

A REPORT OF THE CSIS
RUSSIA AND EURASIA
PROGRAM

Getting the Caucasus Emirate Right

Author

Gordon M. Hahn

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CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
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ISBN 978-0-89206-665-0

Acknowledgments

The CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program is grateful to the Carnegie Corporation of New York for its support.

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GETTING THE CAUCASUS EMIRATE RIGHT

Gordon M. Hahn

“Allah willing, all of the brothers, who are carrying out Jihad in the entire world, are our brothers for the sake of Allah, and we all today are going on one road and this road leads to Paradise. In Paradise, Allah willing, our brothers, who went earlier than us, and, Allah willing and we hope, we will be near the Prophet if we will be sincere on this path and if we will sincerely establish Allah’s laws on this earth.” These are not the words of al Qaeda’s Osama bin Laden, his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, or even the Taliban’s Mullah Omar. They are the words of Dokku Umarov or, by his nom de guerre, Abu Usman, the amir of the mujahideen of Russia’s North Caucasus, quoted on the Chechen Kavkaz Center website in October 2010. The self-declared Caucasus Emirate (CE) was founded in October 2007 to supplant the radical national separatist movement of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya (ChRI), then in a period of steep decline.

As straightforward and clear as Umarov’s statement is, this and identical assertions of his and numerous other CE amirs have made little impression on Western, especially American, discussions of the usually amorphously described “violence in the North Caucasus.” Journalists, analysts, academics, and activists persist in ignoring, denying, and even hiding from the public and policymakers the global jihadization of the Chechen/Caucasus mujahideen, a long process that goes back to the mid-1990s.¹ The “violence in the North Caucasus” is anything but generic and is far from being perpetrated exclusively by Chechens or Russians.

This paper aims to set straight a rather distorted record. It demonstrates the veracity of three vitally important facts usually obfuscated in discussions of the subject: (1) the longstanding and growing ties between the CE and its predecessor organization, the ChRI, on the one hand, and al Qaeda (AQ) and the global jihad, on the other hand; (2) the importance of the CE jihadi terrorist network as a united and organized political and military force promoting jihad in the region; and (3) the salience of local cultural and the Salafist jihadist theo-ideology and the influence of the global jihadi revolutionary movement/alliance as key, if not the main, factors driving the “violence in the North Caucasus.”

The ChRI/CE and the Global Jihad

Perhaps most disturbing, analysts and activists have either ignored or rejected both ChRI and CE connections to AQ and the global jihadi revolutionary alliance in which AQ plays a leading role. In doing so, some even reject the need to present evidence in support of their argument in

1. For more on this process through 2005, see Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia’s Islamic Threat* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007). For more recent developments, see Gordon M. Hahn, *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Reports*, www.miis.edu/academics/faculty/ghahn/report.

explicitly political terms.² Some provide faulty or no evidence.³ Others, like Brian Glyn Williams, note that AQ ties to the ChRI and CE do not mean AQ control of the Caucasus mujahedin.⁴ This, however, is a strawman and has never been claimed by any serious analyst. The real point has been whether or not the ChRI or the CE had or have personnel, operational, financial, or theo-ideological connections to AQ. Despite a plethora of deniers and the fact that the nature of such ties have changed over time, their existence is an incontrovertible fact.

Moreover, the strawman obfuscates a more important fundamental point. The CE is now part of a global jihadi revolutionary movement or alliance, which includes but is not reducible to AQ. As part of the larger revolution developing across the Muslim world, it is a loose global alliance of like-minded Salafist “takfirist” jihadis, who assist each other in various ways—theo-ideologically, politically, financially, technologically, and operationally—and divide among themselves the labor and geography of the global jihad. Since 9/11 AQ has become more decentralized than during the ChRI period. It is now but one network among many, interlocked with other jihadist networks, including the CE. AQ is no longer able or perhaps even willing to directly command and control its affiliates. Much of the mutual support and cooperation now occurs through the Internet. Thus, in changing ways, from early on and continuing today, AQ has played an important role in proselytizing jihadism and providing financial, training, and personnel support to the mujahideen in Chechnya and the Caucasus.

However, AQ, the CE, or any other jihadi force is unlikely to seize full power and establish a sovereign Islamist state, except perhaps as part of a revolutionary coalition. In that event a jihadi group could then seize full power, as Ayatollah Khomeini and the mullahs were able to do in the first Islamist revolutionary takeover in Iran in 1979 or the Bolsheviks in 1917–21. The best candidates for such a scenario are not Russia or one of its regions in the North Caucasus but rather Pakistan or one of the states now experiencing “Arab spring” or fig tree revolutions. Nevertheless, even failing jihadi organizations like AQ and the CE can deliver much violence and do much damage.

The ChRI and AQ

The connections between AQ and the ChRI were common knowledge by the late 1990s among U.S. government officials, intelligence analysts, and terrorism experts.⁵ It was well-known and well

2. Anne Applebaum, “Ethnic Cleansing, Russian Style,” *Weekly Standard*, December 20, 1999, www.anneapplebaum.com/1999/12/20/ethnic-cleansing-russian-style/.

3. Anne Applebaum, “Who Is the Real Renegade,” *Intellectual Capital*, November 11, 1999, www.intellectualcapital.com; Miriam Lansky, Jessica Stern, and Monica Duffy Toft, *Russia’s Struggle with Chechnya: Implications for the War on International Terrorism*, Belfer Center Caspian Studies Program, November 26, 2002, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/12789/russias_struggle_with_chechnya.html?breadcrumb=%2Fexperts%2F124%2Fmiriam_lansky; and Alexei Smirnov, “Political disunity mars Chechen rebel strategy in the North Caucasus,” Jamestown Foundation *Chechnya Weekly*, June 8, 2006.

4. Brian Glyn Williams, “Shattering the Al-Qaeda-Chechen Myth,” Jamestown Foundation *Chechnya Weekly*, November 6, 2003; Brian Glyn Williams, “Allah’s Foot Soldiers: An Assessment of the Role of Foreign Fighters and Al-Qa-ida in the Chechen Insurgency,” in ed. Moshe Gammer, *Ethno-Nationalism, Islam and the State in the Caucasus: Post-Soviet Disorder* (London: Routledge, 2007), 156–78; and Brian Glyn Williams, Keynote Lecture, International Conference “The Northern Caucasus: Russia’s Tinderbox,” CSIS, Washington, D.C., November 30–December 1, 2010.

5. Stephen Sestanovich, U.S. State Department Deputy Chief for CIS Affairs: “Text: Sestanovich Statement on Chechnya to Senate Committee, Nov. 4,” *GlobalSecurity.com*, USIS Washington File, November 4, 1999, www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/1999/11/991104-chechen-usia1.htm. See also

documented as early as the mid-1990s, for example, that the notorious Abu Ibn al-Khattab was an AQ operative and fought in the North Caucasus. The declassified Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) “Swift Knight Report” documents not just Khattab’s deep involvement but also that of AQ and Osama bin Laden personally with the CE’s predecessor organization, the ChRI, in the mid-1990s.⁶ Khattab is described in the report as bin Laden’s “personal friend.”⁷ It notes that “several times in 1997 in Afghanistan bin Laden met with representatives of Movlady Udugov’s party ‘Islamic Way’ (*Islamskii Put’*) and representatives of Chechen and Dagestani Wahhabites from Gudermes, Grozny, and Karamakhi.” The DIA report goes on to document AQ’s plans and methods for funding and organizing the establishment of training camps not just in Chechnya but also in other North Caucasus republics and its sending several hundred trainers, ideologists, and fighters to the region. The purpose of this cooperation is described:

[R]adical Islamic (predominantly Sunni) regimes are to be established and supported everywhere possible, including Bosnia, Albania, Chechnya, Dagestan, the entire North Caucasus “from sea to sea”, Central Asian republics, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, all of Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, and the states of the Persian Gulf. Terrorist activities are to be conducted against Americans and Westerners, Israelis, Russians (predominantly Cossacks), Serbs, Chinese, Armenians, and disloyal Muslims.⁸

Terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna estimates that by 1995 the noted AQ operations had brought some 300 “Afghan” Arabs to Chechnya, and they were later joined by mujahideen from Bosnia and Azerbaijan. It is, therefore, possible that there were as many as five hundred foreign fighters in Chechnya when the second war broke out. These were the forces that spearheaded the invasion of Dagestan led by Khattab and his top Chechen ally Shamil Basaev that sparked the second post-Soviet Russo-Chechen war. Thus, there is a direct link between AQ and today’s “violence in the North Caucasus.” The specific names of numerous Arab amirs from AQ’s Abu Sayif to Abu Hafs, Abu Walid, Seif Islam, Abu Anas Muhammad, and ‘Abdullah’ Doger Sevdet, many of them also tied to AQ or sponsored by foreign pro-jihadi sheikhs, are legendary.

Contrary to the consensus, not only did AQ mujahideen fight in the North Caucasus during the ChRI but North Caucasus mujahideen fought on other fronts in the global jihad during the same time. For example, we know that two Kabardins were among eight ethnic Muslims from regions both in the North Caucasus and Volga area captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2001 fighting among the Taliban and AQ and sent to Guantanamo Bay in 2002.⁹ A brief official CE biography of the late Dagestani amir and CE qadi Magomed Vagabov (aka Seifullah Gubdenskii) shows that in 2001–02 some members of his Gubden Jamaat went to Afghanistan after the rout

Richard Clarke, U.S. National Security Council adviser, *Charlie Rose Show*, PBS, November 30, 1999, www.charlierose.com/view/interview/3968; and Joseph Bodansky, U.S. Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare director, “Chechnya: The Mujahedin Factor,” *Freeman.org*, 1999, www.freeman.org/m_online/bodansky/chechnya.htm.

6. Defense Intelligence Agency Declassified “Swift Knight Report,” Document No. 3095345, no date, *Judicial Watch*, www.judicialwatch.org/cases/102/dia.pdf.

7. *Ibid.*, 3.

8. *Ibid.*, 3–4.

9. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFERL) Newline, vol. 7, no. 60, March 28, 2003; RFERL Russian Federation Report, vol. 4, no. 14, April 17, 2002; “Russia’s ‘Taliban’ Faces Uneasy Future after Guantanamo Torment,” *American Foreign Policy*, August 1, 2004; and *Regions.ru*, March 27, 2003, www.regions.ru.

of the joint Chechen-Dagestani-foreign jihadi force that invaded Dagestan in August 1999. This shows that the same route that AQ operatives established for trafficking mujahideen to the Caucasus discussed in the Swift Knight Report was still being used by the ChRI to funnel fighters to Afghanistan. Among those Gubden Jamaat members who went to Afghanistan was its then-amir Khabibullah, who became the amir of “a Russian-speaking jamaat of AQ”—though the account, provided on the August 13, 2010, Jamaat Shariat website, does not make it clear whether Vagabov himself went to Afghanistan.

If one wants to narrow the issue to Chechens, then there have been numerous reports of Chechens fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq against U.S. forces.¹⁰ In 2003, Indian police uncovered an AQ cell led by a Chechen planning to assassinate Vice Admiral James W. Metzger, commander in chief of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, forcing cancelation of the admiral’s trip to India.¹¹ Bryan Glyn Williams claims that after extensive travel across Afghanistan he was unable to find evidence that even one Chechen fighter ever fought there.¹² It is now common knowledge that still during the ChRI period, the lead perpetrator of the September 11 attacks on the United States, Mohammed Atta, was on his way to Chechnya when he was diverted to Germany and eventually the United States for purposes we know all too well. Finally, every officer and junior officer with whom I have spoken has claimed that he encountered a Chechen presence in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Almost all of these officers spoke some Russian. It is certainly true that some of these testimonials are cases of mistaken identity, taking Russian-speaking Central Asians for Chechens. But it simply strains credulity to believe that not a single Chechen has fought in Afghanistan, as Williams claims, when we have seen that Americans, Germans, other Westerners, Central Asians, Tatars, Kabardins, and Dagestanis have been there.

There is ample proof of AQ funding going to ChRI and its AQ-affiliated foreign fighters. The DIA “Swift Knight Report” and numerous other sources confirm this. AQ funding and materiel supply was funneled through the Benevolence International Foundation, Inc. (BIF) that was supported by the Saudi Arabian government and began operating in Chechnya, elsewhere in Russia, as well as in the United States in the early 1990s. AQ used BIF for “the movement of money to fund its operations” and the support of “persons trying to obtain chemical and nuclear weapons on behalf of AQ,” and BIF funded and supplied the Chechen separatist mujahideen before, during, and after the first Russo-Chechen war before Moscow forced BIF to shut down its operations in Russia.¹³ The U.S. criminal conviction of BIF for supporting terrorist activity reveals much about the AQ-BIF-ChRI connection. AQ ruling Majlisul Shura member Seif al-Islam al-Masry was an officer in BIF’s Grozny office, which moved to Ingushetiya in 1998.¹⁴ A BIF officer “had direct

10. This is according to Iraqi Interior Minister Falah al-Naqib. See “Iraq’s Al-Naqib—‘Terrorists’ from Chechnya, Sudan, and Syria Killed Arrested,” *Beirut LBC SAT Television*, 1300 GMT, January 30, 2005.

11. Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 292.

12. Williams, “Shattering the Al-Qaeda-Chechen Myth”; Williams, “Allah’s Foot Soldiers”; and Williams, Keynote Lecture, CSIS International Conference “The Northern Caucasus: Russia’s Tinderbox.”

13. Robert Walker, Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent, “Affidavit in Support of Complaint Benevolence International Foundation, Inc.; and Emman M. Arnout, aka Abu Mahmood, aka Abdel Samia,” April 29, 2002, in the 2002 case “The United States of America v. Benevolence International Foundation, Inc. and Emman M. Arnout,” *Investigative Project*, www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/94.pdf, 3. From here on cited as “Walker Affidavit.”

14. “Treasury Designates Benevolence International Foundation and Related Entities as Financiers of Terrorism,” Press Release, U.S. Department of Treasury’s Office of Public Affairs, PO-3632, November 19, 2002, www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/1176.pdf.

dealings with representatives of the Chechen mujahideen (guerillas or freedom fighters) as well as Hezb i Islami, a military group operating in Afghanistan and Azerbaijan.” BIF’s work with Hezb i Islami active in Azerbaijan was likely related to AQ’s corridor to the North Caucasus mentioned in the DIA documents excerpted above. BIF worked to provide the Chechen mujahideen with recruits, doctors, medicine, “money, an X-ray machine, and anti-mine boots, among other things.”

Beginning around 2000, the pro-Khattab and likely AQ-backed website *Qoqaz.net* (www.qoqaz.net, where “Qoqaz” is Arabic for “Caucasus”) sought funders and recruits for the Chechen jihad. *Qoqaz.net*, *Qoqaz.co.uk*, *Webstorage.com/~azzam*, and *Waaqiah.com* were created and supported by the AQ-affiliated Azzam Publications run by Babar Ahmad, both based in London. Azzam Publications produced numerous video discs featuring the terrorist attacks carried out by Khattab and Basaev as well as other ChRI operations.¹⁵ According to the U.S. indictment of Ahmad, through *Azzam* he “provided, through the creation and use of various internet websites, email communication, and other means, expert advice and assistance, communications equipment, military items, currency, monetary instruments, financial services and personnel designed to recruit and assist the Chechen Mujahideen and the Taliban, and raise funds for violent jihad in Afghanistan, Chechnya and other places.” Specifically, Ahmad “helped create, operate and maintain” websites based in Connecticut, Nevada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Malaysia, and elsewhere “intended to recruit mujahideen, raise funds for violent jihad, recruit personnel for the Chechen Mujahideen, the Taliban and associated groups, and give instructions for travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan to fight with these groups, provide instructions for the surreptitious transfer of funds to the Taliban, and solicit military items for these groups, including gas masks and night vision goggles.”

Azzam’s websites were created for communicating with: (1) “members of the Taliban, Chechen Mujahideen, and associated groups”; (2) others “who sought to support violent jihad” by providing “material support”; (3) “individuals who wished to join these groups, solicit donations,” and arrange money transfers; and (4) those who sought to purchase “videotapes depicting violent jihad in Chechnya, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and other lands of jihad, and the torture and killing of captured Russian troops.” Videotapes, including those eulogizing dead fighters, were used to solicit donations for the jihad in Chechnya and Afghanistan. Ahmad also assisted terrorists to secure temporary residence in London, England, and to travel to Afghanistan and Chechnya in order to participate in jihad. He also assisted terrorists in procuring “camouflage suits; global positioning system (GPS) equipment; and other materials and information.” Ahmad also put Shamil Basaev in touch with an individual who had traveled to the United States in order to raise money and purchase footwarmers for the ChRI’s fighters.¹⁶

Documents found in BIF’s trash revealed that 42 percent of its budget was spent on Chechnya. During a four-month period in 2000, BIF funneled \$685,000 to Chechnya in nineteen wire bank transfers through the Georgian Relief Association (GRA) in Tbilisi and various BIF accounts across the CIS, according to Citibank records introduced to the court. The GRA was actually a BIF front organization and was run by the brother of Chechen field commander Chamsoudin

15. One disc of videos was viewed by the author and deposited by him in the archives at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

16. “Indictment in United States of America v. Babar Ahmad, aka Babar Ahmed, and Azzam Publications,” *Investigative Project*, no date, www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/96.pdf, 1, 5–9, and 12–13.

Avraligov, who was operating in AQ's training camp in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge.¹⁷ Given that BIF was able to function in Russia for nearly a decade, the claims that AQ sent tens of millions of dollars to the North Caucasus mujahideen made by the Russians is quite feasible. One such claim is that AQ has funneled \$25 million to the Chechen resistance, including a one-time contribution in 2000 of \$2 million, 4 Stinger missiles, 700 plastic explosive packs amounting to over 350 kilograms, remote detonators, and medical supplies.¹⁸ Basaev acknowledged in an interview in 2004 receiving funds from international Islamists "on a regular basis," perhaps understating the amount he received that year at some \$20,000.¹⁹ Despite the crackdown on Saudi-sponsored and AQ-tied foundations like the BIF and the deaths of Khattab in 2003 and Basaev in 2006, both the ChRI and then its successor organization the CE continued to receive foreign funding from Middle Eastern contributions funneled through foreign and AQ-tied mujahideen through 2010.

To be sure, neither the ChRI nor the CE ever declared themselves AQ in the Caucasus or North Caucasus. However, the close ties that developed between the ChRI and AQ beginning in the interwar period meant that the ChRI units and camps of foreign fighters and their local allies led by Khattab and Basaev became AQ's de facto, unofficial North Caucasus affiliate and a key if relatively weak front in the global jihad. These AQ-tied foreign fighters, many of whom settled down and even married in Chechnya and other North Caucasus republics after the second war, were in large part responsible for the growing influence of jihadist ideologies in the region and fundamentally altered the nature of what began as a secessionist struggle for Chechen independence just as AQ had counted on when it infiltrated the ChRI. As a result of AQ's intervention and the growing influence of the global jihadi revolutionary movement has led the radical Chechen national separatist movement down a path traversed by many such movements across the Muslim world in recent decades. Nationalist ideas and cadres were gradually displaced by jihadist elements, transforming the secular movement into a jihadist one. This process was increasingly legitimized and gained momentum as Islamic elements were incorporated into the ChRI proto-state and foreign Salafists and Wahhabis and other Islamic extremists continued to infiltrate the movement throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, bringing finances, guerilla and terrorist training, and, most importantly, a new jihadist ideo-theological orientation.

Given that the largely nationalist ChRI developed cooperation with AQ, it would be strange if the more explicitly jihadist CE did not. Indeed, the ChRI's expanding ties made CE's further integration into the AQ-led global jihadi revolutionary movement or alliance inevitable.

The CE, AQ, and the Global Jihadi Revolutionary Alliance

Since 9/11, AQ has become even more decentralized than it was before, hence the debate among terrorism experts over just how "leaderless" the global jihad has become. Rather than having a central website, AQ now prefers to spread jihadi propaganda and terrorism know-how through jihadi social networking websites and discussion forums run by its allies and supporters, and through them AQ, its affiliates, and other jihadi allies recruit, train, and organize insurgents and terrorists. AQ functions more like a grant-giving foundation for financing and otherwise facilitating various

17. Walker Affidavit, 24–28.

18. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 180.

19. "Chechen commander Basaev vows more attacks," BBC Monitoring, in Johnson's Russia List, November 2, 2004, citing Kavkaz Center; see also Mark MacKinnon, "Will use any tactic, Chechen warlord warns," *The Globe and Mail*, November 2, 2004.

jihadi terrorist projects and is just one of many actor-networks intertwined with others, including the CE. Taken together, these now comprise the global jihadi revolutionary movement or alliance.

The evidence of the CE's integration into the global jihad is overwhelming. Umarov has repeatedly associated the CE with the global jihad, from his announcement declaring the foundation of the CE and jihad against anyone fighting against Muslims anywhere across the globe to his most recent (February 2011) appeals aimed expressly at the Egyptians and Tunisians. For example, in October 2010 Umarov addressed the global jihad quite specifically: "Today, I want to describe the situation in the world because, even if thousands of kilometers separate us, those mujahedin who are carrying out Jihad in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir and many, many other places, they are our brothers, and we today (with them) are insisting on the laws of Allah on this earth." Umarov notes that the CE mujahideen follow the Afghani jihad closely by radio and Internet and that the Taliban are "opposed by Christian-Zionist forces led by America." In Pakistan, Umarov stresses, the mujahideen are opposed by "these very same Americans," while in Kashmir, mujahideen confront "Indian pagans." In Africa, Umarov boasts, "Jihad is going on in Somalia, Mali, Algeria and other places, and our brothers (in Africa) also are successfully fighting on this path." He laments, however, that the heart of the jihad is not in Palestine but that what is going on there only can be called jihad "with difficulty." According to Umarov, Allah has willed that the Caucasus mujahideen fight Russia, the "most despicable of all infidels"—an interpretation he probably hopes will strengthen his and the CE's status within the global jihadi revolutionary movement. In traditional jihadi fashion, Umarov calls the global jihad's enemies "the army of Iblis" or the army of "Shaitan" or Satan, which unites "the Americans, who today confess Christian Zionism, and European atheists, who do not confess any of the religions." As stated on the Chechen Kavkaz Center website in October 2010, "Iblis" fights the mujahideen so "there will be no abode for Islam (Dar as-Salam)" anywhere on earth.

A leading ideologist of the CE's Ingush mujahideen of its G'ialg'aiche (Ingushetiya) Vilaiyat, Abu-t-Tanvir Kavkazskii, subsequently laid out in prose a similar but more specific account of both the CE's wide-ranging "local" territorial goals and its longer-range goals once in power. The connection between the CE's prospective emirate and the grander global caliphate is made abundantly clear in an April 24, 2010, posting on the Hunafa.com website:

In the near future we can assume that after the liberation of the Caucasus, Jihad will begin in Idel-Ural and Western Siberia. And, of course we will be obligated to assist with all our strength in the liberation of our brothers' lands from the centuries-long infidel yoke and in the establishment there of the laws of the Ruler of the Worlds. It is also possible that in our help will be very much needed in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, and Allah as ordered us to render it. And we, Allah willing, will destroy the laws of the infidel on the Central Asian lands in league with the mujahedin of Afghanistan. And it is impossible to forget our brothers in the Crimea, which is also land occupied by non-believers. Just take a glance at a map of the world: Muslims live everywhere from West Africa to India, and at various times they fell under the infidels' yoke and their lackeys from among the hypocrites. And further to the east lie broad Muslim territories. And Allah willing, all these lands will again be a united state living only by the law of Allah—the Caliphate. So Allah promised, and by the example of our Caucasus we are clearly convinced that Allah's promise is the truth.

For years now the most important CE websites—*Kavkazcenter.com*, *Hunafa.com*, *Jamaatshariat.com*, and *Islamdin.com*—carried numerous translations of books, articles, and book chapters by

tens of Saudi and Iraqi sheiks and scholars, including: AQ's Osama bin Laden and Aiman al-Zawahiri; the Jordanian Sheikh Abu Muhammad Asem al-Maqdisi; the American Yemen-based AQ in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) leader Anwar al-Awlaki; the prominent medieval source of jihadi thought Taki al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taimiyya; the leading Egyptian scholar and Muslim Brotherhood activist Sayyid Qutb; the Pakistani Salafist and jihadi revolutionary Sayed Abul Ala Maududi; the London-based Syrian Sheikh Abu Basyr At-Tartusi; Sheikh and Imam Abdullah bin Abdur-Rakhman bin Jibrin, Ibrahim Muhammad Al-Hukail, and Iraqi Sheikh and mujahid Abdullah Ibn Muhammad Ar-Rashud, Sheikh Muhammad Salih al-Munajjid, Sheikh Abdurrahman Al-Barrak, among many others. Numerous AQ and pro-AQ articulations can be found as well. These foreign jihadists are also cited in numerous other works disseminated by the CE on the Internet, such as compilations and their own ideologists' writings and video and audio lectures. Within days of bin Laden's death, CE sites had published at least fifteen articles, announcements, and testimonials. CE sites also post Russian translations of articles from, and summaries of, AQ's English-language journal *Inspire*. Three times in 2010, CE websites, such as *Islamdin.com*, published the infamous al-Fahd fatwa calling for the use of weapons of mass destruction against the (American) infidel.

AQ and AQ-tied forums of the global jihadi revolutionary movement have long issued acknowledgments of the deaths of, and testimonials to, ChRI and CE amir martyrs, revealing the persistence of old thinking. For example, Basaev's demise in July 2006 was lamented that same month by the Shura Council of AQ in Iraq on the *Tawhed.ws* website. Arbi Baraev, Abu Havs, Seif Islam, Abu Walid, Shamil Basaev, 'Seifullah' Anzor Astemirov, and Sheikh Said Abu Saad Buryatskii, among others, have been eulogized on these sites. Aside from obituaries, CE leaders like its amir Dokku Umarov, qadi 'Seifullah' Anzor Astemirov, and those mentioned above are praised on global jihadi website forums that support and are tied to AQ, such as *Ansar al-Mujahideen* and *Minbar al-Jihad wa'l-Tawhid*, as discussed below.

Observers may disregard the CE's status as a global jihadi organization, but leading global jihadi revolutionaries beg to differ. In an April 2, 2008, Internet question-and-answer session with jihadists, Zawahiri repeatedly and almost ritualistically mentioned Chechnya and the Caucasus when listing the places where Muslims were being persecuted and jihad had to be waged. When asked specifically on *Alqimmah.net* whether there is "coordination" between AQ and the CE, Zawahiri replied: "[W]e bless and support the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus." The global jihadi revolutionary movement's leading philosopher, according to the West Point Combating Terrorism Center (CTC), is Sheikh Abu Muhammad Asem al-Maqdisi; his website *Minbar al-Jihad wa'l-Tawhid* is regarded by the CTC as AQ's library.²⁰ In a September 18, 2009, posting on the Kavkaz Center website, Maqdisi endorsed the CE network as a viable global jihadi organization and developed a close relationship with the CE, its OVKBK (United Vilaiyat of Kabardiya, Balkariya, and Karachai), and its late amir and CE qadi 'Seifullah' Anzor Astemirov through correspondence and fatwas. Astemirov frequently quoted Maqdisi's writings in his own, and his February 18, 2010, video lecture "On Tawhid" was based on Maqdisi's *Millat Ibrahim (The Religion of Abraham)*. It has become a staple on CE and other jihadi websites. In turn, Maqdisi's website, *Almaqdes.net*, publishes his own and other authors' articles about the CE, which are then translated into Russian and posted on CE sites as well. In September 2010 postings on the *Islamumma.com* and Kavkaz Center websites, Maqdisi urges Muslims to support the CE, "so the Emirate becomes the door to Eastern Europe."

20. "Militant Ideology Atlas—Executive Report," U.S. Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Center, November 2006, 7–8.

The CE's growing ties with AQ and the global jihad in 2010 gave us the recent CE-tied Belgian plot and Czech cell, not to mention the arrests of the several Chechens arrested on terrorism charges in France, Sweden, and Denmark. The "Shariah4Belgium" group's plot uncovered last autumn included Chechens, Moroccans, and probably AQ's Awlaki (or at least one of AQ's main website) in recruitment and financing for the CE and planning an attack to be carried out in Belgium. The website *Ansar al-Mujahideen* (<http://www.ansar1.info/>), which was used to recruit fighters and raise funds for the CE by those involved in the plot, is closely linked to both AQ and Awlaki. Together with *Islamdin.com*, the website of the CE's subdivision operating mostly in Russia's North Caucasus Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, the so-called United Vilaiyat of Kabardiya, Balkariya, and Karachai (OVKBK), it created a new Russian-language global jihadi website <http://al-ansar.info> no later than July 2010, several months before the Belgian plotters were arrested. Little more than a month later, the webmaster of *Ansar al-Mujahidin*, an ethnic Moroccan named Faisal Errai, had been arrested in Spain. According to the Spanish Civil Guard, Errai registered and paid for the hosting of the site for purposes of spreading jihadi propaganda and indoctrinating and recruiting sympathizers to radical Islamism and jihad. The website was already being used to raise money for terrorists in Chechnya as well as in Afghanistan.²¹

The Russian-language forum also contains some English-language content, suggesting that AQAP's Awlaki may be the real force behind the *Ansar al-Mujahidin* network of which *Al-Ansar.info* is a part. The *Ansar al-Mujahidin* network is typically regarded as a self-started jihadi and pro-AQ site that helps propagandize and recruit for the global jihad and AQ. Leading jihadism expert Evan Kohlmann describes Ansar as "self-selecting form of internet-based terrorism" "promoting the mission of al-Qa'ida" and "loyal" to AQ. In defending the status of *Ansar al-Mujahidin*, its founder Abu Omar al-Maqdisi (no established relationship to Sheikh al-Maqdisi) noted, "We have brothers from Chechnya and Dagestan."²² *Ansar al-Mujahidin's* English-language forum (AMEF) leading personality was 'Abu Risaas' Samir Khan until mid-2010, when he turned up working with Awlaki in AQAP.²³ The Virginian Zachary Adam Chasser, alias Abu Talhah al-Amriki, in prison for assisting the Somalian AQ affiliate Al-Shabaab, also participated in AMEF.²⁴ *Ansar al-Mujahidin's* German-language sister site is closely associated with the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF), which also has produced several operatives arrested for involvement in AQ terrorism plots.²⁵ The Taliban has authorized the *Ansar al-Mujahidin* network as one of three entities that may publish its official statements.²⁶ In short, the *Ansar al-Mujahidin* network is deeply embedded within the global jihadi revolutionary movement and closely associated with AQ and the likes of Awlaki.

In December 2010, *Ansar al-Mujahideen* announced "the Start of a New Campaign in Support of the Caucasus Emirate," signaling a request for fighters and funds for the CE's jihad and empha-

21. "Another Online Jihadi Arrested in Spain," *Jawa Report*, August 31, 2010, <http://mynetjawa.mu.nu/archives/203757.php>.

22. Evan Kohlmann, "A Beacon for Extremists: The Ansar al-Mujahideen Web Forum," *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 3, no. 2, February 2010, www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/CTCSentinel-Vol3Iss2.pdf, 1-4.

23. "Hammer Time: Ansar al-Mujahideen Webmaster Arrested!" *Jawa Report*, August 31, 2010, <http://mynetjawa.mu.nu/archives/203766.php>.

24. "Fairfax County Man Accused of Providing Material Support to Terrorists," U.S. Attorney General's Office, July 21, 2010, www.justice.gov/usao/vae/Pressreleases/07-JulyPDFArchive/10/20100721chessernr.html and "Hammer Time: Ansar al-Mujahideen Webmaster Arrested!"

25. "Hammer Time: Ansar al-Mujahideen Webmaster Arrested!"

26. Kohlmann, "A Beacon for Extremists."

sizing: “We ask Allah to make this year a year of constant discord and increasing enmity for the enemies of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus.” The announcement noted with hope the emerging signs of jihadism in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan and asked Allah for “a new generation of scholars” for the CE to replace Astemirov, Buryatskii, and AQ operative Omar al-Seif, who opened up AQ’s ties to Chechnya and the Caucasus along with Khattab in the mid-1990s. Astemirov, Buryatskii, and Seif are mentioned by name.²⁷

The Russian-language *Al-Ansar.info* is intended to “highlight news summaries of the Jihad on all fronts, both in the Caucasus and in all other lands of the fight” and publish old and new works of scholars of the “ahli sunny ual’ jama’a.” *Islamdin.com*’s announcement of the joint project with the *Ansar al-Mujahidin* network quotes Awlaki, who retains a high profile on CE sites, on the value of being a “jihadist of the internet.” Awlaki proposes this because of the need to create: fee-free and uncensored discussion forums; lists of e-mail addresses so Muslims interested in jihad can contact each other and exchange information; online publications and distribution of literature and news of the jihad; and sites that focus on separate aspects of the jihad. In a July 20, 2010, *Islamdin.com* posting, he urges Muslims to follow the events of the jihad because it “enlivens our connection to the jihad”; “strengthens our belongingness to the Umma”; “approves our joining the jihad”; “inflames our desire to receive martyrdom”; allows Muslims “to see how Allah defends his slaves and leads them to victory”; provides “practical examples on how our brothers are applying theory in contemporary conditions”; and “strengthens our attention to the Koran,” to which strengthened ties “reaches its peak when we ourselves participate in this conflict (jihad), entering the ranks of the mujahedin.” *Islamdin.com* posted the first part of Awlaki’s *Al-Janna* the day after this announcement, and CE websites continue to post Awlaki’s works.

The CE network’s relationship with Maqdisi, AQ, and Awlaki has produced two CE-tied jihadi operations in Europe in the last nine months. The first was the Shariah4Belgium plot broken up on November 23, 2010. Eleven suspects were arrested in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia on suspicion of planning terrorist attacks in Belgium and recruiting “jihadist candidates” and financing the Caucasus Emirate. Europe had been on high alert for weeks over increased chatter and intelligence indicating possible holiday season terrorist attacks—something that received more confirmation after the Iraqis interrogated a recently detained AQ operative. Two of those detained for involvement in the Belgium plot and cell were reported to be Russian nationals, and news agencies reported they were ethnic Chechens or from Chechnya. The Chechens and all the suspects held dual citizenship and belonged to a group called Shariah4Belgium.²⁸ Earlier this year Belgian Islamist and Shariah4Belgium leader Abou Imran declared that the White House would “be conquered,” and “Europe will be dominated by Islam.”²⁹

There was other evidence of the plot’s connection to the CE. On June 22, 2010, *Islamdin.com* posted an appeal from Belgian Muslims to Maqdisi, underscoring once again the way in which the CE’s tie to Maqdisi unites it with the outer global jihadi revolution. Moreover, the arrested Shariah4Belgium suspects were said to have been using the jihadi website *Ansar al-Mujahidin* (<http://>

27. “Announcing the Start of a New Campaign in Support of the Caucasus Emirate,” *Alqimmah.net*, December 5, 2010, www.alqimmah.net/showthread.php?t=21139&goto=nextoldest.

28. Valentina Pop, “Chechen Terror Suspects Busted in Belgian Raid,” *EU Observer*, November 24, 2010, <http://euobserver.com/9/31341>.

29. “Belgian Islamist Abou Imran, of Shariah4Belgium: We Will Conquer the White House, Europe Will Be Dominated by Islam,” Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), video clip no. 2695, November 9, 2010, 09:42, www.memritv.org/clip/en/2695.htm.

www.ansar1.info/) in carrying out their activity.³⁰ As noted above, there are ties between this site and the CE through the CE OVKBK's website, *Islamdin.com*, which along with *Ansar al-Mujahidin* cosponsored a Russian-language forum and site, *Al-Ansar.info*.

Belgian police said the Shariah4Belgium cell was based in Antwerp, where some of the arrests were made, and had connections with a local Islamic center. The Antwerp group had been under investigation since at least 2009. The day after the first eleven arrests were made, another fifteen suspects were detained across Brussels in a separate case. One of the Russian nationals was a thirty-one-year-old "Chechen" arrested in Aachen, Germany, and the suspect under a European arrest warrant issued by Belgium for having recruited young people to fight in Chechnya. The two arrested Chechens were involved apparently in both the recruiting and financing for the CE and the planning of attacks in Belgium. The prosecutor's statement said all detainees were involved in both recruiting and financing for the CE and in planning attacks in Belgium. Later reports indicated the first group taken into custody for planning the Belgian attack and funding and recruiting for the CE was made up primarily, if not exclusively, of Moroccans and Chechens. These included six Moroccan Belgian citizens detained in Antwerp, three Moroccan Belgian citizens arrested in the Netherlands, and two Chechens apprehended in the German city of Aachen near the Belgian border.³¹

A third Chechen allegedly involved in the Shariah4Belgium plot was arrested on December 1 at Vienna's Schwechat airport on the basis of one of nine international arrest warrants issued by the Belgian government.³² The Austrians reported on December 4 that the detainee was "a supporter of Doku Umarov" and was detained upon his return from the hajj to Mecca in connection with an international plot to attack "a NATO facility in Belgium."³³ Identified in one report as thirty-two-year-old Aslambek I., this third detainee reportedly lived in the small Austrian town of Neunkirchen (population 12,000) with this family and was planning to bomb a train carrying NATO troops. Earlier, he reportedly lost both his hands in a grenade attack in Chechnya and had been arrested earlier in Sweden for smuggling weapons, was released, and then left for Mecca.³⁴ It remains unclear whether this CE-connected plot was part of the reported AQ plan to carry out a series of Christmas terrorist attacks in the United States, United Kingdom, and Europe that also probably included the recent failed attack in Stockholm, Sweden.³⁵ The plot was apparently in its early stages, as the terrorism alert level in Belgium after the arrests remained at level 2 out of 5.

30. Stephen Castle, "Police Arrest Suspects in Plot Against Belgium," *New York Times*, November 23, 2010; Phillippe Siuberski, "Belgium arrests 26 in raids against terror," *Sidney Morning Herald*, November 24, 2010.

31. Castle, "Police Arrest Suspects in Plot Against Belgium"; Siuberski, "Belgium arrests 26 in raids against terror"; and Pop, "Chechen Terror Suspects Busted in Belgian Raid."

32. "Austria arrests Chechen fugitive in Belgium plot," AP, December 4, 2010, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40505038/ns/world_news-europe/.

33. "Austrian police arrest Chechen over possible jihad attack on Belgian NATO facility," *Jihad Watch*, December 4, 2010, www.jihadwatch.org/2010/12/austrian-police-arrest-chechen-over-possible-jihad-attack-on-belgian-nato-base.html; and "Austrian police hold Chechen in Belgian attack probe," *Expatica*, December 4, 2010, www.expatica.com/be/news/belgian-news/austrian-police-hold-chechen-in-belgium-attack-probe_115126.html, citing "Austrian police hold Chechen in Belgian attack probe," Agence France Presse, December 4, 2010.

34. "Suspected Terrorist: A Ghost in Neunkirchen," *Die Presse*, December 5, 2010, 18:19, http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/oesterreich/616045/Mutmasslicher-Terrorist_Ein-Phantom-in-Neunkirchen?direct=611111&_vl_backlink=/home/politik/innenpolitik/index.do&selChannel=100.

35. "Qaeda Plans US, UK Christmas Attacks: Iraq Official," Reuters, December 16, 2010, 3:35, http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20101216/wl_nm/us_iraq_qaeda.

In April 2011, counterterrorism officials in the Czech Republic uncovered an international cell connected to the CE's Dagstan Vilaiyat (DV) in Bohemia. According to the chief of the Czech Unit for Combatting Organized Crime (UOOZ), Robert Slachta, the group included one Chechen, two or three Dagestanis, two or three Moldovans, and two Bulgarians, who are accused variously of weapons possession, document falsification, financing, and supplying terrorist organizations, specifically the DV's new members, with weapons and explosives. Some of the group's members visited training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan and were once based in Berlin, Germany.³⁶ This suggests they may have had ties to al Qaeda and perhaps to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan or its successor organization Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), which has fighters in Afghanistan, trains and fights in Pakistan, and has had a longstanding relationship with the CE. In a May 2007 statement, the IJU's amir Ebu Yahya Muhammad Fatih stated that the IJU had "also been working on our common targets together with Caucasian mujahideens."³⁷ In March 2011 the IJU's media department Badr At-Tawhid' sent a seven-minute video message to the CE mujahideen from the IJU's amirs in the "land of Horosan," Afghanistan.³⁸

Documents relating to the Dagestan mujahideen in both Arabic and Russian were found during the arrests. The apartment of the Chechen involved in the Czech cell was reported to have contained "significant quantities of arms and ammunition." Six of the eight accused were arrested in the Czech Republic, with two members still at large in Germany. There was also an unidentified ninth member, and some in the group possessed narcotics. Profits made from the falsification of passports and other documents were sent to Dagestan and presumably used to purchase the weapons and explosives sent there by the cell. None of those arrested were suspected of planning terrorist attacks in the Czech Republic. However, one press report claimed that the Bulgarian members of the group were involved in planning terrorist attacks in unidentified "other states."³⁹ On May 8 Czech police announced the arrest of an unnamed forty-two-year-old Pakistani national wanted by Interpol on murder and terrorism charges. The police stated that there was no connection between the arrests of members of the CE-tied cell and the Pakistani. However, there could be an indirect connection: AQ or global jihadists could be concluding and sharing information that the Czech Republic is an easy venue for activity. They could even be implementing Maqdisi's call for expansion into Eastern Europe.

The Caucasus mujahideen's activity and influence remain evident if less so on the more central fronts of the global jihad. In the same month that the CE was formed, October 2007, the Lebanese government arrested four Russian citizens, including three ethnic North Caucasians, one of which was a Dagestani, who were charged of belonging to Fatah-el-Islam, fighting in northern Lebanon that summer, and carrying out terrorist attacks against Lebanese servicemen while participating in an armed revolt in the Nahr el-Barid Palestinian refugee camp. The four formed a Fatah cell of twenty along with sixteen Palestinians. The AfPak-based Islamic Jihad Union video greeting of

36. "Czech Police Arrest Suspected Russia's North Caucasus Terrorists," *BNO News*, May 3, 2011, 2:27, <http://wireupdate.com/wires/17128/czech-police-arrest-suspected-russias-north-caucasus-terrorists/>.

37. Saoud Mekhennet and Michael Moss, "Europeans Are Being Trained in Pakistani Terrorism Camps, Officials Fear," *New York Times*, September 10, 2007.

38. "IJU: Message from the Mujahideen of the Khorasan to the Caucasus Emirate," *Kavkaz Jihad Blogspot*, March 14, 2011, <http://kavkaz-jihad.blogspot.com/2011/03/message-of-mujahideen-from-khorasan-to.html>; and "Video Badr at-Tawheed—Mensaje de los mujahidines del Jorasán al Emirato del Cáucaso," *Jihad-e-Informacion*, March 2011, <http://jihad-e-informacion.blogspot.com/2011/03/video-badr-at-tawheed-mensaje-de-los.html>.

39. "Czech Police Arrest Suspected Russia's North Caucasus Terrorists."

March 2011 (mentioned above) praises the CE mujahideen for joining the global jihad and noting: “In our jamaat, there are many brothers who were trained or fought on the lands of the Caucasus Emirate.” According to a recent report by Russia’s National Anti-Terrorism Committee, a Kabardin, who allegedly was recently fighting in Lebanon, returned home and was killed in Nalchik.

We also know that the Tatar jihadi jamaat based in Waziristan, Pakistan, the so-called Bulgar Jamaat, has stated it has “Dagestanis, Russians, Kabardins,” though it consists primarily of Tatars, and has carried out operations in Afghanistan.⁴⁰ The Bulgar Jamaat may be playing a role in possible efforts of Tatars and Bashkirs to set up an affiliate of the CE in the Volga and Urals area, the so-called Vilaiyat of Idel-Ural (VIU) area, as promised by Umarov five years ago. This winter the VIU declared its entry on the path of jihad and requested financial, training, and operational assistance for setting up camps in the southern Ural Mountains.

In sum, we do have evidence of a personnel connection between the North Caucasus and the global jihad, and the flow of cadres runs both ways. Overall, though not today, the flow of mujahideen from the Caucasus to abroad has been more limited than that from abroad to the Caucasus. Foreign amirs fighting in the North Caucasus continue to be tracked down and killed with some regularity. Most recently, Russian forces eliminated the Jordanian Abu Anas Muhammad in April and the ethnic Kurd from Turkey ‘Abdullah’ Doger Sevdet in May.

It should be remembered that many of the observers who are telling us today that the CE is a virtual phenomenon, is not a part of the global jihad, and has no ties to AQ are the same people who five and ten years ago were denying the jihadis’ presence in the Caucasus and their role in the making of the second post-Soviet Russo-Chechen war, portraying the ChRI as a purely national separatist movement and thereby distorting the causes of the “violence in the North Caucasus.” Yet the second Russo-Chechen war was clearly sparked by the jihadi forces’ invasion of Dagestan organized and led by AQ’s Khattab and his local ally Shamil ‘Abu Idris’ Basaev in August 1999. Now that the CE is virulently jihadist, controls a Caucasus-wide network, and is an integral part of the global jihadi alliance, these same observers conjure up false flag operations, claiming or implying that Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) has masterminded the creation of the CE and its major suicide bombings in Moscow in recent years.⁴¹ The Jamestown Foundation even claimed that the FSB controls bin Laden’s then-deputy and now AQ amir Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁴² Newcomers to the field, such as Robert Pape, are willing to cherry-pick and distort the meaning of Umarov’s words and ignore the most relevant data in order to claim that the CE is fighting only for Chechen

40. Laith Alkhouri, “Jamaat Bulgar’ Website—‘About Us’ Section—Provides Background Information on Ties to Taliban, Tactics,” *Flashpoint Intel*, April 29, 2010, www.flashpoint-intel.com/images/documents/pdf/0410/flashpoint_jamaatbulgaraboutus.pdf.

41. Anne Applebaum, “How Did Russian Police Know Who Bombed the Moscow Subway,” *Post Partisan*, *WashingtonPost.com*, March 30, 2010, http://voices.washingtonpost.com/postpartisan/2010/03/are_chechens_responsible_for_t.html; also in *Slate*, March 30, 2010, www.slate.com/id/2249293; and *Free Thought Manifesto*, April 1, 2010, <http://freethoughtmanifesto.blogspot.com/2010/04/how-did-russian-police-know-who-bombed.html>. See also Liz Fuller, “Evidence’ in Moscow Subway Bombings Doesn’t Add Up,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Caucasus Report*, April 7, 2010, www.rferl.org/archive/Caucasus_Report/latest/963/963.html.

42. Yevgenii Novikov, “A Russian Agent at the Right Hand of bin Laden?” *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2005, www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=Khattab&tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=5&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=427&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=523e0d96aebd44d614339185c129fc80.

independence.⁴³ Some U.S.-funded commentators even issue praise for the CE mujahideen.⁴⁴ Given the prior record of such analysts, we do better by heeding the promise from the CE mujahideen, in an August 22, 2010, posting on the Jamaat Shariat website, of “operations in Sochi and across Russia and more ‘surprises’ from the horror of which you will blacken.”

Misconceptualizing the Caucasus Emirate

Numerous misconceptions about the CE’s nature and internal workings continue to abound. Analysts and especially activists underestimate the importance of the CE jihadi terrorist network as a united and organized political and military force engaged in jihad and proselytizing the Salafist takfirist theo-ideology across the Caucasus. A key and persistent misconception is that the CE’s jihadi insurgency is disunited, locally based and recruited, and lacks any and all central command and control. The CE as such is never mentioned and an amorphous collection of unspecified “militants” are portrayed without leaders, central command, organization, common goals, ideology, or propaganda.

Although it is true that the CE is a decentralized organization or network and that some of its local jamaats might be formed on the basis of local grievances, it would be wrong to see it as driven solely by local concerns and lacking central control or hierarchy. The foundation of the CE’s structure and hierarchy was laid as early as 2005 with the ChRI’s formation of the Caucasus and Dagestan Fronts, the amirs of which were appointed by the ChRI president/amir, Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev.⁴⁵ Today, the CE’s amir Dokku ‘Abu Usman’ Umarov appoints the amirs of all of the CE networks’ basic nodes, though there has been one exception to this rule. All amirs take the Islamic loyalty oath or *bayat* to him. The CE’s organizational structure is determined by Umarov by decree (omra in Arabic) and is a mix of typical network forms. Its nodes, the so-called *vilayats* (Arabic for governate or province), are based, for the most part, along the lines of the North Caucasus republics. The most important and only continuously acting nodes are the Nokchicho (Chechnya) Vilaiyat (NV), the Galgaiche (Ingushetiya) Vilaiyat (GV), the Dagestan Vilaiyat (DV), and the United Vilaiyat of Kabardiya, Balkariya and Karachai or OVKBK (which covers Russia’s republics of Kabardino-Balkariya and Karachaevo-Cherkessiya). Each of these consists of several fronts or sectors and tens of combat jamaats.

43. Robert Pape, Lindsey O’Rourke, and Jenna McDermit, “What Makes Chechen Women So Dangerous?” *New York Times*, March 30, 2010. See my critique in Gordon M. Hahn, “What Makes Russia’s Jihadists So Dangerous,” *Russia–Other Points of View*, April 28, 2010, www.russiaotherpointsofview.com/2010/04/what-makes-russias-jihadists-so-dangerous.html#more.

44. Less than three weeks after CE amir Umarov sent a suicide bomber to attack Moscow’s Domodedovo Airport killing 37 and wounding more than 200, RFERL’s chief Caucasus correspondent Liz Fuller praised him as a “father” who restrains the mujahideen: “If these young men [the CE’s younger mujahideen] have not become the callous brutes Khasbulatov anticipated, much of the credit must surely lie with the older commanders who were fathers before they became fighters, and have since assumed the role of father figures to the younger generation of insurgents: the natural-born pedagogue Abdullayev; Tarhan; Mansur; and even Umarov, seen receiving a filial embrace from Hadji-Murat at the very end of this clip.” Liz Fuller, “Chechnya’s Youngest Insurgents,” RFERL, February 14, 2011, www.rferl.org/content/blog/2308952.html. Also, see Liz Fuller, “Remembering Mansur,” RFERL, March 17, 2011, www.rferl.org/content/caucasus_report_remembering_mansur/2341725.html.

45. Hahn, *Russia’s Islamic Threat*, 69–71.

When Umarov temporarily resigned in August of last year, sparking a small schism among the CE's Chechen or NV mujahideen, all of the non-Chechen amirs, vilaiyats, and jamaats reaffirmed their loyalty to him. The same sort of hierarchical relationship exists between the amirs/valis of the vilaiyats and the sectors, jamaats, and their amirs. It appears that even some funding is distributed from the "center" to subordinate units and the vilaiyats, and the central and vilaiyat commands endeavor when possible to convene shuras to maintain contact and coordination; some of these shuras are shown in part in videos posted on CE websites. When Umarov announced the revival of the suicide-bombing unit, the so-called Riyadus Salikhin Martyrs' Brigade (RSMB), a wave of suicide bombings began within weeks, including thirty-four suicide bombings to date and spreading to almost all of the North Caucasus republics and Moscow itself. All of the vilaiyats have carried out such attacks, with the exception of the OVKBK. The DV Dagestani mujahideen displayed the united purpose of the CE's vilaiyats when it created its own Riyadus Salikhin Martyrs' Jamaat in autumn of 2010. For the last year, the Dagestanis have led the way in suicide bombings, having carried out or been involved in eleven of the eighteen such attacks in 2010–11. Similarly, the CE's vilaiyats and even some sectors have established shari'a courts, and Umarov appoints the qadis (Arabic for chief judge or magistrate) of the CE's shari'a court. The unity of the network is also expressed in Umarov's appointment of three consecutive CE qadis from outside Chechnya: one an ethnic Kabardin from Kabardino-Balkariya and the OVKBK's amir Seifullah Anzor Astemirov and after his death two consecutive Dagestani amirs.

A very informative letter written by then DV amir and CE qadi Magomed Vagabov (aka Seifullah Gubdenskii) to Umarov at the peak of the crisis that ended in a schism within the NV clearly demonstrates the Dagestani fighters' loyalty to Umarov, the degree of contact and coordination that takes place between the vilaiyat amirs and the CE amir, and the sharing of funds, including those brought to the CE by foreign amirs, some of whom certainly have contacts with AQ (see below). To be sure, the vilaiyats, sectors, and local jamaats independently undertake alms collections, recruitment, and small-scale operations, but overall structural organization, leadership appointments, strategy, and large-scale operations are the purview of Umarov and his top associates. This said, the recent killing of Umarov's naib and long-time mujahid Supyan Abdullaev could severely unsettle the organization and effectiveness of the CE, if Umarov is unable to designate a new naib or successor before he is killed or captured.

Another grave misnomer is that ethno-nationalism, Chechen or otherwise, remains an important element of the CE ideology and motivation for its mujahideen. In some circles that have supported Chechen separatism, this may be more wishful thinking than objective analysis. Separatist violence has not been exclusively Chechen since at least 2005, if not earlier.⁴⁶ Yet experts and more casual observers, sometimes willfully ignoring the facts, continued to refer to Chechnya and Chechens many years after the movement had been filled with ethnic Ingush, Dagestani (Avar, Dargin, Kumyk), Kabard, Adyg, even Russian, Buryat mujahideen, not to mention foreign jihadists and AQ operatives, and jihadi violence having shifted to Ingushetiya, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya, and elsewhere outside Chechnya.⁴⁷

46. Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat*, chapters 4 and 5 on Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkariya, respectively.

47. Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terrorism Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Perhaps the most striking example of mistaking the CE's global jihadi orientation with Chechen national separatism was Robert Pape's March 2010 *New York Times* op-ed, which mistook two Dagestani terrorists behind the March 2010 Moscow subway suicide bombings—the wives of two Dagestani amirs, moreover—as Chechens. See Pape, O'Rourke, and McDermit, "What Makes Chechen Women So Dangerous?"

Thus, when the majority of the CE's Chechen amirs and mujahideen defected from Umarov during the August–September 2010 schism, many, including a National Endowment for Democracy representative to the U.S. Congress, claimed this signaled a return to Chechen nationalism and an abandonment of Salafism and global jihadism.⁴⁸ Nothing could be further from the truth. In October 7, 2010, postings on the *Daymohk.net* and *Chechenpress.org* websites, the splitting amirs stated explicitly that they remained committed to a Caucasus Islamist shari'a law-based state and brothers of the CE mujahideen and were only abandoning Umarov, whom they accused of bad leadership:

Do not think that the cause of our split is specifically Nokchicho [Chechen for Chechnya], Ichkeria or that we desire something even more. No, of course. Our intentions, and Allah sees this, is the establishment of the Law of Allah, the laws of Shariah, the liberation of our people, the Caucasus, and all Muslims, Allah willing. All our major Amirs, who left us—Maskhadov and Shamil and Abdul-Khalim [Sadulaev] as well as the Akhmadovs, the Baraevs—had these same intentions.

A think tank report made a similar point, claiming that the late OVKBK amir and CE qadi 'Seifullah' Anzor Astemirov sought to preserve the territorial integrity of Russia's version of Kabardiya, the Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya.⁴⁹ This would imply that Astemirov was driven by ethno-nationalist considerations. Such a conclusion contradicts his biography and theo-ideological pronouncements. As a foreign-educated Salafist, a receiver of Maqdisi's strong theo-ideological patronage, and the CE's chief theo-ideologist by virtue of his position as CE qadi, Astemirov was in fact a persistent opponent of ethno-nationalism. According to his own writings, shown in a November 20, 2007, posting on the Kavkaz Center website, it was Astemirov who convinced Umarov to establish the CE; he and his closest associate Musa Mukozhev demanded in a shura with Basaev in 2005 that the ChRI be fully jihadized and the extremist Chechen nationalist project be jettisoned for the present project for a purely Salafist and pan-Russian emirate tied to a future caliphate. Astemirov's theo-ideological statements and fatwas, in 2010 *Islamdin.com* postings, make clear that he was a pure Salafist and takfirist and thus an ardent opponent of ethno-nationalism.

Global jihadism and unity are characteristic of the CE's theo-ideology, goals, and propaganda as well. The CE's vilaiyats share and propagate the same Salafist-jihadist ideology based on precisely the same medieval and contemporary philosophical sources upon which the remainder of the global jihadi revolutionary movement relies, as discussed above. A common radical Salafist theo-ideology can be seen across the vilaiyats' official statements and internally generated theo-ideological propaganda, which like the foreign sources, are reposted across the websites of the CE network's various nodes or vilaiyats. Similarly, the goals reflected in official statements and propaganda pieces are one and the same across the vilaiyats and their respective websites. To omit all this in one's writing or comments on the nature of the insurgency is to ignore the significance of

48. Testimony of Miriam Lansky, "Human Rights in the North Caucasus," Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. RFERL has offered the chief radical Chechen nationalist, Akhmed Zakayev, a continuous platform to make the same claim. See "Interview: Zakayev Says 'No Irresolvable Issues' Between Russia, Chechnya," RFERL, September 23, 2010, www.rferl.org/content/Interview_Zakayev_Says_No_Irresolvable_Issues_Between_Russia_Chechnya/2166048.html; and "Chechen Separatist Leader Says He's in Poland, Dismisses Interpol Arrest Threat," RFERL, September 16, 2010, 17:05, www.rferl.org/content/Chechen_Separatist_Leader_Says_Arrest_Threat_Wont_Keep_Him_From_Conference/2158981.html.

49. Andrew Kuchins, Matthew Malarkey, and Sergey Markedonov, *The North Caucasus: Russia's Volatile Frontier* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, March 2011), 4.

many hundreds of easily available global jihadi and Salafist articles, fatwas, official statements, and videos issued by both North Caucasus and foreign mujahideen and sheikhs.

To be sure, local strategic and tactical considerations may sometimes differ, but this hardly adds up to a disunited jihad. And the region's topography is difficult. At the same time, Russian security organs and local police are not quite as incompetent or corrupt as they are sometimes portrayed and are constantly in search of Umarov and the other amirs as well as rank-and-file mujahideen. All this complicates coordination and demands decentralization despite modern communications technology. But all jihadi and revolutionary underground organizations are decentralized networks for reasons of internal security; if a hand is cut off, the body will not die and the head will not be exposed. There are various types of decentralized networks—sparse, basic tree, small world, core-periphery, and scale-free—and the CE exhibits elements of many of these simultaneously. There is nothing “disunited” about such modes of organizational structure, whether we are talking about the CE or the global jihad. In sum, “what is happening in the North Caucasus” is without any doubt a unified, if decentralized, region-wide jihad that is part and parcel of an even more diffuse but still unified global jihadi revolutionary alliance.

Understanding the “Violence in the North Caucasus”

In a 2010 *Foreign Affairs* article, Charles King and Rajan Menon wrote that the literature on the Caucasus jihad is burdened by a “single-factor fallacy”: “Explanations for the upheaval and violence in the North Caucasus tend to seize on a single root cause. The rise of radical Islam is often cited first.”⁵⁰ In fact, this is exactly the opposite of the state of affairs. If this were so, there would be tens of books and hundreds of articles focused on the ChRI and CE mujahideen. But in fact there are only a few books, scholarly journals, and especially leading newspapers and magazines that have even mentioned the CE. Almost all journalism on the generically described “violence in the North Caucasus” explains it as solely a function of Russian brutality, colonialism, and bad governance and asserts or implies that most insurgents choose jihadism in response to the brutal actions of Russian security forces. The consensus in the field, to the extent there is a field of North Caucasus studies, is not the result of sound empirical research but rather a consequence of political correctness and anti-Russian prejudices.

This one-sided consensus is reinforced by a methodological disfunction rooted in an unwillingness to actually study the Caucasus Emirate as a serious phenomenon. Thus, the misapplication of popular political science methodologies inappropriate for addressing the problem allowed two American political scientists to conclude that the CE jihadi underground is not driven by Islamic radicalism and has not been expanding based on an opinion survey. Moreover the survey was conducted among the public, not of former or present mujahideen, and in only three of the eight regions of the North Caucasus and only two of its five titular Muslim republics.⁵¹ The failure of the tens of American political scientists and analysts studying the North Caucasus and of the hundreds of Russia experts to focus on the CE produced these misperceptions so reminiscent of the

50. Charles King and Rajan Menon, “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Russia’s Invisible Civil War,” *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July/August 2010): 30.

51. Theodore Gerber and Sarah Mendelson, “Security Through Sociology: The North Caucasus and the Global Counterinsurgency Paradigm,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, no. 9 (2009): 831–51.

kind that more than a decade ago led to our failure to foresee the AQ threat. (Although this is not to say that the CE represents anything like the threat that AQ represented then.)

The Russian Brutality and Causality Fallacies

Thus, the discussion and literature, at least outside a small circle of experts on jihadism, ignore and understate the extent to which the local North Caucasus highland culture and more importantly the global Salafist takfirist theo-ideology are driving the violence in the region. In my own work I have rejected any monocausal explanation for a phenomenon as complex as the rise of violent jihadism.⁵² Unlike others, I do not exclude the *possibility* that the rise of jihadism globally, elements of the jihadist ideology, and that the North Caucasus population is overwhelmingly Muslim constitute together the main cause of jihadism in the region. Nor do I exclude the possibility that the main cause lies with the well-documented Russian brutality and soft authoritarian form of rule.

However, at present there is simply not enough evidence to settle on any single factor as the main cause. Any objective assessment must acknowledge that from the menu of possible causes—Russian brutality, bad governance, jihadi ideology, foreign jihadi proselytizing and material support, a local culture of violence and intolerance, relative deprivation resulting from a low standard of living, etc.—we have no way of discerning which is the most important. We do not even have sufficient data or methods as yet for establishing conclusively a correlation between any one of these independent variables and the dependent variable of violence or jihadism. Do we have an interview survey of former or, less possible, present mujahideen that asked them why they went “to the forest,” that is, went to jihad and joined the CE? No, we do not. None of the available data has been organized and quantified systematically by anyone in order to weigh these competing explanations. Moreover, the data are sufficiently sparse and uneven, making them difficult to systematize.

An interview survey of former and active mujahideen would perhaps provide the best data, but this is unlikely to happen anytime soon. In trying to discover why young Muslim men and women go to jihad in the North Caucasus and Russia, we could build a data set consisting only of the relatives and friends of mujahideen. However, at least in some cases their testimony would be colored by the ulterior motive of trying to exculpate their close ones who have “gone to the forest” or by their ignorance about their child’s radicalization, which mujahideen are naturally supposed to keep secret. All such “evidence” is highly anecdotal at present. We have cases in which the parents of suicide bombers have denied the involvement of their children in suicide attacks, only to see their children, tragically, on a videotaped final testament days, weeks, or months later declaring their allegiance to Allah and jihad and their intent to carry out *istishkhad* (martyrdom). For example, the mother of suicide bomber Batyr Dzhaniyev claimed he had been on his way to, was in, or was returning from Astrakhan when the attack occurred and that he might have been abducted by law enforcement elements and then falsely accused of being the suicide martyr. Dzhaniyev, who detonated his car bomb in Nazran, Ingushetiya, on December 16, 2009, killing at least ten MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) servicemen and injuring twenty-three, soon appeared in his own final testament video posted by the CE and its suicide bomber unit, the Riyadus Salikhin Martyrs’ Brigade, showing the bomb-making process, Batyr Dzhaniyev’s martyrdom farewell statement, and the explosion in the center of Nazran.⁵³

52. Hahn, *Russia’s Islamic Threat*, 6–29.

53. The video is permanently archived at <http://hunafa.com/?p=3631>.

Unidirectional Response Fallacy

An attendant false assumption—one common in the U.S. mainstream media and some scholarly works on the violence in the region—holds that CE attacks are responses to Russian police and security brutality, when in fact such attacks are the CE's chosen means to achieve its *raison d'être*: establishment of its Salafist shari'a law-based emirate and the global jihadis' caliphate. Of course, to some extent the rise of jihadism is a response to the two post-Soviet wars, but the Chechens bear as much responsibility for the outbreak of those wars as does Moscow. This unidirectional response fallacy—the idea that it is always the mujahideen responding to the state's supposedly routinely brutal counterterrorist operations—is a biased assumption. It is echoed in Umarov's own absurd claim, stated in a March 31, 2010, Kavkaz Center website posting—in turn reflected in news reports—that the March Moscow subway twin suicide bombings were a response to the killing of hunters allegedly by the security forces in Arshty, Ingushetiya, the previous month.⁵⁴ Never mind that: (1) Umarov had announced the revival of the Riyadus Salikhiiin Martyrs' Brigade in April the year before, expressly undertaken to carry out attacks against civilians deep inside Russia; (2) there had been sixteen suicide bombings the previous year, including the November 29, 2009, "Nevskii Express" train bombing between Moscow and St. Petersburg; and (3) operations like this train bombing usually take more than a month to plan. (If the jihad is disunited and local, then why were two Dagestani suicide bombers retaliating for an attack against ethnic Ingush in Ingushetiya?) The only study that closely dissects insurgency-counterinsurgency action and response in the North Caucasus found a "relative decrease in insurgent violence after artillery strikes" and a "negative correlation between many oft-cited 'triggers' and insurgent retaliation."⁵⁵

An attendant and similarly erroneous cliché that has received far too much currency is that CE suicide bombings are carried out almost exclusively by so-called "black widows"—women from the Caucasus who join the jihad because of a relative's death inflicted by Russian or local security forces. A detailed 2004 study of the first wave of suicide bombings from 2002 to 2004 found that one-third of the known perpetrators were men and that some of the women were "exploited, deluded, deceived, and possibly even forced into committing such acts."⁵⁶ Moreover, during the second wave, beginning in May 2009 and continuing to the present, three of every four suicide bombers have been men and twenty-one of the thirty-four attacks have occurred outside Chechnya and were perpetrated by non-Chechens. The two "black widows" who carried out the March 2010 Moscow subway suicide attacks were not the wives of generic or nationalist insurgents. Rather, they were the wives of the top Dagestani amirs. The seventeen-year-old Abdurakhmanova, who detonated her explosives at the Park Kultury metro station, was the widow of the CE Dagestan Velayat's amir 'Al-Bara' Umalat Magomedov, killed by the security services in a special operation in early January in Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala, on the previous New Year's Eve. According to an April 8, 2010, Kommersant website posting, the other, twenty-seven-year-old Maria Sharipova, was the widow of the Arab amir Doctor Mohammed and then wife of the amir of the DV's Gubden Sector "Seifullah Gubdenskii" Magomed Vagabov, who became DV amir in

54. Liz Fuller, "'Evidence' In Moscow Subway Bombings Doesn't Add Up," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Caucasus Report*, April 7, 2010, www.rferl.org/archive/Caucasus_Report/latest/963/963.html.

55. Jason Lyall, "Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from a Natural Experiment," Princeton University working paper, July 16, 2007, www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/PRINCETON_indiscriminateviolenceinciteinsurgent.pdf.

56. John Reuter, "Chechnya's Suicide Bombers: Desperate, Devout, or Deceived?" The American Committee for Peace in Chechnya, August 23, 2004, www.unhcr.org/refworld/type,COUNTRYREP,THE_JE,4d4698ff2,0.html.

July 2010. Why is this distinction important? These “black widows” were not home baking cookies for their unemployed innocent husbands when they were killed by marauding Russian forces. They were the wives of two notorious jihadi amirs and for all intents and purposes were jihadis themselves. Some may recall the photograph flashed worldwide of seventeen-year-old Dzhanet Abdurakhmanova posing with a pistol in her hand and her amir-husband. These “black widows” *istishkhad*, therefore, were not driven solely or even mostly by grief over the loss of a loved one or by the environment of impunity permitted by the Russian state.

Curiously, the possibility that the other side in the conflict—Russian and local North Caucasus *siloviki*—sometimes might be responding to the mujahideen’s violence has never been raised, no less studied. Common sense would tell any objective observer that this must be the case some of the time. Indeed, the rationale for counterterrorism operations would disappear if there were no CE mujahideen. In the 1990s the common “wisdom” was that Shamil Basaev was responding to Russian brutality. It was rarely if ever mentioned that he traveled to Khost, Afghanistan, and Osama bin Laden’s training camps in 1994—before the first war. Over the years, Russians and their local allies could conceivably have been responding to this or any of the following: Dudaev’s illegal seizure of power and formation of armed forces; Basaev’s and Khattab’s terrorism; Dudaev’s threats to attack nuclear energy plants or to raise a million mujahideen; the appearance of hundreds of foreign and AQ-backed mujahideen on Russian territory; Basaev’s and Khattab’s invasion of Dagestan; the suicide bombing campaign in 2002–04 following the second war; or the some 1,700 attacks on *siloviki*, civilian officials, and civilians since the CE’s formation in October 2007, including a new suicide bombing campaign. The literature and reporting would suggest that only North Caucasians respond, Russians simply kill spontaneously.

A related issue is how much is *siloviki* (or jihadi) violence, especially that committed by MVD forces, driven by the Caucasus, especially Chechen, tradition of *krovnyaya mest’* or blood revenge or blood feud? Caucasus historians, journalists, and political scientists certainly recognize the importance of this factor. Dagestani journalist Zaur Gaziyeu notes: “Our culture is different. If we are slighted or wronged we don’t go and get drunk on vodka. We pick up a gun and go out to murder the one who wronged us.”⁵⁷ Leader of the Kabardin nationalist movement ‘Khase’ Ibragim Yaganov notes, in the March 22, 2011, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*: “A Russian guy can hide from reality in a bottle of vodka, but we drink little. What we do is immediately take up a weapon, and this protest is expressed in horrible and bloody forms.” Although Kabardin political scientist Timur Tenov claims that Kabardins “have gotten past this stage,” he says, in the March 23, 2011, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the following about Chechens: “In Chechnya they always respected brute physical force and bright personalities.” Yet *Krovnyaya mest’* is never mentioned in the U.S. writing on the violence in the North Caucasus. An MVD policeman or official might retaliate for mujahideen violence against a member of his or her family or clan, or vice versa. There are inevitably cases when local MVD exact revenge against mujahideen family members not on orders from Moscow, Grozny, or Makhachkala but in accordance with this tradition. This cause of the violence is rooted in the Caucasus and like the global jihadi Salafist theo-ideology is not easily blamed on, or addressed by, Moscow or anyone but the peoples in the North Caucasus. Thus, the presidents of several of the North Caucasus republics have established special programs to combat this violent practice and reconcile feuding families—a small step toward the elusive rule of law in Russia, if it can be taken. On the other hand, Chechen president Ramzan Kadyrov seems to have institutional-

57. Tom Parfitt, “The Deadliest Village in Russia—A Journey Through Russia’s Killing Zone, Part 8,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, April 1, 2011, www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/01/the_deadliest_village_in_russia.

ized this tradition in organizing locals to hunt down the mujahideen and on occasion their family members. It becomes difficult to attribute violence to Russian brutality alone or perhaps even at all, if a Khamadaev is attacking a Bakaev, a Yevloev is attacking an Aushev, or a Magomedov is attacking an Aliev.

To the extent that conclusions need to be based on at least some data and not simply on one's assumptions, hunches, suspicions, prejudices, or agenda, then the conclusion that the Caucasus mujahideen choose jihad in response solely to Russian brutality, authoritarianism, and bad governance is baseless and a singular focus on these causes of the violence is unwarranted. This said, these Russia-centric causes are certainly some of the Caucasus jihad's main engines.

The Jihadist Choice

The choice to go to jihad is not simply the consequence of what mujahideen reject in the Russian world; it is a choice about what they want to replace that world. There are myriad alternative visions and ideologies from which young Muslims in the North Caucasus, who are willing to use violence against the local and Moscow regimes, may choose: Chechen nationalism, Avar nationalism, pan-Caucasus nationalism, communism, fascism, democracy, social democracy, and so forth. But they do not choose any of these; rather, they specifically choose jihadism. Why? Logical explanations would include the weight of Islam in the region's culture and even some indigenous roots of Wahhabism in the region.

The Islamist factor, the revolutionary crisis in the ummah including the influential global jihadi revolutionary movement, and the absence of an Islamic reformation are also driving the jihadi choice in the Caucasus as elsewhere. Excluding amir Umarov, the CE's leading theo-ideologists and operatives—'Seifullah' Anzor Astemirov, 'Seifullah Gubdenskii' Magomedali Vagabov, and Sheikh Said Abu Saad Buryatskii—were introduced to Salafist or Wahhabist takfirism and jihadism when studying abroad. When they returned home and joined the mujahideen, each had a profound influence on the ChRI and CE. In not so different ways, each came to play a leading role in the rise of the CE.

The case of Buryatskii, born Aleksandr Tikhomirov, is especially instructive for an understanding of the power of jihadism's radical pan-Islamist ideology and the limited power of Chechen and even pan-Caucasus national separatism and decolonization in the global jihad. Buryatskii was a Buddhist convert to Islam, of Russian and Buryat nationality, and had never set foot in the North Caucasus to feel the force of Russian brutality—that is, until he joined the jihad. Upon arrival he met with CE amir Umarov, who dispatched him to Ingushetiya where he organized a series of deadly suicide bombings, including the explosion of an entire police headquarters in Nazran that killed 25 MVD personnel and wounded nearly 200 MVD and civilians (including children) and a nearly successful assassination of Ingushetiya President Yunus-bek Yevkurov.

So we can continue to reject out of hand any importance of the global jihadi revolutionary alliance and its theo-ideology and downplay the jihadi nature of the CE, the reality and religious roots of jihadism, and its attractiveness as both a cause and a justification for violence among some in the Muslim community. But we do so at our own, Russia's, and our Muslims' peril. This persistent denial is reminiscent of the Cold War and certain circles' rejection of the salience of ideology in the global communist movement and the formation of Soviet ideology and goals. Like the communists, the mujahideen themselves say explicitly over and over again what it is they are fighting for. They say that they are not fighting because of low living standards or a Chechen state. Rather,

they say, as Umarov states at the beginning of this article, that they go to jihad in order “to raise the word of Allah above all others” and establish a shari’a law-based state across the Caucasus, Russia, and the world. Like the testimony of relatives and friends, the mujahideen’s words are perhaps an anecdotal form of data, but they must be taken at least as seriously as our activists, analysts, and academics take the testimony of the mujahideen’s relatives and friends, if not more so.

Kto Kogo?

In reality, who is killing whom—*kto kogo*? We know that the mujahideen kill Muslims and Russians alike. Moreover, for all the Russian brutality, a Muslim North Caucasian is safer some place in Russia outside the North Caucasus where neither the Russian state, Russians, nor mujahideen are likely to kill him and where some semblance of order and minimal level of tolerance exist. If Russians and the Russian regime were as intent on persecuting or committing genocide against North Caucasians and Muslims, as is so often claimed, we should expect to see as much if not more violence against representatives of those groups across the rest of Russia where they are badly outnumbered. We might expect that Russian nationalist hate crimes and harassment by law enforcement and security organs in the rest of Russia would be a greater threat to the well-being of people from the North Caucasus and Muslims than is the jihadi violence (and presumably breaches of their human rights by “the organs” as well) in the North Caucasus. This is one way we can control for Russian counterterrorist operations in the North Caucasus and answer the question: What would life in Russia’s North Caucasus be like for representatives of the North Caucasian nationalities, if there were no mujahideen and the justification for counterterrorist operations was obviated?

First let us compare the number of Russian nationalist hate crimes and CE mujahideen attacks (see table 1). This most basic comparison shows clearly that the violence perpetrated by the CE mujahideen in the North Caucasus is far greater than that of hate crimes committed by Russian nationalists outside the North Caucasus for the three-year period 2008–10. It is almost six times greater in terms of the number killed, some 45 percent higher in terms of those wounded, and more than 2.3 times greater in terms of total casualties. None of the hate crimes recorded by the Sova Center against minorities occurred in the North Caucasus.

Moreover, the majority of Russian nationalist hate crimes are not committed against the members of the nationalities from the North Caucasus. Rather, Russian nationalist hate crimes target mostly Central Asians and Azerbaijanis. As the Sova Center’s report for 2009 notes: “As before, most victims of xenophobic attacks were people from the Central Asia (29 killed and 68 injured) and from the Caucasus (11 killed, 47 injured), but almost anyone can be a target.”⁵⁸ Thus, only eleven of those killed in 2009 as a result of hate crimes were from the Caucasus, and it is very likely that some and perhaps most of those were from Azerbaijan, not the North Caucasus. The Sova Center also noted that while most attacks in 2009 were perpetrated by the ethnic Russian ultraright, “as in previous years, a few attacks by nationalists from the Caucasus and a few episodes of grassroots xenophobic violence were reported.”⁵⁹ A small portion of hate crimes in 2009 were perpetrated by Caucasians—North or South Caucasians is not delineated in the available data—

58. Galina Kozhevnikova, “Under the Sign of Political Terror: Radical Nationalism and Efforts to Counteract It in 2009,” Sova Center, March 10, 2010, 10:34, www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/reports-analyses/2010/03/d18151/.

59. Ibid.

Table 1. Comparing the number of North Caucasians killed in the North Caucasus as a result of Caucasus Emirate jihadi attacks and jihadi-related violence and the number of North Caucasians killed outside the North Caucasus in Russia as a result of hate crimes.⁶⁰

Year	Number killed		Number wounded		Number of casualties	
	By jihadists in the North Caucasus	In hate crimes in Russia	By jihadists in the North Caucasus	In hate crimes in Russia	By jihadists in the North Caucasus	In hate crimes in Russia
2008	448	110	490	487	938	597
2009	407	84	769	434	1,176	518
2010	359	37	903	382	1,263	419
Total	1,214	231	2,162	1,303	3,377	1,534

presumably against non-Caucasians and perhaps, therefore, against ethnic Russians. Regarding 2010, of the nineteen killed in hate crimes in Moscow city and Moscow Oblast, sixteen were of Central Asian origins and three were from nonminority youth groups; that is, zero of nineteen were North Caucasians.⁶¹ Those nineteen murders comprise half of the total number murdered in hate crimes in 2010. In short, perhaps a handful of North Caucasians were killed as a result of Russian nationalist violence in 2010 as in 2009. If so, the CE mujahideen kills some fifty times more North Caucasians than do ethnic Russian hate crimes annually. I write “some fifty times more” rather than a hundred times more because some of those killed by the CE mujahideen, perhaps 20 percent, were military or intelligence personnel, most of whom would not be of North Caucasus nationality.

In terms of wounded, the same applies. It also needs to be kept in mind that the violence involved in individual attacks tends to be far greater in jihadi operations versus hate crimes. The latter often involve relatively brief or minor beatings without the application of weapons. This fact accounts for the relatively high number of those wounded versus killed in hate crimes as opposed to jihadi attacks. The same is true for the harassment, arrest, and beatings by the “organs.” There have been few if any murders by police of North Caucasus detainees outside of the North Caucasus’s titular Muslim republics in the period under discussion. State-tied abductions, beatings, and

60. This data for hate crimes comes from Russia’s leading human rights organization covering the issue, the Sova Center, which released reports in February 2, 2010, and March 11, 2011. The Sova figures in table 1 for 2009—84 killed and 434 wounded—appear to be data updated by Sova. Earlier, the Sova Center reported 71 killed and 333 wounded in 2009. The data for the violence inflicted by the CE mujahideen comes from Gordon M. Hahn, “Comparing the Level of Caucasus Emirate Terrorist Activity in 2008 and 2009,” *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report*, no. 8, February 5, 2010, www.miis.edu/media/view/19081/original/iiper_8.doc; and Gordon M. Hahn, “Trends in Jihadist Violence in Russia in 2010 in Statistics,” *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report*, no. 33, January 2011, www.miis.edu/media/view/22373/original/kavkazjihad_montrep_iiper_33_jan_2011__1.pdf.

61. As of this writing, the Sova Center still had not provided full data on the ethnic makeup of the victim cohort for 2010.

murders of North Caucasians within the North Caucasus are far more numerous than in the rest of Russia, but much of the former is perpetrated by North Caucasians and some of it is bound to be driven by *krovnyaya mest'*. We have no figures on the number injured during detention; although the number of injuries would be high relative to democratic societies, they are likely to be quite high across much of Russia among non-Caucasus nationalities as well.

Moreover, some reasonable adjustments and qualifications need to be made to the data in table 1. Overall those adjustments and qualifications do not favor the credibility of the claim that North Caucasians are safer in the North Caucasus than they are in the rest of Russia. To the contrary, they make such a claim appear more untenable. One reasonable but imprecise adjustment slightly reduces the number of casualties inflicted by the CE mujahideen. Some of the violent incidents attributed to the mujahideen in the data in table 1 are actually shootouts or counterterrorist operations (KTOs). Some of these incidents cannot be clearly attributable to the mujahideen, and in fact others were not initiated by the mujahideen. The incidents often ensue after fresh intelligence leads tip off law enforcement on the location of mujahideen, which then begins a KTO laying siege to an apartment or house. However, the number of state agents and civilians killed and wounded in KTOs are a relatively small fraction of the overall casualties attributed to jihadi terrorism in my data. The total number of casualties and attacks attributed to the mujahideen should be reduced by at most 15 percent by taking this factor into account. But there is a countervailing factor on this point: counterterrorism operations would be unnecessary if there were no jihad.⁶²

A second adjustment is far weightier than the first and increases the footprint of the violence committed against North Caucasians in the Caucasus compared to the rest of Russia. This second adjustment takes into account the relative size of the universes—the populations—in which the jihadi violence in the North Caucasus takes place versus the hate crime and state violence that occurs outside the North Caucasus in Russia against North Caucasians. The universe of potential ethnic Russian and other non-Muslim perpetrators of hate crimes against North Caucasians outside the North Caucasus is at least fourteen times larger (approximately 128 million versus 9 million) than the universe of potential jihadi attackers in the North Caucasus.⁶³ If we take the combined population of the four republics where the 90 percent of the jihadi attacks occur—Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya, Ingushetiya, and Chechnya—then the disparity between the two universes is even greater and makes the lower level of violence against North Caucasians outside this part of their indigenous region even more striking—23:1 (approximately 128 million versus 5.5 million). Despite a greater probability of North Caucasians being victimized outside the region than within their native territory of 14:1 or even 23:1, the number of casualties inflicted on North Caucasians

62. Moreover, other counts of the number of attacks and casualties attributable to the jihad produce higher figures than my own, including the date of *Kavkaz uzel*, the website of the Russian human rights organization “Memorial” and recently even figures produced by Russian law enforcement and security organs.

63. Russia’s population, according to the recently released preliminary results of the 2010 census, is 142.9 million. Of this 143 million, just over 9 million live in the North Caucasus Federal District (NCFO), which includes Chechnya, Ingushetiya, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkariya, Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, North Ossetiya, and Stavropol Krai. About 3 million of these are ethnic Russian or North Ossetian Christians or at least non-Muslims, leaving a population of some 6 million ethnic Muslims in the NCFO. In addition to the North Caucasus Federal District’s 6 million, another 9 million or so must be subtracted in order to remove the members of North Caucasus, Tatar, and Bashkir nationality from the Russian population outside the North Caucasus. Such Muslims would be unlikely to perpetrate violence against North Caucasus Muslims in places outside the North Caucasus. This 128 million represents the number of potential ethnic Russian and other non-Muslim perpetrators of hate crimes targeting North Caucasians outside the North Caucasus. This universe is some 14 times larger than that of 9 million potential jihadi attackers in the North Caucasus.

by jihadi perpetrators within this native territory still exceeds that inflicted through hate crimes and state terrorism in the rest of Russia. (This number does not include the state terrorism casualties inside the North Caucasus, much of it perpetrated, moreover, by locals against locals and sometimes driven by *krovnyaya mest'*.) Put another way, for the level of violence inflicted by Russian state terrorism and ethnic Russian-perpetrated hate crimes against members of the North Caucasus nationalities to equal proportionally the level of violence perpetrated by the Caucasus mujahideen against North Caucasian nationalities in the period 2007–10, the former figure would have to reach 14 to 23 times the 3,337 casualties inflicted by the CE in 2007–10, that is, 40,000 to 60,000 casualties. In short, the narrative of Russian brutality and authoritarianism marauding against North Caucasians on a spontaneous whim unconnected to the mujahideen's violence is unsustainable. Despite their small number, perhaps a thousand full-time fighters, the CE mujahideen wield the most violence in Russia today.

Conclusion

Dozens of Western scholars have made pronouncements about the “violence in the North Caucasus” without researching its main perpetrators—the North Caucasus mujahideen. Almost all work on the subject eschews detailed study and analysis of the CE's leaders, structure, and theo-ideology. Neglecting the study of these factors naturally leads to underestimating them as drivers of the largely jihadi-related violence in the region. For all the Russian heavy-handedness, repression, and brutality, it is the Caucasus mujahideen and the North Caucasians themselves who are the main violators of human rights in the region.

The one-sided perception of the causes of the North Caucasus violence as well as the misconceptions of both the CE's theo-ideological orientation and goals have had important policy consequences. They have produced missteps like the U.S. State Department's June 2010 decision to include only CE amir Umarov on its list of specially designated international terrorist organizations, but to leave the CE network as a whole off the list, despite its having carried out some 1,800 attacks and inflicted more than 4,000 casualties since its inception in October 2007. The United States asked for a postponement when the United Nations moved to place Umarov on its corresponding list and only acquiesced in March 2011. As writing for this report concluded, the CE as an organization was finally included on the State Department's list.

Despite the belated U.S. support for Russia's war against takfirism, Russia has been highly cooperative with the United States in its war with the Taliban and AQ, opening up the Northern Supply Route for transporting supplies to NATO and U.S. troops, carrying out joint antinarcotics operations in Afghanistan, offering financial and other forms of support to the Afghan government, and exchanging intelligence on AQ with the U.S. government.

Any continued underestimation of the threat posed by the CE not just to Russia, but increasingly to international and even U.S. national security, only increases our vulnerability to attack. Sober analysis of the CE and the multiple factors producing violence in the North Caucasus are therefore requisite.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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