

# The North Caucasus: Russian Roulette on Europe's Borders

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On Monday, 29 March 2010, the world was reminded that the Russian Federation still has an insurgency and terrorist threat in its southern territories. On the busy rush hour morning, female suicide bombers detonated bombs in two Moscow subway stations, killing 39 people and injuring 100. Ten years into the twenty-first century and on the territory of a nation just 20 years ago considered one of the two superpowers, the North Caucasus resembles Afghanistan and the tribal areas of Pakistan more than the southeastern fringes of Europe. Russian analysts warn that Russia “is losing” the North Caucasus and cite a growing threat from Islamic fundamentalists.<sup>1</sup> This mountainous, ethnically diverse, and impoverished region harbors many of the same dangers that the West fears in other un- or under-governed areas: a refuge for terrorists, ethnic clashes, and spillover of violence to other regions. Unlike most of those other areas, the North Caucasus is developing major hydrocarbon resources, is crossed by oil and gas pipelines supplying Europe, and borders NATO and European Union aspirant countries. Ethnic groups are spread across the borders of the Russian North Caucasus into the independent states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

The North Caucasus came into international consciousness during the two Russian-Chechen wars of the mid-1990s and early 2000s, but interest faded as then-President Vladimir Putin's public relations efforts succeeded in convincing the world that Chechnya had been calmed. The capital, Grozny, razed and ruined by Russian bombing, has been replaced by a shining, newly rebuilt city, under the control of the Kremlin-anointed former militant Ramzan Kadyrov. A low-level insurgency continued, however, in the neighboring republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia. Well-known

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journalists and human-rights activists reporting on the region have been murdered. During the past year, the frequency and lethality of the attacks seem to be on the rise with near daily assaults on local government officials. New violence has erupted in Chechnya as well, suggesting that the Kadyrov solution is unraveling. Although Russia had not experienced large-scale terrorist acts since the Beslan incident of September 2004, the jihadist Doku Umarov claimed responsibility for the attacks on the Moscow-St. Petersburg rail line in November 2009 and the Moscow subway in March 2010.

The intensity of the violence apparently has made clear to the Kremlin that its North Caucasus policy has not been successful. In the summer of 2009, President Dmitriy Medvedev visited the region and subsequently made a number of pronouncements and new appointments signaling renewed attention to the security situation.

The time has come for the United States and European allies to turn their attention to the region. If the violence is indeed caused by a rising radical Islamic movement, it poses a potential threat to the United States. In the immediate aftermath of the subway bombings, Russian officials speculated that the perpetrators were connected to al Qaeda. An insurgent North Caucasus can further complicate the complex Georgia-Russia-US relationship, threaten European energy security, and menace the 2014 Winter Olympics. A weakened, preoccupied Russia probably will be a more reluctant partner when dealing with global problems and also, as recent past experience has shown, more likely to escalate its slide from democracy into authoritarianism.

### ***Escalating Violence***

Though Chechnya never became entirely pacified following the second Chechen War, the reign of Ramzan Kadyrov ushered in a period of relative calm. After a no-holds-barred military approach to defeating the separatist movement, the Kremlin adopted “Chechnization.” Moscow selected a former resistance supporter, mufti Ahmad Kadyrov, to lead the republic. Elected in 2004, he was assassinated shortly afterward. His son, also a former separatist fighter, took over first in practice, then in 2007 was appointed president when he reached legal age to hold the office. Central authorities channeled funds to the republic through Kadyrov, enabling him to buy support and reward his own supporters. These resources were not necessarily used to increase the general population’s standard of living. The restored modern face of the capital, Grozny, which had been leveled during the war, belied a still war-torn, impoverished countryside. Kadyrov has received a relatively free hand to run Chechnya as his own fiefdom in

exchange for his loyalty to the Kremlin and maintaining a level of calm. This approach is in marked contrast to the recentralization and vertical axis of power that Putin has imposed on the rest of Russia. Whereas other subjects of the federation have had to align their laws with those of the national government, Kadyrov has introduced some aspects of sharia law.

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***Russian analysts warn that Russia “is losing” the North Caucasus.***

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In April 2009, Moscow announced the end of counterterrorist operations in Chechnya, but subsequently terrorist acts and other violence increased. Incidents such as the February 2010 gun battle that resulted in the deaths of five members of the Russian special forces and six militants are not uncommon. Across the North Caucasus, 2009 saw a spike in violence, which did not slacken during the winter. According to Russian official data, terrorist acts jumped 30 percent in 2009.<sup>2</sup> The Center for Strategic and International Studies, which has tracked violence in the North Caucasus since January 2004, calls the summer of 2009 “especially violent, with July the bloodiest in years.” It notes 462 violent incidents that summer (May through August) compared to 265 in the corresponding period of 2008.<sup>3</sup>

Local authorities have been the main target of terrorism. The trend continued in 2010 with the 8 February fatal shooting of the chief of police in Dagestan’s capital, Makhachkala. In July 2009, an assassination attempt on the newly appointed president of the Ingush republic, Yunus bek-Yevkurov, left him out of action for months. *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, the Internet newspaper affiliated with the human-rights organization Memorial, monitored violent events in Ingushetia<sup>4</sup> and Dagestan.<sup>5</sup> The incidents include the killings of the Minister of the Interior of Dagestan, regional administrators, relatives of mayors, members of the procuracy, deputy mufti, and an odd target, the head of a children’s dance troupe in Ingushetia. “In Ingushetia every day someone was killed.”<sup>6</sup>

Human-rights activists and reporters were among the high-profile victims of the past year’s violence. Human-rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov was killed in Moscow in January 2009. In July, an activist with Memorial, Natalia Estemirova, was gunned down in Grozny; in August, two workers with the apolitical “Save the Generation,” Zarema Sadulaeva and Alik Dzhabrailov, were assassinated in Grozny. As was terrifyingly clear with the October 2006 Moscow killing of the courageous journalist and passionate defender of Chechen rights, Anna Politkovskaya, journalists who dare to be outspoken about the North Caucasus put their lives at risk. Journalist

victims included Malik Akhmedilov, killed in Makhachkala in August 2009, and Anastia Baburova, like Politkovskaya also from *Novaya Gazeta*.

### ***The Wild Caucasus***

Ethnically diverse, tribal, mountainous, and rebellious are clichés used to describe the North Caucasus and explain its violent nature. While these traits are broadly reflective of the people of the region, the policies that the tsars, Soviet Union, and Russian Federation have pursued toward this area exacerbated or created new catalysts for violence. For the most part, the populace of the Caucasus resisted incorporation into the Russian empire but at times turned to Russia for protection against other aggressive neighbors. Their history was not one of a relentless battle of the Russian Christians against Islamic tribes. The story is one of a quest for territory and a buffer state, not for “hearts and minds.” Islam has been used as a rallying cry for rebellion; the imam Shamil and his predecessors in the early nineteenth century created an “imamate,” or jihad-oriented state, which fought the Russians until his defeat in 1859. The campaign inspired late twentieth century Dagestanis and Chechens to have similar aspirations.<sup>7</sup> At the risk of oversimplifying a complex, multi-textured issue, the traditional Islam practiced by the majority of the North Caucasus is mystical, local rather than global in orientation, and influenced by folk traditions. To what extent a more fundamentalist trend is gaining influence and motivating recent terrorist acts is an issue of current debate, examined later in this article.

A yearning for ethnically based nationhood has not been the motive behind most uprisings, with the prominent exception of the two Chechen wars. Chechnya is distinct from neighboring republics due to its greater ethnic homogeneity and because it poses the theoretical possibility of viable statehood. Otherwise, the North Caucasus is unlike Yugoslavia in 1990. Most of the republics are content to remain within the structure of the Russian Federation in exchange for increased autonomy. The multitude of small ethnic groups spread across republic (and even national) boundaries does not lend itself easily to the pursuit of national self-determination. The traditional village or clan form of government is also not conducive to nationalism. Indeed, the geographically based Dagestani jamaats cross ethnic lines and serve to ameliorate ethnic friction. Furthermore, the Soviets drew republic boundaries that persist today so as to disperse ethnic groups; a case in point is that of the republics of Kabardino-Balkharia and Karachai-Cherkessia. In both republics the titular ethnic groups are not related to each other but to a counterpart in the other, e.g., the Karachai and Balkars are ethnically close, as are the Karbardins and Cherkess.<sup>8</sup>

This condition does not mean that a history of or potential for ethnically based strife is absent. In fact, the ethnic chessboard management that the Soviets applied in the region to try to forestall rebellion often created conditions for later conflict. New grievances arose as well. Balkars, Kumyks, Laks, and Circassian demonstrated in 2009 protesting perceived ethnic-based injustices resulting from elections, appointments, reforms, and corruption.<sup>9</sup> The 14 March 2010 killing of Circassian activist Aslan Zhukov has reignited calls for an autonomous Circassian republic within the Russian Federation; Circassians are a minority in Karachai-Cherkessia as a result of the deliberate republic border arrangement previously noted. Furthermore, members of the Circassian diaspora have protested against the holding of the Olympic games in Sochi at locations where their nineteenth-century ancestors were murdered by tsarist forces.

Somewhat reminiscent of the Great Powers approach to Afghanistan, the tsars and their Soviet and Russian Federation successors regarded the North Caucasus as a buffer between the heart of the motherland and hostile neighbors, not as a region to be incorporated into the fabric of the nation. The tsars ruled the Caucasus under the “popular-military” regime, controlling and russifying the cities but leaving the villages largely to administer themselves in traditional ways. The tsars also began mass deportations of ethnic groups, a practice which Stalin later used to terrifying effect. Though many aspects of Caucasian life have been incorporated into Russian popular culture—foods, wedding feasts, movies—ethnic Russians and other Slavs generally look upon the peoples of the region as not “nashi” (ours). The relative indifference of the Russian population to the brutal war in Chechnya reflects this tendency to not see the region as really part of Russia.

North Caucasian Muslims initially greeted with enthusiasm the arrival of the Bolsheviks and their promise of more autonomy. After the initial positive outreach, however, the Bolsheviks resorted to brutal sovietization. Profoundly suspicious of others, Stalin (though a man of the Caucasus himself) intensified the level of suppression through mass deportations of the Karachai, Ingush, Chechen, and Balkar peoples in 1943-44. More than 500,000 Karachai, Chechens, Ingush, and Balkars, and in less numbers Kumyks, Laks, and Avars, were deported to Siberia and Central Asia. The Chechens made up the largest group with nearly 390,000 deported. Dissolution of regional territorial groups and dispersion of the land to bordering regions followed the deportations. Other ethnic groups were resettled on the vacated lands, including the forcible resettlement of North Ossetians in the Prigorodniy district of the former Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic.<sup>10</sup>

In 1957, when the deportees were allowed to return home, they found their former properties inhabited by other people. Although some regions were returned to former republics and the Chechen-Ingush republic restored, the problem was not resolved. During perestroika, an attempt to address these injustices was made in the 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples, but it fell far short of needs. Indeed, one of the worst outbreaks of interethnic violence occurred in 1992 as a result of the land problem. Ossetian refugees from the war between South Ossetia and Georgia settled in the Prigorodny region, furthering the tensions between Ossetians and Ingush caused by the earlier settlement of Ossetians in that area.<sup>11</sup> Other developments in that volatile time combined to create a full-blown conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Perestroika and the first years following the collapse of the Soviet Union generated hope for a new beginning for the North Caucasus. Mosques and religious centers flourished as the Islamic religion, suppressed as much or more than other faiths during communism, was allowed to revive. Political life, including Islamic-based political parties, was vibrant. As the failed rehabilitation law shows, however, reality did not live up to the promise, and old and new problems erupted into violence. The brutal execution of the first Chechen war, Chechnya's failure to create a viable government, and the equally brutal second war destroyed all hope that the North Caucasus could be "normal." The Kremlin's "victory" in the war removed the immediate threat of Russia's further disintegration; it also created many of the preconditions for the most recent upsurge in violence by building a store of resentment and fodder for revenge. Under Khadyrov's rule, violence has become the norm for settling conflicts, as have egregious human-rights violations, including punitive house burning.<sup>13</sup> A British parliamentary fact-finding mission to Chechnya in February 2010 compared the current situation to that of Guatemala and El Salvador in the late 1980s.<sup>14</sup>

Local authorities' attitude toward practicing Muslims has further intensified societal tensions, adding to the climate of fear and hatred. In 1999, the Dagestan parliament outlawed Wahhabism, as Salafism, or fundamental Islam, is known in Russia. This legislation provided the pretext for seizing materials or even people that are deemed in the slightest way suspicious. Memorial Human Rights Center details thousands of cases of disappearances and forced abductions, as well other forms of torture and abuse.<sup>15</sup>

The "verticality of power," or centralization, that Putin instituted in Russia has arguably hindered the resolution of local issues by turning the attention of governing authorities away from the populace and toward the Kremlin. In reaction to the Beslan terrorist incident of 2004, Putin

institutionalized what had already become the case in practice of appointing regional governors. The Kremlin's ouster in 2001 of locally based and popular Ruslan Aushev and the blatantly Kremlin-manipulated election of Murat Zyazikov, former general in the Federal Security Services, as governor of Ingushetia the following year undoubtedly contributed to the sharply deteriorating security situation in that republic. A low-level but constant insurgency gained force as the weak and hated Zyazikov relied on force to rule. Finally, in late 2008, Moscow replaced Zyazikov with the more moderate Yanus bek-Yevkurov, but the change might have come too late. Yevkurov himself was severely wounded in an assassination attempt in June 2009 and unable to govern for several months. In Dagestan, recentralization forced dismantling of the representative political system developed in 1994 to divide power among its multitude of ethnic groups.<sup>16</sup>

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Which of the many factors discussed in this article is behind the recent upsurge in violence? Of particular relevance to western security is whether, and to what extent, radical Islam is the motivating force, and if so, are there linkages to al Qaeda? Pundits, academics, and Russian politicians disagree on the extent of the fundamentalist threat. Experts affiliated with the Moscow Center of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, most notably the well-known specialist on Islam and the North Caucasus, Aleksey Malashenko, attribute the terrorist acts to the growing popularity of radical Salafi/Wahhabism. As evidence, they cite the attacks on religious leaders and Muslims engaged in such unpure activities as casino ownership, jihadist Web sites, and development of networks of radical "jamaats." While the first Chechen war concerned separatism, the second is generally believed to have assumed a broader jihadist goal. Since then, Chechen militants have exported their mission to neighboring republics, facilitated by the presence of Chechen refugees in Ingushetia. In 2007, Chechen militant leader Doku Umarov proclaimed a North Caucasus caliphate and in August 2009 announced a change in targets from the North Caucasus to Russia's industry and infrastructure. In November 2009, his militant group, Riyadus-Salikhyyin, claimed responsibility for the bombing of the St. Petersburg-Moscow train line and a hydroelectric dam accident in Siberia the same day. During the past decade younger, well-educated leadership has emerged, such as Amir Sayfullah (Anzar Astemirov) of Kabardin Balkharia, who was apparently behind the 2005 attacks on security forces buildings in Nalchik.<sup>17</sup>

The underlying conditions that are generally considered to give rise to radicalism elsewhere are prevalent in the North Caucasus. Poverty levels are much higher than in the rest of the Russian Federation. Unemployment, especially among young men, is staggering, up to 50 to 75 percent according to some statistics. Symptomatic of the state of infrastructure is the incident in late January in Makhachkala in which residents were without heat or hot water for more than five days, sparking protests. As elsewhere, youth turn to a fundamentalist religion to find purpose in an atmosphere of social turmoil following the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent violence and unrest. Moreover, the traditional Muslim leadership is widely regarded as a tool of first the Soviet, and now Russian, government. This leadership is further discredited by their limited religious education during Soviet times, when such training was suppressed. Indeed, the lack of religious education under the Soviets left a void that was in part filled by Saudi and other donors who tended to follow a fundamentalist, Wahhabi/Salafi line. Brutal treatment at the hands of local authorities and other human-rights violations round out the list of reasons that youth of the region might be expected to turn to radicalism.

There is little knowledge, however, regarding the typical North Caucasian young person's concerns and aspirations. One of the few reputable surveys of popular attitudes in the North Caucasus is Theodore Gerber and Sarah Mendelson's 2006 study, conducted by Russia's Levada Institute. They found that economics is the chief concern among the target group, not religion, ethnicity, politics, or separatism. Gerber and Mendelson's findings were not much different from similar studies in other regions of the Russian Federation. They did discover, however, the possibility of exploitation of this concern by radicals with respect to another finding: interest in receiving outside aid and indifference to its origins. Furthermore, the researchers also noted growing antiwesternism among the population, which also lends itself to exploitation by fundamentalists.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, it can be argued that the potential for radicalism was greater earlier in the post-Soviet period when the influence of foreign Islamic elements was stronger. In the meantime, Russian forces have eliminated much of the radical leadership, such as Chechen leader Basayev in 2004, Sadilayev in 2006, possibly Sayfullah in 2009, and most recently Amir al-bari on 31 December 2009, the Egyptian Seyf-Islam in February 2010, and Said Buryatsky in March 2010.

Russian authorities, on the other hand, stress the role of organized crime in the violence. Indeed, prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, organized criminal groups originating in the North Caucasus operated



throughout Russia. In his February 2010 speech on police reform at the Interior Ministry, President Medvedev declared as a key challenge for the ministry “elimination of the criminal underground in the North Caucasus.” He further acknowledged that this step is “a prerequisite for economic development in the Caucasus.” A week later, Prosecutor General Yuriy Chaika criticized the level of corruption in the region’s law-enforcement agencies and called for elimination of the criminal underground and trafficking in narcotics and weapons. Attacks on law-enforcement officials, such as the February assassination of the republic police chief in Makhachkala, are consistent with organized crime-related activity and reminiscent of Russian organized crime in the 1990s.

### ***The Kremlin’s Administrative Solution***

In his 12 November 2009 state of the nation address to the Russian Parliament, President Medvedev declared the North Caucasus “the most serious domestic political problem.” This emphasis signals a clear departure from the Putin line that the situation was basically resolved through the ending of the Chechen war, the rebuilding of Grozny, and the termination of counterterrorist operations. Moreover, Medvedev’s characterization of the problem as a “domestic” issue suggests a realization that it is fundamentally a Russian one. No longer is managing the Caucasus a matter of keeping it as a buffer against the evil outside. Using the state of the nation forum to make such a declaration is critical from a strategic communication angle; the “poslanniye,” a roughly annual address without a fixed timetable, is attentively awaited by pundits, diplomats, and other analysts as an indicator of Kremlin priorities.

Medvedev repeated the standard refrain on the need for more effective police and military action against terrorists. He also acknowledged, however, the importance of social and economic conditions and called for an end to corruption, including theft and misuse of federal development funds. “Unemployment and mass poverty in the Caucasus have reached alarming levels.... We need to develop entrepreneurship and to increase investment.”

The words are good, but the presidential plans for solving these problems are weak, at best. The government is ordered to draw up a list of investment projects; internships should be established for youth from the North Caucasus in major Russian universities; the cabinet is instructed to develop metrics for assessing effectiveness by 1 January. Seemingly drawing a page from the US Agency for International Development’s work plan, Medvedev announced support for a pan-Caucasian youth camp.

In his address, Medvedev foreshadowed the one concrete action that has been taken: “There has to be a single individual who will be personally responsible for the situation in the region.” In January, the Kremlin re-established a North Caucasus Federal District, splitting it from the Southern Federal District with which it had been combined earlier in the decade. Moscow named former Krasnoyarsk governor Alexander Khloponin as the presidential envoy for the region. The reason for the choice of Khloponin is consistent with Medvedev’s analysis of the North Caucasus problem; he is well-respected as an effective manager and successful in bringing investment to his region (Krai). In a move that underscores the importance Moscow attaches to this nomination and suggests there is no disagreement between Putin and Medvedev on the appointment, Khloponin was also named as deputy prime minister and thus will report to both the President and the Prime Minister. In his initial statements, Khloponin has echoed the President’s emphasis on economic development and fighting corruption. He even entertained the notion that Russia would welcome World Bank funding for projects in the North Caucasus.

In another sign of a potential broader awareness of the problems faced in the south and of the radical Islamic threat, in February 2010 the Russian Supreme Court declared Umarov’s Caucasus Emirate to be a terrorist organization, thus banning its activity in the Russian Federation. According to Russian scholar Sergey Markedonov, this declaration could signal a reorientation in Russian North Caucasus policy away from major reliance on law enforcement to one incorporating counterpropaganda techniques. He doubts, however, that Russian authorities are ready to undertake a major restructuring of their counterterrorism strategy. In June 2010, however, the Russians gave further indication that they might be receptive to a more holistic approach to the North Caucasus problem. For the first time the Russian Duma delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe approved a resolution critical of their nation’s policies toward the North Caucasus.<sup>19</sup>

The Kremlin also seems to be taking a more sophisticated approach to the appointment of regional leaders, without showing any intent to return to direct elections. The long-overdue replacement of Zyazikov was the most notable indication of an understanding that leadership should be responsive to the population. The choice of Magomedislam Magomedov in Dagestan reflects sensitivity to local interests—his father, Magomedali Magomedov, was the popular former head of the State Council of Dagestan—and interest in bringing in younger and better educated cadre. (Magomedov junior is 46 and a professor of economics.) Russian analysts, however, are skeptical that

he can make a significant difference in the largely dysfunctional republic. Moreover, Magomedov's ethnicity could be a factor in his ability to govern; he is a Dargin, the second-largest ethnic group in Dagestan, while his predecessor was an Avar, the most numerous group.

### ***Western Interests***

Except for some US assistance projects, sporadic public criticism of Russian human-rights violations in the North Caucasus, and exhortations to find and bring to trial the perpetrators of the attacks on human-rights activists and journalists, US and European policymakers have paid scant attention to the region since the first Chechen war. Developments in the past year that coincide with the surge in violence in the region should draw western attention to the North Caucasus. Foremost is the threat posed by the dispersion of highly networked terrorists aligned with al Qaeda throughout the world. Radical militants do not have to be numerous to be threatening, as long as they are allied with other groups; foreign terrorists do not have to be physically present in the North Caucasus to exert influence on the thinking and operations of those in the region. While at least at the present time the region's militants are unlikely to pose a direct threat to the United States, they could threaten America's western allies. North Caucasian radicals are reportedly in contact with Islamic terrorists in Western Europe.

Perhaps a more likely and more worrisome outcome of increased instability in the North Caucasus is a further deterioration in Russia's development into a modern democratic state. A Russia with a raging insurgency, or threatened by terrorist acts in its heartland, will be reluctant to participate in efforts to address global issues. The Kremlin consistently reacts to such internal threats with a heavy hand and increased authoritarian control. Prime Minister Putin's tough statements following the March subway bombings reinforce this tendency to match force with force. The West cannot ignore the potential for nuclear materials falling into the hands of Russian-based terrorists. Also of concern is the fact that oil and gas pipelines critical to European energy security cross the region.

While we view the Caucasus as neatly split into the independent nations of the south and the Russian-governed lands of the north, in fact it is one region, historically, culturally, and ethnically. Ethnic groups cross all borders. The August 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia is proof that tensions are still high. Given the interrelationship between the ethnic groups and the amount of attention North and South Caucasians pay to actions in each other's region, the potential for violence or instability to spread cannot be ruled out.

Finally, the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in the southernmost corner of Krasnodar Krai will bring the troubled Caucasus into the living rooms of the world. While not technically part of what is considered the North Caucasus, the province is adjacent to those republics. A North Caucasian domestic ethnic group, the Circassians, was eliminated from Sochi in a tsarist military campaign in the nineteenth century. The Olympics, an event the Kremlin lobbied hard and expensively to have take place in Russia, are a tempting target for indigenous terrorists.

The North Caucasus needs to be put on a bilateral agenda between the United States and Russia. Shaping that dialogue, however, is difficult; Russian officials will not take kindly to suggestions regarding how to govern their territories. The issue has to be framed in terms of the global threat of terrorism; the US-Russia Counter Terrorism Working Group provides a mechanism for such a discussion. Calls to discuss counterterrorism in the G-8 in the wake of the March Moscow bombings provide additional rationale for raising the issue. At the same time, cloaking the issue in counterterrorism terms runs the risk of endorsing the Russian penchant for using a heavy-handed approach in the region. The underlying socioeconomic reasons for the terrorist threat, including human-rights violations, have to be addressed.

The Kremlin's development of a more thoughtful, "modern" policy toward the North Caucasus might provide an opening for US and western cooperation in the region. In the past decade, Moscow has shunned foreign activities in the region; trips by western officials to the North Caucasus have tended to be highly orchestrated, ostensibly for security reasons, but obviously to control the view. Indeed, under Putin, Russia has sharply limited foreign nongovernmental organization access and ability to implement programs. Nonetheless, for several years the US Congress has earmarked funding for US Agency for International Development programs in the North Caucasus. In fiscal year 2008, the earmark was \$8 million for humanitarian, conflict mitigation, human rights, civil society, and relief and recovery assistance in Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, and North Ossetia. The 2010 appropriations conference agreement provides at least \$7 million for these activities and regions. The report to Congress on assistance activities for fiscal year 2009 highlights training events in tolerance, conflict mitigation, and vocational and life skills in the North Caucasus, as well as the cross-ethnic youth camps favored by Medvedev.

If the Russians are willing to engage in a conversation on the problems of the North Caucasus, the US government could explore using tools such as the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the Trade and Development Agency to stimulate investment in the region. Khloponin's

mention of World Bank assistance suggests this approach might be acceptable to the Russians. Of course, at present the neediest republics are too dangerous for foreign investors. Initially, attention will need to be directed to the adjoining areas considered relatively safe, such as Krasnodar Krai or Adeygia. These investments could provide a model and incentive for other republics. The offer of such assistance would have to be conditioned on respect for human rights and reduced corruption.

Changing the Russian officialdom's mindset toward the North Caucasus and its general indifference to the peoples of the region might be best accomplished outside formal government channels. Russian and American political scientists and other scholars have written extensively on the need for a more enlightened approach to the region and to the issue of Islam in Russia. Creation of an informal academic exchange could potentially amplify their voices and better inform the discussion on both sides, as well as enrich US knowledge and increase the numbers of Americans interested in this complicated region. In addition, the US government can encourage Fulbright scholars to work on or in the North Caucasus—security situation permitting; support historical or other academic conferences; and use the Department of State's Title VIII program to expand junior scholars' research on the North Caucasus.

All US efforts in this region are hampered by the lack of information and contact. The United States needs to enhance engagement and opportunities for information collection. The Gerber-Mendelson survey provided one of the few views into the motivations of North Caucasian youth, but the data is now four years old. Western governments and foundations should fund such studies and seek out opportunities to involve North Caucasians in professional, academic, and youth exchanges.

These are slow, evolutionary processes, but the problem has become more urgent as the Moscow bombings and the daily death toll in Dagestan and Ingushetia prove. The Sochi Winter Olympics are less than four years away; if nothing else, we need to work to avoid them becoming a repeat of the 1972 Munich Olympics or the requisite security measures overwhelming the spirit of the games. Ultimately, only the Russian Federation can address the situation, but the rest of Europe and the United States should make whatever efforts are possible to forestall negative developments or to be better placed to react as threats emerge.

#### NOTES

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