

**ASSESSING TERRORISM IN THE CAUCASUS AND  
THE THREAT TO THE HOMELAND**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
COUNTERTERRORISM  
AND INTELLIGENCE**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS**

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## ASSESSING TERRORISM IN THE CAUCASUS AND THE THREAT TO THE HOMELAND

Thursday, April 3, 2014

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:01 p.m., in Room 311, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Peter T. King [Chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives King and Higgins.

Also present: Representative Jackson Lee.

Mr. KING. Good afternoon. The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence will come to order. Ranking Member Higgins is not here, but I have discussed that with him. In view of the votes that will be coming up sometime in the next 15 minutes or half-hour we are going to start the hearing and the Ranking Member will deliver his statement when he arrives.

The subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony examining terrorism in the Caucasus and the threat which that poses to the homeland. I recognize myself for an opening statement, which I will keep brief. I will include my full statement in the record.

Caucasus are a volatile region, home to several extremist networks that are aligning themselves with al-Qaeda's global jihadist movement and spreading out to join conflicts outside their traditional homeland.

Most alarmingly, we saw this with the Boston bombers, and showing that this conflict has inspired violent extremism around the world, including the U.S. homeland. Sadly, we approach the 1-year anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombings, that were at least partly inspired by the insurgency in the Caucasus and caused three deaths and more than 200 serious injuries. Militants from the region have also reportedly fought in the Balkans, attacked U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and have taken leadership positions with terrorist organizations in Syria, such as the al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

In this hearing, we will explore the threat that these groups pose both inside and outside the region, as well as examine the potential these networks may eventually pose to U.S. interests. Also, we will discuss the extent to which the Russian invasion of Crimea could impact any cooperation we have with the Russians regarding working against these terrorist groups. I look forward to the hearing, and I really want to thank the witnesses for being here.

As I said, I will insert the remainder of my statement into the record, unless the Ranking Member objects.  
[The statement of Chairman King follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN PETER T. KING

APRIL 3, 2014

The Caucasus are a volatile region home to several extremist networks that are aligning themselves with al-Qaeda's global jihadist movement, and spreading out to join conflicts outside their traditional homeland. Most alarmingly as we saw with the Boston bombers, this conflict has inspired violent extremism around the world, including the U.S. homeland.

Sadly, we approach the 1-year anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombings that were at least partly inspired by the insurgency in the Caucasus that caused 3 deaths and more than 200 serious injuries.

Militants from the region have also reportedly fought in the Balkans, attacked U.S. forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and have taken leadership positions with terrorist organizations in Syria, such as al-Nusra front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). This hearing will explore the threat that these groups pose both inside and outside the region, as well as examine the potential threat these networks may eventually pose to United States interests.

While al-Qaeda senior leadership is weakened, its brand and ideology is thriving and spreading. The Arab Spring, U.S. troop withdrawals in Iraq and Afghanistan and the civil war in Syria have breathed new life into al-Qaeda. Today we see elements of al-Qaeda operating in 16 countries, new jihadist media publications that leverage the latest social media technology to reach new audiences inspiring violence around the globe, and a growing army of jihadists gaining battlefield experience in the Syrian conflict.

Instability in the ethnically-diverse Caucasus region has been an on-going problem for centuries: A simmering cauldron mostly contained within the borders of the Russian Federation. In recent years the Russian government's tactics have transformed the battle from a nationalist fight, with anti-Russian roots to a struggle based on Islamist ideology. This conflict is now showing signs of boiling over into unstable havens of terrorist activity in other parts of the world, and is threatening Europe and potentially the homeland.

We also have to examine recent actions by Russia to annex Crimea, part of the sovereign nation of Ukraine. How will these actions and whatever additional hostile actions Russia may take in the region impact intent of the Caucasus Emirate?

Chechens trained with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks, and Osama bin Laden's network supplied fighters and funds to them during the second Chechen war.<sup>1</sup> A Chechen now leads the ISIS forces in northern Syria and has masterminded a series of strategic defeats of Assad's troops.<sup>2</sup>

While the current threat to homeland from the Caucasus today appears minor, we must remember that we have made the mistake of underestimating the threat from terrorists in places like Afghanistan, Somalia, and Yemen before. The Obama administration designated the now-deceased leader of the Caucasus Emirate, Doku Umarov, as a global terrorist in 2010 and the United Nations Security Council al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee has both Umarov and the Caucasus Emirate on its list of terrorists.

As this subcommittee has stressed time and again, global terrorism does not require regiments of hardened soldiers with sophisticated weapons to have a lasting impact on society. Rather, a handful of committed murderers using household pressure cookers, or hijacking commercial airplanes can fundamentally change the course of history if they are disciplined and able to successfully conduct just one or two dramatic acts of violence. Al-Qaeda is an opportunistic ideological movement that thrives in ungoverned spaces such as the Caucasus.

Fifteen years ago, most experts would not have forecasted an attack on the homeland to originate from Nigeria, Pakistan, or Yemen, but this committee's mandate is to examine emerging threats to homeland security and I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses regarding the state of terrorist groups in the Caucasus, and

<sup>1</sup>Zachary Laub, "Instability in Russia's North Caucasus Region" Council on Foreign Relations, February 6, 2014, available at: <http://www.cfr.org/russian-federation/instability-russias-north-caucasus-region/p9021>.

<sup>2</sup>Alan Cullison, "Meet the Rebel Commander in Syria that Assad, Russia and the U.S. All Fear", *Wall Street Journal*, November 19, 2013, available at: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303309504579181962177007316>.

the export of jihadists from the region to Syria and other safe havens of terrorist activity that threaten the United States and the West.

Mr. KING. I am pleased to welcome the Ranking Member, Mr. Higgins, from New York and ask him if he wants to give an opening statement.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I will submit my opening statement for the record so that we can get right to the panel of expert witnesses.

[The statement of Ranking Member Higgins follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BRIAN HIGGINS

APRIL 3, 2014

I look forward to hearing today's testimony as we continue to expand our knowledge of the threats, groups, and counterterrorism efforts within the Caucasus region. Several inter-ethnic conflicts that developed at the end of the Soviet Union remain unresolved and continue to fuel tensions within the Caucasus region.

Specifically, a historical exclusionary political system and competition over land and resources has fueled conflicts in the multi-ethnic Russian republics of the North Caucasus. While several extremists groups have emerged and then later disappeared as a result of these conflicts, one group, the Caucasus Emirate, remains active today. The Caucasus Emirate has admitted to planning and executing numerous terror attacks in the Caucasus region and in Moscow since its founding in 2007. Two of the most deadly attacks claimed by the Caucasus Emirate have occurred in Moscow.

On March 29, 2010, two suicide bombers killed 40 people and wounded more than 100 people after attacking two metro stations. On January 24, 2011 a suicide attack at Moscow's busiest international airport killed 35 people and wounded as many as 180 people. While all of the attacks executed by the Caucasus Emirates deserve our attention, I am especially concerned by these two attacks on high-impact transportation targets.

As the Representative of the Buffalo-Niagara region, I have a keen awareness and concern for high-impact transit targets. Buffalo is home to the Peace Bridge, one of the busiest crossings at the Northern Border. Over 30 billion dollars of annual commerce travels through the Peace Bridge in Buffalo, Niagara region. An attack, similar to those carried out by the Caucasus Emirate in this area could be catastrophic.

For this reason and many more, I remain disturbed that the Buffalo-Niagara Region is not considered "high-risk" enough for State and locals in this area to receive funding under The Department of Homeland Security's Urban Area Security Initiative "UASI" program.

Without UASI funding, the local law enforcement and emergency personnel do not have the ability to sustain the advancements they have made since 9/11. How can the Buffalo-Niagara region be expected to protect and respond to attacks and threats without the same basic funding provided to other, less utilized transit targets?

I want to emphasize that many experts assert that based on known threats and capabilities an attack on the United States from the Caucasus Emirate or other Caucasian groups is unlikely as these groups are generally not preoccupied with the United States. However, the Caucasus Emirate has stated that it has no conflict with the United States and it will not harm any civilians, including Russians, yet this has not always been the case. Therefore, I believe it is fair to both consider and discuss this group and others in a global context, their roles within the larger global jihadi network.

Mr. KING. All right. I thank the Ranking Member. I also acknowledge that the gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee is here and remind all the Members of the committee that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Ranking Member Thompson follows:]

## STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON

APRIL 3, 2014

I would also like to thank the witnesses for testifying to further this committee's efforts to better understanding terrorist threats, their makeup, and the activities of extremists groups within the Caucasus region.

The Boston Marathon bombing and the Sochi Olympics spurred a growing interest in the Caucasus region, and I commend the subcommittee for exploring the topic. However, the subcommittee must be cautious in its approach. There is an opinion that many within the Caucasus region have been radicalized into an extremist mentality of global war. Many want to suggest this was the mentality of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, brother of alleged co-conspirator Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

Mr. Chairman, like I have reminded you that on several occasions throughout our years on this committee, our words go beyond these four walls. We must remember that we have a responsibility to the people of Boston and the rest of the American public, not to create a defense for the capital case against Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. While others suggest that there is a possibility that Tamerlan Tsarnaev was inspired by extremist groups in the Caucasus region, I believe that speculation about any influence he may have received is not helpful to the prosecution.

Just last Friday, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's defense team filed motions based on a report by committee staff. While I do not believe we need to jeopardize the prosecution of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev by speculating on Tamerlan's dealings in the Caucasus region, I do believe it is necessary for us to understand not only which groups are becoming radicalized in the Caucasus region, but also, why this is happening. The Caucasus region continues to be plagued by poverty, high unemployment, and challenges in governance and stability.

Like in other regions, it is possible that these social problems are being exploited to boost recruitment. There is also evidence that suggests religious ideology plays only a limited role in the violence of extremist groups in the Caucasus region, but is used to mask the business of organized crime. According to reports, approximately one quarter of the violence in the North Caucasus is from organized crime. Mislabeling acts of organized crime as "terrorism" diminishes the real threats of terrorism in the region.

Moreover, since 2009, when Russia ended its counter-terrorism operation in Chechnya, there has been a surge in violence and security forces within the North Caucasus region. While it is unclear if violence in the region has created a need for more security forces, it is well-documented that the actions of these security forces—continuous engagement in a brutal and violent harassment and religious profiling—feeds a cycle of insurgency. It is clear that the instability of governance throughout the Caucasus region continues to prohibit religious freedoms and rights, which ultimately fuels al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and other extremists groups. Ultimately, if we hope to gain a serious understanding of terrorists and extremist threats, we must do a thorough examination.

Rather than viewing terrorists and insurgencies in an over-generalized way, I encourage all Members of this committee to seek more information to understand the global and local dynamics fueling the insurgency in the Caucasus region.

Mr. KING. Before introducing our distinguished panel of witnesses, though, I wanted to recognize Jim Nichol from the Congressional Research Service. He is here today. It is his last day of work before retirement. He has been a significant resource to this committee, both when I was Chairman and Ranking Member and certainly, now, under Chairman McCaul in preparation of this hearing. He served CRS and the Congress for more than 30 years. There is no one on the Hill that knows about Eurasia and his expertise will be missed.

Mr. Nichol, we want to congratulate you and thank you for your years of service and dedication and for doing the impossible of making us look reasonably smart. So thank you very much.

Now, for today's hearing we will be hearing testimony from three expert witnesses: Dr. Gordon Hahn, Dr. William Roggio, and Dr. Andrew Kuchins.

I want to welcome all three witnesses here, and I will ask, first, Dr. Hahn. He is an analyst and advisory board member for Geostrategic Forecasting Corporation, a global think tank that provides qualitative and quantitative analysis and business intelligence solutions to prominent geopolitical and geoeconomic threats. He is senior associate in Russia and Eurasia program with the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He is the author of numerous scholarly and analytic articles on jihadism in Russia and Eurasia, and has authored two books on Russia.

We are pleased to have you here today as a witness, and you are recognized for approximately 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF GORDON M. HAHN, PH.D., ANALYST AND ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER, GEOSTRATEGIC FORECASTING CORPORATION**

Mr. HAHN. Thank you for the invitation, Representative King, and the committee and the help from the staff. I am gonna start off talking about my main conclusions first so I get to them in case we run out of time, then give a little background, and then talk about—focus a little bit on the Caucasus Emirate mujahedin in Syria. Okay, in terms of main conclusions, I do not foresee the Caucasus Emirate directly undertaking operations to attack the United States homeland, on its own, in the short- to mid-term. However, the Caucasus Emirate-affiliated militants will, sooner or later, be involved in global jihadi plots to do so.

They will probably be from among those fighting in Syria, perhaps those also fighting in AfPak. These are the so-called mujahedin, or those who have emigrated, or made the hijrah, to fight on another front. Also returning mujahedin and/or IK Caucasus there in mujahedin, remaining in Russia could attempt to attack U.S.-related soft targets in Europe and Eurasia, in particular inside Russia, with attacks that could include embassies, schools, various public venues, transporter pipelines.

The Caucasus Emirate could partner in carrying out such attacks with foreign groups and groups, its mujahedin now more closely networked with in Syria, such as al-Qaeda or AQ and At-Takfir wal-Hirja, which attempted an attack in Moscow last year, or groups from central Asia that are—have made the hijrah through the AfPak region and are now also some are located—fighting in Syria; groups like the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Jihad Union, and some others.

In Russia, I suspect that the Caucasus Emirate will see the lowest annual tally of attacks in this year, since its inception in 2007, because of the exodus of mujahedin to Syria. Okay, in terms of background, I have been arguing for many years—pretty much alone amongst Cretologists, but not among terrorist experts—that beginning in the 1990s, the extremist Chechen nationalist separatist movement, the Chechen republic of Ichkeriya and continuing with its global jihadi successor organizing, the Caucasus Emirate, Chechen and North Caucasus militants who had ties to the global jihadi revolutionary movement, including al-Qaeda, and that the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria was becoming jihadized and likely would become part of the global revolutionary movement and partner with al-Qaeda or other global jihadi groups.

Months after publication of my book, the then-Chechen Republic, which Dokku Umarov abolished the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya, established the Caucasus Emirate took the position of emir instead of president, took the jihadi nom de guerre Abu Usman, and declared the Caucasus Emirates enemies to be Russia, the United States, Great Britain, Israel, and any country fighting Muslims anywhere around the world.

In October 2007, in addition to the Imarat Kavkaz, some—since October 2007, in addition to the Caucasus Emirates, some 2,400 insurgent terrorist attacks and jihadi-related incidences, including 54 suicide bombings. The Caucasus Emirate mujahedin and North Caucasus lone wolves have inspired by it have plotted or carried out insurgent terrorist attacks across the globe from Waziristan to Azerbaijan in the East and from Europe to Boston in the West.

In sum, many years ago the Caucasus Emirate became not just a threat for Russian national security, but an emerging one for U.S. and international security. I want to talk a little bit about the new emir. The reports came out, the Caucasus Emirate confirmed, that Emir Dokku Umarov had been killed sometime last year. They confirmed this a couple of weeks ago. The new emir is one Sheikh Ali Abu Muhammad ad-Dagestani—he was born Aliaskhab Alibutatovich Kabekov and is likely to radicalize and, perhaps, further globalize, and even deterritorialize the Caucasus Emirate further, given his deeper religious and Abu Dagestani roots.

In July 2011, Dagestani stated, “We are doing everything possible to build the caliphate.” In his most recent lecture, he said, “Oh, Allah, punish the Jews, the Americans, the Russians, Iran and Bashar Assad, their followers and helpers.” Sheikh Dagestani is 42 years old. He was born on January 1, 1972. He has been the kadhi—that is, the Sharia court judge—for the Caucasus Emirate for the last—going on 4 years. He faces three basic challenges that I can see.

First is reinvigorating the Caucasus Emirates non-Dagestani networks in Chechnya and in Gushedia. Second, maintaining a balance of power between different ethnic groups. Third and most important, dealing with the negative effects on Caucasus Emirate because of the exodus-emigration of fighters—of Caucasus Emirate fighters and other North Caucasus radicals to Syria. The Caucasus Emirate has had some global reach, as I alluded to before. They have had three foreign plots, all of them failed: One in Belgium, one in the Czech Republic, and one in Azerbaijan in 2012.

They have inspired three plots, only one of which was successful. Unfortunately for us, that successful attack was in Boston last year. But the most important move by the Caucasus Emirate abroad has been to Syria, as I mentioned before. IK-affiliated emirs, such as Tarkhan Batirasvili, are playing the leading role—at least the leading combat role—among the foreign mujahedin fighting in Syria that is now the main global front in the global jihad.

Despite apparent reservations, Umarov appears to have backed three key emirs’ hijrah to Syria in late 2011. Then they would take leading positions in the jihad there. According to the most prominent of these emirs, Batirashvili, Emir Umarov initially financed their activities. First, Batirashvili and the other emirs allied with

al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra, and then shifted towards the ISIS. Through 2012, hundreds of IK and North Caucasian mujahedin and other foreign muhajarine—that is, emigres consolidated around these Chechen emirs—by March 2013 their group, Jeish Mukhajirin va Ansar, the army of emigrants and helpers, or JMA, reportedly numbered more than 1,000.

As relations between al-Nusra and ISIS deteriorated and devolved into violent clashes, Batirashvili took the lifetime loyalty oath, or bayat, to ISIS Emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and was promoted to the position of the ISIS' military emirs. So we have a Chechen holding one of the top posts in this al-Qaeda-affiliated organization. He did this in October 2013. A schism resulted from this and some other factors, leaving at least three major Syrian-based groups, a foreign muhajarine led by Caucasus Emirate emirs. One of them is even named now the Caucasus Emirate in Shama or in Syria.

There is also now for the first time, by the way, a Caucasus Emirate in the Horasan organization that is in AfPak. We don't know exactly where they are—presumably they are in Waziristan. I want to briefly review nine implications—or maybe I won't get through all. I don't know how much time I have left—nine implications of the hijra of—

Mr. KING. Actually, if you could try to do it like in the next 1½ minutes, sir.

Mr. HAHN. Okay, okay.

Mr. KING. Thanks.

Mr. HAHN. First is the debilitating effect on the Caucasus Emirate's capacity. Second is that the high profile of the Caucasus Emirate and other North Caucasus and Russian mujahedin in the Syrian jihad strengthens the Caucasus Emirate's ties to, and profile within, the overall global jihadi revolutionary movement, offering opportunities for greater access to recruits, financing, and weapons. Third, Caucasus Emirate fighters in Syria could acquire some of Assad's chemical weapons.

Fourth, because of the first three implications I mentioned and the advent of a new emir there is a very high likelihood that the new emir is going to change tactics and, perhaps, strategy. That is, globalize the organization more, radicalize it more, maybe even more emphasis on spectacular attacks and suicide bombings. Fifth, likely is the expansion of Caucasus Emirate fighters to other global jihadi fronts. Sixth, a corollary of the fifth is the development of a—because of the networking in Syria—of a Eurasian—more tightly-knitted Eurasian group of fighters two hubs; one in the North Caucasus, another in central Asia. Because all these groups are now in Syria and in AfPak, together, fighting.

Seventh, the new vulnerability to Shia-dominated Azerbaijan to attacks by the Sunni-dominated Caucasus Emirate and other fighters in Syria. Eighth, the possibility of a disastrous rout of Caucasus Emirate forces, damaging its capacity for years to come. Then finally, because of the ties between the Caucasus Emirate and foreign fighters in Syria, we are likely to see Russia be move up higher on the agenda of the global jihad in terms of targeting.

With that, I close.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hahn follows:]

## PREPARED STATEMENT OF GORDON M. HAHN

APRIL 3, 2014

## INTRODUCTION

For a decade voices resonated in U.S. media and think tanks asserting that Chechen separatists and the Caucasus Islamists, such as those who forged the IK, had nothing to do with al-Qaeda and the global jihadi revolutionary movement, despite a plethora of contrary evidence. Some of those same voices still can be heard today.

Contrary to those voices' claims and expectations, we now see the Imarat Kavkaz (Caucasus Emirate or IK) mujahedin and their lone wolves inspired by them carrying out insurgent and terrorist attacks across the globe from Waziristan in the East to Boston in the West.

In fact, for nearly 2 decades, beginning with the extremist Chechen national separatist movement, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya (ChRI), and continuing with its global jihadist successor organization, the IK founded on October 31, 2007, Chechen and North Caucasus militants have had ties to the global jihadi revolutionary movement (al-Qaeda, its affiliates, and allied groups), including al-Qaeda (AQ). Indeed, in September 2009, Jordan's Sheikh Abu Muhammad Asem al-Maqdisi, whom the United States Military Academy's Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) designated "the most influential living Jihadi Theorist," endorsed IK as a major jihadist organization and urged Muslims to support it "so the Emirate becomes the door to Eastern Europe."<sup>1</sup> Consistent with Maqdisi's call, IK would expand operations into Europe and elsewhere abroad.

Though rejected by most, I have been arguing since at least 2006 that the IK has been part and parcel of that movement, supporting its goal of a global caliphate, and employing signature jihadi tactics such as suicide bombing or "istishkhad" attacks and other mass-casualty attacks. Since 2007 Umarov and CE ideologists have stated repeatedly that the organization is part of the global jihadi revolutionary alliance and supports AQ and other jihadi groups, though many refused to listen. CE websites now publish jihadi literature alone, including that of Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Anwar al-Awlaki, and hundreds of others. Published fatwas justify the use of weapons of mass destruction to kill "millions" of Americans, and translated issues of AQ's journal *Inspire* and articles like "Make a Bomb in Your Mom's Kitchen" instruct prospective mujahedin how to build IEDs from pressure cookers as the Tsarnaevs did. After U.S. forces brought justice to Osama bin Laden in May 2011, the now-deceased IK amir Dokku "Abu Usman" Umarov said the AQ amir's reward in Paradise for his service to jihad would be "great" and asserted that neither the death of jihadi leaders nor the desires of "the United States, Russia, or the UN" can stop "Islam's rebirth."<sup>2</sup> Thus, long ago IK became not just a threat for Russian national security but an emerging one for U.S. and international security.

Since its October 2007 founding, the IK has carried out or been involved in some 2,400 insurgent and terrorist attacks and violent incidents, including 54 suicide attacks, inside Russia. Those attacks have produced approximately 9,000 casualties, including more than one thousand civilians. For comparison, the IK's attacks in Russia constitute approximately 6 percent of jihadi attacks globally, a ratio that does not include IK mujahedin attacks in Syria.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Fatwa Sheikh Abu Mukhammad al-Makdisi o fitne v Imarata Kavkaz," *Islam Umma*, 9 September 2010, 10:44, [http://islamumma.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1253:2010-09-10-07-35-03&catid=130&Itemid=485](http://islamumma.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1253:2010-09-10-07-35-03&catid=130&Itemid=485) and "Fatwa Sheikh Abu Mukhammad al-Makdisi (da ukrepit ego Allakh)," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 10 September 2010, 20:55, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2010/09/10/75149.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2010/09/10/75149.shtml).

<sup>2</sup>Umarov said in full: "We ask Allah that He accepts the martyrdom of Sheikh bin Laden, because that man abandoned his wealth and peaceful worldly life for the sake of protecting Islam. And that is a great goal, and the reward for it is great. With regard to the question of whether bin Laden's death will affect the situation in the world, in my opinion the infidels do not believe themselves that their lives will become easier. According to all signs, it is clear that the world is in such situation that the death of the leaders of the Jihad in no way can stop the process of Islam's rebirth. It is the kind of cause that will move forward, regardless of whether the United States, Russia or the UN want it or not." "Amir Dokku Abu Usman o bin Ladene, Imarate Kavkaz i poteryakh modzhakhedov," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 17 May 2011, <http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2011/05/17/81607.shtml>.

<sup>3</sup>This is a snapshot estimate derived from comparing IK and global jihadi activity in December 2013. Specifically, it compares IntelCenter's global data with my own data on IK operations derived in part from reports on Kavkaz uzel ([www.kavkaz-uzel.ru](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru)) and "IMARAT KAVKAZ. Svodka boevykh operatsii modzhakhedov za mesyats Safar 1435 g kh. (5.12.2013-2.01.2014 g.)," *Umma News*, 14 January 2014, <http://ummanews.com/news/last-news/11967-----1435---5-2013--2-2014-.html>. IntelCenter tracked 2,077 people killed and 2,558 people injured in 688

## THE IK'S NEW AMIR

The death of the CE's founder and first amir Dokku "Abu Usman" Umarov, perhaps as early as July 8, and the announcement of his successor "Sheikh Ali Abu Muhammad ad-Dagestani" (born Aliaskhab Alibutovich Kebekov) has potential to bring change to IK, pushing it even a more radical direction. Sheikh Dagestani is an ethnic Avar from Dagestan and has been (and may still be at least for now) the IK's Shariah Court qadi or chief judge since autumn 2010. In July 2011 IK's new amir publicly-endorsed AQ's and the global jihadi revolutionary movement's goal of creating a global caliphate, noting: "We are doing everything possible to build the Caliphate and prepare the ground for this to the extent of our capabilities."<sup>4</sup>

His ascension to the IK's top leadership post is the culmination of the rise to dominance within the IK of its Dagestan network, the so-called "Dagestan Vilaiyat" or DV. From April 2010 through 2013 the DV has been the IK's spearhead, with Dagestan seeing approximately 70 percent of the IK's some 1,700 attacks and violent incidents in Russia and the DV carrying out more than half of the istishkhd attacks during the same period, including those outside the North Caucasus.

Sheikh Dagestani's rise also marks the culmination of the IK's theo-ideological and ideological jihadization. As the IK's qadi, Dagestani was the IK's chief theologian and ideologist, charged with ensuring the compliance of Umarov's and other amirs' actions with the Koran and the Sunna. Therefore, he was at the forefront of strengthening Islamist knowledge among the IK mujahedin. In a hundred or more video lectures, ad-Dagestani exhibits superb knowledge of the Koran, the Sunna, and the Arabic language, unlike his predecessor. His video lectures are replete with Koranic citations delivered in Arabic with the appropriate musical-style recitation and elongated vowel inflection. His first statement after that announcing his succession of Umarov was delivered entirely in Arabic to the IK mujahedin fighting in Syria.<sup>5</sup>

## THE IK'S GLOBAL REACH

Since at least 2010, IK has undertaken operations and inspired attacks outside Russia on a limited scale. The years 2010 and 2011 saw IK's first two major forays into Europe. In November 2010, a "Shariah4Belgium" cell was uncovered, including Chechens, Moroccans, Belgians, and Dutch. It used a Russian-language website tied to al-Qaeda to recruit fighters, raise funds, and plan attacks on NATO targets. In April 2011, a DV-tied cell, including Dagestanis, was uncovered in the Czech Republic, planning attacks in a third country. In April 2012, Azerbaijani security forces foiled a second DV (Dagestani Vilaiyat) foreign plot to carry out attacks in Baku and elsewhere in the southern Caucasus country, home to the strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline.<sup>6</sup> There was also an alleged, still shadowy plot to assassinate President Vladimir Putin reported in late February 2012. Operations for the assassination were to be in Ukraine, with operatives from Kazakhstan moving through Turkey and the Middle East.<sup>7</sup>

IK likely inspired the Chechen Lars Dakaev's failed plot to bomb the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* that published caricatures of Mohammed, setting off vio-

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terrorist/rebel attacks worldwide in December 2013. "Global Casualty Data for Terrorist/Rebel Attacks, Dec. 2013," *IntelCenter*, 15 January 2014, <http://us5.campaign-archive1.com/?u=16cbb24e56cdcd360e9954d7a&id=32cc518d96&e=722a32839a>. My own estimate for the same month in Russia was 42 insurgent and terrorist attacks. It should be taken into account that December is not usually the busiest month for CE activity given the cold and snow in the Caucasus mountains where many of the IK mujahedin winter. Moreover, this does not count attacks carried out by CE-affiliated mujahedin in Syria.

<sup>4</sup>"Stennogramma video: Kadii IK Abu Mukhammad—'Otvety na voprosy'—1 chast'," *Guraba.info*, 8 July 2011, 00:18, <http://guraba.info/2011-02-27-17-59-21/30-video/1117--i-g-q-1-.html> and *VDagestan.info*, 8 July 2011, <http://vdagestan.info/2011/07/08/%d0%ba%d0%b0%d0%b4%d0%b8%d0%b9%d0%b8%d0%ba%d0%b0%d0%b1%d1%83%d0%bc-%d1%83%d1%85%d0%b0%d0%bc%d0%bc%d0%b0%d0%b4%d0%be%d1%82%d0%b2%d0%b5-%d1%82%d1%8b%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%be%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be/>.

<sup>5</sup>For both the Russian-language transcript and Arab-language video, see "Amir IK Ali Abu Mukhammad: Poslanie s sovetom mudzhakhidami Shama VIDEO," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 20 March 2014, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/20/103638.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/20/103638.shtml). The Arab-language video is also at *VDagestan.com*, <http://dagestan.com/obrashhenie-amira-ik-k-bratyam-v-siru.dihad>.

<sup>6</sup>For details of the Azerbaijan plot, see Gordon M. Hahn, *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report* (from here on cited as IIPER), Nos. 56 and 58, [http://csis.org/files/publication/120507\\_Hahn\\_IIPER\\_56.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120507_Hahn_IIPER_56.pdf) and [http://csis.org/files/publication/120621\\_Hahn\\_IIPER\\_58.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120621_Hahn_IIPER_58.pdf).

<sup>7</sup>For details on the Putin assassination plot, see Gordon M. Hahn, *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report*, No. 53, 12 March 2012, Center for Strategic and International Studies, [http://csis.org/files/publication/120312\\_Hahn\\_IIPER53.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120312_Hahn_IIPER53.pdf).

lent demonstrations around the Muslim world, as well as a foiled plot to attack targets in Gibraltar during the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games and later elsewhere in Europe being planned by a group of three terrorists, two of them from the North Caucasus. The leader of the group planning the latter attack, an ethnic Chechen and/or Dagestani, Eldar Magomedov, was said by the Spanish court and police to be AQ's leading operative in Europe based on U.S. and Russian intelligence. The IK certainly inspired the successful Boston Marathon bombings that killed four and wounded 260.<sup>8</sup>

But nowhere does the IK's increasingly de-territorialized and global orientation resonate with such large implications as it does in Syria.

#### THE IK IN SYRIA

North Caucasian mujahedin, especially those affiliated with the IK in the past and present, are playing the leading role among foreign mujahedin fighting in Syria. Amir ad-Dagestani underscored the Syrian jihad's importance for the IK by making it the subject of his first video lecture after announcing his assumption of the IK leadership. He noted: "When jihad began in Shama, we were overjoyed, first, because we studied Islamic sciences in Shama, but second because we studied the hadiths which tell about the achievements of Shama, about the fact that in the end-time of troubles the faith will be in Shama, that Allah's angels will spread their wings over Shama, that the best land is in Shama, and that the Heavenly Group will be in Shama at the end of time."<sup>9</sup>

Despite having an ambivalent attitude towards the emigration of IK mujahedin to Syria, Umarov appears to have backed three key amirs who made the "hijra" and took over leading positions in the Syrian jihad: Tarkhan Batirashvili (jihadi nom de guerre "Abu Umar al-Shishani" or Abu Umar the Chechen), Muslim Margoshvili (Abu Walid), and (Seifullah al-Shishani) Ruslan Machaliashvili (sometimes Meslikaev). They all appear to be ethnic Chechen Kists with ties to Georgia's Pankisi Gorge and previous connections to the CE. They arrived in Syria as a group in late 2011 or early 2012 and were initially financed by Umarov, according to Batirashvili, the most prominent of them.<sup>10</sup>

Through 2012 hundreds of North Caucasian mujahedin and other emigres or muhajirin from Russia, Eurasia, Europe, and the Muslim world began to consolidate around the Chechen amirs through 2012. By late 2012 they formed the brigade "Kataib al-Mujahirin" (KaM), with Batirashvili serving as its amir, and allied with the AQ-affiliated Jabkhat al-Nusra.

In March 2013, Batirashvili received the "bayat" or Islamic loyalty oath from two Syrian rebel units, "Kataib Khattab" and "Jeish Muhammad," which included some 600 fighters who joined the KaM.<sup>11</sup> According to the IK's main website, "Kavkaz tsentr," the KaM, renamed "Jeish Mukhajirin va Ansar" (the Army of Emirants and Helpers) or JMA, now numbered more than a thousand militants.<sup>12</sup>

The JMA, in particular amir Batirashvili, began to drift towards the then AQ-affiliated group, the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (Syria) or ISIS, recently denounced by AQ amir Zayman al-Zawahiri for its radical excesses. JMA amir Batirashvili was appointed military amir of the ISIS's northern front in summer 2013. As relations between Nusra and the ISIS deteriorated and devolved into violent clashes, Batirashvili took the lifetime bayat to ISIS amir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and was promoted to the ISIS's overall military amir in late October.<sup>13</sup>

This prompted a series of splits within the JMA, producing at least three major Syria-based jihadi groups led by Chechen amirs from the IK or the North Caucasus in addition to Batirashvili's ISIS-loyal JMA:

- Margoshvili's Jund al-Sham (JS) appears to function autonomously;

<sup>8</sup>For my detailed report on IK's inspiration of Tamerlan and Jokhar Tsarnaev, see Gordon M. Hahn, *The Caucasus Emirate Comes to America: The Boston Marathon Bombing, Geostrategic Forecasting Corporation (GFC) White Paper*, October 2013, [www.geostrategicforecasting.com/products-page/whitepapers-studiesandreports/boston-marathon-attack/](http://www.geostrategicforecasting.com/products-page/whitepapers-studiesandreports/boston-marathon-attack/).

<sup>9</sup>"Amir IK Ali Abu Mukhammad: Poslanie s sovetom mudzhakhidami Shama VIDEO."

<sup>10</sup>"Interv'yu s Abu Umarom Ash Shishani," *Beladusham.com*, [www.beladusham.com/0392.html](http://www.beladusham.com/0392.html), last accessed 26 March 2014.

<sup>11</sup>"Siriya: K brigade 'Kataib Mukhadzhirin' prisoeidinilis' dva siriiskikh podrazdeleniya," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 22 March 2013, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/03/22/96932.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/03/22/96932.shtml).

<sup>12</sup>"Siriya: Prisyaga siriiskikh modzhakhedov Amiru Armii mukhadzhirov i ansarov Umaru Shishani," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 26 March 2013, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/03/26/97014.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/03/26/97014.shtml).

<sup>13</sup>"Operatsiya 'Fatikh'," *FISyria.com*, 7 December 2013, <http://fisyria.com/?p=1630>.

- Jeish al-Khalifat Islamiya (Army of the Islamic Caliphate) or JKHI, the amir of which—Machaliashvili—was killed in February and which is allied with JS but taken the bayat to Nusra Front amir Abu Muhammad al-Jolani;<sup>14</sup>
- and the Imarat Kavkaz in Sham (Syria) or IKS led by the IK's JMA/ISIS envoy, Salahuddin, appointed by late IK amir Umarov.

In sum, IK-affiliated amirs are playing the leading role among the foreign mujahedin fighting in Syria—the main front in the global jihad at this time. Batirashvili's rise to the ISIS's top ranks and the eulogy to Machaliashvili by al-Nusra amir Jolani testify to this fact.<sup>15</sup> Greater testimony comes from the IK-affiliated amirs' leading command role and their North Caucasian-dominated jamaats' combat role in key battles, in particular those in and around Aleppo. Moreover, IK is in a more intimate relationship with AQ than ever before.

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THE IK MUHAJIRIN IN SYRIA

The Caucasus mujahedin's important role in the Syrian jihad has at least nine implications for the the global jihadi revolutionary movement and the struggle against it in Russia and the West.

First, the flood of many hundreds of IK mujahedin and other North Caucasian and Russian Islamists to the jihad in Syria is having a debilitating effect on the IK's capacity in the North Caucasus and Russia. Even if only several hundred IK fighters have gone to Syria, this is a relatively large number to take away from IK in the Caucasus which only reached some 1,000 fighters. Thus, the Caucasus-Russian hijra to the Syrian jihad is having a debilitating effect on the IK's four networks, including the spearhead Dagestani network, the so-called Dagestan Vilaiyat (DV). But all three other vilaiyats—the OVKBK, Chechnya's Nokhicho Vilaiyat (NV) and Ingushetiya's Galgaiche Vilaiyat (GV)—are seriously crippled by the hijra to Syria. Since it began in 2011, the number of insurgent and terrorist attacks in Russia (99 percent of them in the North Caucasus) has declined steadily. By my own estimate there were 583 in 2010, 546 in 2011, 465 in 2012, and 439 in 2013. According to IK-affiliated figures, in the second Arabic month of 2014, the decline in the number of attacks in Russia reached a nadir, declining to 10 from 31 during the same period in 2013.<sup>16</sup> This and IK Umarov's death late last year go a long way towards explaining the IK's failure to attack the February-March Sochi Winter Olympic and Para-Olympic Games, despite its leaders' many threats going back many years to do so.

Second, the high profile of the IK and other North Caucasus and Russian mujahedin in the Syrian jihad relative to their actual numbers raises the IK's ties to, and profile within the overall global jihadi revolutionary movement. The IK now has stronger ties to AQ and other global jihadi groups and fighters from across the globe, including those from countries in the immediate region such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Iraq. These stronger ties to the global jihad open opportunities for greater access to recruits, financing, and weapons.

Third, JMA/IK fighters in Syria could acquire some of Assad's chemical weapons and manage to transport them into Russia for WMD attacks. On the eve of the Sochi Olympics one amir Umar of a IK DV "diversionary group" called "Ansar al-Sunni" not only claimed responsibility for the December 2013 Volgograd suicide bombings in Volgograd, but warned Sochi that "attacks up to and including chemical attacks" were ready to be approved by IK amir Doku Umarov.<sup>17</sup> Umarov's death may have delayed this attack, or perhaps the chemical materials had not yet been acquired or transported to the Caucasus. Moreover, there is some evidence that rebels in Syria may have acquired chemical agents from Bashar al-Assad's stock-

<sup>14</sup>See the announcement in "Dzheish Khilafa Al-Islamiya ob'yadenilas s Dzhabkhat an-Nusra," *Usudu Sham*, December 2013, [sic].

<sup>15</sup>Jolani noted that he and Machaliashvili fought closely together in Guta and elsewhere and that "the Caucasus always will give birth to new heroes, and they will restore the former influence of the Umma," "Amir 'Dzhabkhat an-Nura' Abu Mukhammad al-'Dzhavliani ob amire Sefullakh Shishani," *Kavkaz tsestr*, 10 February 2014, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/02/10/103115.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/02/10/103115.shtml).

<sup>16</sup>Compare the CE's own data for those Arabic calendar months in 2013 and 2014 in "IMARAT KAVKAZ. Svodka boevikh operatsii modzhakhedov za mesyats rabbi as-sanii 1434 goda po khidzhre (12 fevralya–12 marta 2013 g.)," *Umma News*, 13 March 2013, <http://ummanews.com/news/kavkaz/10099-----1434---12---12-2013.html> and "Svodka Dzhikhada za mesyats Rabi as-Sani 1435 g. kh. (02.02.2014–02.03.2014g.)," *Kavkaz tsestr*, 10 March 2013, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/10/103490.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/10/103490.shtml), respectively.

<sup>17</sup>For more on the potential chemical threat, see Gordon M. Hahn, "Considering the Caucasus Emirate Chemical Threat to Sochi," *Russia and Eurasia Program Blog*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 7 February 2014, <http://csis.org/blog/considering-caucasus-emirate-chemical-attack-threat-sochi>.

piles. On 30 May 2013, Turkish authorities arrested a JaN fighters in possession of about 2 kilos of sarin nerve gas, but no information has been made public about their nationalities.<sup>18</sup> Days later, on June 1, Iraqi officials announced that they interdicted an AQ cell plotting to launch sarin gas attacks in Iraq, Europe, and possibly North America.<sup>19</sup> A recent article by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh contends that CIA analysts reported to the Obama administration in the spring of last year that Syrian rebels may well have acquired some of Assad's stockpiles of chemical agents.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, with the chaos of an on-going civil war in Syria and the more than 40 sites at which Assad's chemical weapons have been reported to be located, it is possible that one or more jihadi groups could have acquired chemical materials.

The first three implications plus the advent of a new era in the IK under its new amir, Sheikh ad-Dagestani' (Kebekov), raises a fourth possible implication: A shift in IK tactics, strategy, and/or goals. The goals of building the global caliphate and its affiliate in the North Caucasus, the IK, will remain. However, the more religiously-steeped Dagestani, who will surely seek to leave his mark both on the local IK and global jihad, could turn to even greater reliance on suicide bombings, mass casualty attacks, and joint operations with foreign jihadi groups perhaps beyond Russia's borders as ways of compensating for lost capacity and maintaining a higher profile given the drain of potency to Syria. He may also change strategy by trying to expand operations more aggressively into the predominantly ethnic Russian North Caucasus regions of Stavropol, Krasnodar, and Rostov and to Volga Tatar regions as an ethnic and cultural bridge to the Crimean Tatars.

A fifth implication could be the expansion of IK and North Caucasian mujahedin involvement on many of the global jihad revolutionary movement's various fronts; something we have already seen as summarized briefly in this report's introduction. For example, Chechens fighting in Syria were reported to be among a flood of extremists, including also Egyptians, Tunisians, and Syrians, heading to the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp near Sidon Lebanon and joining the Abdallah Azzam Brigades' Ziad Jarrah Brigades and Lebanon's Jund al-Sham in order to carry out attacks in Beirut, the Bekaa valley, and Tripoli.<sup>21</sup>

This fifth implication raises a possible sixth—the formation of a more closely-linked Eurasian network of jihadi organizations with a second pillar after the IK in the North Caucasus becoming Central Asia's jihadi groups on the eve of the Western withdrawal from Afghanistan and the possible return to power of the Taliban. There are significant numbers of Central Asian mujahedin who have arrived in Syria from the homelands and from AfPak where a series of Central Asian jihadi organizations—the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Tajikistan's "Jamaat Ansarullah", and Kazakhstan's "Jund al-Khalifat"—are on their own hijra in AfPak. The IK and these groups already exchange personnel, including the travel of North Caucasians to these AQ-tied groups' training camps in AfPak, as well as video propaganda messages for mutual support. More recently, a group calling itself the "Imarat Kavkaz in Khorosan" and its amir Abdullah announced their presence somewhere in AfPak.<sup>22</sup> Now these groups are mingling using their common, if often weak Russian-language knowledge and their peoples' common colonial experiences with Russia that will build bonds beyond those forged in combat.

Seventh, Azerbaijan is increasingly vulnerable to jihadi terrorist activity given its geographical proximity to Turkey, Syria, and Iraq and its use as a travel route by militants traveling to and from the Syrian and North Caucasus/Russian jihadi fronts. As noted in the introduction the IK already attempted a major plot in Azer-

<sup>18</sup> Karen Hodgson, "Reports claim Al Nusra Front members in Turkey were planning sarin gas attacks," *Long War Journal*, 31 May 2013, [www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/05/on\\_may\\_30\\_the\\_turkish.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/05/on_may_30_the_turkish.php).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Jocelyn, "Crisis in Syria: Implications for Homeland Security," Testimony of Thomas Jocelyn (Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies and Senior Editor, *The Long War Journal*) Before the House Committee on Homeland Security, United States Congress, September 10, 2013, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/HM/HM00/20130910/101297/HHRG-113-HM00-Wstate-JocelynT-20130910.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, "Whose Sarin," *London Review of Books*, Volume 34, Number 24, 13 December 2013, [www.lrb.co.uk/2013/12/08/seymour-m-hersh/whose-sarin](http://www.lrb.co.uk/2013/12/08/seymour-m-hersh/whose-sarin).

<sup>21</sup> Linda Lundquist, "Extremists, including Chechens, Egyptians, Tunisians, and Syrians, are reportedly flocking to the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp," *Long War Journal*, 8 February 2014, [www.longwarjournal.org/today-in/2014/02/security\\_forces\\_in\\_zahle\\_detainees.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/today-in/2014/02/security_forces_in_zahle_detainees.php).

<sup>22</sup> "Obrashchenie Amira mudzhakhidov Imarata Kavkaz Abdullakha k mudzhakhidam Kavkaza i musulmanam Rossii," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 20 March 2014, [www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/20/103616.shtml](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/20/103616.shtml).

baijan in 2012. Azerbaijan also has been plagued, if rarely, by jihadi terrorist attacks and CE incursions into its northern regions.

Eighth, there is the possibility of disaster for the IK in Syria. In a major routes of the jihadis by Syrian forces, the bulk of its fighters could be wiped, or IK mujahedin may be so discouraged by the divisions and bloodshed between jihadi groups that they abandon their caliphate and emirate dreams.

Ninth, given the IK's even greater integration into the global jihad and Russia's support for the Bashar Assad regime against which the jihadists are fighting, Russia is likely to move higher on the global jihadi revolutionary movement's target list. One Syrian ISIS commander told a Western journalist that Russia would be a target of the ISIS: "Russia is killing Muslims in southern Muslim republics and sends arms and money to kill Muslims in Syria as well . . . I swear by God that Russia will pay a big price for its dirty role in the Syrian war."<sup>23</sup>

#### POTENTIAL THREAT TO THE U.S. HOMELAND

Although I do not foresee the IK undertaking operations to attack the U.S. homeland on its own, I would expect that IK- or North Caucasus-affiliated militants, especially from among those fighting in Syria and AfPak will sooner or later be involved in international plots to do so. We have seen this already in the AQ plot uncovered in Spain and France during the 2012 London Summer Olympic Games. In that plot, two Chechens, one of whom was identified as AQ's top operative in Europe by the Spanish court based on U.S. and Russian intelligence.

We should also be on guard against similar plots or even plots organized by the IK alone targeting U.S.-related soft targets in Europe and Eurasia, in particular in Russia. In addition to AQ and At-Takfir wal-Hijra—the latter of which undertook a plot to attack Moscow last year<sup>24</sup>—IK could partner with the four more or less Russian-speaking, Central Asian jihadi groups in AfPak with which it maintains ties mentioned above as well as the Waziristan-based Volga Tatar "Bulgar Jamaat," elements of which have also made the hijra to Syria and fight along IK-affiliated groups there.<sup>25</sup>

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR RUSSIAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Russia's greater vulnerability to attacks by global Sunni jihadi groups as a result of the IK's growing ties with the global jihadi revolutionary movement raises several foreign policy implications.

First, all else remaining equal, Moscow will have greater reason to maintain its relationships with Iran and Syria hoping against hope that the Shiites can at least absorb and contain the Sunni jihadi threat.

Second, this likely will complicate non-proliferation efforts in both Iran and Syria and make it more difficult to remove Assad from power and secure Israel's national security.

Third, any major attack emanating from IK or other jihadi groups in Syria could raise tensions in a Russo-Turkish relationship potentially burdened by Istanbul's pan-Turkish impulse to protect Crimea's Tatars from real or perceived Russian transgressions.

Fourth, the same is true regarding Russia's relations with the Arab Gulf and Western states supporting the Syrian rebels.

In sum, the Syrian civil war and jihad is reshaping the geopolitical and security landscape across Eurasia. For the IK, the Syrian jihadi crucible could provide new momentum through a pivotal jihadi victory in the region or swallow up the IK's mujahedin in a grand jihadi failure. Either way, this will have important implications for Russian national security and foreign policy and for Eurasian and international security as well.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Dr. Hahn.

Our next witness, Mr. William Roggio, is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a non-profit, nonpartisan

<sup>23</sup> Anne Barnard and Eric Schmitt, "As Foreign Fighters Flood Syria, Fears of a New Extremist Haven," *New York Times*, 9 August 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2013/08/09/world/middleeast/as-foreign-fighters-flood-syria-fears-of-a-new-extremist-haven.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit\\_th\\_20130809&r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/09/world/middleeast/as-foreign-fighters-flood-syria-fears-of-a-new-extremist-haven.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20130809&r=0).

<sup>24</sup> V Moskve arestovany 15 chlenov "At Takfir val'-Khidzhra'," *Kavkaz uzal*, 29 November 2013, [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/234336/](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/234336/).

<sup>25</sup> To reiterate, the four AfPak-based, Central Asian groups are: The Islamic Jihad Union, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan's Jamaat Ansarullah, and Kazakhstan's Jund al-Khalifat.

policy institute focusing on foreign policy and National security. At the foundation, Mr. Roggio is the editor of *The Long War Journal*, which provides original reporting and analysis of the global war on terror. He is also the president of Public Multimedia, Inc., a non-profit media organization dedicated to covering the long war. He was embedded with the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Army in Iraq in 2005, 2006, and 2007, and with the Canadian Army in Afghanistan in 2006.

We are privileged to have you here today as a witness, we thank you for being here, and you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF WILLIAM F. ROGGIO, SENIOR FELLOW,  
FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES**

Mr. ROGGIO. Thank you, Chairman King. Thank you for the invitation to speak today. I agree—with what Dr. Hahn said about the al-Qaeda's—or the Islamic Caucus Emirate's links to al-Qaeda. They are historical, they are well-documented, and they span decades. You know, not only has Dokku Umarov, the former emir, you know, threatened the United States. But he has said, prior to his death in July he had said that the Islamic Caucus Emirates is part of the global jihad.

You can see this by how this group and how its fighters are dispersed in the major theaters. The Islamic Caucus Emirates fighters have been spotted in Afghanistan and Pakistan for years. They haven't had the prominence that we are now seeing in Syria. They have operated more in the shadows. But they served as combat-enablers, basically special forces. They impart critical tactics and serve in—embedded with not just the Taliban but with al-Qaeda forces and other groups in the region.

They supported groups like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Islamic Jihad Union. As Dr. Hahn had mentioned, a group—the Caucus mujahedin in the Emirate—in the Kurasan was formed, and this group announced its presence in 2011. This group had actually said that it was loyal to the Taliban. So we are seeing—I think it is a key indication of how this group has networked throughout the region.

They—al-Qaeda has long had roots in the Caucasus. Bin Laden supplied—provided support for Ibn Khattab and Shamil Basayev. Our mujahedin fought in Chechnya and in the Caucasus in the 1990s from the beginning. Al-Qaeda also routinely highlights the importance of the Chechen theater. Zawahiri himself, in multiple speeches he talks about the importance of the fighting and the history of the fighting in Chechnya. They are upheld as ideal fighters. He, at one point in one speech said—he said follow the Chechen's lead in their resistance to democracy and resistance to Russian rule.

Chechnya has been used as a recruiting tool in al-Qaeda's propaganda. Some of the 9/11 hijackers, they initially were—wanted to—they were gonna be deployed to fight in Chechnya, but were re-tasked to actually conduct the attacks. Islamic Caucus Emirates employs al-Qaeda's tactics: Suicide bombing, suicide assaults, roadside bombings, and all of the other tools in the insurgency. We see this even in a recent video that was just released the other day in Syria.

We see a training camp from the army of the immigrants and supporters—that is a Chechen-led group, obviously, or Caucus Emirates-like group. This camp looks just like an al-Qaeda training video that they have released over the decades. You see fighters navigating obstacle courses, you see fighters even in an IED class. Building IEDs and then deploying them. Same types of IEDs that have been used against U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But where we are really seeing the Islamic Caucus Emirate having its greatest effect is in Syria. While in Afghanistan and Pakistan it largely operated in the shadows, I think in Syria it has really advertised its fighting. That is because instead of having, say, scores of fighters in the Afghan-Pakistan region you now have hundreds if not thousands of fighters from the Caucasus. I think Dr. Hahn laid out a very good, detailed description of how the Islamic Caucus Emirates fighters began to form and coalesce inside Syria.

It has become quite effective. We are now seeing fighters that are appearing in videos—fighters and commanders, they are appearing in videos—with al-Qaeda leaders or al-Qaeda-linked fighters. Including one sheikh, Abdullah Mohaisany, who has taken sides with al-Qaeda in its dispute with the Islamic State of Iraq. They are seen on the battlefield celebrating. You have two Chechen commanders, you have a leader of the group called Ahrar al-Sham, which is in the Islamic front.

You have a top Saudi cleric, extremely popular Saudi cleric—who definitely is tied to al-Qaeda, all celebrating moments after overrunning a Syrian military position. One of the—the fighters from the Caucasus are considered some of the most tactically-proficient fighters amongst the jihadists. I think this is where they are having a major impact in Syria. They are imparting those tactics that they did on a smaller level in Afghanistan, and they are making these Syrian Islamist groups and jihadist groups far more effective.

I think that is why we are seeing them having such—success against Syrian military formations. The other—I think the biggest concern I have is how they are interacting, in general—the fighters from the Caucasus are interacting in general—with all these other jihadist groups. We even have—there is this one person who identifies himself as an American. His name is Abu Mohamed Amriki, which means, obviously, “the American.” He is currently being investigated for his ties. He claimed to live in the United States for 10 to 11 years.

He is pictured with top leaders from the Caucus Emirates, such as Omar al-Shishani, who is now the military emir of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham. As these individuals are interacting with Westerners or, better, joining the battlefield in Syria, or from countries that, you know—that would easily access the United States, I am deeply concerned with the tactics and capabilities that they are imparting.

Thank you very much for your time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Roggio follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILLIAM F. ROGGIO

APRIL 3, 2014

Chairman King, Ranking Member Higgins, Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here to discuss the terrorist threat emanating from the Caucasus.

Unfortunately, as we saw nearly 1 year ago today at the Boston Marathon, the jihad in the Caucasus has already impacted lives here in the United States.

There is still much we do not know for certain about Tamerlan Tsarnaev's travels in Dagestan and Chechnya, but we do know that, at a minimum, he was sympathetic to the jihadists operating there. Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his younger brother were, of course, responsible for the attacks on the Boston Marathon. As a report by the House Homeland Security Committee noted just last month, it "is reasonable to assume that Tamerlan Tsarnaev was at least inspired by" the "activity and ideology" of jihadists fighting in the Caucasus and he was "driven to take part in the vision of global jihad which they share with al-Qaeda." Indeed, the Imarat Kavkaz or "IK" (otherwise known as the Islamic Caucasus Emirate) does have links to al-Qaeda. And Tsarnaev is known to have sympathized with the IK and its fighters.

The IK has openly proclaimed itself a threat to the United States and the West, and we should take these threats seriously. The U.S. State Department certainly does. In May 2011, the State Department officially designated the IK as a terrorist organization. "The designation of Caucasus Emirate is in response to the threats posed to the United States and Russia," Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, the State Department's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, said at the time. "The attacks perpetrated by Caucasus Emirate illustrate the global nature of the terrorist problem we face today," Benjamin added.<sup>1</sup> In June 2010, the State Department added Doku Umarov, who was then the emir of the IK, to the U.S. Government's list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists.<sup>2</sup> And in May 2011, Foggy Bottom offered a reward of \$5 million for information leading to Umarov's location.<sup>3</sup> In both its June 2010 and May 2011 announcements, the State Department noted that Umarov and the IK pose a threat to the United States and other countries. Indeed, Umarov described the IK as "a part of the global Jihad" in a July 2013 statement in which he called for further attacks aimed at disrupting Russia's plans for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that Umarov was recently killed, there are good reasons to suspect that the IK will continue to pose a threat to American and Western interests both in and outside of Russia. As with other al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, the IK will continue to spend most of its resources waging insurgencies, both inside Russia and elsewhere. Still, in my testimony today, I will highlight several key reasons why the IK poses a terrorist threat to the West. Those reasons are:

- *Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda helped transform the insurgency in Chechnya from a nationalist one into part of the global jihad.*—Al-Qaeda's senior leadership established its influence within the Caucasus long ago. While al-Qaeda was headquartered in Sudan from 1991 to 1996, Osama bin Laden maintained a network of training camps and other facilities that shuttled fighters to several jihadist fronts, including Chechnya.<sup>5</sup> During the 1990s al-Qaeda and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) funneled cash and other support to Muslim rebels in Chechnya through a charity in Baku, Azerbaijan.<sup>6</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri himself, then the head of the EIJ, as well as second-in-command of al-Qaeda, set out for Chechnya in late 1996. He was accompanied by other dual-hated al-Qaeda-EIJ operatives. Zawahiri was arrested in Dagestan before he reached Chechnya and spent several months in prison. Zawahiri's trip to the region underscores, from al-Qaeda's perspective, the importance of supporting the jihad in Chechnya.

Al-Qaeda's efforts in Chechnya have clearly borne fruit. Two highly influential jihadists in Chechnya became closely allied with al-Qaeda's senior leaders. Shamil Salmanovich Basayev (a Chechen) and Ibn al Khattab (a Saudi) established the Islamic International Brigade (IIB). "In October 1999," according to the United Nations Security Council committee responsible for sanctioning al-Qaeda and Taliban-affiliated groups, "emissaries of Basayev and al Khattab traveled to Osama bin Laden's home base in the Afghan province of Kandahar, where Bin Laden agreed to provide substantial military assistance and financial

<sup>1</sup>U.S. State Department, Office of the Spokesman, "Designation of Caucasus Emirate," May 26, 2011; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/05/164312.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. State Department, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Designation of Caucasus Emirate Leader Doku Umarov," June 23, 2010; <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/143564.htm>.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. State Department, Office of the Spokesman, "Rewards for Justice—Doku Umarov Reward Offer," May 26, 2011; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/05/164314.htm>.

<sup>4</sup>Kavkaz Center, "Caucasus Emirate Emir Dokku Abu Usman urged to prevent Olympic games in Sochi," July 3, 2013; <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2013/07/03/17994.shtml>.

<sup>5</sup>9/11 Commission Report, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup>9/11 Commission Report, p. 58.

aid, including by making arrangements to send to Chechnya several hundred fighters to fight against Russian troops and perpetrate acts of terrorism.” Also in 1999, bin Laden “sent substantial amounts of money to” Basayev, al Khattab and other jihadists in Chechnya. The money “was to be used exclusively for training gunmen, recruiting mercenaries and buying ammunition.” By the end of 2002, IIB leaders “had received several million dollars from international terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda.” Al-Qaeda continued to raise funds for the IIB after the 9/11 attacks.<sup>7</sup>

By 1995, the U.N. notes, “Arab Afghans”—that is, men from throughout the Arab world who traveled to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s—accounted for a “substantial” number “of those fighting against Russian troops.” Al-Qaeda not only supported the jihad inside Chechnya, but also made sure to integrate Chechens into its operations in Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda’s elite “055 Brigade,” which fought alongside the Taliban against the Northern Alliance, “included a number of Chechens, many of whom were believed to be followers of” IIB leaders. In October 2001, al Khattab supported al-Qaeda’s fight against coalition forces by sending “additional fighters to Afghanistan” and promising “to pay the volunteers’ families a substantial monthly stipend or a large lump-sum payment in the event of their death.”<sup>8</sup>

Fighters from the Caucasus are present in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region to this day. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) has identified “Chechen” fighters in Afghanistan as recently as May 2011, when it noted that a foreign fighter network in Kunduz “facilitates foreign suicide bombers including Chechens and Pakistanis throughout the province.”<sup>9</sup> A group calling itself the Caucasus Mujahideen in Khorasan announced its presence in October 2011, saying it was in direct contact with its “brothers” in Russia.<sup>10</sup> The United Nations has noted that Umarov, the deceased head of the IK, supported both the Islamic Jihad Group and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).<sup>11</sup> Both groups are based in South Asia and closely allied with al-Qaeda.

- *Al-Qaeda has repeatedly highlighted the fighting in Chechnya in its propaganda videos.*—After the U.S.S. Cole bombing in October 2000, Osama bin Laden ordered his media committee to produce a propaganda video that included a reenactment of the Cole bombing, as well as footage from Chechnya and other jihadist hotspots.<sup>12</sup> The plight of Muslims in Chechnya remained a theme in al-Qaeda’s messaging in the years that followed. And al-Qaeda continues to present the fighting in Chechnya as part of its global jihad. In January of this year, Ayman al-Zawahiri praised Chechen fighters, saying that the “fighting for Chechnya is another page of the pages of eternal jihad to as to achieve true justice in the name of Allah.” Zawahiri asked if other jihadists would be willing to follow the Chechens’ example: “Are we, as Muslims, ready to take the path of the Chechens, and enroll in the ranks of the fight in the name of Allah?” Zawahiri called on Muslims in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia to follow the Chechens’ lead in rejecting democracy and waging jihad.<sup>13</sup>
- *The jihad in Chechnya has been used to recruit terrorists—including a number of the 9/11 hijackers—who were repurposed for attacks against American interests.*—As the 9/11 Commission reported, al-Qaeda’s Hamburg cell traveled “to Afghanistan aspiring to wage jihad in Chechnya,” but al-Qaeda “quickly recognized their potential and enlisted them in its anti-U.S. jihad.”<sup>14</sup> The Hamburg cell included the terrorists who flew the hijacked planes on 9/11. Some of the

<sup>7</sup>United Nations Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning al-Qaeda and associated individuals and entities, “QE.1.99.03. Islamic International Brigade (IIB),” September 7, 2010; <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE09903E.shtml>.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>ISAF Press Release, DVIDS, May 31, 2011; <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/71346/isaf-joint-command-morning-operational-update>.

<sup>10</sup>Bill Roggio, “Fighters from ‘Caucasus Mujahideen in Khorasan’ issue message to ‘brothers’ in southern Russia,” *The Long War Journal*, Oct. 22, 2011; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/10/fighters\\_from\\_caucas.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/10/fighters_from_caucas.php).

<sup>11</sup>United Nations Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning al-Qaeda and associated individuals and entities, “QI.U.290.11. Doku Khamatovich Umarov,” March 10, 2011; <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQI29011E.shtml>.

<sup>12</sup>9/11 Commission Report, p. 191.

<sup>13</sup>SITE Intelligence Group, “Zawahiri Praises Chechen Fighters As Models for Jihad,” January 25, 2014.

<sup>14</sup>9/11 Commission Report, p. 160.

muscle hijackers from Saudi Arabia initially wanted to fight in Chechnya.<sup>15</sup> Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM), the mastermind of 9/11, also attempted to join the ranks of the main jihadist leader in Chechnya, Ibn al Khattab.<sup>16</sup> And in August 2001, French authorities provided evidence to the U.S. Government that Zacarias Moussaoui, who was slated to take part in a follow-on attack after 9/11, had his own ties to Khattab.<sup>17</sup>

- The IK has adopted al-Qaeda's tactics, including the use of suicide bombers in attacks against civilians. The organization has developed expertise in committing mass casualty terrorist attacks. Since the formation of the IK in 2007, the group has executed multiple suicide attacks against security forces, government officials, and civilians. The attacks have not been confined to the Caucasus region of Russia; IK has struck in the heart of Moscow several times. Two of the most deadly IK attacks in Moscow over the past several years are the January 24, 2011 suicide attack at the Domodedovo International Airport in Moscow that killed 35 people and wounded scores more<sup>18</sup> and the March 29, 2010 suicide attack by two female bombers, or Black Widows, who killed 39 people in the Moscow metro.<sup>19</sup>

Other major suicide bombings include the June 22, 2009 attack that wounded Yunus Bek Yevkurov, the President of the Republic of Ingushetia and suicide attacks on Oct. 21, 2013,<sup>20</sup> Dec. 29, 2013, and Dec. 30 2013<sup>21</sup> that targeted transportation nodes (a bus, a train station, and a trolley respectively) in the city of Volgograd. All of these attacks were executed by the suicide teams of the Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs (RSRSBCM), a unit that predates the IK and was responsible for attacks such as the school siege in Beslan, the destruction of commercial airlines, and the theater siege in Moscow.<sup>22</sup> The IK is closely linked to the RSRSBCM.<sup>23</sup>

- *The IK's threat against the 2014 Olympics in Sochi was real, despite the fact that no terrorist attack materialized.*—In June 2013, Doku Umarov called on his supporters to use “maximum force” to stop the 2014 Olympic Games. “Today we must show those who live in the Kremlin . . . that our kindness is not weakness,” Umarov said. “They plan to hold the Olympics on the bones of our ancestors, on the bones of many, many dead Muslims buried on our land by the Black Sea. We as mujahideen are required not to allow that, using any methods that Allah allows us.”<sup>24</sup>

The Russian government erected substantial security barriers in order stop terrorists from striking the Olympic festivities. It is likely that these measures either stopped an attack from occurring, or dissuaded the IK from attempting one. If the opportunity for an attack had presented itself, there is little doubt that the IK would have taken it. And the IK would not have discriminated between Russian government officials/civilians and others who were visiting the games from abroad. That is, the IK's threat against the Olympic Games was not just a threat against Russia, but was in fact a threat against the international community.

- The IK operates as part of al-Qaeda's global network. As we've learned over the past several years, the terrorist threat against the United States can come from

<sup>15</sup> 9/11 Commission Report, p. 233.

<sup>16</sup> 9/11 Commission Report, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> 9/11 Commission Report, p. 274.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Roggio, “Caucasus Emirate leader claims Moscow airport suicide attack,” *The Long War Journal*, Feb. 7, 2011; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/02/caucasus\\_emirate\\_cla.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/02/caucasus_emirate_cla.php).

<sup>19</sup> Bill Roggio, “‘Black Widow’ female suicide bombers kill 37 in Moscow metro blasts,” *The Long War Journal*, March 29, 2010; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/03/female\\_suicide\\_bombe\\_3.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/03/female_suicide_bombe_3.php).

<sup>20</sup> Lisa Lundquist, “Suspected ‘Black Widow’ suicide bomber kills 6 in southern Russia,” Oct. 21, 2013; *The Long War Journal*, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/10/a\\_suspected\\_black\\_wi.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/10/a_suspected_black_wi.php).

<sup>21</sup> Bill Roggio, “Suicide bomber strikes again in southern Russia,” Dec. 30, 2013, *The Long War Journal*; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/12/suicide\\_bomber\\_strik\\_8.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/12/suicide_bomber_strik_8.php).

<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Shapiro, “Caucasus jihad: Terror tactics back on the horizon?,” *The Long War Journal*, May 21, 2009; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/05/caucasus\\_jihad\\_terror.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/05/caucasus_jihad_terror.php).

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning al-Qaeda and associated individuals and entities, “QE.1.99.03. Islamic International Brigade (IIB),” September 7, 2010; <http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/NSQE09903E.shtml>.

<sup>24</sup> Miriam Elder, “Russian Islamist Doku Umarov calls for attacks on 2014 Winter Olympics,” *The Guardian*, July 3, 2013; <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/03/russia-islamist-attack-olympics-sochi>.

any part of al-Qaeda's international network. The IK is integrated with this network. Today, this can best be seen in Syria, where multiple IK commanders and other affiliated fighters have joined the insurgency against Bashar al Assad's regime.

Jihadist from the IK play a pivotal role in the fighting in Syria, and leaders from the Caucasus command large numbers of Syria and foreign fighters in several jihadist groups operating in the country. Those groups include the Al Nusra Front for the People of the Levant, al-Qaeda's official branch in Syria; the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham, or ISIS, an al-Qaeda splinter group; and the Islamic Front, an Islamist alliance that is allied with the Al Nusra Front. Both the Al Nusra Front and the ISIS are on the U.S. Government's list of Specially Designated Global Terrorist entities.

Fighters from IK originally fought in the Kateeb al Muhajireen wal Ansar, or the Brigade of the Emigrants and Helpers. This group was formed in February 2013 and was led by Omar al Shishani (a Chechen).<sup>25</sup> Kavkaz Center noted that the group "includes volunteers from the Caucasus Emirate."<sup>26</sup> In March 2013, the group expanded and rebranded itself the Jaish al Muhajireen wa Ansar, or Army of the Emigrants and Helpers. Syrian jihadist groups merged with Abu Omar's forces at this time.<sup>27</sup>

The Army of the Emigrants and Helpers served as the vanguard for jihadist forces in Syria. It was spotted at the tip of the spear during the fighting at nearly every crucial battle in 2013. The group launched joint assaults with the Al Nusra Front and the ISIS to overrun Syrian military bases. The Army of the Emigrants and Helpers has shot down a Syrian helicopter with a surface-to-air missile and used a captured BMP armored fighting vehicle as a suicide car bomb in order to penetrate the perimeter at a Syrian military base.<sup>28 29</sup>

The Army of the Emigrants and Helpers splintered in the fall of 2013 as ISIS and the Al Nusra Front clashed over a leadership dispute and the former's unwillingness to submit to sharia courts. Abu Omar al Shishani took a faction of fighters and joined the ISIS. Three commanders, known as Saifullah al Shishani, Salahuddin Shishani, and Abu Musa al Shishani, joined the Al Nusra Front. Salahuddin has even been photographed in Syrian sitting in front of an IK flag. And another commander, known as Muslim al Shishani, reformed the Army of the Emigrants and Helpers and remained independent from, but allied with, the Al Nusra Front and the ISIS.

The prevalence of IK fighters and leaders on the Syrian battlefield has serious, long-term ramifications for the global jihad. IK members are interacting with and sharing their tactical skills with Westerners and others. For instance, a jihadist who identifies himself as an American and is known as Abu Muhammad al Amriki has been seen in photographs with Omar al Shishani.<sup>30</sup> He is also seen fighting alongside IK fighters and even speaks in Russian.<sup>31</sup>

Thank you again for inviting me to testify today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Mr. Roggio. Appreciate your testimony.

Now, Dr. Andrew Kuchins is a senior fellow and director of the Russia and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He is an expert on Russian foreign and domestic policies, with his more recent scholarship being dedicated to U.S.-

<sup>25</sup> Bill Roggio, "Chechen commander leads Muhajireen Brigade in Syria," *The Long War Journal*, Feb. 20, 2013, [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/02/chechen\\_commander\\_le.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/02/chechen_commander_le.php).

<sup>26</sup> Kavkaz Center, "Syria. Appeal of Emir of Brigade of Emigrants Abu Omar al-Chechen," Feb. 7, 2013; <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2013/02/07/17333.shtml>.

<sup>27</sup> Bill Roggio, "Chechen commander forms 'Army of Emigrants,' integrates Syrian groups," *The Long War Journal*, March 28, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/02/chechen\\_commander\\_le.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/02/chechen_commander_le.php).

<sup>28</sup> Bill Roggio, "Muhajireen Army fires on Syrian helicopter with surface-to-air missile," *The Long War Journal*, June 27, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/06/muhajireen\\_army\\_fires\\_on\\_syria.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2013/06/muhajireen_army_fires_on_syria.php).

<sup>29</sup> Bill Roggio, "Muhajireen Army uses BMP to launch suicide assault on Aleppo airport," *The Long War Journal*, June 27, 2013; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/muhajireen\\_army\\_uses.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/06/muhajireen_army_uses.php).

<sup>30</sup> Bill Roggio, "'American' jihadist in Syria pictured with dangerous ISIS commanders," *The Long War Journal*, March 19, 2014; [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/03/american\\_jihadist\\_in.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/03/american_jihadist_in.php).

<sup>31</sup> The video can be found on YouTube, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPNIOL34bA4&feature=youtu.be>.

Russian relations and the Russia-Asian strategy; and the role of energy in the Russian Far East.

From 2003 to 2006, Dr. Kuchins was a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where he served as director of its Russian and Eurasian program, and was the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center in Russia. I am glad they got your nameplate straight. We are very privileged to have you here today as a witness, Dr. Kuchins.

You are recognized, thank you.

**STATEMENT OF ANDREW C. KUCHINS, PH.D., DIRECTOR AND SENIOR FELLOW, RUSSIA AND EURASIA PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Mr. KUCHINS. Thank you very much Chairman King. It is a great pleasure and honor for me to have the opportunity to speak before the committee today, and, along with the two very distinguished colleagues. I should say out the outset that I agree very, very much with what my predecessors have said, particularly about the dangers of the links between fighters from the North Caucasus and their link-up with those in Syria, and the potential implications.

The thrust of my remarks will be somewhat different. In my view, the terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland emanating from the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation is likely to increase in the years ahead. The judgment is based on my perception of several on-going trends and phenomena. I want to make, basically, six points. One, the governance problems in the Northern Caucasus that plague the region at large are growing. While the incidents of violent acts may have subsided moderately in the past few years, the underlying issues of poor governance, economic deprivation, high unemployment, and endemic corruption are all getting worse.

In addition, oppression on the basis of religion by the Russian state is increasing in the face of the growing role of Islam, including radical and violent Salafi groups in ideology in the North Caucasus, in Russia more broadly. Many people who may have initially been quite moderate in their views and goals have been radicalized by the very unpleasant experiences of themselves or those close to them in encounters with Russian state authority.

Two, the growing resonance of Russian nationalism and national politics is feeling increasing resentment about the subsidization of the region. This sentiment, which has been captured by the popular phrase “stop feeding the Caucasus” is pushing the Russian government to curtail government spending toward the region just as the strains of economic stagnation in the Russian economy at large—there is a less than a 1 percent annual growth at the moment—are putting pressures on the budget more broadly. The near-term prospects for the Russia economy have much greater downside risk today than upside potential.

In a CSIS report on the Northern Caucasus published in 2011, we concluded that the Northern Caucasus is increasingly looking like a virtually ungovernable region under kind-of a different jurisdictional administrative regime than that which prevails in the rest of the country; maybe more akin to the Fatah in Pakistan. This is also reflected in growing sentiment among Russians that

people from the Caucasus are not “nosh” or “ours.” That this is a region populated by peoples that are not really Russia, certainly not Ruski, maybe even not Rasiski.

Three, Islam, as it is in many countries and regions of the world, is becoming a more significant part of individual’s identity in the Northern Caucasus and elsewhere in the Russia Federation, notably the Volga Region and other large cities. Not surprisingly, we see increasing voice for Islam being expressed in the political context. Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov for example, has embraced and promoted this in Chechnya, even endorsing the implementation of Sharia law. We also see greater prevalence of radical Salafi strains of Islam, as well as overt linkages with global jihadist ideology, which is largely facilitated by the internet, as well as the direct links that Gordon and Bill talked about.

Four, significant numbers, likely, hundreds not thousands, according to available data, of jihadists from the Northern Caucasus have left for Syria to take up arms against the Assad regime. Here, they have become battle-hardened veterans with much deeper ties to global jihadist financial, ideological, arms, and warfare training networks. Vladimir Putin’s strong stance supporting Assad only deepens their hatred of the ruling order in Russia and their desire to demolish it if, and when, they return to Russia.

The success of the mujahedin in Afghanistan in the 1980s was a watershed event for the emergence and consolidation of embryonic jihadist networks. If there were a similar success in Syria for the jihad-inspired forces in taking down the Assad regime, we should also anticipate how this event could prompt another quantum leap in the capabilities of jihadist networks globally in terms of recruiting, financing, training, among other areas. Already, as my colleagues have laid out, the linkages between the Northern Caucasus and the battleground in Syria have strengthened in many ways. We should anticipate that the success—and even to a lesser extent, even with the—if it were to—with failure of jihadists in Syria could dramatically increase the dangers that groups and individuals present in the Northern Caucasus.

The Obama administration has consistently under-appreciated this factor as a major reason for Vladimir Putin’s staunch support for the Assad government for the past 3 years.

Five, the poor state of U.S.-Russia relations was already a contributing factor in suboptimal counterterrorism and intelligence sharing that, in part—a lesser part for sure—facilitated the intelligence failure represented by the Boston bombing by the Tsarnaev brothers in April 2013.

Committee Members know far better than I that intelligence sharing, even with our closest allies, is a complicated and challenging task. Intelligence sharing with a partner like the Russian Federation, where mutual trust is very low, is that much less likely to be successful and useful. Since the mutual intelligence failure of the Boston bombings a year ago—again, clearly, the lion’s share of this responsibility falls on U.S. intelligence and law enforcement institutions, given that the act took place on U.S. territory—U.S.-Russia relations have dramatically worsened over issues including, but not limited to, the Snowden affair and Russia’s military occupation and subsequent annexation of Crimea.

As we sit here today, it is extremely difficult for me to imagine that existing problems in U.S.-Russia intelligence sharing on interactions between dangerous individuals and groups in the Northern Caucasus with like-minded individuals and groups in the United States or elsewhere, who may pose a threat to the U.S. homeland—will improve. Realistically, the current dysfunctional status quo in U.S.-Russia counterterrorism cooperation will be politically hard to maintain.

Six, a far more dangerous threat to the U.S. homeland could emerge if Russian government intentions regarding how it manages its own terrorist threat changes in certain ways. What do I mean? My previous point suggested expectations of cooperation from Russia to help contain threats that we had identified as at least, to some extent, mutual in the past are likely to be disappointed.

A far more acute danger for the United States would emerge, however, if the Russian government decided, for reasons to contain the threat of jihadist-inspired terrorists committing terrorist acts on a Russian territory and/or to asymmetrically punish the United States, they could be a facilitator for attacks on the U.S. homeland. Always with plausible deniability of course.

Alternatively, but with a similar result, could we imagine that Moscow and Tehran could conclude to direct other Islamic-inspired, non-Salafi jihadists—terrorist networks to wreak havoc on the U.S. homeland, out of mutual interest—to asymmetrically punish the United States. So in conclusion, I am virtually certain that the problems in the North Caucasus, to some degree, have increased the threat to the U.S. homeland.

Although we do not know or understand everything that transpired between the act of the Tsarnaev brothers to set off the bomb at the Boston Marathon a year ago, and their links and interactions with groups and individuals in the Northern Caucasus, for me this terrorist attack is indisputably demonstrated that, in some form, what is going on in the Northern Caucasus increases the overall threat assessment for the United States.

The confluence of the on-going Syrian imbroglio, the Iranian nuclear problem, and the dramatic worsening in U.S.-Russia relations that has no end in sight, is certainly increasing the threat to the United States. There are clear links from the problems in the Northern Caucasus to this threat, but they are not the only reason that Russia's position could very significantly increase the threat to the U.S. homeland. That is my final point.

This brings me—and it revolves around the psychology and the potential intentions of Vladimir Putin and, more ominously, those around him who may have much darker motivations and intentions. Mr. Putin has been underestimated by Russian as well as foreign elites, very always to their regret since he emerged on Russia's national political stage in 1999. Undoubtedly this is a phenomenon that he personally has encountered and manipulated to his benefit since his youth.

Americans, but not only Americans, also have deeply underestimated the national psychological trauma that the collapse of the Soviet Union constituted for Vladimir Putin and tens of millions of other Russians. We need to conceptualize the Russian Federation

as continuing to endure something akin to post-traumatic stress disorder. Mr. Putin resonates so well with the majority of Russians because he taps directly into this very, very rich psychological vein.

I do not pretend to know much about psychology, but I do know that if PTSD is not treated its symptoms get worse, not better, over time. Mr. Putin, as he did in Brussels last week, and—sorry, as a starting point I would recommend to our President to refrain from publicly taunting Mr. Putin as he did in Brussels last week, and caution other American politicians and officials from doing the same. I would also recommend that the President and other officials refrain from revealing in public to Mr. Putin and others around the world what are our deepest fears that keep us up at night.

In addition, I urge all to carefully read the speech Mr. Putin gave to the federal assembly on March 18 in Moscow. Because it is possible that historians in the future may mark that moment as the tipping point of Weimar Russia into a fascist state.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kuchins follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANDREW C. KUCHINS

APRIL 3, 2014

It is my view that the terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland emanating from the Northern Caucasus region of the Russian Federation is likely to increase in the years ahead. This judgment is based on my perception of several on-going trends and phenomena:

(1) The governance problems in the Northern Caucasus that plague the region at large are growing. While the incidence of violent acts may have subsided moderately in the past few years, the underlying issues of poor governance, economic deprivation, high unemployment, and endemic corruption are all getting worse. In addition, oppression on the basis of religion by the Russian state is increasing in the face of the growing role of Islam, including radical and violent Salafi groups and ideology, in the North Caucasus and Russia more broadly. Many people who may have initially been quite moderate in their views and goals have been radicalized by the very unpleasant experiences of themselves or those close to them in encounters with Russian state authority.

(2) The growing resonance of Russian nationalism in national politics is fueling increasing resentment about the subsidization of the region. This sentiment, which has been captured by the popular phrase “Stop Feeding the Caucasus,” is pushing the Russian government to curtail government funding toward the region just as the strains of economic stagnation (less than 1 percent annual GDP growth at current estimations) are putting pressure on the budget more broadly. The near-term prospects for Russian economy have much greater downside risk than upside potential. In a CSIS report on the Northern Caucasus published in 2011, we concluded that the Northern Caucasus is increasingly looks like a virtually ungovernable region under a different jurisdictional administrative regime than that which prevails in the rest of the country, similar to the FATA in Pakistan. This is also reflected in growing sentiment among Russians that people from the Caucasus are not Nash (ours), and that this is a region populated by peoples that are not really Russian.

(3) Islam, as it is in many countries and regions of the world, is becoming a more significant part of individuals’ identity in the Northern Caucasus and elsewhere in the Russian Federation (notably the Volga Region and other large cities).<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, we see increasing voice for Islam being expressed in the political context. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, for example, has embraced and promoted this in Chechnya, even endorsing the implementation of Sharia law. We also see a greater prevalence of radical Salafi strains of Islam as well

<sup>1</sup>Sergey Markedonov, *The Rise of Radical and Nonofficial Islamic Groups in Russia’s Volga Region* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2013).

as overt linkages with global Jihadist ideology, which is largely facilitated by the internet.

(4) Significant numbers (likely hundreds, not thousands according to available data) of Jihadists from the Northern Caucasus have left for Syria to take up arms against the Assad regime. Here they have become battle-hardened veterans with much deeper ties to global jihadist financial, ideological, arms, and warfare training networks. Vladimir Putin's strong stand supporting Assad only deepens their hatred of the ruling order in Russia and their desire to demolish it if and when they return to Russia. The success of the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan in the 1980s was a watershed event for the emergence and consolidation of embryonic Jihadist networks. If there were a similar success in Syria for the Jihad-inspired forces in taking down the Assad regime, we should also anticipate how this event could prompt another quantum leap in the capabilities of Jihadist networks globally in terms of recruiting, financing, and training, among other areas. Already the linkages between the Northern Caucasus and the battleground in Syria have strengthened in many ways, and we should anticipate that the success (and to a lesser extent, even failure) of Jihadists in Syria could dramatically increase the dangers these groups and individuals present in the Northern Caucasus. The Obama administration has consistently underappreciated this factor as a major reason for Vladimir Putin's staunch support for the Assad government for the past 3 years.

(5) The poor state of U.S.-Russia relations was already a contributing factor in sub-optimal counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing that in part facilitated the intelligence failure represented by the Boston bombing by the Tsarnaev brothers in April 2013. Committee members know far better than I that intelligence sharing even with our closest allies is a complicated and challenging task. Intelligence sharing with a partner like the Russian Federation where mutual trust is very low is that much less likely to be successful and useful. Since the mutual intelligence failure of the Boston bombings a year ago (though clearly the lion's share of this responsibility falls on U.S. intelligence and law enforcement institutions given that this act took place on U.S. territory), U.S.-Russian relations have dramatically worsened over issues including but not limited to the Snowden affair and Russia's military occupation and subsequent annexation of Crimea. As we sit here today, it is extremely difficult to imagine that existing problems in U.S.-Russia intelligence sharing on interactions between dangerous individuals/groups in the Northern Caucasus with like-minded individuals/groups in the United States or those elsewhere who may pose a threat to the U.S. homeland will improve. Realistically, the current dysfunctional status quo in U.S.-Russia counter-terrorism cooperation will be politically hard to maintain.

(6) A far more dangerous threat to the U.S. homeland could emerge if Russian government intentions regarding how it manages its own terrorist threat changes in certain ways. What do I mean? My previous point suggests that expectations of cooperation from Russia to help contain threats that we had identified as, at least to some extent, mutual in the past are likely to be disappointed. A far more acute danger for the United States would emerge, however, if the Russian government decided, both for reasons to contain the threat of Jihadist-inspired terrorists committing terrorist acts on Russian territory and/or to asymmetrically punish the United States, to be a facilitator for attacks on the U.S. homeland—always with plausible deniability of course. Alternatively, but with a similar result, could we imagine that Moscow and Tehran could collude to direct other Islamic-inspired (i.e. non-Salafi Jihadists) terrorist networks to wreak havoc on the U.S. homeland out of mutual interests to asymmetrically punish the United States?

In conclusion, I am virtually certain that the problems in the Northern Caucasus to some degree have already increased the threat to the U.S. homeland. Although we do not know or understand everything that transpired between the act of the Tsarnaev brothers to set off the bomb at the Boston marathon a year ago and their links and interactions with groups and individuals in the Northern Caucasus, for me this terrorist act indisputably demonstrated that in some form what is going on in the Northern Caucasus increases the overall threat assessment for the United States. The confluence of the on-going Syrian imbroglio, the Iranian nuclear problem, and the dramatic worsening in U.S.-Russia relations that has no end in sight is certainly increasing the threat to the United States. There are clear links from the problems in the Northern Caucasus to this threat—but they are not the only reason that Russia's position could very significantly increase the threat to the U.S. homeland.

This brings me to my final point that revolves around the psychology and potential intentions of Vladimir Putin and, more ominously, those around him who may have much darker motivations and intentions. Mr. Putin has been underestimated by Russian as well as foreign elites, virtually always to their regret, since he emerged on Russia's national political stage in 1999. Undoubtedly, this is a phenomenon that he has encountered and manipulated to his benefit since his youth. Americans, but not only Americans, have also deeply underestimated the national psychological trauma that the collapse of the Soviet Union constituted for Vladimir Putin and tens of millions of other Russians. We need to conceptualize the Russian Federation as continuing to endure something akin to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Mr. Putin resonates so well with the majority of Russians because he taps directly into this rich psychological vein. I do not pretend to know much about psychology, but I do know that if PTSD is not treated its symptoms get worse, not better, over time. As a starting point, I would recommend to our President to refrain from publicly taunting Mr. Putin (as he did in Brussels last week), and caution other American politicians and officials from doing the same. I would also recommend that the President and other officials refrain from revealing in public to Mr. Putin and others around the world what are our deepest fears that keep us up at night. In addition, I urge all to carefully read the speech Mr. Putin gave to the Federal Assembly<sup>2</sup> on March 18 because it is possible that historians in the future may mark that moment as the tipping point of Weimar Russia into a fascist state.

Mr. KING. On that encouraging note—

Mr. KUCHINS. Yes!

Mr. KING [continuing]. Thank you. Thank you, Dr. Kuchins, for your testimony.

Mr. KUCHINS. There is the bad news.

Mr. KING. In view of the schedule, I think we will have a chance to get through most of the hearing. When you are talking about the terrorist jihadist network in the Caucasus, are there any ethnic or geographic differences which would split them? Or does the Islamist theology, or dogma, unite them?

Mr. HAHN. Yes, okay. It is a complicated story. There was a split in August 2010 involving the majority of the Chechen emirs from Emir Umarov and the rest of the Caucasus Emirate. However, it was not based on ethnicity, per se, and it was certainly not based on any rejection of the Salafist takfir's goal of creating the caliphate, as the splitters themselves stated explicitly. It was more a result, I believe, of competition between the different networks, right?

So if you have a—the Chechen network is based on the Chechen Republic, the Dagestani network is based on the Dagestani Republic. The Dagestanis were on the rise in terms of the number of attacks and becoming more prominent. The kadhi, the Sharia court judge of the Caucasus Emirate was a Dagestani. So there was a certain sense among the Chechens that they were getting—they were moving on to this—they were being pushed aside, essentially, within the movement. That is what drove it.

So in the—so there is not really inter-ethnic tensions, per se. There is tension between networks. The overriding ideology is anti-ethnic; that is, they don't believe—it is sort of like the communist ideology, right? They don't believe in ethno-national compartments, right? They believe in an overriding ideology that unites all Muslims. So if you—assuming that your Islamic faith complies with their view of Islamic faith. So ethnicity is something to be put on the second plane.

<sup>2</sup>Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," *Kremlin.ru*, March 18, 2014, accessed March 29, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/6889>.

Mr. KING. Okay. Mr. Roggio.

Mr. ROGGIO. Yes, I agree with what Dr. Hahn had said. I think their ideology ultimately resolved that dispute, that split that existed in 2010. To amplify the point that he made that they look to be inclusive, they even have recently stated, with the Russian invasion of the Crimea, that they were permitting any jihadists in the Crimea to fight alongside—if any—if fighting did begin against a Russian occupation, they permitted fighters to join alongside what they would consider to be secular fighters in order to punish the Russians.

So they are—I think we are seeing this in Syria, as well, the al-Qaeda. They are trying to be a little bit more inclusive. I—that doesn't make them more moderate. It only makes them more dangerous.

Mr. KING. Dr. Kuchins.

Mr. KUCHINS [continuing]. The vast majority of Muslims in the Northern Caucasus, and the Russian Federation at large, of course, are not global jihadists. There is, I think however, quite serious ethnic or national competition, to some extent—that is maybe not the right way to phrase it—amongst different strains of Muslim thought. I mean, in Dagestan, for sure, you have the—probably the oldest and the deepest and the most sort-of serious school, I think, of Islam within the Northern Caucasus.

If you go back historically to elsewhere in the Russian Federation, you go to the Volga region—to Tartarstan, Bashkidistan—they also have extremely rich and deep tradition in their interpretation of the Koran and Muslim practices. In other places, Chechnya and the, you know, the understanding of the Koran would be considered, I think, by many serious scholars, of which I am not of this, quite superficial and, you know, sort of less significant in ways.

Not significant—not less significant for the purposes of global jihad, but sort of in the pantheon of comparative Muslim religious life.

Mr. HAHN. Can I just qualify one thing I said in my remarks?

Mr. KING. Sure.

Mr. HAHN. That split that I mentioned actually was overcome, right? These Chechen emirs returned to the Caucasus Emirate, and that is evidence in and of itself that they didn't reject the global jihadi goals of the Caucasus Emirate.

Mr. KING. My time is almost expiring. Could each of you give a brief answer, if possible, as to why IK or any of the other groups was not successful in attacking the Olympics?

Mr. HAHN. I can outline three reasons, basically. One potential reason is, depending on the timing, it was the death of Umarov. Because he basically controlled a group called the Riyad us-Saliheyh Martyrs Brigade that would have carried out suicide bombings to attack Sochi or around Sochi or some—at the time of Sochi. The other was very intensified counterterrorist operations in which, of course, the Russians, as usual, violated human civil rights on occasion.

But they also targeted the correct spot, and that was Buinaksk in Dagestan where there was a very dangerous cell involving ethnic Russians who had become mujahedin. Third was the exodus of fighters to Syria—the most capable, the most fervent, fighters,

mujahedin and Caucasus Emirate—because of the lack of capacity and the repression in the North Caucasus are leaving Syria, where they can operate more openly and more effectively.

Mr. KING. Mr. Roggio.

Mr. ROGGIO. Yes, I think the—one, the Russians laid down a significant security blanket, that was quite effective and multilayered, limited their capacity to conduct attacks. Second, I agree with Dr. Hahn. I think the exodus of fighters from the region to Syria certainly took—you know, it limited their capacity to focus and conduct attacks.

Mr. KING. Dr. Kuchins.

Mr. KUCHINS. I would agree with what Gordon and Bill just said. The honest answer, though, is that I was surprised that there wasn't an attack, either in Sochi itself or somewhere, elsewhere in the Russian Federation, particularly after the two successful attacks in Volgograd in late December. So it appears that they decided to keep their powder dry. The problem is not going away.

Certainly, the most recent act by Russia in Crimea and the Crimea—there, for the Crimean Tartars is only gonna add more fuel to their furor. They are going to—they are gonna come back. The problem is not going away.

Mr. KING. The Ranking Member, Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, I have often heard Vladimir Putin characterized as being more tactical than he is strategic. He seems to be appealing to Russian nationalist aspirations to somehow reconcile the collapse of the Soviet Union. Dr. Kuchins, you had indicated that the Obama administration underestimates Caucasus Emirate as a factor in Putin's involvement or support in Syria. Can you collaborate on that?

Mr. KUCHINS. I have been struck, over the past 3 years—particularly if you go back to the reactions to the administration or our former ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—to their surprise that the Russians did not vote with us on the sanctions against Syria in the the U.N. Security Council. I am mystified as to why they were surprised. There should have been—there was no indication whatsoever that the Russians would ever vote with us on sanctions against Syria.

But what really struck me subsequently was the way we, they, kind-of castigated the Russian position in moral terms, in some kind of moral degradation. I think rather than trying to look a little bit more seriously into the substantive reasons as to why the Russians have not been with us on Syria. For me, if you look at them, I don't find it very difficult to come up with a series of reasons that make pretty good sense in the Russian context, in the Russian context of their interest, and they are not simply about just blocking the United States' interests.

They're not even—certainly, the desire to prevent, you know, military regime change is an important factor for the Russians. But even that, I think, is not right at the heart of the matter. We could never answer to the Russians, effectively, what would happen if Mr. Assad goes? Can you explain to me why it would be more stable in the region if Mr. Assad goes? That was the question from the Russians, and I don't think that we could ever give them a satisfactory answer.

Then subsequently, when the Russians see what happened in Egypt, when they see what happened when they saw what happened in Libya, it only confirmed what were their preconceptions going in that this Arab Spring and this wave of democratization in the Middle East would result in greater instability and danger.

Mr. HIGGINS. But, you know, it seems—there was a debate 6 months ago here about authorizing the administration to use military force in Syria if they determined that was necessary. I think a lot of the concern at that point was, you know, this was really not, in Syria, a fight for freedom and democracy. It was really a fight for power. In that part of the world, which is highly pluralistic—you know, minorities are aligning themselves with Assad for one reason, survival.

Because, you know, in that part of the world if you are not on top you get slaughtered. You know, the one thing that wasn't coming from the administration at that time, they were trying to use 100,000 people being killed because of chemical weapons in Syria. Well, the opposition, the best fighters—and I think it has been identified here—were all al-Qaeda affiliates, including the Caucasus Emirate. You know, they were beheading people. So you can choose your own demise, I guess.

But, you know, this is what makes that situation, I think, the larger situation in that part of the world complicated. To find the right entry point if, in fact, there ought to be one. Because, you know, a great book by Marwa Mawasher, "The Second Era of Awakening," he argues this, that without pluralism in the Middle East, in that region, you are never gonna have peace and stability. Because it is not, again, a fight for freedom or democracy, regardless of what these revolutions, you know, express to be their objective. What you really have is minorities afraid that, you know, if Assad goes they will be next to be attacked.

Because, as we know, Syria is about 75 percent Sunni, and Sunnis take control. This is the problem that we have made in Iraq. You know, Nouri al-Maliki is pushing Americans away 5 years ago, saying, "Well, we have other allies in the region." He was talking about Ahmadinejad in Iran. Then, because of his failure to embrace the Sunni population, he has got a Sunni problem, he has got an al-Qaeda problem. So now he is back to the United States, saying, "We need financing for our arms because we have to fight this problem."

Who caused the problem? You did. I think that, you know, permeates throughout the Middle East. I just think this is another iteration of the manifestation of that inability to embrace minorities. To convey to them, you know, life ain't great but we are not gonna slaughter you. That is a big problem here.

I yield back.

Mr. KING. The gentlelady from Texas is recognized.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Let me thank both the Chairman and the Ranking Member for their courtesies in this committee. I sit on the full committee and serve on another committee, but this is a crucial moment in our history.

Let me just go to Dr. Hahn very quickly. You mentioned Azerbaijan. I just want to know if—Azerbaijan is leaning as far as they can, in my belief—these are my words—toward Europe. What are

you saying about the terrorist presence, Chechen presence, in Azerbaijan? Or is it on the border, or—because don't you think that they are certainly a bright light in the region? Dr. Hahn.

Mr. HAHN. One of the problems is that Azerbaijan is a transit route for some of the mujahedin going from the North Caucasus to Syria and back. Since they are predominantly Sunnis, and they are fighting the Shiites in Syria, there is a possibility, certainly, that they would try to carry out attacks against Shia-dominated Azerbaijan. Also, in the past there was—

Ms. JACKSON LEE. In their travels going through, but not that Azerbaijan would be coddling any of—

Mr. HAHN. No, no, no, no. No, I didn't mean to say that. The other issue is that there have been incursions from the north, from Dagestan into Azerbaijan, by Caucasus Emirate mujahedin. The other issue is that there was a Dagestani plot, Dagestanis from the Caucasus Emirate, to attack the Eurovision games in Baku in 2012. It was a Mumbai—the plot was a Mumbai-style plot in which they were gonna try to assassinate the president, they were gonna try to attack the Eurovision music festival, bomb a couple of hotels, then retreat from the capitol and then set up an insurgency in the mountains.

That was uncovered in spring and summer 2012. So there is a Sunni—there has been a pattern of a potential Sunni threat to Azerbaijan.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Well, they are in the region.

Mr. HAHN. Right.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. They remain under threat. Let me move quickly, because of the time—and thank you very much.

Mr. Roggins, as I note, the North Caucasus do not have a dominant ethnic Russian. There is a multiple ethnicities there. Are they in the line of Russia's eyesight? Are they in a position to fend Russia off, because there is not a dominant political body that wants to associate with Russia? How will Russia—how do you perceive that playing out? Rebel fights or terrorist fights? Russia leaving them alone? Russia wanting them to go away? How do you perceive that?

Mr. ROGGIO. Well, currently the Caucasus Emirates really is the only opposition to the Russians. The rest of the—Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, they are Russian republics with their governments. The fight in Chechnya really was the insurrection there, and that has largely been put down and just replaced by the Caucasus Emirates current jihad against the Soviet regime. I am sorry, the Russian regime.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. So it is a standoff in that—

Mr. ROGGIO. Yes. You know, look, this has been going on for years. It has been ebb-and-flows. Right now, the Russians seem to have the upper hand. But as we have seen, they have declared the Caucasus Emirates dead, or their predecessors dead in the past. They have come back and regenerated their forces. Conducted attacks even inside Moscow. You know, so it is an ebb-and-flow, but this is a persistent group with an ideology that appeals to a certain segment of the population and it is not going away.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you.

Is it Mr. Kuchins?

Mr. KUCHINS. Kuchins.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Kuchins. Thank you very much. Well, there is a lot that I want to ask you. But let me just quickly say, as I looked at the comments that the President made—might I take issue a little bit with taunting—I think it was the President who gave a little leeway for Putin in terms of making negative comments prior to the interaction on Ukraine just in trying to keep relationships. I think if it was anything, the President gets criticized for either not being strong or being strong.

Putin has brought his problems on himself. We didn't contribute to Soviet Union's demise. The people rose up and the Cold War ended and independent-minded individuals decided to move into their own sovereign nation. So the question for us, for Putin, is whether or not he will live in the world order. Which is we have sovereign nations and we don't necessarily take well to people invading other countries. Which is Ukraine, and Crimea which is associated with Ukraine.

My question to you, then, is Russia has its own share—affairs on terrorism, either inside the country or around its borders. Isn't that a full plate for it to then be engaged in a full-scale war with the West? When I say that, through promoting or coddling terrorists so that they can launch from Russia. Their own people are under threat, their own people are not stable. If we continue the sanctions, if they continue to look as if they are gonna move 40,000 to 80,000 troops into Ukraine, I can't imagine that a combination of Western minds—European Union, the NATO coalition—is not going to have to find a way to be very strong with it if it starts with sanctions.

Mr. KUCHINS. The challenge that we face, and particularly our President faces, I think, is really trying to understand the mind of Vladimir Putin and the calculations and the framework that he has. They are very, very, very different. I think if we look at Russian history, Russians have shown a remarkable capacity to endure incredible economic hardship and deprivation. To do things that we would consider absolutely inconceivable because of the hardship that they would entail for things that have been decided that, you know, are to achieve the greater good.

So we have to be very cautious in applying, I think, our mindset on Mr. Putin and his elite. The second thing, and this is what has been very, very disappointing to me in the United States' response to Crimea, is that I think there has been a deep mismatch in rhetoric and action. It began on the very first day, on February 28. It really simply hasn't been, it hasn't been corrected effectively. I am afraid that we may—"we," the United States of America—our leadership may not understand, I think, the magnitude of the danger that Mr. Putin potentially could present.

You know, just for example, there was an opportunity last—2 weeks ago in Brussels, where the President made a speech. That was to be the speech that was gonna be the—kind of the hallmark of the trip. I can't tell you how disappointed I was personally with the speech. Because the speech was all about ideals, platitudes, values kind-of at 30,000 feet. There was not one thing said about what the United States and the Europeans can, should, will do to support Ukrainian sovereignty.

So I completely agree with you that we have to focus like a laser beam on supporting Ukrainian sovereignty. For the Ukrainians and Kiev, and around the country, who have no interest in joining the Russian Federation, I am sure when they heard that speech they cried. When they read it in Moscow they laughed. We have—if we create this perception, too-permissible of an atmosphere, Putin is gonna further make a deep, deep, deep, miscalculation. I think he is making miscalculations, and ultimately—to put in vernacular terms, “screwing himself over.”

But it is the collateral damage that he could cause in doing so. The Soviet Union and Mr. Gorbachev went out with a whimper. I don’t see that happening with this guy. There is no question in my mind that whether he invades Eastern Ukraine or not, I mean, whatever he and the Russians are doing it is ultimately at the goal of depriving Ukraine of its sovereignty. Fundamentally depriving Ukraine of its sovereignty, that is the goal.

That goal is not gonna stop. He is going to be relentless about it. He is gonna use every possible trick in the KGB Russian—

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Kitchen.

Mr. KUCHINS [continuing]. Historical—to pursue that. So frankly, I would actually like to see—to me, what the strength right now is to showing, not showing but doing, providing Ukrainians the capability—and they have shown a remarkable lack of capability over the last 10 years themselves. They have created the problem themselves because of their dysfunctional governance, the total failure of the Orange Revolution 10 years ago, unfortunately.

Hopefully, you know, as Samuel Johnson said about the imminence of the beheading will focus the mind. That Ukrainian elites will realize that, literally, their independence and their sovereignty is at stake if they don’t get it together. But they need help on this, from us on that. The change, the calculation, in Mr. Putin’s mind that we and the Europeans are not gonna roll over. There is nothing Mr. Putin would like to do better than to expose the Transatlantic Alliance as a complete sham.

There is nothing Mr. Putin would like to do more, and it is all there in that March 18 speech, to basically undo the covenants, the agreements of the post-Cold War order. Because in his view and the views of the people around him they are unfair, they are unjust to Russia. They took advantage of Russia’s weakness, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Dr. Kuchins.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I yield back to the gentleman. Thank you.

Mr. KING. Time is running down on the vote. I have one question for Dr. Hahn, if I could. If you would try to limit your answer to about 90 seconds, and then any written supplement you want to provide would be greatly appreciated.

In your testimony you mention that the new emir seems to be more aggressive as far as a global jihad. Then we have the factor of more and more people from the Caucasus going to Syria. As far as a threat to the United States, the homeland, are there any red flags we should be looking for? Is there anything that you would look out there as a warning signal to us that we should be on the lookout over the next 6 months, year, 2 years?

Mr. HAHN. Well, if the emir or someone close to him started to emphasize the United States more in his rhetoric that would be one signal. I think most of these things are gonna be hard to identify. It is gonna be—you know, it is gonna be North Caucasus mujahedin getting involved in the kind of camps that Bill—William Roggio described previously. Because we have had this report of al-Qaeda, right, planning to set up camps specifically in Syria for the purpose of attacking the United States in Syria.

So it is really indirect. It is the threat from the Caucasus Emirate is—for the present is indirect in that it is part of the global jihadi revolutionary movement. So it is very much likely to be involved in any plots organized through Syria by al-Qaeda or other groups. Because they are gonna try to have an international flavor to any plot. A good model might be the 2000 plot to hijack a plane in Frankfurt, where the plan was to have a Pakistani, I believe an Arab of some nationality, and a Chechen.

The Chechens eventually pulled out of that plot, and it never came off. So I think we are gonna see that kind of a model more in the global jihad.

Mr. KING. Time is running down to vote. If either of you would want to add to that, Mr. Roggio, Dr. Kuchins?

Mr. ROGGIO. Just real quick. Yes. Yes, sir. Thank you. Real quick, the camps. One of the key things, this has been al-Qaeda historically has done this. They use those camps to train for the local jihad, and they siphon off a small amount to conduct it—what they call its “external operations.” The question is—is al-Qaeda interested in that right now to conduct attacks on the U.S. homeland or U.S. interests abroad? Or are they interested in focusing all their efforts in—because they are being quite successful in their local insurgencies in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Mali, et cetera.

That is what we don’t know right now. But the fact that this camp run by the Caucasus Emirates was disclosed, two other camps run by the al-Nusra Front, which is al-Qaeda’s official affiliate. They are in action and they look just like the videos you used to watch back in the 1990s of—you know, of al-Qaeda fighters going through the motions. That is really what disturbs me the most. I think we need to keep an eye on these camps that are out there and, perhaps, take some direct action if needed.

Mr. KING. Dr. Kuchins, we have about 30 seconds, then I have to—

Mr. KUCHINS. Well, the one major takeaway I took from the Boston bombing is that we really need to raise our awareness level and our monitoring level of, you know, what is happening in the Northern Caucasus and jihadists that we know are from the Northern Caucasus; where they are traveling, what they are doing. It is a level that we look at places like Yemen and other countries and regions. That we are at a higher kind of risk level for us. I think the Northern Caucasus needs to be at that higher level.

Mr. KING. Thank you, Doctor. Let me thank all the witnesses. Also thank you for accommodating us with the compressed schedule today.

Unfortunately, the vote schedule was different from what we thought it was going to be. But, again, you managed to get an

awful lot in. If you have any other thoughts you want to give us, believe me we would look forward to it. I want to thank you for your testimony today, for your cooperation. I also thank the Ranking Member for his cooperation in holding this hearing.

So thank you very much. With that, the meeting stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:01 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

