

Testimony by Dr. Sabine Freizer, Europe Program Director, International Crisis Group to the Joint hearing on “Islamist Extremism in Chechnya: A Threat to the U.S. Homeland?” of the Subcommittees on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats, and Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs

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I would like to express my appreciation to Chairman Dana Rohrabacher and Ranking Member William R. Keating of the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia and Emerging Threats and Chairman Ted Poe and Ranking Member Brad Sherman of the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade for the opportunity to testify this morning. I want to commend the subcommittees for focusing their attention on the North Caucasus during this critical time.

Crisis Group is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that provides field-based analysis, policy advice and recommendations to governments, the United Nations, the European Union and other multilateral organizations on the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict. Crisis Group was founded in 1995 by distinguished diplomats, statesmen and opinion leaders including Career Ambassador Mort Abramowitz, Nobel Prize winner and former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, late Congressman Stephen Solarz, and former UN and British diplomat Mark Malloch Brown who were deeply concerned at the international community’s failure to anticipate and respond effectively to mass atrocities in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Ambassador Thomas Pickering is our current chairman. Louise Arbour, former chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda and for the former Yugoslavia, and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, is our current president. In 2011, Crisis Group was awarded the Eisenhower Medal for Leadership and Service.

Crisis Group publishes around 90 reports and briefing papers annually, as well as a monthly CrisisWatch bulletin. Our staff is located on the ground in ten regional offices, and sixteen other locations, covering between them over 60 countries and focused on conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding. We maintain advocacy and research offices in Brussels (our global headquarters), Washington and New York. We have liaison offices in London, Beijing and Moscow.

Crisis Group began a North Caucasus Project based out of Moscow in 2012 and produced two background reports last October, “*The North Caucasus: The Challenges of Integration, Ethnicity and Conflict*” and “*The North Caucasus: the Challenges of Integration, Islam, the Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency.*” I would respectfully ask that these reports be incorporated into the

Committee record. A third report will look at the institutional cases of conflict and will be published in early summer and include recommendations. Our staff has carried out field research throughout the North Caucasus region.

I understand that these hearings take place in the aftermath of the horrendous bombing that occurred in Boston on April 15 and Crisis Group joins with others to express our condolences to the many victims.

There are two primary threats to peace and security in the North Caucasus: ethnic conflict and Islamist insurgency. The first involves the challenge of ethnic nationalism, most evident in Chechnya where two bloody wars caused tens of thousands of deaths in the 1990s-early 2000s. The second is the insurgency linked to fundamentalist Islam, in particular Salafism, which has been growing in the region since the end of the Soviet Union, and which is the dominant cause of violence we see today in Dagestan. Taken together, these twin threats produce deadly violence and made the North Caucasus the most dangerous region in Europe with some 700 killed in 2012. In many ways, the two conflict causes also feed off one another to complicate Moscow's effort to secure a lasting end to violent attacks and terrorism.

Let me begin by discussing the threat of ethnic conflict: During the early 1990s, separatists sought full independence for Chechnya, but the failure of their state-building project and their expanded use of armed force brought a massive and at times indiscriminate Russian response during the first Chechen war in 1994-1996. During the fight and its aftermath the Chechen nationalist cause largely transformed into an Islamist one, with a jihadi component. Skirmishes between federal forces and Chechen fighters continued after 1996 until several major acts of terror helped push Russian forces back into Chechnya and a new war that lasted from 1999-2000. After 2003, Moscow adopted a policy of Chechenisation, transferring significant political, administrative and security functions to ethnic Chechens. Today the republic has gone through a major reconstruction and loss of life has been significantly reduced.

Several inter-ethnic conflicts that developed at the end of the Soviet Union remain unresolved, continuing to fuel tensions. The Ingush-Ossetian conflict led to full-fledged war in 1992, as both groups asserted claims over the Prigorodny district. Though Russia invested large sums to return displaced persons and rehabilitate their communities, many Ingush in Prigorodny remain unintegrated in the rest of North Ossetia and want to be part of Ingushetia. Exclusionary historical narratives and competition over land and decision-making have fueled conflicts in other multi-ethnic republics, especially Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Stavropol Krai. Some of the groups maintain maximalist aspirations, wanting to change Russia's internal borders and establish new ethnically-identified entities.

Inter-ethnic tensions do not today threaten major violence, but they may grow with the recent revival of national movements that were particularly strong in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Though political parties based on national or religious identity are prohibited, a new law simplifying registration is likely to make it easier for politicians with nationalist agendas to infiltrate small parties. Already groups such as the Nogays, Kumyks, and Lezgins in Dagestan, the Circassians and the Cossacks are sharpening their organizational capacities. Their political demands largely focus on rehabilitation and justice, state support for native language and culture, greater support for economic development, greater autonomy and access to land. Tensions are

beginning to appear where the legal framework is not sufficient to address complaints, existing laws are not implemented, and police and local administrative capacity are perceived as ethnically biased and corrupt.

Many of these disputes and tensions feed into the Islamist insurgency. Some members of the younger generation -- who twenty years ago would have joined nationalist movements to address their grievances -- have become disenchanted with those movements and are instead joining the Islamist insurgency.

The second threat of Islamist insurgency: The Caucasus Emirate (Imarat Kavkaz) was proclaimed in 2007 as a final step of the transformation of the Chechen separatist movement into a region-wide radical Islamist project. It is recognized as a terrorist organization by Russia and the U.S. among others. It operates across the North Caucasus, attracting youth of all ethnicities, and attacking not only federal forces and local police, but also civil servants and elites who disagree with its fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. This unified force, with its own cause, modes of operation and communication, funding sources, leadership and cadre is behind most of the armed clashes and terrorist acts that haunt local communities.

A day rarely goes by without an attack on a Russian security official or the killing of an alleged insurgent in a counter-terrorist operation. Some 750 people were killed in 2011, and almost the same number again in 2012. Much of the original Islamist insurgency leadership has been killed by security forces and replaced with a much younger, less experienced and unified cadre. The insurgency is less able to carry out large, spectacular acts of terror or engage in lengthy battles with Russian military forces. But since 1996 at least 26 major attacks have been committed in Moscow with at least 627 killed and 934 injured in Moscow alone. As recently as January 2011 a suicide bomber killed 37 at Moscow's Domodedovo airport. In May 2012 a double bombing in Dagestan's capital Makhachkala killed thirteen civilians and injured over 100.

The vast majority of attacks now occur in the North Caucasus and are against security services, local officials and traditional clergy. They tend to involve improvised explosive devices (IEDs), shootings and, at times, suicide bombers. In February 2012 the head of the Caucasus Emirate, Doku Umarov, said that his movement would no longer target civilians. Nevertheless, many attacks against officials and security services also result in civilian casualties.

Government Response: The government's main response until recently has been a tough focus on eradicating the insurgency with a massive security presence, but recently has opened some room for dialogue. While this policy has had successes, the continuing numbers of attacks and loss of life clearly demonstrate that something more is required.

To succeed in conflict resolution, Russia needs to design and implement a long-term comprehensive approach joining ethnic policies, intra-confessional dialogue between traditional Muslims and non-violent Salafis, efforts to engage and provide opportunities for young people and non-discriminatory access to services, and support the work of committees to reintegrate ex-fighters. For those who break the law through violence, intimidation and terrorism, strengthening the capacities of the police, prosecutors and judiciary also remains essential.

Some in the Russian government have come to understand the limitations of a counter-insurgency policy based solely on hard security measures. Local authorities in Dagestan have been testing a novel approach that includes dialogue with and more tolerance of moderate Salafis and negotiations to encourage insurgents to lay down their weapons and reintegrate into peaceful life. A similar approach in Ingushetia has significantly improved the situation since 2009.

The North Caucasus's authentic integration with the rest of Russia is essential for security and healthy ethnic relations in the country. The spread of violence from Chechnya to neighboring republics; high losses among civilians, military and the insurgents; and deteriorating ethnic relations countrywide indicate that more effective and comprehensive approaches are needed to deal with the root causes of deadly conflict.

Thank you for this opportunity and I look forward to your questions.