

**Bringing the War Home:  
The Strategic Logic of “North Caucasian Terrorism” in Russia**

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**Author**

Vassily A. Klimentov

*International History, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland*

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies

Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland

[vassily.klimentov@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:vassily.klimentov@graduateinstitute.ch)

## **Bringing the War Home: The Strategic Logic of “North Caucasian Terrorism” in Russia**

Terrorism connected to the North Caucasus has been pervasive in Russia between 1992 and 2018. Based on an original dataset, this article presents statistics on rates of terrorist attacks outside of the North Caucasus, their geography and targets, and the tactics used. It argues that terrorism by North Caucasian insurgents has retained a strategic logic despite their conversion to radical Islamism. Accordingly, the erosion of its strategic logic was the principal factor that determined the end of North Caucasian terrorism outside of the North Caucasus as the insurgents lost sight of the political goals terrorism was meant to advance.

**Keywords:** terrorism, Russia, North Caucasus, Islamism, nationalism, suicide bombing

As the Soviet Union collapsed, political violence emerged in Russia in parallel to turmoil in the North Caucasus.<sup>1</sup> In that region, it oscillated in the 1990s between clashes among local groups, guerrilla warfare against Russian security forces, and terrorism. Outside of the North Caucasus, it was about terrorism only. In both cases, political violence by North Caucasian insurgents was long a mean to promote Chechen separatism and retaliate against abuses by pro-Moscow security forces. Only in the late 1990s, reasons related to radical Islamism, a transnational militant movement that ‘conceives of Islam as a political ideology’,<sup>2</sup> emerged to justify it. After years of violence, terrorism connected to the North Caucasus faded away outside of the North Caucasus without the insurgents, now proponents of radical Islamism being able to achieve their objectives through terrorism.

Based on an original dataset, this article presents statistics on rates of terrorist attacks by North Caucasian insurgents<sup>3</sup> outside of the North Caucasus, as well as on their geography, targets, and tactics. It argues that terrorism by armed groups from the North Caucasus has retained a strategic logic despite these groups conversion to radical Islam in the 2000s. In this context, the erosion of its strategic character was the main factor that determined the end of

North Caucasian terrorism outside of the North Caucasus. This happened in the 2010s when the armed groups lost sight of the political goals their attacks were meant to advance.

This article has three parts. The first one examines how this research adds to debates within the field of terrorism studies. The second presents the dataset on attacks that have happened between 1992 and 2018. The last part shows how the evolution of the insurgents' ideology has affected their use of terrorism as a tactic.

### **Terrorism's Rationality and Effectiveness**

This article contributes to debates in terrorism studies on the rationality of using terrorism for insurgents and its effectiveness to extract concessions. At the same time, it helps understand North Caucasian terrorism, an understudied case<sup>4</sup> that has five characteristics: (i) it lasted for over 20 years; (ii) it remained connected to the insurgency in the North Caucasus, leading to attacks in that region and the rest of Russia; (iii) it led to concessions in the 1990s and early 2000s but ended without negotiations; (iv) the insurgents' ideology evolved from nationalism to radical Islamism; and (v) it saw the use of hostage takeovers and suicide bombings.

Based on Richardson, North Caucasian terrorism is defined in this article as: (i) having political goals; (ii) involving physical violence or the threat of thereof; (iii) having a public and psychological impact beyond destruction; (iv) not being concerned with individual victims; and (v) choosing targets based on their symbolic significance.<sup>5</sup> In line with most definitions, this article limits terrorism to attacks on non-combatants.<sup>6</sup> This definition differs from the one adopted in Russia's anti-terrorism law of 2006.<sup>7</sup> As the law it replaced,<sup>8</sup> it does not limit terrorism to attacks on non-combatants, allowing for confusion between terrorism and guerrilla warfare, and is ambiguous as to the political nature of terrorism, making it difficult to separate it from criminal violence.

This article then follows Crenshaw in arguing that terrorism is the product of an environment where there are grievances among an identifiable and sizeable part of the population and no political mechanism to express them. Terrorism may in such a case start following a ‘precipitating event’.<sup>9</sup> In the North Caucasus, terrorism resulted from contestation within the region and against the Russian center. Since 1992, three precipitating events led to campaigns of attacks outside of the North Caucasus: the first Chechen War in 1994, the Second Chechen War in 1999, and the formation of the insurgents’ *Imarat Kavkaz* (Caucasus Emirate, IK) in 2007.

The argument presented here accordingly follows most researchers, including Bloom, Crenshaw, Hoffman, and Pape, in arguing that terrorism is best understood as a way to achieve political objectives *i.e.* it has a strategic logic.<sup>10</sup> Terrorists operate as cohesive entities at group-level and are actors that can predict the consequences of their actions. One dominant critique of this explanation has been that it works better in analyzing terrorists pursuing limited, as opposed to maximalist, goals. As noted by Abrahams,<sup>11</sup> the former seek concessions that may be accommodated within the existing political order and/or that relate to a territory that is not of vital importance to the center. The latter want to impose their ideology, reshape the state’s polity and alter its inhabitants’ way of life. Generally, while ethno-nationalist terrorists have gravitated toward limited objectives, “ideological terrorists” have aimed for maximalist ones.

Radical Islamist terrorists like al-Qaeda (AQ) and the Islamic State (IS) have often been made into archetypical maximalists.<sup>12</sup> Unlike terrorists challenging specific policies, they have supposedly been opposing Western values and modernity as part of their *raison d’être*. Radical Islamist terrorism would be therefore partly irrational without a well-defined strategic logic. More than a year before 9/11, Benjamin and Simon have argued that such terrorism was the product of Islamist extremists led by Ben Laden who had been able to tap

into ‘a powerful and growing wave of religiously motivated hatred of the West’.<sup>13</sup> The authors included North Caucasian terrorists as part of such extremists.

Crenshaw has aptly analyzed the dispute over the break represented by radical Islamist terrorism.<sup>14</sup> Some leftist groups during the Cold War had maximalist goals and used terrorism while radical Islamist groups resorting to terrorism have at times produced political claims similar to that of nationalist groups.<sup>15</sup> However, the idea that terrorism mutated around 9/11 is worth exploring. As noted by Moghadam, the 2000s saw the consolidation of international radical Islamist networks that had an unprecedented reach and impact. Insurgent groups that relied on terrorism in the North Caucasus, in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, in South-East Asia have reframed their ideology and updated their tactics as they joined these networks. Inspired by AQ, their struggles turned “glocal” as local grievances became mixed with radical Islamism.<sup>16</sup> Many insurgent groups relying on terrorism that converted to radical Islam then introduced suicide terrorism through a process of global training and emulation. Though secular groups have also conducted suicide attacks, the justifications for suicide attacks by radical Islamists went beyond the rational, integrating concepts of martyrdom and concerns with afterlife.<sup>17</sup>

In this context, North Caucasian terrorism allows to examine the break represented by the rise of radical Islamism using one such “glocal” case. North Caucasian insurgents have integrated into radical Islamist terrorist networks in the 2000s.<sup>18</sup> This integration participated in transforming their tactics but changes in their motivations were slower to come. The strategic objective of securing an independent Chechen state long remained at the center of their platform. What Juergensmeyer’s has called the ‘religionization’<sup>19</sup> of the war did not translate into the abandonment of nationalist political objectives in the North Caucasus.

Under these conditions, the North Caucasian case says something about terrorism’s effectiveness. Few other debates have proven more politically charged, not least because an

answer has policy implications for both terrorists and counter-terrorists.<sup>20</sup> This question then relates to the debate over the rationality of terrorism. If terrorism is on average unsuccessful, why do armed groups continue using it? Abrahams has been one of the scholars arguing that terrorism was ‘strategically ineffective’ despite the fact that many armed groups continued to rely on it.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, most other researchers contended the opposite.<sup>22</sup> As shown below, this debate has interestingly also been ongoing among North Caucasian insurgents.

One important aspect is to define the parameters of success for terrorism. To do so, we need to distinguish terrorists’ process goals from their outcome goals. The former include attracting funding and public attention, hindering organization-threatening peace processes, and boosting membership in the group using terrorism, including by provoking government overreaction.<sup>23</sup> However, success in achieving these objectives is not a success for terrorism because it only allows continuing the campaign to achieve the outcome goals. In other words, process goals are a diversion of resources that insurgents resorting to terrorism have to accept. By contrast, outcome goals are about achieving meaningful political concessions. These may lead to splintering in insurgent groups, as some insurgents accept compromises in place of original outcome goals. In this sense, the rationality of armed groups relying on terrorism should not be judged based on them being maximalists or not but on their capacity to achieve strategic concessions through terrorism that may be the result of compromises that are lesser than the initially pursued goals. The latter presupposes that insurgents are open to negotiations in the first place.

Such was arguably the case of the campaign of North Caucasian terrorism during the First Chechen War that contributed to the Kremlin offering a favorable peace agreement to Chechen insurgents. By contrast, the campaign of attacks at the beginning of the Second Chechen War was conducted by breakaway radical Islamist armed groups who wanted to block the political deal achieved with some of the former Chechen nationalists and extract

more far-reaching concessions from the Kremlin. Then, the last campaign of North Caucasian terrorism had less clearly articulated political objectives; it tried to advance an ill-defined pan-regional project and was most effective when it tried to undermine the Sochi Olympics. Throughout the last two campaign of attacks, the insurgents were never able to force the Kremlin into changing its policies. At best, terrorist attacks allowed them to advance their process goals and perpetuate for a time the cycle of violence. When it became clear that terrorism outside of the North Caucasus had become ineffective in extracting concessions, dissensions over its use arose among North Caucasian armed groups and terrorism stopped.

### **North Caucasian Terrorism since 1992**

This article provides an original count of terrorist attacks by North Caucasian armed groups outside of the North Caucasus.<sup>24</sup> The data do not include the North Caucasus for four reasons. First, the region has witnessed a conflict during the period, making it difficult to separate terrorist attacks against non-combatants from guerrilla warfare. Second, because the North Caucasus saw tens of thousands of casualties during the Chechen wars, including it would make attacks in others parts of Russia analytically irrelevant. Third, it is relevant to separate attacks inside and outside of the North Caucasus because the attacks' political and public impact was incomparable. By targeting civilians Moscow and Krasnodar *Krai*, the insurgents brought the conflict to what they saw as the "colonial center", creating fear among the Russian population. This was the most symbolic characteristic of North Caucasian terrorism and one that had an effect in changing Russia's policies. This was well-understood by the North Caucasian armed groups themselves. Fourth, the parameters of the campaigns of violence inside and outside of the North Caucasus were different, including in their scale, time period, choice of targets, and in part even in their logic. Violence in the North Caucasus was also driven by wishes for one-off 'individual retaliation' against perpetrators of abuses.<sup>25</sup>

Terrorist attacks were selected using three criteria. (i) Only attacks against civilians and non-combatant forces were included. Attacks targeting mixed civilian-security targets were included when they affected civilians only (an Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in a street near a police office for example). (ii) Only effective and failed attacks were included. Threatened, prevented, and defused attacks (unless together with small arms fire (SAF)) were excluded. (iii) Only attacks linked to the political situation in the North Caucasus were included. Attacks by nationalist, far right and far left groups, as well as by IS affiliates when not in relation to the North Caucasus were excluded. The list has one IS-attack where a connection to the North Caucasus was strongly suspected.<sup>26</sup> Attacks by radical Islamists with no connection to the North Caucasus and criminal violence without any political motivation by North Caucasians were excluded. The list includes attacks where the connection to the North Caucasus was either confirmed or strongly suspected, based on the author's judgment with regard to each incident. Another 24 attacks where the connection to the North Caucasus could not be ascertained were excluded.

All terrorist attacks were disaggregated by time and space. Attacks that happened at the same time in different locations or at the same location at different times were counted as separate attacks. Attacks that happened in the same location and were separated by less than 30 minutes were counted as a single attack.

Unless an exact location could be pinpointed, attacks that happened in means of transportation were tagged to the city of departure. Hence, the hijacking of a flight between Makhachkala in Dagestan and Moscow in 2000 was excluded because it happened in the North Caucasus. By contrast, attacks on transports connecting Russian and foreign territories were included. Hence, two attacks on transports connecting Russia and Turkey made the list.



With regard to casualties, information from the Russian authorities was used and all combatants were excluded from the figures. All casualties were counted as resulting from the attacks even if part of them occurred during rescue operations in case of hostage takeovers.

### *Number of Attacks*

Between 1992 and 2018, 94 terrorist attacks by North Caucasian terrorists were recorded outside of the North Caucasus (**figure 1**). More than two-thirds (66) of attacks occurred before 2005, and almost 50% (45) occurred between August 31, 1999 and August 31, 2004. That period corresponded to the most active phase of the Second Chechen War. This wave of attacks started while armed clashes were ongoing along the border between Chechnya and Dagestan. Bombings in Moscow, Volgodonsk, and Buynaksk initiated the campaign that lasted until Russian forces established control over most of Chechnya. It ended after the hostage takeover in Beslan in September 2004. The latter is though not included in the list of attacks because it took place in North Ossetia.<sup>27</sup> [**Figure 1 near here**]

Two additional terrorist campaigns may be identified. One lasted between May 26, 1994 and August 12, 1996 (15 attacks) and corresponded to the First Chechen War, including the six-months before its start that saw tensions build between Grozny and Moscow. It is worth stressing that all attacks in 1996 happened before the signature of the Khasavyurt Accord that ended the conflict on August 31, 1996. The only attack to happen in 1995 was the infamous hostage takeover in Budyonnovsk in Stavropol *Krai*.

The third campaign of attacks lasted from November 19, 2009 until January 8, 2014 (23 attacks). It was more irregular than the previous two, with eight attacks happening in 2010 alone and only one in 2011. It came after the consolidation of new conflict patterns in the North Caucasus. The campaign moreover followed the end of the regime of counter-

terrorist operation in Chechnya in April 2009 that put an official end to the Second Chechen War.

In-between terrorist campaigns, the periods from 1997 to 1998, 2005 to 2008, and 2015 to 2018 saw only eight attacks. These corresponded to quiet spells in-between the Chechen wars, as well as following the success of Russia's military operations and political strategy in the Second Chechen War. Since the mid-2010s, various factors have played a role in ending North Caucasian terrorism. The sole attack of 2017 was conducted by an IS-affiliate that had limited links to the North Caucasus.

### *Lethality of Attacks*

**Figure 2** provides a count of casualties from terrorist attacks. Between 1992 and 2018, 988 civilians were killed and another 3,911 wounded in attacks. In addition, **figure 2** shows the death toll from attacks with 10 and more people killed. These led to 896 civilian deaths, 91% of the overall death toll. **[Figure 2 near here]**

Two-thirds (652) of the deaths from terrorism happened between August 31, 1999 and August 31, 2004 during the main campaign of attacks (**figure 1**). Among the ten deadliest attacks, seven occurred during that period. These ten attacks represent over three-quarters of the deaths (741) with each resulting in at least 28 killed. The data again do not include the attack in Beslan in September 2004 that would add another 330 people.

The spike in casualties in 1995 in **figure 2** corresponds to a single attack: the hostage takeover in Budyonnovsk. The latter resulted in 129 people killed and was by far the most lethal terrorist attack of the First Chechen War. Overall, terrorism during the First Chechen War was on average less lethal than in following campaigns. Counting Budyonnovsk, an average of 10.6 people per attack were killed between May 26, 1994 and August 12, 1996. Excluding Budyonnovsk, which appears as an outlier, this average drops to 0.9 killed per

attack in 14 attacks. Indeed, leaving Budyonnovsk aside, only 12 people were killed by North Caucasian terrorism outside of the North Caucasus during the First Chechen War.

This stands in contrast with the situation during the terrorist campaigns of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An average of 14.5 people per attack were killed in 45 attacks between August 31, 1999 and August 31, 2004. An average of 7.1 people per attack were killed in 23 attacks between November 19, 2009 and January 8, 2014.

**Figure 2** thus points to a difference in the lethality of terrorism between the 1990s, the 2000s, and 2010s. The string of deadliest attacks at the start of the Second Chechen War certainly amplifies the contrast. Nevertheless, the data show that the higher lethality levels remained even after 2004. This increased lethality is explained by the adoption of suicide terrorism and the focus on high-profile civilian targets.

### ***Terrorist Tactics and Lethality***

**Figure 3** desegregates the 94 attacks by tactic used across four categories: Hostage Takeover, IED & Complex (including IEDs with SAF), Suicide Bomber Improvised Explosive Device (SBIED), and SAF & Cutting Weapons. To separate between hostage takeovers and SBIEDs, this article examines how the attack proceeded. If the terrorists never interacted with the authorities, the attack is an SBIED. By contrast, even if some terrorists during a hostage takeover carried suicide vests, the attack is a hostage takeover if negotiations occurred. Accordingly, the attack at the theatre in Moscow in 2002 was a hostage takeover while the attacks in aircraft in 2004 were SBIEDs. [**Figure 3 near here**]

Interestingly, **figure 3** shows an evolution in the terrorist *modus operandi*. Although the terrorists have used IEDs as their main tactic (67% of attacks) throughout the period, hostage takeovers were employed only between 1992 and 2002, and SBIEDs only between 2003 and 2018 outside of the North Caucasus. In that region, the hostage takeover in Beslan

in September 2004 was the last to take place. Among the nine hostage takeovers recorded outside of the North Caucasus, three were high profile operations that resulted in dozens of people killed while the rest were small-scale events that were of a partially criminal nature. The two hostage takeovers of Russian transports that happened in Turkey in 1996 and 2001 led to minimal casualties and had a limited public resonance. Another high-profile hostage takeover happened in Dagestan during the First Chechen War.

Since 2003, 15 SBIEDs (including two failed ones) occurred outside of the North Caucasus. During the same period, 30 IEDs (including six failed ones) happened. Before they were exported elsewhere, suicide tactics were used in the North Caucasus. In June 2000, the first suicide attack targeted the headquarters of a Russian Special Forces detachment in the village of Alkhan Yurt in Chechnya. Still, it took three years for an SBIED to hit outside of the region. That attack happened at a rock concert near Moscow in July 2003. Since 2000, suicide attacks remained more common in the North Caucasus than in the rest of the country. For comparison, a non-exhaustive list has over 90 suicide attacks, not all terrorist events as per this article's definition, across the North Caucasus and the rest of Russia since 2000.<sup>28</sup>

As in other contexts, SBIEDs have been on average more lethal than IEDs. Since 2003, an average of 24.5 people per attack were killed in 13 successful SBIEDs. By contrast, an average of 2.8 people per attack were killed in 24 successful IEDs during the same period. Going back to **figures 1** and **2**, the emergence of SBIEDs has increased the proportion of lethal attacks. With five attacks, SBIEDs are likewise over-represented among the deadliest attacks since 1992. Among these, two others were hostage takeover, and three IEDs. In addition to increasing the lethality of terrorism, SBIEDs have also made attacks more reliable: Only two SBIEDs have failed.

### *Locations and Targets*

Two additional points have to do with the geographical distribution and the targets of the attacks. **Table 1** shows a clustering of attacks in Moscow (44% of the total) and Stavropol *Krai* (30%). The crowding aspect is more pronounced for attacks that led to at least 10 people killed. Almost two-thirds of these hit the Russian capital. For the North Caucasian insurgents, this was the most symbolic, politically attractive, and mediatic target. Compared to Moscow, Stavropol is a less attractive objective. It is however the majority ethnic Russian region located closest to the Caucasus. It is hence easier to organize an attack there. The same argument goes for other regions in South Russia such as Voronezh, Krasnodar, Volgograd, and Astrakhan. [**Table 1 near here**]

Interestingly, these patterns do not change if one separates attacks per period. Hence, the attacks that happened after the start of the Second Chechen War and after the creation of IK continued to predominantly target Moscow and Stavropol. For the campaign of attacks between November 19, 2009 and January 8, 2014, one can though see a slight re-balancing away from Moscow and toward regions in South Russia. In parallel, it is notable that Russia's other Muslim regions, including Tatarstan that saw only small-scale attacks in the 2010s, and large cities, such as Saint Petersburg, Novosibirsk, and Yekaterinburg, were not targeted.

**Table 2** shows that North Caucasian terrorism has principally focused on means of transportation (55.5% of all attacks and 58% of attacks with over 10 people killed). In this context, there is a prevalence of attacks on trains, train stations, and railways – a trend that the terrorists have dubbed the “railway war” – and buses and bus stations during the first campaign. At the same time, there is a continuity in targets throughout the period. The only notable evolution is the surge in attacks conducted directly in the street, including near security buildings, starting from the late 2000s. [**Table 2 near here**]

Bombings in the Moscow subway and in public places (concert, theatre, market, hotel, etc.) are significant among the deadliest attacks. As the focus on means of transportation, this is coherent with the objective of inflicting maximum casualties by targeting areas with crowds of people. Nonetheless, the ten most lethal attacks were one-off operations with unique targets. These included two bombings of residential buildings in downtown Moscow at the start of Second Chechen War, hostage takeovers in a hospital in 1995 and a theatre in 2002, suicide bombings in two aircraft in 2004, and an airport bombing in 2011. Only one attack in the Moscow subway and one suicide bombing in a train are among these.

### **The Rise and End of North Caucasian Terrorism**

Since 1992, North Caucasian insurgents have used terrorism to instill fear in the Russian population. Their goal was to force it to pressure its political representatives into changing their policies in the North Caucasus. For this reason, terrorists have focused on the Russian capital and aimed at high-profile civilian targets (**tables 1 and 2**). At the same time, they declared that their attacks were in retaliation for Russia's abuses in the Caucasus.

As noted above, three campaigns of North Caucasian terrorism outside of the North Caucasus can be distinguished: one during the First Chechen War (1994-96), one at the height of the Second Chechen War (1999-2004), and one after the creation of IK in 2007. In-between these campaigns, lulls in attacks resulted from negotiations between the Kremlin and armed groups and ideological transformations within the North Caucasian insurgency.

Relying on terrorist leaders' interviews and information from insurgents' websites, this part analyzes North Caucasian insurgents' motivations for using terrorism outside of the North Caucasus. It shows how changes in terrorists' tactics may be explained by changes in the insurgents' thinking and how North Caucasian terrorism long maintained a strategic logic despite the insurgents' adoption of radical Islamism. It concludes by pointing out that the

erosion of that strategic logic has made terrorism outside of the North Caucasus irrelevant for the insurgents.

### ***Terrorism and Chechen Politics***

In the North Caucasus, conflict re-ignited when local elites tried to establish an independent Chechnya in the power vacuum that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union. While Moscow backed groups that pushed for Chechnya to remain inside the Federation, power consolidated around Dzhokhar Dudayev's separatists. That burgeoning conflict saw the start of North Caucasian terrorism that, though it involved operatives from across the region, was until the mid-2000s related to Chechnya.

In November 1991, Chechens led by Shamil Basayev hijacked an *Aeroflot* aircraft in Mineralnye Vody in Stavropol *Krai*. The terrorists thus protested the introduction of martial law in Chechnya by President Boris Yeltsin that same month. Threatening to blow up the plane if Yeltsin did not yield, they rerouted it to Ankara. The terrorists then negotiated for passage back to Chechnya in exchange for the release of the 178 hostages. That hijacking set the stage for the ensuing campaign of terrorism. Engineered by Basayev, who would become the most infamous Chechen insurgent leader and terrorist,<sup>29</sup> it had the features of future attacks (**table 2**). It targeted a mean of transportation, a symbolic civilian target – the national airline, and threatened high casualties. Unlike later attacks, it was though resolved peacefully.

Tensions intensified after Chechnya adopted a Constitution in 1992 that proclaimed its sovereignty. After a failed attempt to arm anti-Dudayev factions, the Kremlin intervened militarily in December 1994. Amidst a difficult economic situation, the First Chechen War and its mounting casualties proved unpopular with the Russian people. In early 1996, against the background of the upcoming presidential election, the Kremlin sued for peace with the separatists. Chechen terrorism, in particular the hostage takeover in Budyonnovsk, played a key role in pushing Moscow to negotiate. After Yeltsin's victory in the presidential elections,

the separatists retook Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, against superior Russian forces. In the aftermath, the parties signed a peace agreement in Khasavyurt in Dagestan on August 31, 1996. Chechnya obtained *de facto* independence while the final decision regarding its status was to be made by December 31, 2001. The agreement also put an end to Chechen terrorism (**figures 1 and 2**). The Kremlin had in fact agreed to most of the insurgents' demands.

In Chechnya, the post-war period saw growing competition between nationalists supported by “traditional” Sufi Islamic leaders and “national-Islamists”,<sup>30</sup> and fragmented radical Islamists who coalesced around Basayev and the Saudi Arabian-born Ibn al-Khattab, a veteran of the Soviet-Afghan war, who had come to Chechnya in 1995 and organized a battalion that included foreign fighters. Although the nationalists originally dominated local politics after Aslan Maskhadov became President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in 1997,<sup>31</sup> this did not put an end to radical Islamist influence. Instead, more Chechen leaders drifted toward radicalism and strengthened ties with sponsors in the Persian Gulf through Khattab.<sup>32</sup> In 1997, they created the terrorist and insurgent training center *KavKaz* near the southern town of Avtory, opposite Serzhen-Yurt.<sup>33</sup> In February 1999, Maskhadov introduced *Sharia* law in Chechnya in a sign of the shift toward radical Islam that had happened among local elites. This further intensified elites' competition while the republic saw a proliferation of armed groups and militias. Ensuing violence and criminality also spilled over into South Russia.

By 1999, the political situation had changed in both Grozny and Moscow. In the Kremlin, the statist and security elites who had come to power after the First Chechen War had definitely discredited pro-Western leaders were eager to avenge the defeat and forcefully deal with the criminality streaming out of Chechnya.<sup>34</sup> In Grozny, some among the radical Islamists were dreaming of a pan-Caucasian Islamist state while making in-roads into Dagestan. These growing tensions nevertheless did not result in an immediate spike in



terrorist attacks against Russia. No attack occurred in 1998 and only two non-lethal attacks struck between January and July 1999 (**figure 1**). There was in fact long no reason for the Chechens to provoke Russia into another confrontation.

Two series of events accompanied the start of the Second Chechen War. In August 1999, Basayev and Khattab led an attack by around 2,000 Chechen, Dagestani, and foreign fighters into Dagestan. The insurgents apparently expected that their offensive would find support among the radical Islamist communities that had appeared there since the end of the First Chechen War. When this hope did not materialize, their forces were pushed back into Chechnya. In parallel, IEDs hit in September in Moscow, Volgodonsk in Rostov region, and Buynaksk in Dagestan, leading to nearly 300 deaths (**figure 2**). While conspiracy theories have surrounded these attacks ever since, Moscow attributed them to North Caucasian and Chechen terrorists. On the Chechen side, although the staging of such attacks as a deterrent to a Russian intervention may in retrospect appear strategically sound, both Maskhadov and Basayev have denied responsibility.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, although he never claimed the attacks, Khattab had a few days prior declared that he intended to target Russian civilians.<sup>36</sup> In any case, these IEDs forever changed the way Russians saw the situation in Chechnya. The once remote war entered the public consciousness.

The attacks and the way they were framed by the authorities crystallized support for the intervention in Chechnya that begun in September 1999. Vladimir Putin, one of the main advocates of the war, became President of Russia in May 2000. Marked by a fast advance of Russian forces, the Second Chechen War unfolded differently from the first. By summer, the insurgents had been mostly defeated. In retaliation, they stepped up terrorism outside of the North Caucasus, conducting over 40 attacks between 2000 and 2004 (**figure 1**). Although that campaign eventually resulted in over 400 civilians killed (**figure 2**), it took some time to reach high levels of lethality per attack.

After the Russian forces established control over most of Chechnya, Moscow started its Chechenisation policy. In July 2000, it appointed Akhmad Kadyrov – the former Chief *Mufti*, an Islamic jurist, of Ichkeria – as Head of Administration in Chechnya. Kadyrov had defected to the Russian side in 1999 following the struggles among Chechen elites that had happened during the inter-war period.<sup>37</sup> His appointment was done to split the insurgents' ranks, as part of the nationalists and followers of Sufi Islam were co-opted to fight against radical Islamists. With the Kremlin's blessing, Kadyrov promulgated amnesties for Chechen insurgents and reinforced his power base by recruiting former militants into loyal security forces.<sup>38</sup> In short, Moscow assured Kadyrov-led Chechen elites that, as long as their republic remained part of Russia and terrorism was under control, they could enjoy some autonomy in managing their affairs. In October 2003, Kadyrov became President of Chechnya.

In time, Chechenisation proved a political and public relations success for Moscow that was able to present the war as an internal Chechen affair. Adopted despite the opposition of Russian security forces,<sup>39</sup> it was originally a risky strategy that relied on a unique pro-Russian leader in Chechnya.<sup>40</sup> It represented a tacit compromise that offered real concessions to some of the nationalist insurgents. One of its consequences was that the radical Islamists whom it politically side-lined responded with an increase in attacks against Russia. In particular, they organized two hostage takeovers with a nationwide impact to force the Kremlin into negotiating with them and challenge Kadyrov's capacity to keep terrorism under control.<sup>41</sup> Under these conditions, they also exported suicide terrorism outside of the North Caucasus (**figure 3**). In Chechnya, the nationalist insurgents who rejected Kadyrov's compromise gathered around Maskhadov. Though they condemned terrorism against Russia, they still formed a joint front with the radical Islamists by 2002.<sup>42</sup> At the international level, 9/11 helped the Kremlin present the Chechen conflict as part of the American "War on Terror" and reinforced the appeal of Chechenisation.

In May 2004, when Kadyrov was killed in an IED staged by Basayev, Chechenisation vacillated before Moscow was able to select a replacement. Following an interim by Alu Alkhanov, Ramzan Kadyrov, the son of Akhmad, became President in 2007.<sup>43</sup> Chechnya then received more autonomy, including a monopoly on violence for R. Kadyrov's forces and the right to bend federal laws to accommodate local "traditions".<sup>44</sup> To ensure Chechen loyalty, Moscow also covered over 80% of the republic's budget in the 2010s.<sup>45</sup> In return, R. Kadyrov was able to deliver on the promises of security, overseeing a reduction in terrorism. Between 2005 and 2009, only seven attacks were registered (**figure 1**) and 32 people killed (**figure 2**) outside of the North Caucasus. In this respect, Chechenisation – with its ruthless counter-insurgency and numerous failings in terms of human rights abuses by Russian and Chechen forces<sup>46</sup> – was at the core of the pacification of Chechnya. At the same time, it is ironically the threat of insecurity spilling over from the North Caucasus that pushed the Kremlin toward Chechenisation in the first place. The handing of responsibility to Chechen forces therefore intensified when North Caucasian terrorism became more lethal in 2003.

### ***The Impasse of Hostage Takeovers***

The connection of religious and nationalist motivations found among North Caucasian armed groups is not unusual. Such a combination of motivations, albeit to different extents, exists in the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Lebanese Hezbollah, armed groups in the Indian Kashmir, and AQ.<sup>47</sup> However, unlike in cases where radical Islamism overtook nationalism following conversion, the use of terrorism by North Caucasian insurgents was long aimed to advance political demands related to Chechen statehood. This is not entirely unique among radical Islamists. Parallels may be in this regard explored between the evolution of the ideology of North Caucasian insurgents and that of armed groups in Mindanao Island in the Philippines, notably the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and its splinter groups, and Abu Sayyaf.

When asked after the second campaign of terrorism against Russia (**figure 1**) about how his conversion to radical Islam had changed his motivations, Basayev stressed that he first fought for ‘independence’, ‘freedom’, and for the ‘Chechen people’. He explained that his Islamist agenda and *Sharia* were ‘secondary’ to that goal.<sup>48</sup> Even though such statements may have been aimed at placating Western audiences, they were remarkably different from the typical discourse of radical Islamists. They may for instance have undermined support for the insurgency in radical circles in the Persian Gulf and, in this regard, contrasted with the narrative put forward after the creation of IK. Besides, by explaining that his attacks would not target the West but only the Russian ‘colonial occupier’,<sup>49</sup> Basayev inscribed the Chechen conflict into a unique post-colonial context. For him, as for other veteran commanders, such as for instance Ruslan Gelayev,<sup>50</sup> radical Islamism never entirely replaced nationalism.

Although Basayev and other insurgents’ motivations showed continuity in the early 2000s, their terrorist *modus operandi* changed. They stopped conducting hostage takeovers after October 2002 outside of the North Caucasus and after September 2004 inside that region (**figure 3**). After that, they relied exclusively on IEDs and SBIEDs. Unlike these tactics, hostage takeovers were intended to force the Kremlin into on-the-spot negotiations over the situation in Chechnya. This was the rationale behind the attacks in Budyonnovsk, Moscow, and Beslan. From the terrorists’ perspective, the first attack was a success while the following two were failures, even though the attack in Moscow allowed them to advance their process goals.

In June 1995, Budyonnovsk was a turning point in the First Chechen War. After a raid into Stavropol *Krai*, terrorists led by Basayev seized a hospital, holding some 1,000 people hostage. The attack captured frontline news in Russia while the terrorists demanded to hold a press conference, executing hostages after the authorities initially refused.<sup>51</sup> As the country watched the negotiations live on television, the Russian Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin

conducted negotiations with Basayev over the phone.<sup>52</sup> Following four days of crisis and three failed assaults, he agreed on a deal that allowed the terrorists to retreat to Chechnya and promised negotiations to end the war. Amidst reports that the attackers had bribed their way through security checkpoints, Budyonnovsk shed a crude light on the corruption affecting Russia and further discredited its security forces.<sup>53</sup>

Conversely, Budyonnovsk was a definite success for the Chechen insurgents who were able to advance both their process and outcome goals. They had mounted a large-scale operation outside of the North Caucasus, publicized the situation in Chechnya, obtained political concessions, and made it back safely. Afterward, this became the blueprint for future hostage takeovers. They needed to be high profile enough to capture media and public attention, and threaten high casualties to force the authorities into restraint. Before the end of the war, militants conducted another similar attack, striking this time in the town of Kizlyar in Dagestan in January 1996. Although that attack originally targeted a military base, it led to considerable civilian casualties in the nearby village of Pervomaiskoe. However, because it happened in the Caucasian conflict zones, it had less of a public impact.

The hostage takeovers in Moscow and Beslan answered to the same logic as the one in Budyonnovsk. They however unfolded in a transformed context. Chechenisation, counter-insurgency, and fragmentation had weakened the insurgents. Answering to Basayev, the terrorists who perpetrated the attacks did not have the support of Maskhadov.<sup>54</sup> On one hand, Basayev wanted to force the Kremlin into negotiating with him directly instead of relying on Kadyrov. On the other, the hostage takeovers were a way to show that Chechenisation was not effective in stopping terrorism outside of the North Caucasus.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, the mood had likewise changed in the Kremlin where Putin's administration had adopted a no-negotiation approach to terrorism.

In October 2002, terrorists led by the Chechen Movsar Barayev captured over 850 hostages in the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow. Before the attack, they set in motion a media strategy by sharing a video through *Al-Jazeera*. In addition, the terrorists filmed themselves during the attack and invited television crews in an attempt to get their message across. Despite the radical Islamist rhetoric, the slogans in Arabic displayed in the theatre, and the female operatives clothed in Arab-style *niqab* and wearing suicide vests – attributes that may have been part of fundraising and signaling strategies directed at radical Islamist circles in the Persian Gulf,<sup>56</sup> the terrorists presented themselves as ‘nationalists’ in much the same way as during the First Chechen War.<sup>57</sup> The video they disseminated spoke of Chechens’ ‘God-given right [to] freedom and right to choose [their] destiny’. It accused the ‘Russian-occupiers’ of ‘flooding [Chechen] land with [their] children’s blood’.<sup>58</sup> Barayev’s terrorists’ wanted the independence of Chechnya and – according to some reports – an end to indiscriminate artillery fire and mopping-up operations by pro-Russian security forces.<sup>59</sup> Their demands did not say anything of the rest of the North Caucasus or of radical Islam.

Unlike in Budyonnovsk, the Kremlin was however not ready to negotiate. Russian Special Forces introduced an unknown gas into the theater that affected terrorists and hostages alike. All terrorists except one were killed in the ensuing assault. Some 130 hostages were also killed due to the gas and in crossfire, making it into the deadliest terrorist attack ever in Moscow (**figure 2**). The hostage takeover in the Dubrovka Theater was however not a complete failure for the insurgents. Indeed, they had challenged the Kremlin’s narrative over the situation in Chechnya, demonstrated their readiness to pursue terrorism, and showcased their radical Islamist credentials. In this way, they ensured that their movement got support and resources from international radical Islamist networks.

In September 2004, North Caucasian terrorists conducted one last hostage takeover, targeting a school in Beslan, a town in North Ossetia. The latter is the only non-majority

Muslim republic in the North Caucasus and is seen by some North Caucasians as having been historically favored by Moscow. Unlike in the Dubrovka Theater, the Kremlin was this time better at stopping the terrorists from sharing their demands.<sup>60</sup> According to Basayev, they offered the Russian authorities a choice: either they put an end to military operations in Chechnya, or Putin resigns as President.<sup>61</sup> If Chechen independence was granted, the terrorist mastermind claimed to be ready to commit for the insurgents to not enter political and economic alliances against Russia, not host foreign military bases, not fund armed groups at war with Russia, join the Russia-led Community of Independent States and Collective Security Treaty Organization, and stay in the ruble zone.<sup>62</sup> In fact, the terrorists even offered to ensure that Muslims from other Russian regions ‘would renounce armed opposition’ against Russia ‘for 10-15 years on the condition their liberty of religious worship was respected.’<sup>63</sup>

This program, if it was indeed what the insurgents had in mind at the time, tried to put limitations on the policies of an independent Chechnya to make the idea more acceptable to the Kremlin. Interestingly, it was again entirely Chechen-centric. National independence was more important to Chechen insurgents than anything else was, including supporting fellow radical Islamists in other parts of the Caucasus. This is crucial to understanding terrorism in Basayev’s times: Attacks’ were meant to pressure Moscow into abandoning Kadyrov and leaving Chechnya, less in advancing a maximalist pan-Caucasian radical Islamist project. This however never worked. The resolution of the Beslan crisis came after three days of siege that saw children being held in inhumane conditions. Russian Special Forces then conducted an assault on the primary school that resulted in 330 hostages killed in crossfire.

### *Suicide Terrorism and the End of North Caucasian Terrorism*

The failure to coerce the Kremlin into negotiations led to a change in tactics. Part of the insurgents decided that they stood better chances at forcing Russia to leave Chechnya by stepping up attacks against Russian civilians. This evolution was however progressive. The two years following the bombings of September 1999 saw an increasing number of attacks but only two major ones: an IED in Moscow in August 2000 that led to 13 deaths and an IED in Stavropol *Krai* in March 2001 that led to 21 deaths (**figures 1 and 2**). The string of most deadly attacks did not begin until after the hostage takeover in the Dubrovka Theater. In fact, the switch in tactics was associated with the marginalization of Maskhadov and the rise of the influence of the radical Islamists led by Basayev at an insurgent commanders' meeting in spring 2002.<sup>64</sup> After it took command of the insurgency, the Basayev faction exported suicide terrorism from Chechnya to Russia.<sup>65</sup>

Following the attack at the Dubrovka Theater, Basayev threatened that next time 'there will be no hostages' and no demands. The terrorists' would come 'with the principal goal of eliminating enemies and inflicting maximum damage.'<sup>66</sup> This marked a moment of radicalization of North Caucasian terrorism. At the same time, some of the insurgents may have believed that they had publicized their demands enough and now needed to make good on their threats. Under these conditions, suicide terrorism appeared as a rational strategic choice. SBIEDs were indeed lethally efficient, had a greater probability of success, were relatively inexpensive, and overall easier to execute than IEDs and hostage takeovers.<sup>67</sup> Unlike in hostage takeovers: it took only one man – or often woman in the Russian case as in some others<sup>68</sup> – to conduct an attack. In 2003-04, North Caucasian terrorists conducted eight SBIEDs (one failed) outside of the North Caucasus, including seven in Moscow (two in aircraft), that led to 205 civilians killed – a death toll superior to that of the hostage takeover in the Dubrovka Theater (**figures 1 and 2**).



In 2005, following the tragedy of Beslan that was a last attempt to resort to hostage takeovers, Basayev gave an interview to a Russian journalist. According to him, his terrorist attacks always had concrete political motivations. In an unconvincing way, he even claimed that demands were shared during the SBIEDs.<sup>69</sup> In fact, Basayev seemed troubled that his terrorism might be seen as irrational violence. Though he and most of the insurgents had by then embraced radical Islamism, their political project had been left mostly unchanged. As Maskhadov's nationalists, the Chechen radical Islamists were overall ready to settle for the independence of Chechnya. In this regard, this was ironically a step back for some of them as compared to 1999 when promoters of a pan-Caucasian radical Islamist entity, centered on Khattab who was killed in 2002, had become influential in Chechen politics.

After Maskhadov's death in 2005, negotiating with Russia on Chechen independence remained on the agenda of Abdul-Halim Sadulayev, the new President of Ichkeria.<sup>70</sup> Though also gravitating toward radical Islamism, Sadulayev opposed terrorism outside of the North Caucasus, indirectly criticizing Basayev, as not helping to advance that goal.<sup>71</sup> With the death of Basayev in 2006, the insurgents then lost their terrorist mastermind. These two factors together with Chechenisation explained the end of the second and most intensive campaign of North Caucasian terrorism outside of the North Caucasus (**figure 1**). In that period, the radical Islamists had not achieved anything through terrorism. Their attacks had ironically reinforced the Kremlin in its intent to heighten the pace of Chechenisation to back their local opponents. At the cost of sympathy in the West, suicide terrorism and hostage takeovers had only allowed them to gain backing among international radical Islamist networks.

The next period saw Chechen terrorism truly become North Caucasian terrorism. In the mid-2000s, in-exile Chechen leaders, including Akhmed Zakayev – the influential former Minister of Foreign Affairs, lost influence in the Caucasus. Then, as military commanders from the 1990s, including Sadulayev in 2006, were killed, Chechnya itself lost its centrality

to the conflict. This accompanied a process of generational and ethnic change among rank-and-file insurgents.<sup>72</sup> When Doku Umarov, one of the last veterans of the First Chechen War, took command of the insurgency, many non-Chechens were already fighting under his orders. By then, conflict patterns had regionalized and the number of security incidents in Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Kabardino-Balkaria was on par with Chechnya.<sup>73</sup> The insurgents' motivations and associated terrorism could no longer be about Chechen independence.

Under these conditions, radical Islamism became not only an overlay to nationalism but increasingly the insurgency's structuring ideology. In October 2007, Umarov declared 'unlawful' the 'territorial-colonial territories named the "North Caucasian republics"' and called for world *jihad*.<sup>74</sup> The insurgents were now fighting to establish the AQ-affiliated *Imarat Kavkaz* that would be stretching across the Caucasus and parts of South Russia. Although Umarov was keen to inscribe this shift into the history of Chechen separatism,<sup>75</sup> his decision alienated supporters in Chechnya and the diaspora. In reality, his decision to scrap Ichkeria was as much forced by circumstances, as pushed forward by a group of ideologues more versed into Islamic theology than him – Isa Umarov, Movladi Udugov, and Anzor Astemirov, the leader of Kabardino-Balkaria's insurgents. These people persuaded Umarov that this turn would bring more funding from the Persian Gulf to the weakened insurgency.<sup>76</sup>

Though radical Islam had appeared in the North Caucasus in the 1980s and foreign fighters had entered the country during the First Chechen War,<sup>77</sup> it is only after the creation of IK that maximalist demands connected to Islam became dominant. The insurgents' pan-Caucasian Emirate under *Sharia*<sup>78</sup> could not be accommodated without shattering the foundations of Russia. In any case, Moscow was no longer the sole enemy; IK intended to fight the entire West.<sup>79</sup> To underscore how they had become part of the globalized *jihad*, meaning in this context the holy war against the unbelievers, the insurgents now paralleled in

their statements Russian policies in the Caucasus with Western policies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria.<sup>80</sup>

This shift opened the way for the last campaign of North Caucasian terrorism outside of the North Caucasus that lasted from November 19, 2009 to January 8, 2014 (23 attacks, **figures 1 and 2**) and came following the end of the regime of counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya in April 2009. Renewed attacks were in this context a way to signal that the insurgency had not been defeated despite the relative success of Chechenisation and counter-insurgency but did not have originally well-articulated political motivations.<sup>81</sup> The campaign began with an IED in the Moscow – Saint Petersburg train and was more irregular than the previous two with quiet spells, such as in 2011, alternating with periods of intense attacks such as from October 2013 to January 2014 (**figure 1**). At the same time, North Caucasian terrorism continued to focus on high-profile civilian targets and rely on SBIEDs (6 attacks, 26% of attacks, **figure 3**). One interesting feature was the re-balancing of attacks between Moscow and Stavropol *Krai*. The latter may be explained by practicality – Stavropol was easier to strike for a weakened insurgency.

The irregularity of the last wave of North Caucasian terrorism was besides related to dissent within the insurgency. In addition to a break with in-exile Chechens who claimed that Umarov was discrediting the struggle against Russia,<sup>82</sup> the creation of IK led to tensions among the insurgents. In 2010, Husein Gakaev, Aslanbek Vadalov, and Tarkhan Gaziev, three influential commanders from Chechnya, and Khaled Yusuf Mohammad, a foreign fighter, tried to depose Umarov.<sup>83</sup> Although being radical Islamists, they challenged Umarov for having declared his Emirate without consulting with them. They were moreover at odds with his drive to integrate the war into the globalized *jihad* against the West and opposed terrorist attacks on Russian civilians, arguing that they only served to divert resources and

alienate western support.<sup>84</sup> Several commanders from other republics backed them, as well as leaders from the diaspora who wanted the insurgency to return to its nationalist roots.<sup>85</sup>

This split in IK was only overcome in July 2011 thanks to a *Sharia* court gathering militants from across the region and support to Umarov from Islamic scholars in the Middle East.<sup>86</sup> After he pledged loyalty to Umarov, Gakaev received an important position within *IK*. Beyond this, in an apparent concession to his rivals, Umarov declared the suspension of terrorist attacks outside of the North Caucasus in February 2012, motivating it by the anti-Putin protests in Moscow.<sup>87</sup> The latter moratorium temporarily ended North Caucasian terrorism in Russia. The only attacks in 2012 (**figure 1**) were small-scale incidents in Tatarstan that were organized by terrorists with minimal connections to the North Caucasus. Interestingly, the Umarov-Gakaev clash showed how the national/ regional (or international) break did not fully parallel the nationalist/ radical Islamist one. Even among radical Islamists, some wanted to focus on their national republics instead of partaking in a regional project and even less so of joining a *jihad* against the West. This led sometimes to tensions over priorities for the insurgency. In parallel, the clash showed some of the insurgents' ambivalence as to the effectiveness of terrorism. Some among them supported terrorism outside of the North Caucasus only if it answered to a strategic logic.

Umarov lifted his ban on terrorism against Russia in July 2013, announcing that *IK* would disrupt the upcoming Sochi Olympics, an event of great international prestige for Moscow.<sup>88</sup> It is noteworthy that terrorism was again meant to be a strategic weapon with a specific and limited goal. Umarov's declaration resulted in three SBIEDs in Volgograd in November and December (**figures 1 and 3**). These were the last bursts of North Caucasian terrorism outside of the North Caucasus. In fact, no more IEDs or SBIEDs occurred until a suicide attack in the metro in Saint Petersburg in April 2017. That attack had though no apparent link with the North Caucasus and was instead the sign of a rising transnational IS

threat. As to the insurgents who prepared the attacks in Volgograd, they remarkably released a mostly nationalist justification similar to that of previous attackers. They claimed to be retaliating for Russia's invasion of '[their] lands' and told the 'inhabitants of Russia' to pressure their authorities to 'immediately leave the lands of the Caucasus'. At the same time, they connected their attacks with the legacy of the First Chechen War that was allegedly 'the reason why *jihad* had spread to the entire Caucasus'. In the end, they pledged to conduct more attacks against the 'crusaders', threatening Russians that 'not Putin, not any other damned politician' would be able to protect them.<sup>89</sup>

That statement superficially combined traditional denunciations of Russia's rule in the Caucasus with the idea of *jihad*. As compared to justifications for earlier attacks, terrorism was now meant to force Russia out of the entire Caucasian region. In fact, the insurgents called for Moscow to leave large swathes of territory where they enjoyed limited support. At the same time, their declaration had surpassingly little of the "sacred conflict" and of the project of building an Emirate under *Sharia*. The new narrative was contradictory in how it shifted to a maximalist goal but still tried to subdue ideology in favor of politics. This was indeed the limit reached with regard to the strategic logic of North Caucasian terrorism: it had become unclear what political project the attacks were meant to advance.

The elimination of Umarov fostered the end of North Caucasian terrorism in 2013. His death completed the turn away from the legacy of Ichkeria while no leader of comparable influence existed in the North Caucasus. In this context, Aliaskhab Kebekov, an ethnic Avar from Dagestan, became the first non-Chechen to head the insurgency in 2014. Against the backdrop of fighters leaving for the *jihad* in Syria<sup>90</sup> and successful counterinsurgency by pro-Moscow forces, the insurgency continued to weaken under him.

Interestingly, despite Kebekov regularly presenting the war as being against '*kafirs*' (infidels),<sup>91</sup> he upheld the ban on terrorism outside of the North Caucasus. This though did

not stop discussions among the insurgents about the value of re-starting attacks against Russia.<sup>92</sup> Certainly, counter-insurgency<sup>93</sup> and the exodus of fighters to the Middle East have weakened IK during that period<sup>94</sup> but it is difficult to ascribe the end of terrorism in Russia to these two factors alone. There is no need for considerable resources and people to stage an SBIED. In this context, the end of North Caucasian terrorism came because the insurgents were unable to reframe the strategic logic behind the attacks, and answer the question about the efficiency and expediency of terrorism in the new environment. In the 2010s, they lacked a clear political project on the model of Ichkeria. What goals could the attacks then advance? Although loathed by the insurgents and the diaspora, local elites following the success of Chechenisation and similar processes in some other republics now administered large parts of the North Caucasus. This was enough to satisfy many in the former opposition amidst general fatigue over the long conflict.

At the same time, publication on websites such as *Kavkaz-Center* attempted to play up radical Islam as an incentive for violence, notably referring to fighters and terrorists who had died as *shahids* (martyrs), and recruit victims of abuses by using religious incentives.<sup>95</sup> In this regard, a statement issued by IK in January 2014 had an interesting blending of the religious and the political. Calling on ‘Russians to rise against Putin’, its authors claimed to be ready to give ‘their lives for Allah’ because all those killed were ‘bound for paradise’. In turn, Russians were to ‘burn in hell’ because they had waged war against ‘the religion of [Allah]’.<sup>96</sup> Such calls had an appeal for some as shown by the few terrorist attacks by ethnic Russian converts.<sup>97</sup> But, in the North Caucasus, the most ideologically radicalized insurgents ended up leaving for the “greater” *jihad* in Syria and Iraq.<sup>98</sup> As shown by the drop in attacks, radical Islamism without an actual political project behind it proved insufficient in motivating the ones who stayed to continue striking at Russian civilians.

## Conclusion

North Caucasian terrorism has been a bane for Russia since 1992. It has resulted in 94 attacks outside of the North Caucasus, concentrated in three campaigns: during the First Chechen War (1994-1996), the Second Chechen War (1999-2004), and after the insurgents created their Emirate (2009-2013). Throughout the period, terrorism remained eminently strategic, focusing on high-profile civilian targets in Moscow and Stavropol *Krai* in an attempt to force Russia to leave first Chechnya and then the North Caucasus. This remained the motivation for attacks even after radical Islamism became the insurgency's structuring ideology. While terrorism has contributed to the Chechen victory in the first war and its threat has been instrumental in leading to the political compromise known as Chechenisation, it has eventually ended without the Russian authorities ever accepting to negotiate with the radical Islamists. It ended when it became apparent that, short of a concrete political project, radical Islamism by itself was not enough to motivate terrorist attacks by North Caucasians.

This remarkably did not change with the rise of IS in the North Caucasus. In late 2014, the IK commander in Dagestan was the first to switch to IS. In 2015, he was followed by most of the insurgents, a process accelerated by the elimination of Kebekov. This affected conflict dynamics in the North Caucasus and led to renewed, but limited, violence and terrorism in that region. As to terrorism outside of the North Caucasus, the SBIED in the subway in Saint Petersburg in 2017 came as a turning point. The terrorists who conducted the attack had no operational links with groups in the North Caucasus and no clear affiliation. They were targeting Russia in retaliation for its policies in Syria, as part of a globalized *jihad* against the West. In the future, this may be the greater threat for Russia as compared to North Caucasian terrorism that despite its perpetrators' conversion to radical Islam always remained attached to grievances in the North Caucasus.

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<sup>1</sup> The North Caucasus encompasses Karachay–Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia-Alania, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan. The North Caucasian Federal District includes Stavropol *Krai* (region). Stavropol is though populated for over 80% by ethnic Russians and sees different political dynamics. In this article, Stavropol *Krai* is dealt with separately from the North Caucasus.

<sup>2</sup> Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*; Kepel, *Jihad*; for the quoted definition of Islamism: Roy, *Islam*, ix.

<sup>3</sup> The paper refers to North Caucasian groups without disaggregating between individual units. The reason is that these groups, save for a few exceptions, have operated under a single command. This is especially so for groups that launched large-scale terrorist attacks outside of the North Caucasus. More than the individual units, it is important to know the masterminds that engineered the attacks.

<sup>4</sup> On terrorism in Russia: Pape, *Fuse*, 251-83; Stepanova, “Approach,” 301-22; on terrorism as part of the wars in the North Caucasus: Bakke, “Help,” 150-87; Bakke, “Copying,” 31-62; Moore, “Bodies,” 395-415; Ratelle, “Assessment,” 1-24; Souleimanov, *War*; Tishkov, *Chechnya*.

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, *Terrorists*, 4-6.

<sup>6</sup> Most definitions limit terrorism to attacks on non-combatants: Schmid, “Terrorism”; including in Critical Terrorism Studies: Jackson, “Commitments”; but not all of them: Neumann and Smith, *Strategy*, 8. Terrorism is now rightly seen increasingly as a tactic that could also be used by states.

<sup>7</sup> “Federalnyi Zakon.”

<sup>8</sup> Stepanova, “Approach,” 310-11.

<sup>9</sup> Crenshaw, “Causes,” 381-85; McCormick, “Decision-Making,” 480.

<sup>10</sup> Bloom, *Dying to Kill*; Crenshaw, “Logic,” 7–24; Hoffman, *Inside*; Kydd and Walter, “Strategies,” 49–80; Lake, “Extremism,” 15–29; McCormick, “Decision-Making,” 480-95; Pape, “Introduction,” 643-50; Pape, “Logic,” 2.

<sup>11</sup> Abrahms, “Effectiveness,” 374; Pape, “Logic,” 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffman, *Inside*, 84-89, 229-56; Moghadam, “Suicide,” 707-729; Moghadam, “Martyrs.”; Piazza, “Islamist,” 62-88; Roy, “Hate,”; About changes in the 2000s: Laqueur, “Postmodern,” 24-6; Münkler, *Wars*, 99-116; Crenshaw, *Explaining*, 31-66.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin and Simon, “Face.”

<sup>14</sup> Crenshaw, *Explaining*, 31-66.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*; Hoffman, *Inside*, 89-97; Pape, “Logic,” 1-19.

<sup>16</sup> Hegghammer, “Fighters,” 53–94; Moghadam, “Martyrs.”

<sup>17</sup> Hoffman, *Inside*, 158-63; Moghadam, “Martyrs.”; Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler, “Islam,” 421-48.

<sup>18</sup> Bakke, “Help”; Sagramoso, “Radicalisation,” 561-595.

<sup>19</sup> Juergensmeyer, “Religion,” 140.

<sup>20</sup> Abrahms, “Effectiveness,” 366–93

<sup>21</sup> Abrahms, “Terrorism,” 42-78; see also the same claim in Neumann and Smith, *Strategy*, 74-75.

<sup>22</sup> Hoffman, “Inside”; Hoffman McCormick, “Signalling,” 243-81; Pape, *Fuse*, 251-83; Pape, “Logic”; Moghadam, “Terrorism,” 707-29 for a critic of Pape.

<sup>23</sup> Abrahms, “Effectiveness,” 367; Kydd and Walter, “Strategies”; Hoffman and McCormick, “Terrorism.”

<sup>24</sup> The appendix gives the list of attacks and the information resources used to select the attacks.

<sup>25</sup> Ratelle and Souleimanov, “Retaliation.”

<sup>26</sup> The bombing by an IS-affiliate of the *Metrojet* Flight 9268 between Sharm El Sheikh and Saint Petersburg on October 31, 2015 and the bombing in the Saint Petersburg metro on April 3, 2017 were notably excluded (see Conclusion). Another seven minor attacks by IS since 2015 were excluded as being either directed against security forces, or leading to defused IEDs.

<sup>27</sup> The hostage takeover in Beslan happened in North Ossetia-Alania (see Part 3).

<sup>28</sup> “Terroristicheskie.”



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- <sup>29</sup> Shlapentokh, “Basayev,” 139-45.
- <sup>30</sup> Malashenko, *Kadyrov*, 23-27; Speckhard and Akhmedova, “Jihad,” 111-12.
- <sup>31</sup> Z. Yandarbiyev was acting President after Dudayev until his defeat to Maskhadov. He was then in exile in Qatar. At the start of the Second Chechen War, he visited Mullah Omar in Afghanistan, obtaining his support for Chechnya. Mamon and Pilis, *Paradise*.
- <sup>32</sup> Kramer, “Guerrilla,” 251-52; Bakke, “Help”; Sagramoso, “Radicalisation.”
- <sup>33</sup> Speckhard and Akhmedova, “Jihad,” 111.
- <sup>34</sup> “Sergei Stepashin”; Tishkov, *Chechnya*, 164-79.
- <sup>35</sup> “Basayev”; Kramer, “Guerrilla,” 268.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* In *The Life and Times of Khattab*, the propaganda movie about him, Khattab says that the attack on Dagestan was meant to support Dagestani radical Islamist communities against Russia. In summer 1999, he was already talking about bringing the war to the entire North Caucasus; Bakke, “Copying,” 48.
- <sup>37</sup> Malashenko, *Kadyrov*, 23-27.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39; and Malashenko, *Islam*, 111.
- <sup>39</sup> Malashenko, *Kadyrov*, 111.
- <sup>40</sup> The Kremlin had also reached to Akhmad Zakayev in November 2001 and Ruslan Gelayev. Russel, “Conflict,” 187-88; Mamon and Pilis, *Chechnya*.
- <sup>41</sup> Rechkalov, “Il’yasov.”
- <sup>42</sup> Souleimanov, *War*, 282; It is likely that Maskhadov was aware of the hostage takeover in Moscow.
- <sup>43</sup> Malashenko, *Kadyrov*, 18-9, 46-9.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-84.
- <sup>45</sup> Silin and Tokareva, “Ramzan.”
- <sup>46</sup> For example: Politkovskaïa, *Tchéchénie*.
- <sup>47</sup> Pape, “Logic,” 7.
- <sup>48</sup> Babitsky, “Basayev.”
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> Mamon and Pilis, *Chechnya*.
- <sup>51</sup> Souleimanov, *War*, 112-14; Speckhard and Akhmedova, “Jihad,” 107.
- <sup>52</sup> Gamov, “Chernomyrdin.”
- <sup>53</sup> Speckhard and Akhmedova, “Jihad”, 108; for the terrorists’ account of the attack: “Znai Svoyu Istoriyu. ‘My’.”
- <sup>54</sup> Souleimanov, *War*, 282.
- <sup>55</sup> Hoffman and McCormick, “Terrorism.”
- <sup>56</sup> Bakke, “Help,” 180-81; Speckhard and Akhmedova, “Suicide,” 11; Bakke, “Copying,” 53-7 on the influence of foreigners in resorting to more radical tactics.
- <sup>57</sup> “Gunmen.”
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> Kara-Murza, “Nord-Ost.” It is unclear to which extent these additional demands were shared with the authorities.
- <sup>60</sup> Shlapentokh, “Basayev,” 140.
- <sup>61</sup> Babitsky, “Basayev”; “Znai Svoyu Istoriyu. Chekisty.”
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; Souleimanov, *War*, 246-53.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* It is unclear to which extent these conditions were shared with the authorities.
- <sup>64</sup> Insurgents’ websites speak of it as a turning point that united the insurgents behind radical Islam. “Abu-l’-Valid Al’-Gamidi.”
- <sup>65</sup> Kramer, “Guerrilla,” 246. There was training by Palestinian suicide bombers.

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- <sup>66</sup> Kornilov, “Basayev.”
- <sup>67</sup> Hoffman, *Inside*, 132.
- <sup>68</sup> Bloom, “Bombshells,” 1-21.
- <sup>69</sup> Babitsky, “Basayev.”
- <sup>70</sup> “Sadulayev: ‘Chechenskoe’.”
- <sup>71</sup> “Prezident ChRI.”
- <sup>72</sup> Souleimanov, *War*, 261-72.
- <sup>73</sup> Russel, “Conflict,” 193.
- <sup>74</sup> ‘Ofitsial’nyi Reliz.’
- <sup>75</sup> “Doku Abu Usman.”
- <sup>76</sup> Youngman, “Ideology,” 376.
- <sup>77</sup> Moore, “Bodies,” 399-400.
- <sup>78</sup> “Movladi Udugov.”
- <sup>79</sup> ‘Ofitsial’nyi Reliz.’
- <sup>80</sup> Campana and Ducol, “Voices,” 679-700; as examples: “Znai Svoyu Istoriyu. ‘My.’; “Pis’mo.”; “Dzhikhad.”
- <sup>81</sup> Hoffman and McCormick, “Terrorism.”
- <sup>82</sup> “Zakaev.”
- <sup>83</sup> “Amir IK Dokku Abu Usman Nazval.”
- <sup>84</sup> Leahy, “Moratorium.”
- <sup>85</sup> Vatchagaev, “Gakaev.”
- <sup>86</sup> For example: “Fatwa.”
- <sup>87</sup> “Amir IK Dokku Abu Usman Izmenil.”
- <sup>88</sup> “Amir IK Dokku Abu Usman Otmenil.”
- <sup>89</sup> “Dagestanskii.”
- <sup>90</sup> For example, “Pis’mo.”
- <sup>91</sup> “Kadii.”; and “Amir IK Abu Mukhammad.”
- <sup>92</sup> On the attacks in Volgograd: “Shariatskii Khukm.”
- <sup>93</sup> Duffy Toft and Zhukov, “Islamists,” 222-38.
- <sup>94</sup> “Statistika.”; “Foreign.”
- <sup>95</sup> See striking examples: “Imarat Kavkaz.”; “Abu Tal’kha.”; and Campana and Ducol, “Voices,” 694; Speckhard and Akhmedova, “Jihad,” 128-37.
- <sup>96</sup> “Modzhakhedy.”
- <sup>97</sup> Mashkin, “Podtsepili.”
- <sup>98</sup> “Dzhikhad.”; Yarlykapov, “Terrorism”.

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## Appendix: Terrorist Attacks by North Caucasian Armed Groups outside of the North Caucasus, 1992-2018<sup>1</sup>

Date	City	Region	Target	Tactic	Deaths	Wounded
27.03.92	Mineralnye Vody	Stavropol	Bus	Hostage Takeover	0	0
26.05.94	Kinzhal	Stavropol	Bus	Hostage Takeover	0	0
28.06.94	Mineralnye Vody	Stavropol	Bus	Hostage Takeover	0	0
28.07.94	Mineralnye Vody	Stavropol	Bus	Hostage Takeover	5	14
18.11.94	Moscow	Moscow	Railway	IED	1	0
22.12.94	Moscow	Moscow	Train	IED	0	0
27.12.94	Moscow	Moscow	Bus	IED	0	1
14.06.95	Budyonnovsk	Stavropol	Hospital	Hostage Takeover	147	397
16.01.96	Trabzon	Turkey	Ferry	Hostage Takeover	0	0
11.06.96	Moscow	Moscow	Subway	IED	4	12
11.07.96	Moscow	Moscow	Bus	IED	0	8
12.07.96	Moscow	Moscow	Bus	IED	0	28
19.07.96	Voronezh	Voronezh	Train Station	IED (Failed)	0	0
25.07.96	Astrakhan	Astrakhan	Train	IED	0	0
05.08.96	Volgograd	Volgograd	Apartment Building	IED	1	0
12.08.96	Astrakhan	Astrakhan	Train	IED	1	8
23.04.97	Armavir	Krasnodar	Train Station	IED	3	20
28.04.97	Pyatigorsk	Stavropol	Train Station	IED	2	17
27.06.97	Moscow	Moscow	Train	IED	5	14

<sup>1</sup> The information resources: *Antiterror.ru*, *Centrasia.ru*, *Gazeta.ru*, *Goloslama.ru*, *Interfax.ru*, *Iz.ru*, *Kavkaz-uzel.eu*, *Kommersant.ru*, *Korrespondent.net*, *Kp.ru*, *Lenta.ru*, *Mgutm.ru*, *Newsru.com*, *News.ru*, *Ng.ru*, *Rbc.ru*, *Regnum.ru*, *Ria.ru*, *Ridus.ru*, *Rg.ru*, *Start.umd.edu*, *Svoboda.org*, *Tass.ru*, *Terroru.Net*, *Utro.ru*, and *Vesti.ru* were primarily used to compile the attacks. Information about each attack was triangulated across several sources.



<b>26.04.99</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Hotel	IED	0	11
<b>22.06.99</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Interior Ministry Office	IED	0	0
<b>31.08.99</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Shopping Mall	IED	1	40
<b>09.09.99</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Apartment Building	IED	100	690
<b>13.09.99</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Apartment Building	IED	124	7
<b>16.09.99</b>	Volgodonsk	Rostov	Apartment Building	IED	19	89
<b>16.10.99</b>	Aksarayskiy	Astrakhan	Bridge	IED (Failed)/ SAF	0	3
<b>08.08.00</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Subway	IED	13	61
<b>24.08.00</b>	Galyugayevskaya	Stavropol	Railway	IED (Failed)	0	0
<b>06.10.00</b>	Pyatigorsk	Stavropol	Train Station	IED	2	10
<b>06.10.00</b>	Nevinnomyssk	Stavropol	Bus Stop	IED	0	0
<b>06.10.00</b>	Nevinnomyssk	Stavropol	Market	IED	2	15
<b>29.10.00</b>	Budyonnovsk	Stavropol	Bus	IED	0	1
<b>24.11.00</b>	Budyonnovsk	Stavropol	Bus Stop	IED	0	0
<b>08.12.00</b>	Pyatigorsk	Stavropol	Market	IED	4	45
<b>05.02.01</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Subway	IED	0	20
<b>15.03.01</b>	Istanbul	Turkey	Plane	Hostage Takeover	2	0
<b>24.03.01</b>	Mineralnye Vody	Stavropol	Market	IED	24	108
<b>24.03.01</b>	Iessentouki	Stavropol	Police Office/ Street	IED (Failed)	0	22
<b>24.03.01</b>	Mineralnye Vody	Stavropol	Police Checkpoint/ Street	IED	2	0
<b>31.07.01</b>	Nevinnomyssk	Stavropol	Bus	Hostage Takeover	0	1
<b>19.10.02</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Restaurant/ Street	IED	1	8
<b>23.10.02</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Theater	Hostage Takeover	130	700
<b>05.07.03</b>	Pokrovskoye-Streshnevo	Moscow	Open-Air Concert	SBIED	16	50

<b>09.07.03</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Street	SBIED (Failed)	1	0
<b>25.08.03</b>	Krasnodar	Krasnodar	Bus Stop	IED	4	10
<b>25.08.03</b>	Krasnodar	Krasnodar	Bus Stop	IED	0	5
<b>25.08.03</b>	Krasnodar	Krasnodar	Bus Stop	IED	0	3
<b>03.09.03</b>	Iessentouki	Stavropol	Train	IED	7	80
<b>05.12.03</b>	Iessentouki	Stavropol	Train	SBIED	47	233
<b>09.12.03</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Hotel	SBIED	5	14
<b>06.02.04</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Subway	SBIED	41	250
<b>12.02.04</b>	Chekhov	Moscow	Gas Pipeline	SAF	0	0
<b>12.02.04</b>	Podolsk	Moscow	Gas Pipeline	SAF	0	0
<b>18.02.04</b>	Bronnitsy	Moscow	Gas Pipeline	IED (Defused)/ SAF	0	0
<b>18.02.04</b>	Bronnitsy	Moscow	Gas Pipeline	IED	0	0
<b>18.02.04</b>	Bronnitsy	Moscow	Gas Pipeline	IED	0	0
<b>19.02.04</b>	Voronezh	Voronezh	Bus Stop	IED (Failed)	0	2
<b>15.03.04</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Power Line	IED	0	0
<b>22.03.04</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Apartment Building	IED (Failed)	0	0
<b>04.06.04</b>	Samara	Samara	Market	IED	11	70
<b>19.07.04</b>	Voronezh	Voronezh	Bus Stop	IED	1	8
<b>26.07.04</b>	Voronezh	Voronezh	Bus Stop	IED	0	11
<b>24.08.04</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Plane	SBIED	42	0
<b>24.08.04</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Plane	SBIED	45	0
<b>24.08.04</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Bus Stop	IED	0	4
<b>31.08.04</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Subway	SBIED	8	51
<b>26.01.05</b>	Voronezh	Voronezh	Bus Stop	IED	0	0

<b>12.06.05</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Train	IED	0	44
<b>13.08.07</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Train	IED	0	60
<b>09.12.07</b>	Nevinnomyssk	Stavropol	Bus	IED	3	14
<b>19.11.09</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Church	SAF	1	1
<b>27.11.09</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Train	IED	28	132
<b>28.11.09</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Train	IED	0	0
<b>29.03.10</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Subway	SBIED	26	127
<b>29.03.10</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Subway	SBIED	14	0
<b>26.05.10</b>	Stavropol	Stavropol	Concert Hall	IED	8	60
<b>17.08.10</b>	Pyatigorsk	Stavropol	Restaurant/ Street	IED	1	46
<b>08.09.10</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Garage Gazprom Office	IED	0	0
<b>30.09.10</b>	Stavropol	Stavropol	Restaurant/ Street	IED (Failed)	1	0
<b>20.11.10</b>	Matsesta	Krasnodar	Railway	IED	0	0
<b>31.12.10</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Hotel	SBIED (Failed)	0	1
<b>24.01.11</b>	Moscow	Moscow	Airport	SBIED	37	170
<b>19.07.12</b>	Kazan	Tatarstan	Car/ Street	SAF	0	1
<b>19.07.12</b>	Kazan	Tatarstan	Apartment Building	IED	1	0
<b>21.08.12</b>	Novochuvashskiy	Tatarstan	Street	IED (Failed)	0	0
<b>21.10.13</b>	Volgograd	Volgograd	Bus	SBIED	6	37
<b>27.12.13</b>	Pyatigorsk	Stavropol	Car/ Street/ Police Office	IED	3	0
<b>29.12.13</b>	Volgograd	Volgograd	Train Station	SBIED	17	45
<b>30.12.13</b>	Volgograd	Volgograd	Bus	SBIED	15	25
<b>08.01.14</b>	Maryinskaya	Stavropol	Car/ Street	IED (Defused)/ SAF	3	0
<b>08.01.14</b>	Zol'skaya	Stavropol	Car/ Street	IED/ SAF	1	0

<b>08.01.14</b>	Zol'skaya	Stavropol	Car/ Street	SAF	1	0
<b>08.01.14</b>	Tambukan	Stavropol	Car/ Street	SAF	1	0
<b>19.08.17</b>	Surgut	Khanty- Mansiysk	Shopping Mall/ Street	Cutting Weapon	0	7