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**“Assessing Terrorism in the Caucasus and
the Threat to the Homeland”**
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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 Qa`ida 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 two 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 Qa`ida, its affiliates, and allied groups), including Al Qa`ida (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.”¹ 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

¹ “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 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.

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.”² 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.³

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 Alibutatovich 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.”⁴

² 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>.

³ 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) and “IMARAT KAVKAZ. Svodka boevykh operatsii modzhekhedorov 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 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.

⁴ “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-q-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%85i%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->

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 *istishkhad* 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 strategic 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.⁵

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 Qaida 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.⁶ 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.⁷

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

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⁵ 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. The Arab-language video is also at *VDagestan.com*, <http://dagestan.com/obrashhenie-amira-ik-k-bratyam-v-sirii.djihad>.

⁶ 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 and http://csis.org/files/publication/120621_Hahn_IIPER_58.pdf.

⁷ 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.

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 260.⁸

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."⁹

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.¹⁰

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.¹¹ 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

⁸ 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/.

⁹ "Amir IK Ali Abu Mukhammad: Poslanie s sovetom mudzhakhidami Shama VIDEO."

¹⁰ "Interv'yu s Abu Umarom Ash Shishani," *Beladusham.com*, www.beladusham.com/0392.html, last accessed 26 March 2014.

¹¹ "Siriya: K brigade 'Kataib Mukhadzhirin' prisoedinilis' dva siriiskikh podrazdeleniya," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 22 March 2013, www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/03/22/96932.shtml.

thousand militants.¹²

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.¹³

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;
- 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;¹⁴
- 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.¹⁵ 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 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

¹² “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.

¹³ “Operatsiya ‘Fatikh’,” *FISyria.com*, 7 December 2013, <http://fisyria.com/?p=1630>.

¹⁴ See the announcement in “Dzheish Khilafa Al-Islamiya ob'yadenilas s Dzhabkhat an-Nusra,” *Usudu Sham*, December 2013, <http://usudusham.com/2013/12/джейш-хилафа-ал-исламия-объядинилса-с-дж/>.

¹⁵ 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’-Dzhavlani ob amire Sefullakh Shishani,” *Kavkaz tsentr*, 10 February 2014, www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/02/10/103115.shtml.

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 Nokchicho 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 2013.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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 stockpiles. On 30 May 2013, Turkish authorities arrested a JaN fighters in possession of about two kilos of sarin nerve gas, but no information has been made public about their nationalities.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ A recent article by investigative journalist

¹⁶ 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 tsentr*, 10 March 2013, www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/10/103490.shtml, respectively.

¹⁷ 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>.

¹⁸ Karen Hodgson, "Reports claim Al Nusrah 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.

¹⁹ Thomas Jocelyn, "Crisis in Syria: Implications for Homeland Security," Testimony of Thomas Joscelyn (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-JoscelynT->

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.²⁰ Certainly, with the chaos of an ongoing 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.²¹

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.²² Now these

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²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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_detai.php.

²² "Obrashchenie Amira mudzhakhidov Imarata Kavkaz Abdullakha k mudzhakhidam Kavkaza i musul'manam Rossii," *Kavkaz tsentr*, 20 March 2014, www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/20/103616.shtml.

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 Azerbaijan 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."²³

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 year²⁴ – 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.²⁵

Implications for Russian Foreign and Security Policy

²³ 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.

²⁴ "V Moskve arestovany 15 chlenov 'At Takfir val'-Khidzhra'," *Kavkaz uzal*, 29 November 2013, www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/234336/.

²⁵ 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.

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.