The Allure of *Jihad*:
The De-Territorialisation of the War in the North Caucasus

The last version of this article is published in *Caucasus Survey*.
See: Klimentov, V. A., & Jasutis, G. (2020). "The Allure of Jihad: the de-territorialization of the war in the North Caucasus", *Caucasus Survey*, *8*(3), 239-257. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/23761199.2020.1783619

Authors:
Vassily A. Klimentov (first and corresponding author), Dr Grazvydas Jasutis.

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 | grazvydas.jasutis@graduateinstitute.ch

The Allure of *Jihad*:
The De-Territorialisation of the War in the North Caucasus

Insurgents in the North Caucasus have switched from the *al-Qaeda*-affiliated *Imarat Kavkaz* to the Islamic State after 2014. Although this transition was partially the result of *Imarat Kavkaz*'s military defeat, it has also settled two decades of tension over ideology. It signalled the victory of *Salafi-jihadism* over a nationally rooted (radical) Islamism and led to a break between the insurgents and the Caucasian context. This de-territorialisation of grievances for the war has in turn increased the threat of radical Islamist violence for Russia.

Keywords: Russia, Caucasus, Islamism, War, Imarat Kavkaz, Islamic State

Introduction

The North Caucasus has seen significant conflict since the collapse of the Soviet Union, from the separatist rebellion of the First Chechen War to the radical Islamist Caucasus-wide insurgency with ties to international terrorist networks of the Second Chechen War. Since late 2014, the insurgents have abandoned their pan-Caucasian state project conducted under the banner of the *al-Qaeda* (AQ)-affiliated *Imarat Kavkaz* (IK, Caucasus Emirate) to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State's (IS) local franchise, *Wilayah al-Qawqaz* (WQ, Caucasus Province).

Relying on an analysis of over 3,000 articles published in the "Kavkaz" section on *Kavkaz Center* (KC), IK's online mouthpiece that also republishes materials from other insurgent websites, between 2013 and 2018 and selected publications from before 2013, as well as on interviews with Caucasian diaspora and community leaders, this article puts in historical perspective the motives that led North Caucasian insurgents to IS. It argues that the defection to IS marked the victory of a global "de-territorialised" radical Islamist ideology akin to *Salafi-jihadism* – a militant Islamism underpinning violence against "deviant" Muslims in majority-

Muslim countries and against the West – over a nationally rooted (radical) Islamism. In its analysis, the article uses in-depth interviews with Husein Iskhanov, a Member of the Parliament of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (Ichkeria, *de facto* independent between 1996 and 1999); Djamboulat Souleimanov, a Chechen "national-Islamist" war leader who was part of a group that included foreigners during the First Chechen War and personally knew most of the Chechen leaders; and Mairbek Vatchagaev, an adviser to Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, as well as two interviews published on *Kavkaz Uzel* (KU) with young Muslims who left Russia for Syria (2015; 2017).

The article contributes to the literature on the North Caucasian conflicts at three levels. First, it offers a historical view to a problem that has too often been analysed as being only about the post-2007 period. Second, it proposes a new perspective on the changing ideology of the North Caucasian armed groups. Third, it provides an extensive qualitative analysis of existing sources in Russian on the insurgents' main website and adds original sources to the discussion.

This article is organised in six parts. First, it reviews the literature on conflicts in the North Caucasus and develops its explanatory framework. Second, it discusses the rise of radical Islam until the creation of IK. Then, it analyses how IK has worked to connect competing local and global Islamist ideas amidst funding considerations. The fourth and fifth parts show how the allegiance to IS came as a last resort option of a dying insurgency and as the victory of *Salafi-jihadism*. In lieu of a conclusion, the last part examines what the re-alignment toward IS may mean for the future of radical Islamist violence in Russia.

Ideology and De-Territorialisation

For the post-Soviet period the literature on the conflicts in the North Caucasus has been surveyed by Ratelle who points out that it has revolved around four themes: 'grievance, greed, trauma, and radicalisation' (2015). Three debates have structured publications on these themes: (i) the causal role of identity, nationalism, and greed in the conflicts of the 1990s; (ii) the role of Islamist radicalisation in mobilisation patterns after 1999; and (iii) the patterns of violence diffusion in the North Caucasus and the role of counter-terrorism (*Ibid*). In this article, the focus is on radical Islamism. This topic however connects to the other debates as it is often discussed either in opposition to nationalism, or in the context of how violence has spread from Chechnya to other republics.

Because it has obvious policy implications and connects to the "civilisational debate", the analysis of the importance of radical Islamism in the ideology, defined after Gutiérrez Sanín and Wood as 'a set of more or less systematic ideas that identify a constituency, the challenges the group confronts, the objectives to pursue on behalf of that group, and a (perhaps vague) program of action' (2014, 214), of North Caucasian armed groups has led some authors to forgo complexity for a clear-cut answer that either ascribes a priority importance to, or downplays radical Islamism. In this respect, the North Caucasus is part of a larger debate on the competition between ideology and instrumentality in civil wars that has (re)gained prominence with regard to conflicts involving radical Islamist groups that try to at times appeal to a larger "international constituency" (*Ibid*; Walter 2017; Abrahams, Maynard, and Thaler 2018).

In the North Caucasus, the evolution of the armed groups' ideology from nationalism to radical Islamism has typically been interpreted through the prism of either their conversion and integration to global *Salafi-jihadist* networks (Hahn 2007; Sagramoso 2012), or, on the opposite,

an evolution that was largely forced and tactical (Wilhelmsen 2005; Bakke 2014). This latter strand has integrated more nuanced analysis as the armed groups moved away from their initial grievances and scores of their fighters left for Syria (Moore 2010). While the account above is simplifying a debate that has been enriched by analyses that looked at the changing ideology of the North Caucasian insurgents using Social Movement Theory and Framing (Youngman 2020; Sagramoso and Yarlykapov 2020), the reality is that there has been a difficulty in reconciling these two views. In this context, this article argues that this debate needs to be re-framed by adding a layer of explanation: the tension has been as much between radical Islamism and nationalism, as between a nationally rooted (radical) Islamism and a transnational form, akin to *Salafi-jihadism*. Not all radical Islamists were ready to forgo the building of a national state.

While competition between "national-Islamism" and radical Islamism has been present since the 1990s, the local Islamist idea was definitely subsumed under the global one against the backdrop of the defeat suffered by IK and the appearance of IS. While recruits, now as before, continue to join the insurgency to retaliate for abuses by pro-Moscow forces, the appeal of global *jihad* against "enemies of all Muslims" and of the Caliphate has been stronger than that of IK's regional political project for a generation of fighters. In this context, although allegiance to IS came by default for some insurgents, it was the climax of a break between the insurgency and the local context that had been in the making since before IK replaced Ichkeria in 2007. To use Roy's term (2004, 3-5), this was a process of 'de-territorialisation' of the grievances for the war.

The rise of WQ has implications for the threat represented by radical Islamist violence in Russia because it provides a shared "non-Caucasian" ideology for Muslims who wish to oppose the state. The Islamic identity of such radicals, and by extension their grievances, are no longer 'embedded in territorial cultures' (*Ibid*, 20), but part of globally constructed identity and

grievances. As in Western Europe, Roy's 'globalisation of Islam' was enhanced in Russia by the arrival of millions of Muslims to majority non-Muslim regions. Mostly Central Asians, these people settled around Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In the North Caucasus, the reverse process of out-migration to the Middle East has heightened the 'globalisation of Islam'. While terrorist violence in Russian cities was previously driven by politics in the Caucasus, it is now – as in the West – increasingly driven by a rejection of Russia's policies in the Middle East, as well of the liberal secular modernity it promotes.

The Road to *Imarat Kavkaz*

The term "Wahhabism" is derogatively used in Russia for Salafi-inspired movements that challenge the practices of the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools of Islam. As a reformist movement, "Wahhabism" wants to restore the "purity" of early Islamic worship and criticises Islamic sects that it considers deviant. In the 1990s, while a small minority supported it, "Wahhabism" started competing with Sufism, a mystic current in Sunni Islam (Vatchagaev 2018; Souleimanov 2019; Tishkov 2004, 168-72). Since the 2000s, the term "Wahhabism" has been used to mean in Russia what in other contexts is called *Salafi-jihadism*. In this article, the term "radical Islamism" is used to mean both the nationally-rooted form and *Salafi-jihadism*. While the two have worked together against Sufism, they have also competed to dominate the ideology of the insurgents.

Three stages to the diffusion of radical Islamism to the North Caucasus can be identified. This ideology was originally associated with the Islamic Renaissance Party that became active in late Soviet times. Unlike other local leaders, the party's ideologues, the Dagestani Bagautdin Kebedov, and Chechens Isa Umarov and Movladi Udugov, drifted early on toward a form of "de-nationalised" radical Islamism (Souleimanov 2019; Kisriev 2007). An important moment

was the arrival in 1994 to Chechnya of Sheikh Ali Fathi al-Shishani, a Jordanian of Chechen origin. Fathi, an Islamic scholar and veteran of the Soviet-Afghan War, set up a battalion – called "*jamaat*" (assembly) – that included fighters from Turkey and the Middle East, and started spreading Salafism. Fathi was joined in 1995 by Samir Saleh Abdullah (Ibn al-Khattab), a Saudi-born veteran of the Soviet-Afghan War who led a group of some 70 Chechen and Arabs during the First Chechen War (*Ibid*). After Fathi's death in 1997, Khattab remained at the vanguard of international radical Islamist support, especially coming from the Gulf, to Chechen insurgents until his death in 2002 (Vatchagaev 2018; Moore 2015, 405-6; Tishkov 2004, 172-79). Hence, radical Islamism in Chechnya had both a domestic and a foreign origin.

Khattab and Fathi's influence on insurgents' leaders was though long limited. One of the reasons was that they were reportedly only able to muster a few dozen foreign fighters during the war against Russia (Iskhanov 2019; Souleimanov 2019; Vatchagaev 2018). Besides, the appeal of radical Islam in Chechnya that had experienced decades of Soviet re-modelling remained superficial. The majority of the population stayed attached to Sufism and associated practises such as *zikr* and visitations of the tombs of Saints (*Ibid*; Chechen Veterans 2017; Elders Council 2018; Tishkov 2004, 172-79). Hence, while Chechnya and its leaders underwent a process of Islamisation in response to the war – incarnated by Dzhokhar Dudayev's appeal to embrace Islam and conduct a defensive *jihad* in a mosque in Shali, a city southeast of Grozny, in March 1995 – none of them saw it as independent from building a national state (Souleimanov 2019; Trenin and Malashenko 2004, 71-101).

The second stage of the spread of radical Islamism to the Chechen rebellion came during the inter-ward period. In ruins after the conflict, Chechnya saw the competition of armed groups representing various elites that all tried to showcase their Islamic credentials. Testifying to rising

radical Islamist influence, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, the acting President of Ichkeria after the death of Dudayev in April 1996, supported the creation of *sharia* courts. Sheikh Omar, an Arab foreigner, fast-forwarded the training of judges in courses of only three-to-six months (Souleimanov 2019; Vatchagaev 2018). The interwar period also saw Kebedov's return to Chechnya where he linked to Isa Umarov and Udugov, and to commanders organised around Khattab who already eyed a pan-Caucasian Emirate. Shamil Basayev, the most infamous Chechen commander and steadfast "anti-Wahhabi" after the first war, began to gravitate toward that group in spring 1998 (*Ibid*; Tishkov 2004, 164-95). He however seemed to remain attached to the idea of a national state as did some other Islamists, notably Yandarbiyev.

Tensions between Islamic sects led to clashes near Gudermes, a town east of Grozny, in spring 1998 (Tishkov 2004, 178; Troshev 2017, 178). The short conflict witnessed the victory of Sulim Yamadaev's Sufis backed by Aslan Maskhadov, the new President of Ichkeria who had scrapped *sharia* courts and promoted a more secular line, against Arbi Baraev, Ramzan Akhmadov, and Abdul-Mali Mezhidov's radical Islamists. Thanks to Basayev's mediation, radical Islamists were able to avoid annihilation and consolidate dominions in Alkhan-Yurt and Urus-Martan, near Grozny. The Gudermes episode was remarkable in the extent it remained an intra-Chechen affair that saw foreigners such as Khattab stand aside despite their sympathy for the radical Islamists (Vatchagaev 2019). It besides showed how Maskhadov was unable to mediate between competing clans, sects, and parties in Chechnya (Troshev 2017 (2001), 176-77; Sokiryanskaya 2014).

Parts of the republic were already escaping his authority. Chechnya hence witnessed the consolidation of the terrorist and insurgent training camp *KavKaz*, located in the southern town of Avtury, on the opposite side of the river from Serzhen-Yurt. Providing military training and

basic Islamic education, *KavKaz* was managed by Khattab. Thousands of Chechens, up to 3,000 Dagestanis (mostly Avars), hundreds of other Caucasians (mostly Ingushs and Karachays), some 100 to 200 Tajiks and other Central Asians, dozens of foreigners, and few Muslims from other Russian regions reportedly passed through it (Souleimanov 2019). Some of these fighters came to replenish the ranks of radical Islamists, who by local accounts enjoyed considerable financial support from abroad (*Ibid;* Vatchagaev 2018) and strengthened ties to AQ (Kramer 2005, 229, 275).

In that context, despite their defeat in Gudermes, the radical Islamists increased their influence, helped by a religious aura that made it difficult for the authorities to challenge them amidst the ongoing Islamic revival. In February 1999, Maskhadov introduced *sharia* law in the entire country. By that point, Chechen parties were on colliding courses. Chief of the "moderates", Maskhadov was weakened by the splintering of anti-radical forces and his incapacity to prevent tensions with Russia. In Moscow, the nationalist elites that had come to power after the first war had besides no intention of helping him consolidate his authority and were eager to forcefully deal with the criminality coming from Chechnya (Tishkov 2004, 107-26; Troshev 2017, 136-78). While an array of political-militarised parties had consolidated in Chechnya, their ideologies differed in their emphasis between nationalism and Islamism but importantly, in the latter case, also as to the territory of a potential Islamist state – Ichkeria-centred or pan-Caucasian with sometimes "internationalist" components (Muzaev 1999, 69-78).

In August 1999, despite calls for restraint from Ichkerian authorities and some Islamists (Souleimanov 2019), an invasion by Basayev, Khattab, Kebedov and 2,000 Chechen, Dagestani, and foreign militants from Chechnya into Dagestan precipitated the start of the Second Chechen War. Bombings attributed to North Caucasian terrorists in Moscow, Buynaksk in Dagestan, and

Volgodonsk in Rostov Region further contributed to igniting large-scale violence. All attacks were denounced by Ichkerian authorities (*Polit.ru* 1999). In the meantime, some influential Sufis and former separatists led by Akhmad Kadyrov, the chief *mufti* of Ichkeria, backed Moscow against the radical Islamists (Malashenko 2009, 23-27). After the Russian army retook control of Chechnya by summer 2000, its administration was handed to Kadyrov and loyal local elites, marking the start of Moscow's Chechenisation policy. The forces loyal to Maskhadov, mostly Sufis and "national Islamists" with a minority of *Salafi-jihadists*, stayed in the opposition.

After that point though, the influence of the radical Islamists in the opposition steadily grew until Maskhadov's role was downgraded at a meeting of Chechen and foreign commanders in 2002 (Souleimanov 2019; KC August 2013). Leadership passed to commanders like Basayev who were ready to use suicide terrorism against Russian and Kadyrov's forces. Following a period of guerrilla and terrorist warfare, the insurgency underwent a generational and ethnic change as veterans of the first war exited the stage (Sagramoso 2012). By 2006, Maskhadov, Basayev, Ruslan Gelayev, Abdul-Halim Sadulayev, who took the leadership of the insurgency in 2005, and other commanders had been killed. All of them, even Basayev, Gelayev, and Sadulayev who had gravitated toward radical Islam, were attached to a Chechen national state (Souleimanov 2019; Bakke 2014). By contrast, most of the radical Islamists who came after them originated from other republics and had little interest for Chechen independence. In 2006, Doku Umarov, a Chechen veteran of the first war, became the 5th President of Ichkeria. A year later, he scrapped it to proclaim the Caucasus Emirate, *Imarat Kavkaz* (IK), candidly admitting some of the reasons for the shift:

> [After Basayev and Sadulayev's deaths] Emir Sayfullah [Anzor Astemirov] …told me… 'If you do not declare Imarat, I will be forced to declare it myself, and call for brothers fighting in the

> Caucasus to make bay'ah [pledge of allegiance] to me.' If this were to happen, this would have been an obvious split. In any case, I know that Dagestanis would have made bay'ah to Sayfullah, and Ingushs would have made bay'ah, and we would have been left [alone]. It was already clear that people would not follow us; our ranks were not being replenished under the flag of Ichkeria. … Those who had gone to avenge a killed father, brother, a sister that had been taken away, the romantics… we do no need them. We only need those who came with pure intentions for Allah (KC August 2011).

Though Umarov personally lamented the lack of appeal of Ichkeria, creating IK was meant to boost recruitments. As people who knew him in the 1990s have pointed out, Umarov was first of all a military leader (Souleimanov 2019). His decision was as much forced by circumstances, as engineered by people more versed in Islamic theology, namely Isa Umarov, Udugov, and Astemirov, the leader of Kabardino-Balkaria's insurgents. These people have suggested that the *Salafi-jihadist* turn would bring more funding from abroad. This was a necessity for a weakened insurgency but one that diverted remaining Chechen Islamists from their roots (*Ibid*; Vatchagaev 2018; Youngman 2019).

The creation of the Emirate marked a rupture at several levels. Instead of a national state, the rebels now fought to create an entity that would stretch across the Caucasus and parts of South Russia, from the Black to the Caspian Sea. Their movement was to support AQ. Though Umarov presented this shift as the outcome of Chechen separatism, claiming that Maskhadov and Basayev had wanted for the Emirate to happen, his decision alienated many supporters of Ichkeria. At another level, Umarov declared that the Russian Federation was no longer the sole enemy: IK was fighting against the entire West (KC 2007). This marked a point of no return when *Salafi-jihadism* started winning over the idea of a national Islamic state.

Ideology and Funding

The declaration of the Emirate led to dissensions among the forces opposing Moscow in summer 2010. Field commanders Husein Gakaev, Aslanbek Vadalov, and Tarkhan Gaziev, and foreign fighter Khaled Yusuf Mohammad (Muhannad) tried to unseat Umarov (KC 27 September 2010). Being the most influential commanders in Chechnya, they were also some of the most active across the Caucasus. While being proponents of radical Islam, they still challenged Umarov's declaration as having been done unilaterally. They were at odds with his thrust to integrate the conflict against Russia into a global war against the West and criticised his vague political project (Leahy 2012). They likewise opposed the staging of terrorist attacks against civilians in the Caucasus and Russia as only diverting resources and alienating supporters. Commanders from other Caucasian republics supported them, as well as personalities from the diaspora who wanted the insurgency to return to its separatist Chechen roots (Vatchagaev 2013; *BBC* 2010).

The division in the insurgency was only overcome in July 2011 following a *sharia* court and alleged mediation by Dagestani militants. Gakaev was appointed to a higher position within IK after he pledged to support Umarov. Sign of the globalisation of the rebellion, Umarov was able to reassert control in no small part thanks to supportive rulings from Islamic scholars in the Middle East (KC 10 September 2010). In an apparent concession to Gakaev, he declared the suspension of terrorist attacks outside of the Caucasus in February 2012, motivating it by the anti-Putin protests in Moscow (Popov 2013).

With regard to ideology, the Umarov-Gakaev split was remarkable in how it challenged the domestic-foreign dichotomy among the radical Islamists. More than between nationalism and radical Islamism, the competition was by the 2000s between a form of Chechen-rooted Islamism and a regional or global pan-*Salafi-Jihadism*. Reflecting on the collapse of IK in 2017, Ahmed

Umarov, the brother of Doku, claimed that many of IK's shortcomings came from the fact that 'national ambitions frequently took precedence over the sharia of Allah' (*ChechenInfo*). Others might have argued that the problem was precisely the opposite: *Salafi-jihadism* had hindered the achievement of a national Islamic state.

The period following the proclamation of IK witnessed an evolution of the insurgents' narrative toward a greater emphasis on global, as opposed to local, *jihad*. Even in the North Caucasus, the conflict was presented in increasingly existential terms. Demands for far-reaching social and political changes replaced attempts to promote a concrete political project. As opposed to the early 2000s, there were no longer prospects for a compromise with Moscow, especially after Chechenisation picked up under Ramzan Kadyrov, the son of Akhmad. This confrontation was fed on both sides. On the Russian side, the insurgents were indistinctly labelled terrorists and "Wahhabis" (Russel 2005) while counter-terrorism was instrumentalised to consolidate Vladimir Putin's regime (Baev 2004). On IK's side, it resulted in the othering of Russia in cultural and religious terms. A text on the Ingush portal *Hunafa* hence noted:

> We live today in one of the corners of the world where military jihad is ongoing… we have to deal with the most historically fierce and uncompromising enemy of Islam and Muslims – Russia… Pointing our arms at the enemy, we need to forget that it is a human with two hands and legs… We were ordered by the Almighty to kill enemies of Islam… We now have our own, Islamic, and rightful state – Imarat Kavkaz. It is in danger, and the duty of each Muslim in the Caucasus and in other places is to support it (2009).

By creating IK, Umarov traded the idea of the Chechen Islamic state for *Salafi-jihadism*. He hoped that it would help unify the insurgency and build support for IK in Russia and abroad, as

well as make the Chechen cause more appealing to foreign backers. Statements as the one above played to that audience as well. Yet, the issue of funding was far from clear-cut.

In one way, the creation of IK resulted in economic loses for the militants because it made them estranged from the diaspora (Iskhanov 2018; Souleimanov 2019). In-exile politicians, such as Akhmed Zakayev, Ichkeria's former Foreign Minister, even suggested that Umarov's declaration had been engineered by Russian intelligence to discredit Chechen separatism (*Lenta.ru* 2009). Testifying to the lasting rift, KC published a defence of Umarov's decision in rebuke of 'national-democratic groups' as late as 2014. In terms of funding, as explained by Vatchagaev, Umarov had 'cut the branch on which he was sitting. There are 200,000 Chechens and other Caucasians in Europe; perhaps not all back Ichkeria, but many do. By proclaiming IK, he basically said them goodbye' (2018).

Losses from the diaspora did not seem to have been recouped trough new sources, though money – amounts being impossible to gauge – made it to IK from AQ and the Middle East (*Novaya Gazeta* 2006; Hahn 2007, 32). At least, it is clear that militants have worked to cater to such supporters. To prove their Salafi credentials, they targeted alcohol shops and advocated bans on music (KC December 2013; September 2013; Souleimanov 2015b). Such policies did though no good for IK's support among the population (Community Representatives 2017). They were likewise at odds with the goals of the rebellion as seen by in-exile Chechen leaders. As explained by Iskhanov:

> [IK] instead of fighting for freedom against Russian forces, they started to attack shops selling alcohol… I know people from these groups… [They explained that] there were people [in IK] who financed and told them to do such attacks. … But these shops… belong to someone from a village. It is the same as when you kill local policemen from a village in a raid. It results in that a village that used to help the opposition yesterday stops doing so. Why would you attack local policemen?

> You have Russian security forces around. This conflict gradually became intra-Chechen, as [IK] switched targets (2019).

Whatever support for IK came from abroad, it was not a game-changer. Global *Salafi-jihadism* saw Chechnya as a sideshow to the battlefields of *jihad* in the Middle East, especially as turmoil following the Arab Spring spread. But, support for IK had been dwindling even before that. The death of Khattab and of other foreigners by the mid-2000s impacted on ties with the Gulf, a fact acknowledged on Islamist websites (KC August 2013). Foreign backers considered the Caucasian struggle to have reached an impasse, and few foreigners were coming to the region. In 2009, Arkadii Edelev, the Russian Deputy Minister of Interior Affairs who led governmental forces in Chechnya, celebrated the killing of insurgent commanders and terrorists – including AQ's emissary and financier Abu Hafs al-Urduni (Falaleev). But, unwittingly, he admitted that the "globalisation" of the war was exaggerated: out of the 1,300 fighters killed in five years according to him, only 50 were foreigners – less than 4%. In April 2011, the death of Khaled Yusuf Mohammad further impacted IK's ties with AQ. By 2012, there was no recognisable leader among foreign fighters in the North Caucasus (Moore 2015, 405-06).

The failure to raise money from abroad had perverse consequences for the local population. By the late 2000s, the former Chechen rebellion had become a network of republic-based insurgencies, bound together by *Salafi-jihadism* and a vague political project. Due to local objectives and limited communications, militants were primarily loyal to local leaders who cared for their well-being and provided them with weapons (KC February 2013). In this context, groups in IK engaged in criminal-type activities. The insurgents self-funded through extortions from local businesses and officials (Bolotnikova 2012; Souleimanov 2018), further undermining IK's support in the Caucasus.

In this regard, the declaration made by Astemirov in March 2009 is notable. While arguing that the insurgency received no money from abroad, he suggested that it was however flush with cash, being able to offer a better price when buying weapons from locals than the authorities through their weapons' recovery programs. This was so because 'financial and other forms of support are no longer voluntary'. 'Now they are farḍ al-'ayn [compulsory for individual Muslims] for every true Muslim because we are at war' (KC 2009). This was one way in which ideology justified doubtful behaviour while Astermirov's claim that support to the armed groups was *farḍ al-'ayn* – an argument that would often come with regard to *jihad* – was an innovation in Islam (2004, 42). Because it is not one of the five pillars of Islam, *jihad* is not a personal but a collective duty under certain circumstances. Making it an individual duty was the central part of the doctrine, that led to *Salafi-jihadism*, developed by the Palestinian preacher Abdullah Azzam in the context of Afghanistan in the mid-1980s. After 2014, the criminal part of IK's activities was curtailed under Umarov's successor (KU 2014), a move that alienated some militants (ICG 2016). Its impact on IK's popularity was however limited since it came in a context where the insurgency had already lost much of its strength.

Military Defeat and Exodus to Syria

Umarov's death in September 2013 completed IK's turn away from the legacy of Ichkeria. No figure of equal influence and military experience existed in the Caucasus. Among major commanders, Astemirov was killed in 2010, Ali Taziev from Ingushetia was captured the same year, and Gakaev and his brother were killed in 2013. In this context, it is no surprise that IK was taken over for the first time by a non-Chechen who had little experience of actual fighting. In January 2014, Aliaskhab Kebekov, an Avar from Dagestan who joined IK in the 2000s and been

its *Qadi* (*sharia* court judge) since 2010, became the new leader. Against the backdrop of successful counterinsurgency by pro-Moscow forces and the departure of fighters for the Middle East, IK continued to weaken during his tenure.

The decline of conflict in the Caucasus happened long before the reorientation toward IS. Between 2010 and 2016, conflict-related deaths, including pro-Moscow forces, insurgents, and civilians, decreased by 73% from 749 to 202 (KU 2019a). This trend was amplified afterward with the region registering 134 insurgency-related deaths in 2017, 82 in 2018, and 31 in 2019 – the lowest level of violence in decades (*Ibid.* 2019b). The militants themselves recognised the weakening of IK. In March 2012, a militant acknowledged that '*jihad* in Ingushetia was almost quiet' (*Hunafa*). And, in May 2014, militants discussed on the website of Kabardino-Balkaria's insurgents the 'horrible situation' they faced (*Islamdin*).

The decrease in conflict was the result of actions of pro-Moscow forces, as well as factors within the insurgency. First, ruthless counter-insurgency, including human rights abuses against real and suspected militants, and pressure on their relatives, played a major role. Some militants claimed that they were leaving for Syria because 'in Chechnya, they tormented relatives, burned houses' (KC July 2013). Many researchers have documented widespread human rights abuses under the cover of counter-terrorism against the population in Chechnya and other republics since the 2000s (ICG 2012). This factor has contributed to the limited support of IK among the population, especially in Chechnya, and has hindered the insurgents' capacity to maintain communication and solve logistical issues (Chechen Veterans 2018).

Second, the departure of fighters for Syria was crucial in reducing the strength of IK. One lower estimate indicated that at least 2,400 Muslims had left Russia for Syria and Iraq by 2015 (Soufan Group 2015). With regard to prospective militants, local authorities tolerated, if not

encouraged, such enthusiasm for *jihad* abroad before the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Some militants were allowed to procure travel documents and cross the border (ICG 2016, 16-18). IS recruiters in Dagestan and other parts of the Caucasus seemed to have also helped people arrange for the logistics of moving to the Middle East (Sagramoso and Yarlykapov 2020).

Departures for Syria led to tensions in IK as it had to simultaneously praise *jihad* in the Middle East and discourage militants from joining it. In the insurgency, this was the product of the competition between supporters of global *jihad* – such as Udugov and Isa Umarov who had both left the Caucasus – and Doku Umarov who hoped to reinvigorate the local conflict. Even among people who embraced radical Islamism, expectations with regard to what this turn may represent were not the same. Before Umarov's death, insurgent websites published several articles calling for militants to join IK instead of groups in Syria. In articles titled 'Jihad, where it is easier…' (*Hunafa* March 2012) and 'Jihad. Where to fight?' (*Hunafa* December 2012), they argued that the local struggle had priority other the global one:

> Obviously, jihad is everywhere farḍ al-'ayn, but … there is the need to make the right choice. … if Muslims from every corner of the world can join the mujahideen in Syria almost without problem, it is extremely complicated for even Caucasians themselves to join the Caucasian jihad…. Accordingly, a Caucasian can leave for another front of the jihad only after making sure that he has no opportunity to take part in the jihad against Russia (*Ibid*).

As Astermirov's comment above, this extract is remarkable for the claim that *jihad* is *farḍ al-'ayn*, showing again how North Caucasian insurgents integrated the *Salafi-jihadist* doctrine. In that context, the argument that priority should be given to the local *jihad* appeared however increasingly at odds with the emphasis on belonging to the "*Salafi-jihadist* International". The latter, promoted by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, not yet IS), used an Islamic

eschatological argument as to an upcoming 'final battle' to incite Muslim to come to North Syria (Warrick 2016, 170). It also contradicted the insurgents' own largely unsuccessful calls for volunteers from Russia's other Muslim regions (Souleimanov 2019).

Interestingly, tensions over departures to the Middle East led IK to criticise international centres of Salafism, showing that not all Caucasian radical Islamists were ready to see their *jihad* being subordinate to larger goals (KC October 2013). One essay was particularly noteworthy in this regard. Written by Ali Abu Muhammad, Kebekov's alias, it bluntly criticised Saudi authorities. They were the ones who allowed 'centres where riba [usury] was conducted', 'stole by millions', and exploited 'poor Pakistanis and Bengalis' while claiming to have 'a government in accordance with sharia'. They were 'happy with the oil' that had 'become the curse of this Ummah' [global Islamic community] (KC March 2014).

Kebekov's statement came at a time of uncertainty. While IS had publicly broken with AQ between June 2013 and February 2014, it had not yet proclaimed the Caliphate. While IK was linked to AQ, many of its militants had come to the Middle East where ISIL was picking up traction as compared to AQ's *Jabhat al-Nusra*. For Caucasians, this meant that their affiliations were in doubt. Statements criticising international Salafi centres should be read as a way to assign blame for the dissensions in global *Salafi-jihadism*, as well as explain why IK was losing its war to pro-Moscow forces while seeing its fighters leave for Syria and receiving no support from the Gulf.

In the North Caucasus, both a sign and a result of IK's decline was the new message shared with supporters. Articles asked people to not attempt to join the *jihad* unless they knew militants personally (*ChechenInfo* 2014). In January 2014, Kebekov himself explained that when IK 'called on [people] to undertake jihad, this did not mean to immediately take up arms'.

Instead, supporters were to conduct themselves ‘for no one to suspect anything’ and make ‘jihad at home’ (*VDagestan*). Another author accordingly praised the ‘city mujahideen’ who sheltered militants and spied on the enemy, and ‘the media-fighters who prepared the information’ (*VDagestan* October 2014). Such statements were potent signs that guerrilla warfare was dying down. As an IK militant in Ingushetia summed up in November 2016, ‘at the present stage, the best and the easiest that could be achieved is the “tactic of harassing fire”’ (*Hunafa*). Insurgents were left to conducting small-scale operations and only limited contact between armed groups was maintained (Veterans in Duisi 2018). Such a sad state of affairs negatively affected the image of IK and of its AQ patron.

Here, it is interesting to look at the account provided to KU by Akhmad, a man from Dagestan who had joined first and AQ-affiliated group and then IS in the Middle East. While he reflects on the mental and physical journey that led him to Syria, Akhmad notes that:

> We had direct acquaintances, who were not “in the forest”, but in the cities. We tried to find a way through them to go to the forest. But, at the time there was an active fight, it was very complicated. We could not find a way. For this reason, we decided to go to Syria (2017).

Akhmad’s account is coherent with information on militants’ websites. It is corroborated by Furkat, a Central Asian student in Moscow who also left for Syria. Speaking about Caucasians, Furkat explains that, ‘it was easier [for them] to go to Syria. … I asked many Caucasians why they are not fighting [at home]; they answered that even if there were fighters in the mountains, you did not hear anything from them’ (KU 2015). By 2013 when Akhmad and Furkat left Russia, IK was under such pressure that it was challenging for local partisans to join it. Going to Syria was under these conditions partly a choice by default.

Ideology, Grievances, and Martyrdom

Akhmad's journey to Syria started with a rejection of Western-type consumerist modernity. After explaining that he had a comfortable life in Moscow, he notes in his account that it was though 'empty' and lacked meaning (KU 2017). His radicalisation then built on reading an article on KC about 'the fact of leaving prayer' and not living an Islamic life. This led Akhmad to stop drinking, smoking, and break with his girlfriend. Then, another aspect played a role in changing his worldview. Although Akhmed himself notes that he had no 'jihadist beliefs' back in 2012, he still became empathic to 'the problems of Syrian Muslims'. 'They were being killed, while they were simply defending their territory' (*Ibid*). It would be surprising that the situation of Syrian Muslims did not remind Akhmad of Dagestan, and that he did not consider Russia's support to Bashar al-Assad's Alawite regime – although limited to weapons supplies at the time – as problematic.

The rejection of the liberal secular modernity and the solidarity toward Syrians combined after Akhmad returned to Dagestan. Seeing the rise of ISIS and becoming observant in matters of faith, Akhmad 'understood' that it was '[his] obligation' to 'make jihad, defend and free Muslims and Muslim territories'. During this period, he continued to watch videos by Sayfullah Shishani, a well-known Chechen fighter and propagandist in Syria, and discussed joining armed groups in Dagestan with his friends.

On his journey to Syria, other Chechens who had come under harassment from security services because of their Salafi beliefs joined Akhmad. In their group, only one was somehow well-versed in Islamic theology, though they all saw *sharia* law as a way to right local socio-economic and political wrongs. This is an important point; Yarlykapov and Sagramoso have similarly ascribed a crucial importance to the search for 'social justice' in pushing people to

leave for Syria (2020). *In fine*, Akhmad and his friends left the Caucasus as they subsumed their local grievances such as the closing of mosques and harassment of Salafi communities under global ones such as the defence of Muslims in Syria.

Akhmad's story is notable in how it blends local and global themes, and echoes Furkat's account. Furkat has also radicalised by watching Sayfullah Shishani in 2013 (KU 2015). This came after he started to 'get interested in Islam and look on the Internet for videos about what [armed groups in Syria] are fighting for'. More than by Islamic theology, Furkat was taken in by calls to defend fellow Muslims. While he did not explain his rejection of Western-type modernity in the same way as Akhmad, one may note that Furkat was also a successful young man. Coming from Central Asia, he had made it into a higher education institution and had enough money to cover his trip to Turkey. As Akhmad, Furkat believed that 'repressions' and the lack of possibilities to 'freely practice one's religion' were pushing people to leave. The cases of Akhmad and Furkat are interesting because they present examples of young men who left for Syria bypassing the North Caucasus. Furkat did not even consider it as an alternative. Even before IS created its Caliphate, the two men saw in the fight of armed groups in Syria a cause that appealed to them in a way IK did not (or not enough in the case of Akhmad).

The situation was different for people who were already in armed groups. In the 2010s, IK had embraced *Salafi-jihadism* as a structuring ideology. You had to be at least cognisant of it to be a member. At the same time, recruits who made it into IK were joining an insurgency in decline. In fact, their *jihad* was a different affair from Syria where armed groups enjoyed comparatively good fighting conditions. In 2014, Caucasians in Syria laughed at Kebekov's attempts to prevent fighters from leaving by telling him to go 'eat leaves' in an allusion to IK's poor material conditions (Souleimanov 2015a). This difference likely played a role in Akhmad

and Furkat's decision to forgo IK, but probably also gave pause to militants in the North Caucasus as they pondered why throw away their lives for what looked like a lost cause.

In this context, IK had to square the circle to continue attracting support. Since 2007, its narrative emphasised grievances and *Salafi-jihadism* (Campana and Ducol 2015, 690-94). As to the former, KC*, VDagestan,* and other websites published hundreds of articles detailing real and alleged abuses by Moscow and its supporters dating back to the imperial and Soviet periods. *ChechenInfo*, the mouthpiece of IK in Chechnya, announced that one of its 'main tasks' was to publicise 'information about the military crimes of Russia' (KC July 2014). For IK, despite *Salafi-jihadism*, highlighting local grievances remained an important recruitment tool.

Righting local wrongs was then presented as contributing to a common cause because the Caucasus was one battlefield of the war between believers and infidels. Replying to a critic letter on *Islamdin*, one militant explained that, thanks to the '*mujahideen*', people were not 'going about with crosses around their necks' (2014). Another contributor claimed that the 'mujahideen' were fighting to 'remove the enemy' from 'Muslim territories' (KC 1 June 2014). These "glocal" parallels were regularly stressed in articles:

> Never think that kafirs [unbelievers] are abusing us because we rose up in arms against them … we know how the Russians got into Afghanistan. Was the reason for that in an Afghan attack upon the Russians or in the killing of Russians? No, they attacked them for their own interests. Likewise, America got into Iraq and Afghanistan. What for? … America attacked them for its own interests. We see the situation in Palestine, and what the Jews are doing to Palestinian Muslims. (*Ibid*.)

Retaliation was one way to attract recruits, but as this extract shows it was not enough. In fact, many of those who came for retaliation wanted a return to normality after a one-off attack (Ratelle and Souleimanov 2017). A way to deal with that was to emphasise the concept of

martyrdom (*shahada*). IK in this regard remained influenced by Caucasian ideologues of *Salafi-jihadism*, including Kebedov, Isa Umarov and Udugov (Community Representatives 2017). First, Chechen war leaders – Dudayev, Maskhadov, Yandarbiyev, and Basayev – were (wrongly) presented as martyrs who sacrificed for a pan-regional Caucasian Emirate under *sharia* (KC 22 November 2014).

Second, IK highlighted the life stories of current fighters. These included the serialised publication of the diary of one Khalid in 2014 (KC 10 November 2014). Khalid's texts stressed the devoutness, modesty, and camaraderie among IK's militants. They were manifestly intended as inspirational pamphlets for aspiring recruits. Taking note from AQ playbook, the diary concluded with a video titled 'The Last Conversation of the Mujahid Khalid before Shahada'. The vignettes about Khalid gave an idea about the (short) life of a militant from the moment he joined IK until his death. The latter was presented as the moment when his earthly purpose was fulfilled and joy could ensue as the martyr proceeded to the afterlife.

Another article similarly celebrated the promises of paradise (KC May 2013). That piece is especially notable because it tackled – as the author put it – the 'poor excuse of the people who spoke of the wrongness of jihad because of losses among mujahideen.' To such critics, the author answered that 'with the first drop of blood' of the *mujahid* 'all sins were forgiven,' and this was reason enough to go for 'jihad'. In fact, the short life of the *mujahid* was worth 'a dozen of years of the lives of people living under the authority of taghuts [tyrants who do not worship Allah]' (*Ibid*). Unable to offer the hope of victory or even any tangible success on that path, IK promised its recruits martyrdom and the afterlife.

Martyrdom had another advantage. It allowed arguing for fighters to stay in the North Caucasus while not appearing to withhold support from *jihad* in the Middle East by suggesting

that the finality was the same. Take the example of an article about a man who discovered a recording about the journey that brought a Chechen militant named Zaid to Syria (KC 16 June 2014). Presented as an audio diary, the story circulated, along with recordings by Said Buryatsky – one of IK's main ideologues and unique in that he had joined from Siberia after the creation of the Emirate, among young men in the North Caucasus. The story of Zaid is remarkable in how it implicitly points to a way of resolving the tension between local and global *jihad*. First, Zaid *was forced to* leave Chechnya after his network and relatives were arrested, meaning he had no choice. Second, the young man who was "inspired" by Zaid decided to travel to Syria. In Latakia Province, he ended up meeting the "real" Zaid shortly before the latter was "martyred". The spirit of the story is that martyrdom fulfils a militant's purpose, be it in Syria or the Caucasus.

Giving an overarching importance to ideology however sometimes led to a break with the North Caucasian context as militants explained violence only as motivated by ideology:

> Let the kafirs speak of the "terrorist activity" of the mujahideen. … The reason for that is not in unemployment, not in money, not in romanticism, extremism or something else, the reason is simple – the youth has awakened, found the meaning of life… understanding its duty, comes to the path of Allah, to kill and be killed. … The jihad that originated in Nokhchiicho' [Chechnya] grew into the big jihad of the entire Caucasus Emirate (KC May 2011).

Separating violence from political and socio-economic grievances may have helped keeping fighters in armed groups, but it came with risks. This was where IK's narrative became problematic at two levels. First, if a militant were to agree with the author above, it is difficult to see why he would not be attracted to the "even bigger" *jihad* in the Middle East, embracing IS' eschatological vision noted above (Sagramoso and Yarlykapov 2020). Second, stressing martyrdom led to issues locally. One author had hence to explain on *Hunafa* that IK was fighting

to establish *sharia* in the Caucasus for the common good as he answered critics who accused militants of being selfish in 'trying to win heaven for themselves' (2010). Indeed, if the war was about martyrdom, what was in it for the insurgents' supporters?

By 2014, IK had effectively lost control over its narrative. Violence in the North Caucasus was "ideologised" and linked to the global *jihad* to the point that these aspects took precedence over local retaliation. It was either a path to martyrdom, or a prelude to moving to Syria. Both options were at odds with the achievement of political gains. Under these conditions, the usefulness of IK was unclear, especially as it was no longer associated with the dominant international *Salafi-jihadist* force and controlled no territory where governance under *sharia* could be realised. For Muslims unsatisfied with the situation in Russia, Syria offered a land of hopes that promised social justice and the chance to live an "Islamic life". The creation of the Caliphate further raised such expectations.

Conclusion: The Rise of *Wilayah al-Qawqaz*

The switch of North Caucasian insurgents to IS unfolded swiftly. Rustam Asel'derov, IK's *Emir* in Dagestan, was the first major commander to swear allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in December 2014. Although Kebekov initially managed to contain defections, his death in April 2015 ended up undermining IK. In June, more commanders, including Aslan Byutukayev, IK's leader in Chechnya, switched to IS. The latter then created its "Caucasus Province" with Asel'derov as *Emir*. The year 2016 saw the further weakening of IK as Vadalov, its commander in Chechnya, left for Turkey and Zalim Shebzukhov was killed in Kabardino-Balkaria. By 2017, IK was no longer active in the Caucasus according to Akhmed Umarov (*ChechenInfo* 2017).

The rise of WQ resolved the tension that existed in IK between local and global *jihad* as power relationships in the Caucasus attuned to the situation in the Middle East. There, most Caucasians – including those in AQ-linked armed groups – moved to the Caliphate after its creation (KU 2017; 2015). It is likely that many took its victories, including against AQ's *Jabhat al-Nusra*, as a sign of its righteousness. However, the appeal of IS for Caucasians was primarily in its ability to build a state under *sharia* that was, unlike IK, not virtual. Supporting the Caliphate was then the choice of a higher loyalty. In fact, Caucasian fighters in Syria and Iraq were apparently not ready to return to exact 'revenge' on Russia (KU 2015). Akhmad thus notes that they considered that there was 'no need for one group to splinter [from the Caliphate] and leave for another place' (KU 2017). This was perhaps even more so as Caucasians in IS were fighting in groups led by compatriots, most prominently Abu Omar al-Shishani, and, unlike in the North Caucasus, experiencing military success.

Ironically, Kebekov's rebuke of IS echoed the criticism levelled on IK by Ichkerians. In the 2000s, grievances had "ideologised" and moved from Chechnya to other parts of the North Caucasus; now they had moved to the Middle East. In this context, allegiance to IS was a choice that was either natural, or by default for IK militants. It is remarkable that defectors have not tried to explain their motivations when claiming support for the Caliphate. Youngman has noted that this was possibly a way to avoid theological debates with Islamic scholars such as Kebekov (2019, 205). That may be one reason though defectors could have relied on foreign scholars to fend off Kebekov's arguments. However, the lack of explanation may be also related to the perceived obvious nature of the shift. As long as one saw the Caliphate as legitimate, support to it was self-explanatory. Unlike switching from Ichkeria to IK, moving to IS did not entitle ideological changes. IK had embraced *Salafi-jihadism* and supported armed groups in Syria,

including ISIL, up to 2014. The latter is confirmed by Akhmad who notes that ISIS provided financial support to Umarov (KU 2017), as well as by the positive reporting on ISIL on KC until dissensions appeared. Most IK militants had no attachment for a Caucasian political project; their departure to IS was comprehensible.

Practically speaking, aligning with IS was the last hope for many IK commanders. Sure, it meant accepting that the local *jihad* would take a back seat to the Caliphate. However, they could hope that IS would provide some support and not call for militants to leave. Akhmad notes that IS was apparently willing to accept such terms (*Ibid*). In fact, according to one research, IS did provide WQ with funding after December 2015 (Yarlykapov 2017, 14). At another level, joining IS allowed using its global brand, online presence, including in Russian (ICG 2016), and expertise in information technologies. In the long run, it meant preparing the return of fighters from the Middle East, an issue that became acute after IS lost the territories it controlled in 2016 (ICG 2016; Community Representatives 2017; Chechen Diaspora 2018).

The creation of WQ had also consequences in terms of national security for Russia. In the North Caucasus, it led to the further discredit of the opposition and reinforced local authoritarian rulers. Although WQ claimed attacks in the region, including in Dagestan in 2015, in Stavropol Region in 2016, and in Chechnya in 2019, they did not reverse the region-wide drop in conflict. Still, given the continuing presence of political and socio-economic grievances, violence is likely to linger in the North Caucasus but unlikely at the levels seen in the 2000s.

For Moscow, the rise of a domestic IS ironically proved a public relations victory. It confirmed its claim that all insurgents were “Wahhabi” terrorists, as well as played into the justification for the intervention in Syria that was officially started to destroy terrorism abroad ‘before it can come to Russia’ (Putin 2015). However, the appearance of WQ also led to a

mutation of the radical Islamist threat. The de-territorialisation of grievances broke the curtain that had existed between the Caucasian wars and other discontent Muslims. In this regard, Yarlykapov pointed to the constitution of a Russia-wide network of recruiters engaged with *Salafi-jihadism* (2017, 13-15). On par with online recruitment, they try to bring people into armed groups in Dagestan. So far, the creation of WQ has resulted in only small-scale attacks out of the Caucasus, including in Moscow in 2016, Nizhny-Novgorod in 2016, and Surgut in 2017. None of these approached the levels of violence of the terrorist attacks unleashed by Ichkeria and IK in the 2000s. This is not to say that they would not in the future.

A different case was the suicide attack in the subway in Saint Petersburg in 2017. Killing 15 people, it was the deadliest attack out of the North Caucasus since suicide bombings in Volgograd in 2013. Akbarzhon Dzhalilov, an Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan with Russian citizenship, conducted the attack. Unlike previous terrorists, he and his group had no links with the Caucasus. Their connections with international terrorist groups were also unclear (*BBC* 2018). In fact, their attack presented the first Russian instance of *Salafi-jihadist* terrorism mixing the local and the global. Unlike IK's attacks that, despite the ideology, remained connected to grievances in the North Caucasus, these "new terrorists" who originated from Russia's Central Asian community presented the bombing as in response to Moscow's actions in Syria. As Furkat, they went to Syria, before, unlike him, returning to Russia. This is a worrying trend. If *Salafi-jihadist* groups, such as WQ, are able to recruit among Russia's diverse Muslim communities, this could open the way to a re-ignition of large-scale terrorism in the country. If such is the case, the threat for Russia would be much the same as for Western Europe that sees attacks by its local radicalised Muslim youth.

References

1. Abrahms, M., Maynard, J.L., and Thaler, K. 2018. “Ideological Extremism in Armed Conflict.” *International Security* 43 (1): 186–90.
2. Baev, P. 2004. “Instrumentalizing Counterterrorism for Regime Consolidation in Putin's Russia.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27 (4): 337-52.
3. *BBC*. 2018. “V podryve.” 3 July. https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-44703808
4. *BBC*. 2010. “Zakaev.” 28 September. https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2010/09/100928_zakaev_breaking_point
5. Bolotnikova, S. 2012. “Nalogovaya.” *Bol’shoi Kavkaz*, 14 November. http://www.bigcaucasus.com/events/topday/14-11-2012/81530-flash_card-0
6. Bakke, K. 2014. “Help Wanted? The Mixed Record of Foreign Fighters in Domestic Insurgencies.” *International Security* 38 (4): 150-87.
7. Campana, A. and B. Ducol. 2015. “Voices of the “Caucasus Emirate”: Mapping and Analysing North Caucasus Insurgency Websites.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27 (4): 679-700.
8. *ChechenInfo*. 2017. “Akhmed Umarov.” 20 October. http://www.checheninfo.com/2017/10/20/419
9. *ChechenInfo.* 2014. “Otvety.” 19 August, http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/08/19/105917/otvety-na-voprosy-chitatelej-ChechenInfo-amira-vilayata-nokhchijcho-khamzata.shtml
10. Chechen Diaspora in Istanbul. 2018. Interview, November.
11. Chechen Veterans in Urus-Martan. 2017. Interview, August.
12. Chechen Veterans in Tbilisi. 2018. Interview, October.
13. Community Representatives in Gudermes, Khasavyurt, Makhachkala, Shali, and Urus-Martan. 2017. Interview, August.
14. Elders Council in Pankisi Valley. 2018. Interview, March.
15. Falaleev, M. “Chekisty.” *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 8 October. https://rg.ru/2009/10/08/edelev.html
16. Gutiérrez Sanín, F., and Wood, E. J. 2014. “Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond.” *Journal of Peace Research* 51 (2): 213-26.
17. Hahn, G. 2007. *Russia’s Islamic Threat*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
18. *Hunafa.* 2012. “Gde voevat’?” 3 December. https://hunafa.com/2012/12/03/gde-voevat
19. *Hunafa.* 2016. “Nekotorye sovety.” 23 November. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2016/11/23/113658/Hunafa-nekotorye-sovety-bratyam-v-gIalgIajche.shtml
20. *Hunafa.* 2012. “Dzhikhad tam, gde legche…” 15 March. https://hunafa.com/2012/03/15/dzhixad-tam-gde-legche

21. *Hunafa*. 2009. "“Nas ne nado zhalet”…" 19 January. https://hunafa.com/2009/01/19/nas-ne-nado-zhalet
22. *Hunafa*. 2010. "Tsel’ dzhikhada." 18 November. https://hunafa.com/2010/11/18/cel-dzhixada-vozvyshenie-slova-allaxa/
23. ICG. 2016. "The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad?" https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/north-caucasus/north-caucasus-insurgency-and-syria-exported-jihad
24. ICG. 2012. "The North Caucasus: The Challenges of Integration (II)." https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/russianorth-caucasus/north-caucasus-challenges-integration-ii-islam-insurgency-and-counter-insurgency
25. Iskhanov, H. 2019. Interview, March.
26. *Islamdin*. 2014. "Ty vinovat." 17 May. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/05/17/104660/ty-vinovat-v-etom-brat!.shtml
27. *Kavkaz Center.* 2013. "Chechnya." 24 August. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/08/24/100102/abu-l-valid-al-gamidi-chechnya-posle-amira-khattaba.shtml
28. *Kavkaz Center.* 2013. "Somneniya." 2 May. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/05/02/97713/abu-talkha-ad-dagestani-somneniya-o-dzhikhade.shtml
29. *Kavkaz Center*. 2010. "Amir IK." 27 September. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2010/09/27/75492.shtml
30. *Kavkaz Center*. 2014. "Amir Imarata Kavkaz." 22 March. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/03/22/103667/amir-imarata-kavkaz-ali-abu-mukhammad-prichiny-unizheniya-etoj-ummy-video.shtml
31. *Kavkaz Center*. 2013. "Nasha tsel’." 22 February. http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/02/22/96383/amir-khusejn-nasha-tsel---osvobodit-kavkaz-i-ustanovit-shariat!-(video).shtml
32. *Kavkaz Center.* 2009. "Amir Sayfullah." 26 March. https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2009/03/26/64698/amir-sajfullakh-(anzor-astemirov)-dal-intervyu-dzhejmstaunskomu-fondu.shtml
33. *Kavkaz Center*. 2010. "Fatwa Sheikha." 10 September. http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2010/09/10/75149/fatva-shejkha-abu-mukhammada-al-makdisi-o-fitne-v-imarate-kavkaz.shtml
34. *Kavkaz Center*. 2011. "Imarat Kavkaz." 1 May. http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2011/05/01/81196.shtml
35. *Kavkaz Center.* 2013. "Likbez." 3 December. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/12/03/102031/likbez-dlya-kadyrovskikh-murtadov-naglo-obyavivshikh-muzyku-dozvolennoj-v-islame-ch--3.shtml

36. *Kavkaz Center*. 2014 “O vrednykh.” 1 June. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/06/01/104932/o-vrednykh-posledstviyakh-ostavleniya-dzhikhada.shtml

37. *Kavkaz Center*. 2007. “Ofitsial’nyi reliz.” 21 November. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/11/21/54480.shtml

38. *Kavkaz Center*. 2013. ‘Pis’mo.” 1 October. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/10/01/100938/pismo-ot-mudzhakhida.shtml

39. *Kavkaz Center*. 2013. “Pis’mo.” 15 July. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/07/15/99263/pismo-v-redaktsiyu--dzhikhad-v-sirii-i-na-kavkaze.shtml

40. *Kavkaz Center*. 2014. “Rasskaz.” 16 June. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/06/16/105154/rasskaz-zajda.shtml

41. *Kavkaz Center.* 2014. “Raz”yasnenie.” 22 November. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/11/22/106992/razyasnenie-nekotorykh-aspektov-provozglasheniya-imarata-kavkaz-i-protivodejstvie-etomu-natsional-demokraticheskikh-gruppirovok.shtml

42. *Kavkaz Center.* 2011. “Shamil’.” 30 August. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2011/08/30/84755.shtml

43. *Kavkaz Center.* 2013. “Vilayat Dagestan.” 28 September. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2013/09/28/100849/vilayat-dagestan--v-khasavyurte-vzorvali-ocherednoj-magazin-torguyuschij-spirtnym.shtml

44. *Kavkaz Center*. 2014. ‘Vilayat Nokhchiicho. “ChecheInfo.com”.’ 12 July. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/07/12/105493/vilayat-nokhchijcho--Checheninfo-com---ofitsialnoe-izdanie-vilayata-nokhchijcho.shtml

45. *Kavkaz Center.* 2014. “Zapiski.” 10 November. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/11/10/106844/zapiski-mudzhakhida-khalida-(2012-2013)---5.shtml

46. *Kavkaz Uzel*. 2014. “Kebekov.” 2 July. https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/245167/

47. *Kavkaz Uzel*. 2015. ‘Puteshestvie.” 31 December. https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/putesestvie_v_ig/

48. *Kavkaz Uzel*. 2017. ““Safari po-siriiski.”.” 26 July. https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/Safari_Siria_rasskaz_boevika

49. *Kavkaz Uzel*. 2019a. “Statistika.” http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/statistika_jertv_2010_2016

50. *Kavkaz Uzel*. 2019b. “ Statistika.” https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/rubric/1103

51. Kisriev, E. 2007. “Islam and Social Conflicts in the North Caucasus.” In *Religiya i Konflikt*, edited by Alexei Malashenko and Sergei Filatov, 107-29. Moscow: Carnegie.

52. Kramer, M. 2005. “Guerrilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency and Terrorism in the North Caucasus: The Military Dimension of the Russian-Chechen Conflict.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57 (2): 209-90.

53. Leahy, K. D. 2012. “Umarov Declares Moratorium on Attacks against Russia’s “Peaceful Population”.” *CACI*. 21 March. https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12467-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2012-3-21-art-12467.html
54. *Lenta.ru.* 2009. “Zakaev.” 26 October. https://lenta.ru/news/2009/10/26/zakaev
55. Malashenko, A. 2009. *Ramzan Kadyrov: Rossiiskii politik kavkazkoi natsional’nosti*. Moscow: Carnegie.
56. Martynyuk, L. 2018. “Strannoe rasledovanie.” *Radio Svoboda*, 3 February. https://www.svoboda.org/a/29010052.html
57. Moore, C. 2015. “Foreign Bodies: Transnational Activism, the Insurgency in the North Caucasus and “Beyond”.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27 (3): 395-415.
58. Muzaev, T. 1999. *Etnicheskii separatism v Rossii*. Moscow: Tsentr “Panorama”.
59. *Novaya Gazeta*. 2006. “Vse dorogi.” 2 July. https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2006/07/03/28736-vse-dorogi-vedut-v-nalchik
60. *Polit.ru*. 1999. “Basayev’.” 13 September. https://polit.ru/news/1999/09/13/536544/
61. Popov, D. 2013. “Dokku Umarov.” *MK*, 3 July. https://www.mk.ru/social/2013/07/03/878846-doku-umarov-otmenil-moratoriy-na-teraktyi-kotoryiy-i-tak-nikto-ne-soblyudal.html
62. Putin, V. 2015. “Soveshchanie.” *Kremlin.ru*, 30 September. http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50401
63. Ratelle, JF. 2015. “A Critical Assessment of the Scholarship on Violent Conflicts in the North Caucasus during the Post-Soviet Period.” *Caucasus Survey* 3 (1): 1-24.
64. Ratelle, JF. and E. Souleimanov. 2017. “Retaliation in Rebellion: The Missing Link to Explaining Insurgent Violence in Dagestan.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29 (4): 573-92.
65. Roy, O. (2002) 2004. *Globalised Islam, The Search for a New Ummah*. London, Hurst & Co.
66. Russell, J. 2005. “Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves: Russian Demonisation of the Chechens Before and Since 9/11.” *Third World Quarterly* 26 (1): 101-16.
67. Sagramoso, D. 2012. “The Radicalisation of Islamic Salafi Jamaats in the North Caucasus: Moving Closer to the Global Jihadist Movement?” *Europe-Asia Studies* 64 (3): 561-95.
68. Sagramoso, D. and A. Yarlykapov. 2020. “What Drove Young Dagestani Muslims to Join ISIS? A Study Based on Social Movement Theory and Collective Framing.” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14 (2): 42-56.
69. Sokiryanskaya, E. 2014. “State and Violence in Chechnya (1997-1999).” In *Chechnya at War and Beyond*, edited by A. Le Huérou et al., 93-117 London: Routledge.
70. Soufan Group. 2015. “Foreign Fighters.” http://www.soufangroup.com/foreign-fighters
71. Souleimanov, E. 2007. *An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

72. Souleimanov, E. 2015a. “Dagestan’s Insurgents Split over Loyalties to Caucasus Emirate and IS.” *CACI,* 15 April. https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13177-dagestan%E2%80%99s-insurgents-split-over-loyalties-to-caucasus-emirate-and-is.html

73. Souleimanov, E. 2015b. “Dagestan’s Jihadists and Haram Targeting.” *CACI*, 18 February. http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13140-dagestan%E2%80%99s-jihadists-and-haram-targeting.html

74. Souleimanov, E. 2018. “Making Jihad or Making Money? Understanding the Transformation of Dagestan’s Jamaats into Organised Crime Groups.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41 (4): 604-28.

75. Souleimanov, D. 2019. Interview, March.

76. Tishkov, V. 2004. *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

77. Trenin, D. and A. Malashenko. 2004. *Russia’s Restless Frontier*, *The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia.* Washington D.C.: Carnegie.

78. Troshev, G. 2017. *Moya Voina.* Moscow: Veche.

79. Vatchagaev, M. 2013. “Killing of Gakaev Brothers.” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 31 January. https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/1174901.html

80. Vatchagaev, M. 2018. Interview, December.

81. Veterans from R. Gelayev’s Group in Duisi. 2018. Interview, March.

82. *VDagestan.* 2014. “Neobkhodimost’.” 4 January. http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/01/04/102617/amir-ik-abu-mukhammad-neobkhodimost-sozdaniya-imarata-i-dzhamaata-video.shtml

83. *VDagestan*. 2014. “Gorodskie mudzhakhidy!” 19 October. https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/10/19/106623/gorodskie-mudzhakhidy!.shtml

84. Walter, B. F. 2017. “The Extremist’s Advantage in Civil Wars.” *International Security* 42 (2): 7-39.

85. Warrick, J. 2016. *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS.* New Kensington: Anchor.

86. Wilhelmsen, J. 2005. “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Islamisation of the Chechen Separatist Movement.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57 (1): 35–59.

87. Yarlykapov, A. 2017. “Terrorism in the North Caucasus.” DOC Research Institute. https://doc-research.org/2017/03/terrorism-north-caucasus

88. Youngman, M. 2019. “Broader, vaguer, weaker: The evolving ideology of the Caucasus Emirate leadership.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31 (2): 367-89.

89. Youngman, M. 2020. “Ideology along the Contours of Power: The Case of the Caucasus Emirate.” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14 (2): 11-26.