Studies*

**Robert Bruce Ware**, *Southern Illinois University*

**11:00–12:45**      **Military and Security Challenges in the North Caucasus**

An overview of the security challenges in the North Caucasus and the types of responses they elicit from the government as well as an overview of military arrangements in the region.

**Anatoly Tsyganok**, *Military Prognosis Center, Moscow*

**Mark Kramer**, *Harvard University*

**1:00–2:00**      **Lunch**



## Participants

**Elena Babkova**

*Center for Strategic & International Studies*

**Marjorie Balzer**

*Georgetown University*

**Janusz Bugajski**

*Center for Strategic & International Studies*

**Christopher Campbell**

*U.S. Department of State*

**Yury Efimov**

*Stavropol Agricultural State University*

**David Gordon**

*Center for Strategic & International Studies*

**Gordon Hahn**

*Monterey Institute of International Studies*

**Donald Jenson**

*Johns Hopkins University, SAIS*

**Charles King**

*Georgetown University*

**Kyle Parker**

*U.S. House of Representatives*

**Nathaniel Reynolds**

*U.S. Department of State*

**Thomas Sanderson**

*Center for Strategic & International Studies*

**Caroline Savage**

*U.S. National Security Council*

**Mark Handy**

*Defense Intelligence Agency*

**Toby Davis**

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*Georgetown University*

**Maxim Suchkov**

**Mikhail Mamedov**

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*Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Andrew C. Kuchins** is a senior fellow and the director of the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program. He is an internationally known expert on Russian foreign and domestic policies who publishes widely and is frequently called on by business, government, media, and academic leaders for comment and consulting on Russian and Eurasian affairs. Much of his more recent scholarship has been devoted to the Project on the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) and his analysis of the situation in Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of an economic strategy in conjunction with the U.S. military presence there. His recent publications include *The Key to Success in Afghanistan: A Modern Silk Road Strategy*, coauthored with S. Fred Starr (Central Asia–Caucasus Institute, May 2010), *Russia after the Global Economic Crisis*, coedited with Anders Aslund and Sergei Guriev (Peterson Institute, June 2010), “The Speeding Troika” (*Russia Beyond the Headlines*, September 2010), and “Keep on Truckin’” (*Foreign Policy*, October 2010).

From 2000 to 2006, Kuchins was a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he was director of its Russian and Eurasian Program in Washington, D.C., from 2000 to 2003 and again in 2006, and director of the Carnegie Moscow Center in Russia from 2003 to 2005. He has also held senior management and research positions at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Stanford University, and the University of California at Berkeley. Kuchins currently teaches at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and has also taught at Georgetown and Stanford Universities. He holds a BA from Amherst College and an MA and PhD from SAIS.

**Matthew Malarkey** is a graduate student in the War Studies Department at King’s College London, where he focuses on the security situation in Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia as well as on nuclear proliferation issues. Prior to furthering his education, he spent two years researching and tracking the levels of violence in the North Caucasus for the CSIS Human Rights and Security Program. While living in Moscow, he studied from 2003 to 2004 at the Pushkin Institute of Russian Language and also worked for Deloitte from 2006 to 2007, where he contributed to research and development projects related to IPOs and the Russian private equity market. Mr. Malarkey graduated from the University of Bristol with a joint-honors BA in Russian and Politics and is due to receive an MA from King’s College in international conflict studies in 2011.

**Sergey Markedonov** is a visiting fellow in the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program. He is an expert on the Caucasus as well as the Black Sea, regional security, nationalism, interethnic conflicts, and de facto states in the post-Soviet area. His publications include several books and reports, 50 academic articles, and more than 400 press pieces. Recently published books and reports include *The Turbulent Eurasia* (Academia, 2010), *The Big Caucasus: Consequences of the “Five Day War,”* *New Challenges and Prospects* (International Centre for Black Sea Studies, 2009), and *The Ethno-*

*national and Religious Factors in Social-political Life of the Caucasus Region* (Moscow State University, 2005).

Markedonov graduated from Rostov-on-Don State University in 1995 and earned a doctoral degree in history at Rostov-on-Don State Pedagogical University in 1999. From 1996 to 1999, he was a lecturer in the History Department of Rostov-on-Don State Pedagogical University and, from 1998 to 2001, served as senior fellow at the Governor's Press-Service in the Rostov Regional Administration. From 2001 to 2010, he worked as head of the Interethnic Relations Group and deputy director at the Institute for Political and Military Analysis in Moscow. During 2006–2010, he also held teaching positions at the Russian State University for the Humanities, the Moscow State University, and the Diplomatic Academy.



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