Caucasus Emirate

Azov Sea

Russian Federation

Vilayat of the Nogay steppe

Delyeshu

Nogay - Shakhar

Vilayat Cherkessia

Caspian Sea

Myehyapye

Cherkessk
Vilayat of Kabarda, Balkar and Karachay

Vilayat Nohchiycho

Black Sea

Nalshyk

Vilayat Galgayche

Dzhohar

Shamilkala

Abkhazia

Buro-Glava

South Ossetia

Vilayat Dagestan

Georgia

Derbent

'Russian-Speaking' Fighters in Syria, Iraq and at Home: Consequences and Context

FULL REPORT

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'RUSSIAN-SPEAKING' FIGHTERS IN SYRIA, IRAQ AND AT HOME: CONSEQUENCES AND CONTEXT
FULL REPORT

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conflict in Syria and Iraq, now in its sixth year, has generated considerable interest and concern for its potential impact on regional and international stability. Despite this interest, however, significant aspects of the conflict remain understudied and poorly understood. This report seeks to address one of these neglected areas by examining and contextualising the involvement of people from Russia and the former Soviet Union. The report is divided into four parts – two looking at the contemporary situation and two identifying lessons from the evolution of conflict in the North Caucasus – and offers the following conclusions:

- *Assessing the 'Russian-speaking' Contingent in Syria & Iraq:* It is impossible to estimate exact numbers using open-source information, but evidence points to the large-scale mobilisation of 'Russian-speaking' fighters, particularly from the North Caucasus. They are present across groups – the boundaries between which are often fluid – that are mutually hostile to Russia but divided over the legitimacy of targeting civilians.

- *The extent and limits of Russia's domestic terrorism threat:* The North Caucasus insurgency is now allied to the Islamic State (IS) but is in long-term decline, and IS has to date demonstrated limited capacity in Russia. However, Russia's domestic terrorism threat extends beyond both IS and returnees from Syria and Iraq, with domestic recruits and Turkic and Central Asian networks adding to a complex security picture.

- *Learning from foreign fighters in the North Caucasus:* The North Caucasus conflict highlights how ideologues, personal ties, and trust are crucial to the development of foreign fighter networks. Foreign fighters left a lasting legacy in the region, but ultimately failed to adapt to changing circumstances.

- *Interpreting the evolution and decline of an insurgency:* The North Caucasus insurgency illustrates how rebel leaders need to balance competing agendas to be successful, and how succession is a negotiated process that becomes increasingly difficult. Weakness and state pressure played a key role in driving ideological change, and the loss of ideological leaders and low levels of trust and morale undermined the insurgency's appeal.

PART ONE: ASSESSING THE 'RUSSIAN-SPEAKING' CONTINGENT IN SYRIA & IRAQ

People from around the world have migrated to the conflict in Syria and Iraq in unprecedented numbers, and citizens of Russia and other former Soviet states have accounted for a significant proportion of this 'foreign fighter' contingent. This has generated security concerns about whether they are likely to remain in theatre, return home, or migrate to other locations – either as combatants or civilians. The first section of this report addresses these concerns by looking at the origins, biographies, and stated positions of this contingent and offers the following conclusions:

- At the time of writing in mid-May 2017, Russian officials estimate that up to 4,000 Russian citizens have travelled to Syria and Iraq, with an additional 5,000 coming from former Soviet countries. This information cannot be independently verified and can only serve as a rough guide.

- Data from Syria-related convictions support official claims that the majority of Russian citizens are from the North Caucasus, but also show an unprecedented nationwide mobilisation. The data suggests the conflict has appealed to audiences in a way previous – and potentially future – conflicts have not.

- Citizens of Russia and other former Soviet countries – often referred to as 'Russian-speaking' because of shared cultural and historical heritage – are present in multiple groups, including those aligned with the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda (AQ). Clear boundaries exist between IS-aligned and other groups, but those between non-IS groups appear much more fluid.

- Several ethnic North Caucasian leaders in Syria have historical links with – and an on-going interest in – the North Caucasus insurgency, but are unlikely to be able to return home. Their groups are mutually hostile to Russia but divided over the legitimacy of targeting civilians, highlighting the importance of differentiating both between groups and the threat the pose to Russia and other countries.

THE CHALLENGES OF ESTIMATING HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE TRAVELLED FROM RUSSIA

'Russian-speakers,' particularly ethnic North Caucasians, were among the first external participants in the Syrian conflict. Indeed, several senior figures with links to the North Caucasus insurgency were already established by the time their involvement was publicly confirmed in autumn 2012. Russian official estimates of how many of its citizens have travelled to Syria and, later, Iraq, have lacked consistency, but have nevertheless steadily increased over time:
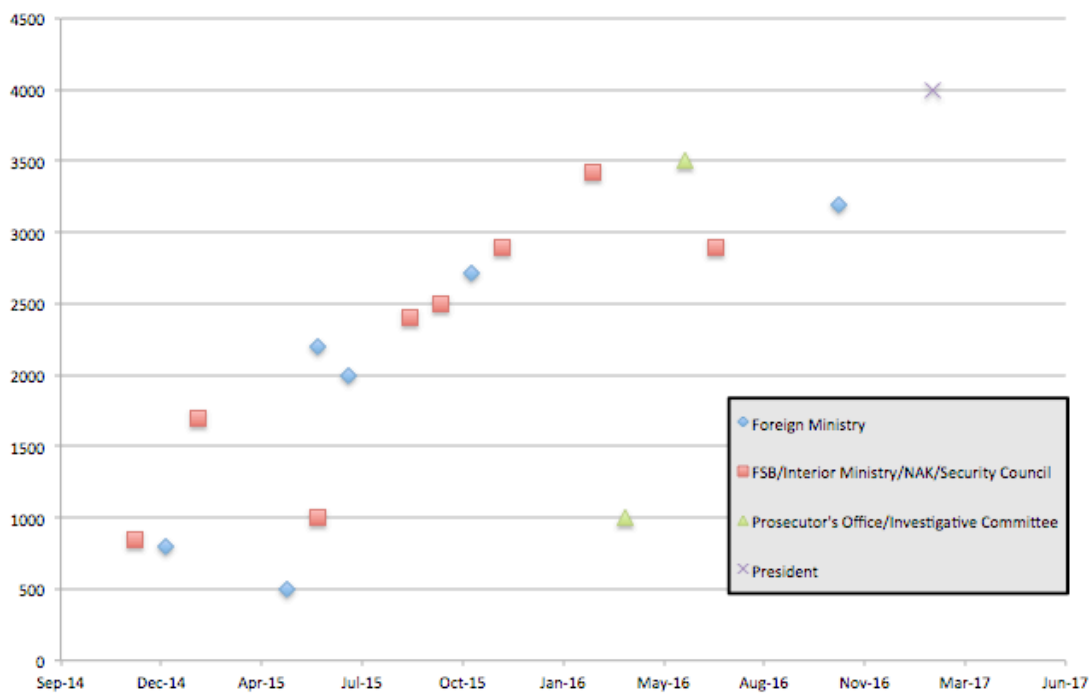
Figure 1: Official estimates of the number of Russian citizens in Syria and Iraq.

In February 2017, President Vladimir Putin offered the most recent of these figures: 4,000 from Russia, plus an additional 5,000 from elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Authorities in Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan have themselves reported 1,100, 900, and 508 respectively. Kazakhstan does not appear to have updated its early estimates, but a statement that 559 were prevented from joining and 78 have returned points to significant levels of mobilisation (see Appendix A for a list of official statements). Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have not been observed to make any official estimates. Georgia, a non-CIS country, meanwhile claimed in March 2016 that 50 of its citizens are in Syria and Iraq. Data collected by the authors, however, suggests that at least that number – mainly from the Pankisi Gorge – have been killed.

All estimates of the numbers who have travelled from Russia should be treated with caution and can only serve as a rough guide. First, official statements lack transparency, providing little or no information on sourcing, time periods covered, and limitations. 'Estimates' offered by think tanks seeking a prominent media profile are consequently unreliable: The Soufan Group and the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) are heavily reliant on these official figures. They also lack methodological rigour, employ flawed definitions (see Part Three), and fail

to acknowledge the impact of language capacity on their estimates. Academic and journalistic research uncritically citing these sources contributes to a stale and flawed information loop, a problem exacerbated by a neglect of primary sources, a reliance on ethically dubious methods, and a lack of understanding of context and doctrines of activism.

Second, Russian officials and media often conflate groups – a result of both political agendas and ignorance. Individuals are frequently linked to IS even when evidence of alternative affiliations is available. As such, distribution across groups cannot be gauged from media reporting.

Third, the media activities of groups vary considerably: IS-affiliated groups have been highly active on social media and have sought media exposure, whereas Adzhnad al-Kavkaz has maintained a lower profile and often focused on Chechen audiences. This distorts impressions of their relative strength. Fourth, the designation 'North Caucasian' (and associated designations like 'Chechen') includes not only those who have travelled directly from the region, but also people from refugee (e.g. Austria, Turkey), student (e.g. Egypt), and related ethnic (e.g. Georgian Kist) communities. Transnational diaspora ties between these communities make clear delineation impossible, as Russian officials themselves acknowledge (Rogachev, 2015).

Finally, those who have travelled from Russia include migrant workers from across the former Soviet space, many of whom may be unregistered and not return to Russia. Tracking these individuals across borders poses numerous challenges, even when cross-border security service cooperation is intense.

RUSSIAN CITIZENS MOBILISE FROM THE NORTH CAUCASUS AND BEYOND

Russian official statements are clear that the majority of citizens to travel to Syria and Iraq come from the North Caucasus. Security Council Secretary Nikolay Patrushev, for example, reported in April 2017 on the involvement of 2,700 people from the region. Dagestani authorities stated in late 2015 that 600-900 residents had travelled, numbers that increased to 1,200 by early 2017. Figures for Chechnya increased from 405 in June 2015 to 600 in January 2017, and for Kabardino-Balkaria from 60 in July 2014 to 175 in February 2017. Ingushetian Head Yunus-bek Yevkurov reported numbers of 30 in October 2015, 87 in October 2016, and 97 in December 2016; the Ingushetian Interior Ministry, however, offered a figure of 200 in January 2017.

North Caucasian residents involved in Syria/Iraq
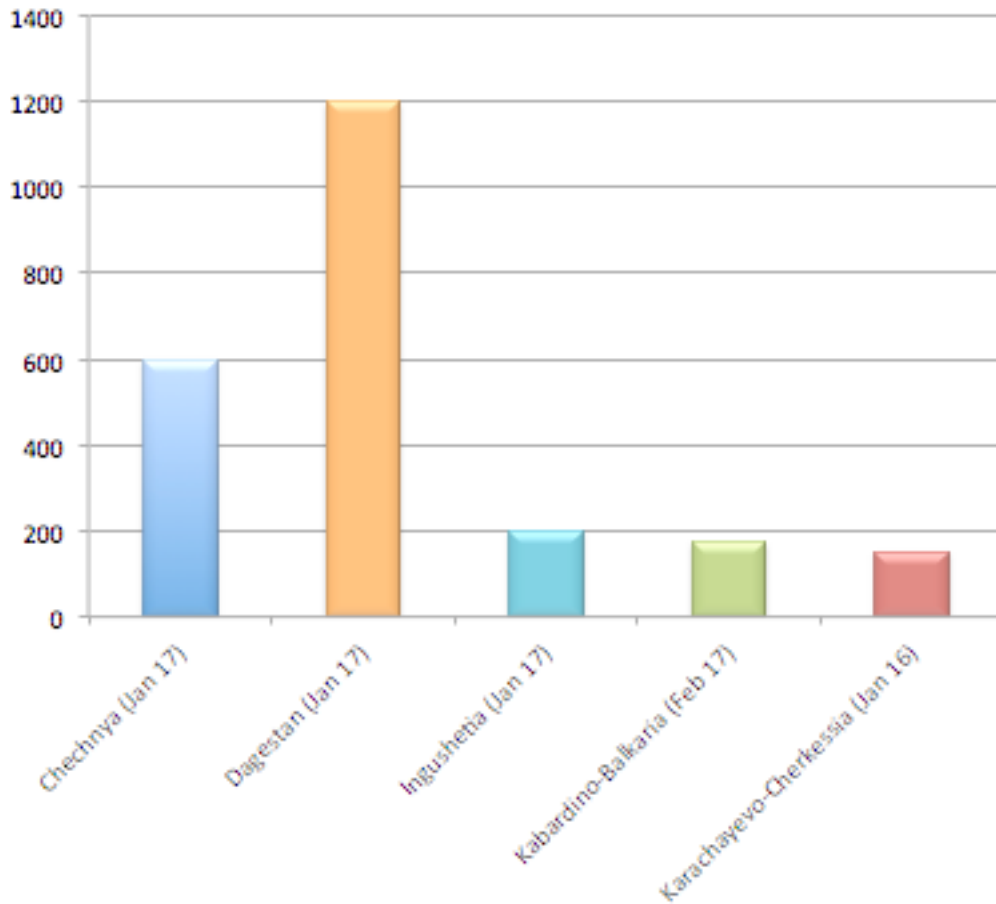
Figure 2: Most recent official statements by local authorities on the number of residents involved in Syria and Iraq (as of mid-May 2017).

One of the authors has collected data on 156 Russian citizens who have been either convicted of travelling to Syria (72 people) or attempting to do so (76 people), or who were accused of fighting in Syria but were killed by security services on their return to Russia (8 people). This data confirms that the majority of Russian citizens have indeed travelled from the North Caucasus. However, it also shows recruitment from parts of the region where insurgent activity has long been limited (Stavropol Kray and Karachayevo-Cherkessia), as well from across Russia:

Number of Participants*	Administrative Division
56	Dagestan
39	Chechnya
10	Stavropol Kray
7	Ingushetia; Kabardino-Balkaria
6	Karachayevo-Cherkessia; Moscow; Tatarstan
5	Adygea; Kazakhstan; Krasnodar Kray
3	Azerbaijan; Egypt; Tyumen Oblast
2	Ivanovo Oblast; Kalmykia; Khakasia; Kirov Oblast; Khabarovsk Kray; Kostroma Oblast; Kyrgyzstan; North Ossetia; Orenburg Oblast; Samara Oblast; Turkey
1	Astrakhan Oblast; Chelyabinsk Oblast; Chuvashia; Karachayevo-Cherkessia; Komi; Krasnoyarsk Kray; South Korea; St Petersburg; Tambov Oblast; Tajikistan; Ukraine; Uzbekistan
Based on place of origin and/or place of residency. *Total numbers exceed 156 because places of origin and residence may differ. Data unavailable for 4 individuals.*	

Only four of 156 individuals were reported as having previous convictions and seven as having some level of involvement with the North Caucasus insurgency. There is, however, likely to be underreporting of prior criminal involvement: Many media outlets are heavily reliant on official statements and sources and conduct little independent investigative reporting, and Russian courts do not appear to report all lapsed convictions. Similarly, high rates of unemployment among recruits (28 individuals) are likely to be distorted by a failure to account for temporary and black-market work. Some court documents describe people as unemployed but also reference various forms of economic activity.

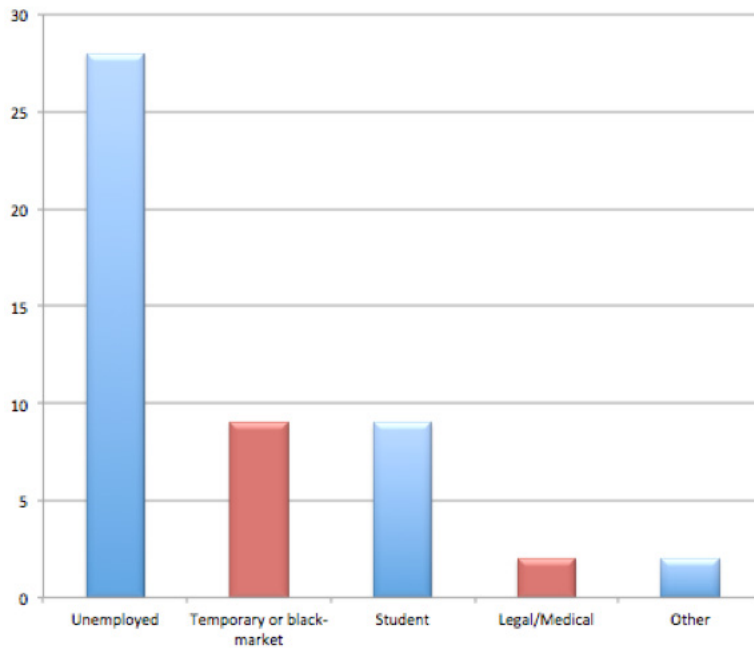## Employment status

Figure 3: Reported employment status of people convicted of travelling or planning to travel. Data unavailable for 105 individuals.

Mobilisation has occurred across age categories, although the majority have been under 30:
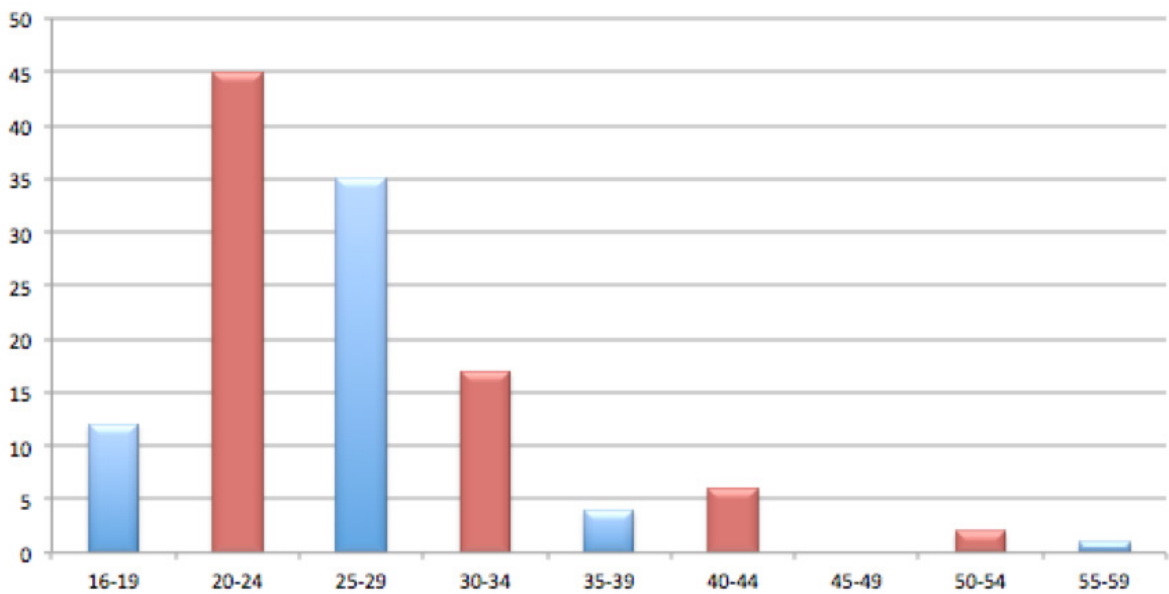
Age of convicted individuals

Figure 4: Age of individuals convicted of travelling or planning to travel. Data unavailable for 34 individuals.

This available biographical data strongly suggests that groups such as IS have mobilised significant numbers of participants who did not respond to appeals by domestic groups such as the Imarat Kavkaz (IK) (Youngman, 2016a). It highlights the importance of considering not only the appeal of jihadist ideology in general, but also the appeal of the conflict in Syria and Iraq in particular, since this may not be transferable to other groups or theatres. There is, however, anecdotal evidence of loyalty to groups in some cases persisting after individuals quit Syria and Iraq: The intent to continue insurgent or terrorist activity competes with the need for rest and recovery from injury as the main reasons offered for people leaving the conflict zone (11 individuals for each); disillusionment (2), personal reasons (2), and fearing punishment for spying (1) also feature. Available information, however, is sparse and should be treated with caution in the absence of detailed exit interviews.

RUSSIAN SPEAKERS PRESENT ACROSS GROUPS WITH OFTEN FLUENT BOUNDARIES

Initially, the majority of participants from former Soviet states joined the North Caucasian-led group that became Jaysh al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar (JMA). However, in late 2013, the group fractured. First, a small faction led by Seyfullakh al-Shishani broke away and ultimately joined AQ's Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusrah (JN) (See Appendix B for details on the main Russian-speaking groups in Syria and Iraq and Appendix C for details about key insurgent personnel). Then, JMA leader and Georgian citizen Umar al-Shishani defected with a large number of fighters to IS (then still known as ISIL). Those who rejected allegiance with IS reformed under the JMA name and the leadership of Salakhuddin al-Shishani. However, the group became increasingly dominated by non-North Caucasians and ousted Salakhuddin in early 2015. Salakhuddin than established Imarat Kavkaz in Syria (IKS) with many of JMA's remaining Russian-speaking fighters, until IKS also ousted him in late 2015 and he established Jaysh al-Usro (Paraszczuk, 2016).North Caucasians have also been present in several other groups, most notably Jund al-Sham and Adzhnad al-Kavkaz, led by two veterans of the Chechen conflict, Muslim al-Shishani and Abdul-Khakim al-Shishani respectively. The boundaries between non-IS groups appear to be relatively fluid and based as much on personal loyalties as ideological distinctions. Jund al-Sham, for example, at one point united – albeit with limited long-term significance – with Jaysh al-Khilafah al-Islamiya and Ansar al-Sham; its military emir has featured in photos alongside Adzhnad al-Kavkaz fighters; and both Adzhnad and Jund al-Sham have cooperated with other rebel factions in specific operations. However, the media operations of these groups have declined markedly in the last few years, and such propaganda as is produced is increasingly disseminated via closed platforms such as Telegram or WhatsApp, rather than open and searchable platforms like Twitter and established websites. Thus, it has become increasingly difficult to monitor their activities online, particularly when communications specifically target North Caucasian audiences.

Central Asian fighters, many of them drawn from migrant worker communities in cities like Moscow and St Petersburg, have also been present across different groups. Some recruits have joined independent *jama'ats* (armed groups), while others – such as the Uzbek Imam Bukhari Jama'at, the Turkistan Islamic Party, and Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad – have established training facilities and released statements in support of various factions aligned with JN (latterly Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and Tahrir al-Sham) and IS, sometimes switching allegiances between them (Botobekov, 2017).

These groups have benefitted from long-standing clandestine networks and informal links between communities throughout former Soviet countries (see Part Two). The Imam Bukhari Jama'at, for example, emerged from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) – a splinter group from the IMU – has released video footage of its training camps in Syria. Ansar al-Jihad, another group with Uzbek, Uighur, and Turkish members, has also released video footage of the fall of Aleppo.

LEADERS UNITED IN HOSTILITY TO RUSSIA, DIVIDED OVER LEGITIMATE TARGETS

Unlike rank-and-file participants, many ethnic North Caucasians in leadership roles were previously involved with the North Caucasus insurgency. Muslim al-Shishani, for example, fought with Ibn Khattab, the most famous of the Arab foreign fighter contingent in Chechnya (see Part Four), and his successors, fellow Saudi Abu Walid and Pakistani Abu Dzhafar. According to his 'official' biography (M. al-Shishani, 2014b). – published in Russian, German, and Arabic and intended to boost his authority as leader – he handled Abu Walid's financial affairs, as well as being responsible for rebels in Chechnya's Sunzhenskiy Rayon and Ingushetia. He was captured in 2003 and imprisoned for two years; following his release, he left for Georgia. Abdul-Khakim al-Shishani similarly fought in Chechnya, initially under the command of another Khattab protégé, Rustam Basayev. It is unclear whether he fought directly with Khattab, but he served as emir of Chechnya's Central Front until injury forced him to leave for Turkey. Pankisi native Salakhuddin al-Shishani's biography is murkier – his identity was concealed for a long time, and he used multiple aliases to avoid extradition to Russia – but he fought with the North Caucasus insurgency in the early 2000s. Akhmad Chatayev, who assumed a prominent role in IS, likewise fought in the First and Second Chechen Wars, until he quit and acquired refugee status in Austria in 2003. The involvement of Abu Jihad, responsible for IS Russian-language propaganda, appears much more limited, but in 2010 a local court sentenced him to a year for aiding insurgents.

The biographies of these senior figures offer important insights into their decision to travel to Syria and potential future destinations. All of them, with the possible exception of Abu Jihad, left the North Caucasus before the Syrian conflict started, and many appear to have failed in attempts to return. Muslim al-Shishani, for example, returned to Dagestan in 2008, but claimed he was unable to re-establish links with Chechen groups, who distrusted him following his imprisonment. In 2012, he again attempted to return to Chechnya through Georgia, but abandoned his efforts when other rebel leaders became involved (M. al-Shishani, 2014a). That operation culminated in the August 2012 Lopota Gorge incident, in which Salakhuddin and Chatayev were also involved (Public Council at the Public Defender's Office of Georgia, 2014). Abdul-Khakim al-Shishani also cited failed attempts to return to Chechnya as a justification for travelling to Syria (A-Kh. al-Shishani, 2017). Although these leaders' statements have frequently referenced the situation in, and expressed a desire to return to, the North Caucasus, their previous difficulties – and increased border security as a result of the Syrian conflict – make such a return unlikely.

These senior leaders express mutual hostility to Russia in their statements. Those inside and outside IS, however, have sharply diverged on what constitute legitimate targets and acceptable tactics. IS has sought to inspire attacks globally as its strongholds in Syria and Iraq come under pressure; it has also claimed multiple attacks in Russia (see Part Two), targeted Russian interests abroad – most notably downing a Russian passenger jet over Egypt in October 2015 – and orchestrated a series of terrorist attacks in Turkey. Adzhnad al-Kavkaz, however, issued a statement in mid-2016 denying involvement in attacks in Turkey and Saudi Arabia and questioning the 'permissibility and expediency' of such attacks, particularly in Muslim-majority countries that have previously provided refuge to militants (A-Kh. al-Shishani, 2016). Abdul-Khakim al-Shishani also criticised attacks on law enforcement personnel in Chechnya, arguing that they are not expedient given higher casualties among rebels than targets (A-Kh. al-Shishani, 2017). Muslim al-Shishani articulated an almost identical position on both issues (M. al-Shishani, 2016b; M. al-Shishani, 2017), and described the Russian people as a 'hostage' to Russian policies rather than an enemy (M. al-Shishani, 2016a). Although both groups have cooperated with AQ-aligned factions on the ground, their operational activities – at least in as far as these can be assessed from open source information – appear to reflect this focus on waging insurgent warfare against security services. This demonstrates the importance of differentiating between Russian-speaking groups in assessing the threat they pose. Although there is broad agreement on the legitimacy, if not the expediency, of targeting Russian security service personnel, attacks on civilians enjoy much narrower support. Importantly, operations in Turkey are viewed by some both as illegitimate and as undermining a potential retreat for insurgents.

PART TWO: THE EXTENT AND LIMITS OF RUSSIA'S DOMESTIC TERRORISM THREAT

The threat posed by 'returnees' from the conflict in Syria and Iraq features high on Russia's domestic security agenda but is only one of several overlapping concerns. The North Caucasus has been a source of instability since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the large number of people from the region fighting in the Middle East has prompted concerns about the potential rejuvenation of the domestic insurgency. Elsewhere in Russia, supporters of radical Islamist ideologies have emerged from among the country's sizeable Muslim and migrant worker population, and only some of these have travelled to Syria and Iraq. Moreover, extremist groups throughout Russia are able to tap into long-standing transnational networks. This section surveys these complex threats and offers the following conclusions:

- The Islamic State (IS) has replaced the Imarat Kavkaz (Caucasus Emirate, IK) as the main insurgent group in the North Caucasus. The regional insurgency, however, has been in long-term decline, and IS faces the same operational pressures as the IK and has failed to transfer its appeal to local groups.

- IS-claimed attacks in Russia have to date demonstrated only limited capacity, mainly involving attacking security service personnel with basic weapons to acquire firearms. This suggests IS is able to mobilise supporters but has thus far been unable to support more substantive attacks.

- Very few returnees have linked up with the domestic insurgency, and those that did had only a negligible impact on its trajectory. Most planned attacks linked to Syria and Iraq have not involved returnees, but previously unknown actors inspired and potentially supported by groups operating there.

- External threats are not limited to Syria and Iraq. Caucasian and Central Asian networks linked to Russia-based extremists have deep roots in Turkey and Afghanistan/Pakistan and have been linked to attacks in Russia. The size of Russia and its migrant communities and the extensive nature of (non-radical) post-Soviet transnational networks create multiple opportunities for attacks.

VIEWING THE INSURGENCY'S ALLEGIANCE TO IS IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS DECLINE

The Syrian conflict posed a challenge for the IK, as its leaders sought to balance support for those fighting there with mitigating the negative effects on the domestic insurgency. Ultimately, however, these efforts proved unsuccessful, and the splits among Russian-speaking groups in Syria (see Part One) replicated themselves in the North Caucasus itself. IK leaders Aliaskhab Kebekov and Magomed Suleymanov supported al-Qaeda (AQ) and its Syrian affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusrah (JN), while many of their subordinates increasingly favoured IS (Youngman, 2016b). Internal divisions became public when, in December 2014, the leader of the IK's Dagestani branch, Rustam Asilderov, pledged allegiance to IS. Over the next few months, many other IK leaders followed suit, leaving the IK without prominent representation in Chechnya and Ingushetia and severely weakened in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria. IS formalised its advance into the region in July 2015, when spokesman Muhammad al-Adnani declared it a province of the 'caliphate,' the Caucasus Wilayah (IS/CW), to be led by Asilderov. The IK's already precarious position was further undermined by security service operations, which killed almost all of its remaining leaders. Its last surviving senior figure was killed in St Petersburg in August 2016.

IS/CW initially emerged as the dominant insurgent force in the North Caucasus. It too, however, has come under intense security service pressure that resulted in the loss of most of its known leadership, including Asilderov. Its sole surviving senior figure, Chechnya's Aslan Byutukayev, is known to have suffered serious health problems. Indicative of IS/CW's limited and largely reactive capacity, it took nine months following the first defections before IS claimed the groups' first attack, and a full year before a verifiable attack actually occurred (see below). IS/CW's weakness is rooted in the reasons for the long-term decline of the insurgency, which predate the Syrian conflict. The ideological evolution of the insurgency, which traces back to its origins in the Chechen Wars of 1994-1996 and 1999-2002, was driven by a need to expand its support base – first from Chechnya to the broader region, then to Russia's Muslims, and finally to the global jihadist community – and appeal to the next generation of insurgents (see Part Four). Such expansion was necessary because the original support base was no longer sufficient. Amnesties, sustained security service pressure, and general conflict fatigue had, over many years, degraded the insurgency. Furthermore, from 2010 onwards, the authorities pursued a number of soft policies, including local commissions to rehabilitate insurgents and increased engagement with Salafi communities, which undermined support for the insurgency. Equally important, the security services increased the pressure in the run-up to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, particularly in Dagestan. While this largely signalled the end of the soft policies in the region – and the failure to lay the foundations for stability is a key reason why low-level violence is likely to continue – this also contributed to a much more challenging operating environment. The appeal of the Syrian conflict to potential and actual insurgents cannot be viewed in isolation from the unattractiveness of the local conflict and perceptions that the IK had reached a dead-end. Although IS/CW leaders claimed that being part of the 'caliphate' negated the necessity, and indeed the legitimacy, of travelling to Syria and Iraq, there is little evidence that IS has been able to translate its appeal into significant support or recruits for the domestic insurgency.

IS MOBILISES SUPPORTERS BUT DEMONSTRATES LIMITED CAPACITY

The formal incorporation of the North Caucasus into the 'caliphate' complicates assessments of IS activity in Russia, since it leads to a conflation of domestic insurgent activity with threats linked to Syria and Iraq. The frequent tendency of Russian officials and media to refer to all radical Islamists as IS – which aligns with Russia's broader foreign policy agenda – further muddies the waters. Evaluating the attacks explicitly claimed by IS helps delineate its activities from those of other groups and sheds light on the nature of the threat it poses. As of mid-May 2017, IS has claimed responsibility for 15 attacks in Russia: Of these, eight occurred in Dagestan, two in Chechnya, two in Moscow Oblast, and one each in Astrakhan Oblast, Khabarovsk Kray, and Ingushetia. Those in Dagestan are hardest to separate from regular insurgent activity, with the majority occurring between December 2015 and March 2016 in the southern districts where the group led by Gasan Abdullayev (d.June 2016) – one of the most outspoken defectors to IS – was active. Perhaps the most revealing aspect of IS-claimed attacks in Dagestan is that the first – an attack on a military barracks in Magaramkentskiy Rayon – is unlikely to have occurred. There was no observed media reporting of any attack in the area on the day it supposedly occurred, and both security services and local residents denied the very existence of the supposed target (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2015). This highlights the importance of independently verifying IS claims, which sometimes display a lack of knowledge about the details of events even when IS involvement can be confirmed (see, for example, Merenkova, 2016).

IS attacks outside of Dagestan reveal more about the group's capabilities in Russia. The first occurred in a Moscow suburb in August 2016, when two Chechens attacked and wounded traffic police with an axe purchased shortly beforehand, purportedly with the aim of seizing the policemen's weapons (Pavluk-Pavluchenko & Bezrukova, 2016). This template of using rudimentary weapons against police in order to acquire firearms to continue the attack appears to have been replicated in other incidents. This includes the December 2016 attack on Groznyy, in which seven rebels and four security service personnel were killed (Milishina, 2016), and the April 2017 attack on Astrakhan Oblast, when four people killed two traffic policemen before themselves being killed in a special operation (Kavpolit, 2017). It also appears to have been the case for the March 2017 attack on a military unit in Chechnya – independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta (Milishina, 2017) cast doubt on claims the attackers were armed – and an April 2017 attack on an FSB office in Khabarovsk Kray, which was preceded by a raid on a shooting club. In the latter incident, investigators linked both raid and attack to known members of a far-right group and denied IS involvement (Kopacheva, 2017). The only other incidents outside Dagestan were an arson attack on a Moscow Oblast furniture factory that was not initially even reported as suspicious (Grigoriev, 2016), and a May 2017 attack on a police post in Ingushetia that left one policeman and the two attackers dead. One of the Ingushetia attackers was also accused of an April 2017 attack on traffic police not claimed by IS (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2017), which – together with the timing of the Astrakhan attack claim – suggests attacks are not claimed if individual perpetrators are still at large. Overall, IS-claimed attacks outside

of Dagestan have been marked by low levels of sophistication, suggesting the group is capable of inspiring attacks but has to date been unable to provide more substantive support for successful operations.

DOMESTIC RECRUITS APPEAR TO POSE GREATER THREAT THAN 'RETURNEES'

Russia has used the potential threat posed by returnees to justify Russian military involvement in Syria (Mir TV, 2017). Such a threat is not limited to IS and may be considered from two angles. On the one hand, returnees may exacerbate existing security concerns by seeking to join or re-join the North Caucasus insurgency, thereby reversing Russia's successes in degrading its capacity. On the other, they may generate new threats, either by returning with the intent to carry out or support terrorist activity, or failing to reintegrate into civilian life and continuing to support radical ideologies. A database of Syria-related open source material constructed by one of the authors, however, suggests that few returnees have subsequently engaged in insurgency- and terrorism-related activity. Instead, most reported planned attacks are linked to those inspired by radical ideologies who have not been to Syria and Iraq.

There is to date little open source evidence to suggest that returnees are likely to radically alter the trajectory of the North Caucasus insurgency. There have been only 10 observed cases of returnees joining the insurgency, of whom six were killed and four arrested (one subsequently convicted). Although individuals have clearly succeeded in returning undetected – and actual numbers may be higher – it is doubtful they could do so in sufficient numbers to rejuvenate the insurgency. Nor does available evidence justify fears that returnees will revitalise rebel leadership cadres. Kamaldin Kazimagomedov and Gadzhi Abdulayev both reportedly fought in Syria before becoming leaders of, respectively, the IK's Southern and Mountain Sectors in Dagestan. Both remained loyal to the IK after the splintering of the insurgency, but neither survived long: Abdulayev was killed in August 2015, less than a month after being appointed; Kazimagomedov survived for almost ten months in his post before being killed in May 2016. Moreover, senior rebel leaders in Syria are the least likely to be able to return, given their prominence and previous failed attempts to return to the region (see Part One). Low levels of trust and fear of infiltration by spies working for the Russian security services have also long hindered collaboration and recruitment where personal ties are lacking. Even without these obstacles, any returning leadership would need to rebuild much of the insurgency's organisational structure from scratch. Although there is ample evidence that jihadist ideologies continue to attract adherents, the threat arguably remains domestic rather than foreign in nature.

The number of people who have been reported to have travelled to Syria and planned an attack on their return is also low: The authors have identified only nine such cases as of late April 2017. Moreover, none of the IS-claimed attacks appear to have involved returnees. It was reported that the perpetrator of the 3 April 2017 St Petersburg attack travelled to Turkey, prompting speculation he may also have travelled to Syria, but no evidence has been offered to support these claims. It remains possible that the plans of arrested returnees are unknown or were not publicised, and there

is insufficient evidence to allow for reliable conclusions about post-return re-integration into civilian life. Nevertheless, the majority of those accused of planning attacks in the name of Syria-based groups (47 individuals in total) do not appear to have fought there; 11 instead planned to travel after carrying out their attacks. In most cases, however, available information on plots is limited and none have resulted in prosecutions, making it difficult to distinguish media speculation from intent.

TURKIC AND CENTRAL ASIAN NETWORKS CREATE ADDITIONAL EXTERNAL THREATS

Although attention invariably focuses on Syria and Iraq, these are not the only external sources of Russian security threats. Intensive pressure on North Caucasian Salafi communities and on the insurgency has resulted in both conservative Muslims and insurgents relocating to Turkey. Many of these have created self-sustained communities in and around Istanbul (International Crisis Group, 2016). Those to have relocated include Chechen rebel leaders Makhran Saidov, one of the first leaders to pledge allegiance to IS; Aslambek Vadalov, a former challenger to Dokka Umarov for leadership of the IK; and Tarkhan Gaziyev, whose supporters founded a *jama'at* in Syria. The outflow of fighters has swelled the long-standing networks that have helped sustain the North Caucasus insurgency – providing a refuge for exhausted and injured fighters, as well as resources – and facilitated the flow of recruits from the region to the Syrian conflict. The charity Imkander, for example, regularly conducts fundraising events and rallies celebrating the 'martyrdom' of prominent North Caucasian jihadists. Russia is suspected of carrying out targeted assassinations against members of this support community, resulting in the deaths of at least eight people since 2003. This included the November 2015 murder of Abdulvakhid Edilgeriyev, who fought in Chechnya, Syria, and Ukraine and served as an administrator for the prominent insurgent website *Kavkazcenter*. Many of those who have relocated remain hostile to the Russian state and maintain active ties with their homeland.

Azerbaijan has also historically served as a support base. Baku-based charitable organisations, led by Saudi and Yemeni volunteers, channelled funds from the Middle East in the late 1990s, with Russian media reports claiming they were training people to foment unrest in Dagestan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Khattab and Abu Omar al-Sayf used foreign support passing through Azerbaijan and Georgia to construct training facilities in Serzhen-Yurt, Chechnya. These facilities welcomed volunteers from across the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, Khattab later claimed that some Central Asian volunteers were Russian spies (Ibn Khattab, undated), leading him to banish suspected individuals and curtail the influence of Central Asians at the camp. Nevertheless, Dagestani and Nogay groups continued to play a role in the regional insurgency throughout the 2000s, retaining links to Azerbaijan, other Turkic-speaking CIS communities (to which Nogays belong), and Pakistan.

Many of these networks overlap, are pan-Turkic in nature and – despite their small size relative to the broader communities from which they have emerged – create a security challenge that transcends national boundaries. In some cases, groups have benefitted from weak or absent central governance. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), for example, was able to establish its presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1990s in part because the partially governed tribal areas around the border afforded a measure of protection for small groups of militants, especially those aligned

to local tribes. After 9/11, this region continued to offer sanctuary, with new networks forming around localised or regional agendas. The pan-Turkic Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), an offshoot of the IMU, emerged after 2004 and drew supporters from Turkic-speaking communities across Europe, Russia, Central Asia and China. It established paramilitary training camps in Waziristan and was affiliated to the Taliban and supported informally by AQ. Notably, it was linked to a thwarted plot in 2007 against the US air base in Ramstein, Germany, which led to arrests across Europe. Osama bin Laden had mentioned a desire to mobilise support in Turkey (Jihadica, 2015), and by 2010 the Turkish authorities had responded to the threat posed by groups in Afghanistan with the arrest of 120 suspects (BBC News, 2010). It is likely that some of those arrested were linked to the IJU, which meanwhile continued to emphasise loose ties to militants in the Caucasus (Jihadology, 2011). A small number of Azeri volunteers also appear to have established links to groups in Waziristan, judging from court reports (Rafıqqızı, 2017). While their exact role remains unclear, they may have relied on informal channels linked to pan-Turkic groups like the IMU, the IJU, and the Turkistan Islamic Party, as well as AQ and the Haqqani network.

Factionalism and infighting, coupled with targeted pressure from local and US forces, have hampered these groups' capacity to build on their presence. Nevertheless, incidents including the June 2014 Jinnah airport attack in Karachi illustrated some cooperation, even though formal ties between the groups were not established (Reuters, 2014). The Pakistani authorities' response to this attack forced many of these groups to seek sanctuary elsewhere. Events in Syria and Iraq and the April 2017 terrorist attacks in St Petersburg and Stockholm have, however, resulted in renewed attention to these networks. The St Petersburg attack was perpetrated by an ethnic Uzbek originally from southern Kyrgyzstan who obtained Russian citizenship, and led to the arrest of numerous people of Central Asian origin on suspicion of aiding the perpetrator and recruiting for Syria-based groups. A Moscow judge considering the arrest of one alleged accomplice stated that representatives of an unspecified international terrorist organisation financed the attack through Turkey (Vedomosti, 2017). A hitherto unknown group calling itself the 'Battalion of Imam Shamil' claimed it had carried out the attack on the orders of AQ. The claim, however, is impossible to independently verify, although it was publicised by AQ-linked media outlets and carries echoes of previous attempts by Zawahiri to portray the conflict in Chechnya as a legitimate jihad forming part of a global struggle led, naturally, by him. Swedish authorities identified the perpetrator of the Stockholm attack as an ethnic Uzbek asylum seeker with 'sympathy for extremist organisations, among them IS' (Johnson, Pollard & Roos, 2017). Swedish Radio News claimed that the same group may have organised both attacks, citing the social media profile of the Stockholm attacker (Rosen, 2017). Again, however, such information cannot be independently verified.

PART THREE: LEARNING FROM FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

The conflict in Syria and Iraq is far from the first to attract external participants. Foreign activists played an important role in the North Caucasus insurgency, impacting its trajectory, ideology and perceived legitimacy. The decline of this manifestation of the foreign fighter phenomenon can offer insights into how other conflicts may evolve, and how military defeat could impact groups like the Islamic State (IS). This section examines the evolution and legacy of foreign activists in the North Caucasus and offers the following conclusions:

- Shortcomings in how the 'foreign fighter' concept is defined and a failure to account for its complexity and the full range of activities transnational activists engage in undermine our ability to understand the phenomenon.

- Ideologues played a key role in building the North Caucasian foreign fighter network. Sheikh Fathi al-Shishani's personal credibility was critical to local insurgents accepting Khattab, the most famous of the foreign fighter contingent. Personal ties and trust were, in turn, central to Khattab's network.

- Foreign fighters in the North Caucasus formed part of a broader social movement and played an important role in Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) state building. They had a lasting impact on the tactics and ideology on the insurgency that continues to resonate today.

- The decline of the foreign fighter movement was attributable in part to its failure to effectively adapt to changing circumstances, and to the weakening of the North Caucasus insurgency itself. Foreign fighters suffered significant losses 1999-2002 and increasingly relied on small, trusted regional networks.

'FOREIGN FIGHTER' CONCEPT MORE COMPLEX THAN WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED

Men and women have volunteered to participate in foreign conflict zones throughout history, for reasons of ideology, religion, or financial reward – or a combination of the three (Moore & Tumelty, 2008). Yet until recently this phenomenon has been understudied and it remains poorly understood, with implications for how it is treated, the conclusions that are drawn, and the effectiveness of responses to it. Some think-tank and academic treatments of the topic view the term 'foreign fighter' as self-explanatory, while others draw on popularised definitions that are incomplete and conceptually unreliable. A widely cited definition by David Malet (2013), for example, characterises foreign fighters as 'non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts' to defend some form of common identity. However, numerous historical examples demonstrate that motivations for 'foreign fighters' are often shaped by religion, kinship, or ideology, with citizenship offering little insight. Citizenship, moreover, is not always a static variable: people who travelled from countries like Georgia and Azerbaijan to fight in the North Caucasus were, after all, once citizens of the same state. It is also important to recognise that external observers, recipient communities, and the actors themselves may have different perceptions of their 'foreignness,' and this may impact the reception and effectiveness of foreign fighters (Moore, 2015). A Jordanian Chechen, for example, may view himself first and foremost as Chechen but nonetheless by viewed as foreign by Chechens in Chechnya.

In another widely cited definition, Thomas Hegghammer (2010/11) builds on Malet's definition to focus on those lacking 'citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions,' and excluding those who are paid or members of an official military organisation. Yet this only adds further problems. Excluding kinship ties arguably means that the Pankisi Kists and Jordanian Chechens who fought in the Chechen wars should not be considered foreign fighters; yet, as shall be seen below, this would require us to ignore someone like Sheikh Fathi al-Shishani, who was integral to creating the foreign fighter movement in the North Caucasus. Excluding those who are paid would rule out many more, including many IS fighters, and impose an unreasonable requirement that foreign fighters somehow live in a post-capitalist world. This part of the report instead draws on the definition offered by Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, which avoids many of these problems by defining foreign fighters as 'non-indigenous, non-territorialized combatants who, motivated by religion, kinship, and/or ideology rather than pecuniary reward, enter a combat zone to participate in hostilities'(Moore & Tumelty, 2008: 412). Such a definition focuses on how motivations are prioritised, rather than treating them as exclusive. Moreover, it emphasises the critical role played by personal and identity factors. This approach finds support in work that illustrates the role played by personal circumstances, family and peer groups, and wider social networks in motivating and enabling foreign fighters (Borum & Fein, 2017; Holman, 2015; Nilsson, 2015; de Bie, de Poot & van der Leun, 2015). At the same time, it is recognised that the term 'foreign fighters' is itself problematic, since transnational activists engage in a range of roles that extend far beyond combat activities. The term is used here because it is widely used and readily understood, but is not intended to exclude these other activities.

IDEOLOGUES AND TRUST KEY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN FIGHTER NETWORKS

Transnational ideologues play an important role in mobilising foreign fighters, using 'mechanisms of emulation and the attribution of similarity' to produce the narratives that support transnational mobilisation (McAdam & Tarrow, 2005). Local or domestic frames of activism, in turn, co-opt, adapt or integrate messages in order to construct broader narratives that draw on the arguments of transnational ideologues. The process of movement framing – how actors seek to shape people's interpretations of the world in which they operate – is therefore an active one in which ideologues play an important role. 'Dynamic mechanisms' – from local peer groups involved in transnational mobilisation to broader ideological narratives – are part of 'sequential *processes*' that shape activism and create what McAdam and Tarrow (2005) call 'contentious politics.' Recent works have analysed the statements of leading militants to understand the processes by which militancy is diffused, how grievances resonate, and how leaders retain credibility (Holbrook, 2014; Youngman, 2016a). Importantly, this work sheds light on the ways in which ideological frames – and the movements that adopt them – change (Youngman, 2016b).

The importance of transnational ideologues can clearly be seen in the case of the foreign fighter movement in the North Caucasus. Perhaps most importantly, Sheikh Fathi al-Shishani arrived in the region in the early 1990s. Although he was too ill to fight in Afghanistan, his status as a Jordanian Chechen and his ability to speak both Arabic and Chechen afforded him credibility in local communities along the border with Chechnya and Dagestan (S.F. al-Shishani, undated). It was Sheikh Fathi who invited the Saudi Ibn al-Khattab to Dagestan in 1995 and gave him command of a small local militia, or *jama'at*. Other ideologues followed and each played a role in supporting and enabling the foreign fighter movement to grow.

KEY RELIGIOUS ADVISORS TO FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN CHECHNYA				
Nom-de-guerre	*Ethnicity*	*Prior experience*	*Arrival*	*Date of death*
Sheikh Fathi al-Shisani	Jordanian Chechen	Afghanistan	1992	May 1997
Abu Omar al-Sayf	Saudi	Afghanistan	1995	December 2005
Abu Hafs al-Ur-dani	Jordanian	Unconfirmed – possibly participated in Tajik civil war with Khattab	1995	November 2006
Mukhannad	Unconfirmed	Unknown	1999	April 2011

Khattab was influenced by the writings of the Palestinian ideologue Abdullah Azzam. He viewed jihad in Afghanistan as 'compulsory' and later argued that support for Muslim brothers was an 'obligation in Islam' (Ibn Khattab, 1997). According to his family, Khattab viewed Islam as inclusive of 'all except those who sow discord and unrest' (Ibn Khattab, 2002). He quickly gained military experience in

Afghanistan, earning a reputation as a brave and courageous leader (Moore & Tumelty, 2008). After the war ended, Khattab sought to mobilise volunteers in support of embattled Islamic communities in Tajikistan (Ibn Khattab, undated), leading one of three groups that became involved in the conflict there. However, it was his actions in the North Caucasus that brought him to prominence. For Khattab, the international community, notably the United Nations, had failed to protect Muslims in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, or Bosnia. The Arab mujahideen in the North Caucasus were consequently organised around a reading of jihad as an individual duty or obligation (*fard al-ayn*) to defend the global community of Muslims, or *umma*, directed against the non-Muslim occupation of Muslim lands. Whereas socio-revolutionary Islam focused on challenges to domestic politic norms, the pan-Islamist understanding of jihad that focused on the *umma* enable a form of transnational activism directed towards supporting oppressed Muslim communities. Khattab's vision of jihad, however, differed sharply from the emergent discourse associated with al-Qaeda (AQ).

Personal ties and trust were central to the network that Khattab established. Following Azzam's lead, Khattab implemented a model where individuals of any nationality could join his forces. However, he also ensured that any prospective recruits were vetted. Thus, Khattab organised his cadre of foreign fighters around a small, trusted inner circle of aides, all of whom had fought alongside him in Tajikistan or been involved in Azzam's training camps in Pakistan. With the exception of the Egyptian Abu Bakr Aqeedah, the nucleus of the group appears to have been Saudi. It included Hakim al-Medani, Abu Omar al-Nadji, Abu Walid al-Ghamidi, Sahel al-Owfi, Khalid al-Subai, and Abu Musab (possibly al-Tabuki). In total, around 80 Arab volunteers participated in the first Chechen war. Khattab's group launched a series of ambush operations in early 1996 in support of Chechen rebels, bringing him to the attention of local militia leader Shamil Basayev. It was the relationship between Khattab and Basayev that was to be critical to the growth of the foreign fighter movement in the North Caucasus. Consequently, the emergence and success of the foreign fighters depended not just on military leadership, but also on the transnational ideologues and the local allies who inspired and legitimised their presence.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS INTEGRAL TO STATE-BUILDING EFFORTS, LEFT LASTING LEGACY

Following the Khasavyurt Accords, signed in August 1996 to mark the end of the First Chechen War, the Chechen leadership focused on ensuring the withdrawal of Russian troops. Aslan Maskhadov, Akhmed Zakayev, Movladi Udugov and Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev all took lead roles in the negotiations overseen by the OSCE, which culminated in a peace treaty signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Maskhadov in Moscow in May 1997. At the same time, Yandarbiyev and others continued to promote shari'a law. In September 1996, Yandarbiyev, as acting ChRI President, issued a decree introducing a shari'a-based criminal code. He also declared the 1994-1996 war a jihad. In October 1996, he met with Sheikh Fathi and the newly arrived young Saudi religious advisor, Abu Omar al-Sayf (Voice of the Caucasus, undated). This meeting provided the foundation and theological rationale for embracing shari'a law and establishing the Shari'a Guard paramilitary group. In December 1996, Yandarbiyev issued a series of statements embedding shari'a in the new constitution, before stepping down to contest the January 1997 presidential elections.

Although Yandarbiyev's views on the nature of the first role and the preferred role for shari'a were not widely held – as evidenced by his defeat by Maskhadov in those elections – his stance attracted external support. Al-Sayf had some knowledge of both Islamic and jihadist doctrines, having studied before travelling to Pakistan in the early 1990s. On his arrival in the North Caucasus, he quickly linked up with Khattab's group, and it was Al-Sayf – working alongside Jordanian-Chechen ideologues – who provided the financial support for the integration of the foreign fighters into the newly formed ChRI state structures. Thus, the alliance of foreign fighters and influential local allies helped the foreign fighter movement integrate itself into ChRI state-building efforts. Yandarbiyev was able to use his position as interim president to support the shift towards a more overt reading of Islam, while Sheikh Fathi and Al-Sayf were integral to the establishment of the Shari'a Guard.

Despite their defeat in the elections, former members of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) such as Yandarbiyev began to agitate for control and influence beyond the newly formed government. Maskhadov was acutely aware of the significance of local Islamist groups, even though he was elected on a secular mandate. Isa Umarov, religious advisor to late ChRI President Dzhokhar Dudayev, and Yandarbiyev continued to support the activities of the Shari'a Guard. Islam Khalimov, who had been involved in the Jundullah Brigade – the only Chechen Islamist fighting unit during the first war – was appointed Interior Minister and focused on developing the Shari'a Guard in late 1996 and 1997. He appointed Supyan Abdullayev and Abdul Malik Mezhidov as deputies who oversaw the Shari'a Guard. Abdullayev – who later acted as a close advisor to Dokka Umarov, the man who was to abolish the ChRI and replace it with the explicitly jihadist Imarat Kavkaz (IK) – had been a member of the IRP in the early 1990s, before aligning with the Jundullah Brigade.

This group coalesced around a vision of Islamic activism focused on resisting federal pressure on Chechnya. Khattab, however, also retained close ties to other foreign veterans, including Abu Jafar al-Yemeni, Abu Quteyba al-Libi, and Abu Khalid. Khattab created a movement that was multinational in character, with a handful of activists joining after the war in Bosnia faltered in early 1996. Alongside them, local Chechen paramilitary groups increased their influence, particularly the Islamic Battalions and the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR). Khattab's training camps would also prove crucial in later sustaining the movement, and provided a model for other groups to emulate. He ensured that his foreign fighter network became embedded locally and therefore was more resilient, and he integrated local ideologues and financiers. Khattab's influence also continues to resonate in other ways: His name and ideas featuring in the wider jihadi literature, and he pioneered certain media tactics, such as videotaping operations and establishing a multilingual portal for disseminating statements. The legacy of the foreign fighter movement, moreover, outlasted their direct involvement, and many key indigenous leaders – such as Dagestan's Magomed Vagabov and Kabardino-Balkaria's Anzor Astemirov – benefited both from religious training abroad and links to the Khattab/Basayev networks. At the same time, the foreign fighter movement that Khattab to a large degree symbolised was not unitary, with contestation between Jordanian Chechens and Saudis in particular.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS FAILED TO ADAPT TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

The foreign fighter movement in the North Caucasus drew support from a range of locations. As already indicated, some came from Bosnia and the Balkans, but many travelled with Khattab from Tajikistan. Members of ethnic groups from Central Asia and the wider Caucasus region (e.g. Nogay, Azeri) were initially welcomed to the training camps in the interwar period. Shared languages and culture (Russian and Turkish) and the ability to travel to the region, coupled with access to informal support networks in and around Chechnya, facilitated the growth of their networks. Moreover, the foreign fighter movement could claim some success as a result of the first war, which boosted its appeal. At the same time, Khattab appears to have tried to manage the growth and professionalism of the foreign fighter network. Although a small number of Yemeni, Egyptian, and Algerian volunteers arrived after 1995 via staging points in Baku and the Pankisi Gorge, few of them succeeded in integrating themselves into Khattab's network. He also appears to have restricted the influence of the Central Asian networks amid fears they were infiltrated by informers.

The early success of the foreign fighter movement in the North Caucasus in some ways laid the foundations for its decline. The raid on Buynaksk in December 1997 and the invasion of Dagestan in summer 1999, which triggered the second war, failed to spark a popular revolt. Many key figures were killed in Dagestan, the battle for and retreat from Groznyy, and in Komsomolskoye in 1999-2000, and the invasion was seen as a mistake, leading some who were able to do so to leave. The foreign fighter networks suffered further losses in 2001, Khattab was killed in March 2002, and many of those remaining were killed under Khattab's successors, Abu Walid (died April 2004) and Abu Qutaybah (died July 2004). Moreover, the international environment was changing: As Al-Sayf noted, the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 drained any vestiges of support in Saudi circles. The death of Al-Sayf in 2005 and Abu Qutaybah's successor, Abu Hafs al-Urdani, in 2006 effectively ended the involvement of Khattab's foreign fighter network in the insurgency, with the remaining fighters essentially incorporated into local units. Over time, the foreign fighter movement increasingly relied on small local and regional networks and on on-going support from the foreign fighters who had returned to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Turkey. Neighbouring countries became important hubs for the foreign fighter networks, providing support, training and recruits, and a small number of foreign fighters were aligned to groups in the Chechen highlands – particularly around Vedeno – and Dagestan. As a result, by 2007 the foreign fighter networks were more Turkic than Arabic, as illustrated by court proceedings in Baku, where 16 people were convicted of involvement in insurgent groups (Turan News Agency).

The degradation of the insurgency in which the foreign fighter network was embedded was another important factor in explaining its decline. The inability to control territory curtailed the operation of the training camps. The federal authorities succeeded in co-opting influential local actors, such as the Kadyrovs and the Yamadayevs, who, over time, established a semi-autonomous form of governance in Chechnya. As the insurgency's fortunes deteriorated, many local fighters accepted amnesties and changed sides – an option not available to the foreign fighters, who were consequently trapped. Pressure from the local authorities and the FSB on the remaining groups forced foreign fighters to

increasingly rely on small, trusted networks, and some found it difficult to establish contact with local militant groups. Some foreign fighters struggled as a result of language and cultural difficulties, and those who succeeded, such as key Saudi and Yemeni figures, relied on local deputies to link them to local communities. Although the foreign fighters demonstrated considerable resiliency, the reliance on personal trust networks created difficulties achieving continuity and succession when key personnel, local and foreign, were killed. The gradual weakening of the foreign fighter infrastructure was indicated by the delays in announcing the deaths of Khattab's successor, Abu Walid al-Ghamdi, in early 2004 and Al-Sayf in late 2005. Although the last senior foreign fighter, Mokhannad, was not killed until 2011, by that point the movement had ceased to play a significant role in the insurgency.

PART FOUR: INTERPRETING THE EVOLUTION AND DECLINE OF AN INSURGENCY

Learning lessons from one conflict can help us better understand developments in another. The North Caucasus has been a site of conflict since the Soviet Union's collapse, and the evolution and decline of armed opposition to the state offers valuable insights into insurgent leadership, succession, ideological change, and appeal. This final section builds on part three by examining the broader failure of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) and Imarat Kavkaz (IK) state-building projects and offers the following conclusions:

- Insurgencies are best understood not simply as collections of hierarchical paramilitary units, but as social movements whose leaders must balance their own needs and agendas with those of members if they are to be successful.

- Clandestine groups often have succession plans in place, even if these are not publicised. However, succession is a negotiated process that is vulnerable to external interference and difficult to achieve in the event of recurring leadership losses.

- Weakness was a key factor driving the ideological evolution of the North Caucasus insurgency. Rebel leaders continually sought to expand the insurgency's constituency as its core support weakened, but changing conditions and a perception it had reached a dead end undermined its appeal.

- The loss of the IK's indigenous ideologists diluted its unique identity and its ability to respond to developments, suggesting insurgent groups may be as dependent on the strength of their ideological cadres as their combat ones. The IK's ability to function and recruit was also undermined by low levels of trust and morale, which were exacerbated by security service behaviour.

INSURGENT LEADERS BALANCE COMPETING INTERESTS IN PURSUING THEIR AGENDA

The language used to describe groups engaged in terrorism and political violence often mirrors that of militaries, with leaders positioned at the apex and issuing orders to subordinates. In many ways, this is understandable: insurgent groups themselves frequently employ military terminology, and groups often function as military units when directly engaged in combat operations. Moreover, leaders are widely understood as playing important roles in all types of movements: as McAdam has noted, 'in the context of political opportunity and widespread discontent there still remains a need for the centralised direction and coordination of a recognised leadership' (McAdam, 1999, 47). For this reason, the study of leadership in social movements has tended to focus on charismatic leadership and its capacity to mobilise people.

Nevertheless, drawing parallels with the hierarchical structures of militaries is often a misleading way of conceiving of leadership as a whole within insurgent movements. Many groups deliberately employ decentralised, cell structures: Leaders are important components, but the existence of the group is not contingent on their survival – something that Khattab explicitly argued (al-Nowaiser, 2002). Leadership is, moreover, often explicitly linked to opportunities in particular historical, cultural, social, and political environments, and social and political 'capital' may not be transferable between settings. Conversely, individuals with low standing in one milieu may assume a prominent role in another – contrast, for example, the widespread contempt in Chechen society for Movladi Udugov (Derluguian, 2005) with his leading role in shaping the ideological direction of the insurgency. Leadership is also relational and enabled by a social network, and can depend on the personal characteristics – experience, training, reputation, etc. – of the leader. As Melucci (1996) argues, in a relational setting, leaders act as representatives of their group and are expected to advance its interests, in return for which they are afforded 'status, loyalty, prestige, and power.' In settings where 'ideological identification is more elastic, alliances and fusions are more probable' (Melucci, 1996, 326). However, if the relational benefits are neither fair, nor equitable, leaders may sever the link to other external groups, or supporters.

Different types of leader can address the challenges of negotiating leadership in different ways. ChRI President Aslan Maskhadov was, first and foremost, a military commander, and throughout his tenure he sought to balance the interests of competing factions within the ChRI to achieve a united front. As such, he vacillated between appeasing and suppressing the Islamists (Wilhelmsen, 2004), but his position was weakened by a lack of external support and the loss of many allies (Moore, 2010). His letters reveal his on-going efforts to maintain the support of and control influential commander Shamil Basayev, and his recurring frustration at the independent actions of Ruslan Gelayev (Akhmadov, 2013). A rapprochement did occur between the two separate military, religious, and political command structures – the State Defence Committee led by Maskhadov and the Majlis al-Shura aligned to Shamil Basayev – in June 2002, but this was only possible after the foreign fighter movement suffered major losses, including Khattab himself. Dokka Umarov, the leader who abolished the ChRI and replaced it with the IK, was similarly a military leader who sought to balance competing interests within the insurgency. His statements testify to the pressures both from

the younger generation of fighters and those from outside Chechnya for ideological change, and Umarov's personal shift to jihadism post-dated that of the movement that he led. This highlights how ideology and leadership are two-way, interactive processes, and how a leader's control over a movement can be maintained by ideological flexibility and accommodating demands from within the insurgency (Youngman, 2016a). By contrast, Aliaskhab Kebekov, Umarov's successor, was an ideological leader who appeared to prioritise adherence to a particular strand of jihadist ideology over movement unity. Thus, when the Syrian conflict created bottom-up pressures for change, he ceased to be able to balance the competing interests – with the breaking of the relationships manifested in the widespread defections to IS. Kebekov's opponents, by contrast, avoided offering explicit arguments of how defecting would improve the situation in the insurgency, drawing on the emotional appeal of the 'caliphate' and allowing followers to project onto the movement their own goals and aspirations (Youngman, 2016b).

SUCCESSION A NEGOTIATED PROCESS THAT BECOMES CUMULATIVELY DIFFICULT

Even within decentralised movements, leaders often have succession plans in place, as they seek to ensure the survival of the movement and the continuation of their own political and ideological preferences. Plans can differ significantly: in some cases, successors are publicly designated; in others, there may be an acknowledged 'logical' successor; and in yet others succession plans may only be known to a trusted inner circle. Maskhadov, for example, appointed Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev as ChRI vice president, as did Sadulayev Umarov several years later; as such, when both died, a legal heir was in place. When Kebekov was killed in April 2015, leadership of the IK transitioned naturally to Magomed Suleymanov, his close ally and one of the few surviving IK loyalists. At the same time, having a designated heir can be dangerous. The IK, for example, split in 2010-2011 when a group led by his chosen successor, Aslambek Vadalov, sought to oust Umarov. The nature of the attempted coup may explain why Umarov did not have a designated successor in place when he died in September 2013.

Succession can depend on a number of factors. Succession plan may not be known, or may be disrupted – if, for example, the intended successor is killed around the same time as the leader. Furthermore, a logical consequence of viewing leadership as involving the balancing of interests is that succession should be understood as a negotiated process. This is arguably even truer of jihadist as opposed to other types of insurgent groups: pledges of *bayah*, or allegiance, are to individual leaders, not groups, meaning the death of leaders can create opportunities to renegotiate alliances. The personal authority of any successor, as well as the position adopted by other influential figures – and potential competitors – within the movement are important. Sadulayev's and Umarov's leadership bids were clearly strengthened by support from Basayev, helping assuage the concerns of influential ideologues like Anzor Astemirov, whereas Vadalov's challenge foundered due to a lack of support from key rebels in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria – which at the time were the focal points of insurgent violence. Moreover, insurgent leaders face challenges in negotiating competing interests that non-clandestine group do not, and state opponents can seek to exploit these. This was most clearly seen with Kebekov's ascension to the IK leadership. Umarov was killed in September

2013, but the regional leadership were unable to meet to agree a successor. It took six months of negotiations conducted using USB sticks and involving actors in Turkey for a mutually acceptable candidate to be agreed upon, with the absence of personal relationships between the parties playing an important role. In the meantime, security services in the North Caucasus intercepted and leaked details of the negotiations in an apparent attempt to exacerbate disagreements and foster uncertainty. These issues were only resolved in March 2014, when Kebekov proclaimed himself the new IK leader. Similarly, the IK leadership's efforts to resolve the disagreements over IS were severely hindered by the inability of rebel leaders to communicate with one another – again with a reliance on USB sticks that did not always reach their destination (Youngman, 2016b).

Existing literature (Cronin, 2009) shows that the death or arrest of a leader can have varying effects, sometimes leading to the demise of the group, at others to its rejuvenation. Evidence from the North Caucasus supports this. In Ingushetia, the arrest of Emir Magas and the death of Said Buryatskiy in early 2010 effectively crippled that branch of the insurgency, and it has never recovered. By contrast, the death of Anzor Astemirov in Kabardino-Balkaria in March 2010 led to an upsurge of attacks, demonstrating how leaders can restrain as well as exacerbate violence. The death of his successor, by contrast, prompted a sharp decline. However, there has been very little research on the cumulative effect of leadership losses and their impact on succession planning. Logic would suggest that sustained losses, particularly over a short period of time, make it harder to put succession plans in place and ensure a smooth leadership transition. In Kabardino-Balkaria, the insurgent leadership was decimated by successive operations that eliminated much of its leadership cadre, and the insurgency there has all but disappeared. In Dagestan, most of the leadership positions are now vacant because of sustained security service pressure. Insurgencies do not have infinite personnel resources with which to replace losses, particularly if they are already suffering from recruitment problems. Nevertheless, it is clearly an area requiring further research.

WEAKNESS A KEY DRIVER OF IDEOLOGICAL CHANGE IN THE INSURGENCY

Over the course of its existence, the ideology of first the ChRI and then the IK underwent a gradual transformation. The First Chechen War (1994-1996) was predominantly nationalist, with Islam playing only a subsidiary, instrumental role (Hughes, 2007). However, the region-wide process of post-Soviet Islamic revival occurred in Chechnya in the context of – and was accelerated by – war (Gammer, 2011), and a loose Islamist camp formed within the separatist movement. It was this camp that repeatedly challenged Maskhadov's leadership and that he sought to appease. Ultimately, however, it came to dominate the entire insurgency. The transformation continued under Sadulayev and then Umarov. Umarov was a nationalist-separatist who portrayed Russia as a colonial force occupying Chechnya. With the proclamation of the IK, his portrayal changed dramatically, with religion becoming its defining characteristic. At the same time, he continued to prioritise Russia and paid little heed to international affairs. From late 2010 onwards, however, the hierarchy of enemies became increasingly blurred as he demonstrated an increasing in global events (Youngman, 2016a). Under his successors, this interest became even more prominent as events in Syria developed and the involvement of ethnic North Caucasians became clear. Kebekov moved the IK closer to al-

Qaeda (AQ) than had previously been the case, and placed himself in clear opposition to the Islamic State (IS). Suleymanov continued these policies during his short leadership.

Weakness was a key factor in explaining both the ideological transformation and the long-term decline of the insurgency. Maskhadov's ability to counter the influence of the insurgency's Islamist wing was continually undermined by Russian security service operations that targeted his supporters. Russian state policy thus facilitated, arguably deliberately, the radicalisation of the insurgency. By the time Umarov assumed the ChRI leadership in June 2006, the insurgency was in a perilous state. The deaths of Maskhadov and Sadulayev – coupled with a general amnesty and the co-option of former insurgents into the ranks of forces under the control of Kremlin-appointed leaders Akhmad Kadyrov and his son and successor Ramzan – drained the insurgency and necessitated the replacement of key military and ideological leaders. It was clear that the insurgency needed to expand its appeal if it were to survive. Religion had historically proven to be the best means of appealing to the wider region and provided a ready-made sense of common identity for appealing to and beyond it. Moreover, both the younger generation of insurgents and those in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria were pushing for an ideology that represented their interests more closely than Chechen nationalism. The weakening of the Chechen core reduced its dominance over the insurgency's ideological orientation and its ability to withstand bottom-up pressures. With this and each subsequent shift in focus, the leadership sough to expand its support base – first from Chechnya to the wider region, then to Russia's Muslims, and finally to the global community of Muslims and jihadists elsewhere – because its original support base was no longer sufficient.

The soft policies pursued by the authorities from 2010 onwards (see Part Two) only served to further weaken the insurgency's appeal. Extremist ideologies always seek to tap into and shape perceptions of existing grievances, and addressing some of these undermined the insurgency's support base and recruitment potential. The rehabilitation commissions, in particular, encouraged those only peripherally engaged or disillusioned to disengage, and appear to have had the greatest success in Ingushetia – not coincidentally, the republic where soft policies have been pursued with the greatest sincerity. By the time IS emerged in the region, the IK was already in critical decline. Furthermore, the appeal of the Syrian conflict for would-be recruits in the North Caucasus cannot be viewed in isolation from the situation at home: IS' extensive propaganda output and the international media coverage it received, particularly in 2014-2015, served to create the impression of an insurgency that was winning, or at the very least capable of it. This stood in stark contrast to the North Caucasus, where even IK loyalists publicly admitted the insurgency had reached a dead-end. The increased security service pressure in the run-up to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi created an even more challenging operating environment, and the continuation of these policies post-Sochi has resulted in the almost total decimation of the insurgency across the region. These practical difficulties only served to increase the appeal of Syria as an alternative, and the insurgent leaders who defected to IS sought to adapt their ideological appeal in response.

LOSS OF IDEOLOGISTS, LOW TRUST HAD A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE INSURGENCY'S APPEAL

Several factors negatively impacted the insurgency's attractiveness and ability to function and recruit, and therefore to counter the negative processes influencing ideological change. One of these was that, by 2011, it had lost many of its indigenous ideologists, key figures such as Astemirov, Buryatskiy, and Supyan Abdullayev. Although the short-term impact of their deaths varied, it was these individuals who were able to translate pan-Islamic narratives of jihad to local audiences. Without them, the IK lost much of its distinct ideological identity and struggled to respond to changing circumstances. Thus, the IK was poorly placed to respond to the challenges of the Syrian conflict, and Kebekov's decision to move the IK closer to AQ occurred at a time when the two movements were arguably at their lowest ebb. Absent indigenous ideologists on the ground, the North Caucasus insurgency was unable to combat perceptions that it had reached a dead-end. This suggests insurgent movements may be as dependent on the depth of their ideological cadres as their combat ones, as well as heavily impact by the availability of more attractive alternatives.

Another important consideration in considering the insurgency's ability to recruit is the low levels of trust and morale. The statements of rebel leaders in the North Caucasus and Syria are replete with references to mistrust, the threat posed by informants, and the constraining effects this has on mobilisation. Muslim al-Shishani's complaints that he could not re-join the insurgency after his release from prison because of suspicion he may have been turned are indicative of this problem. For this reason, leaders such as Umarov repeatedly recommended that would-be recruits carry out independent actions rather than attempting to join up with existing insurgent groups. The impact of informants appears to have been particularly telling in the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, where the security services twice succeeded in wiping out the majority of the leadership. This led *Islam Din*, the 'official' website for that branch, to lament the failure to follow basic security procedures.

Federal and North Caucasian security services have actively sought to exacerbate these problems of mistrust and low morale, although only some of the methods are replicable in law-governed states. For example, following the arrest of Magas, Russian media widely reported that he was collaborating with the investigation, even though neither his behaviour in court nor his sentence reflected any such position. A lengthy delay between his arrest and it being publicly reported served the purpose of exacerbating rebel concerns that any information he had could have been compromised. In Dagestan, the website *Kavkazpress* is used by the federal security services to leak compromising information, and it appears to have been used to turn internal discussions about whether to pledge allegiance to IS into public disputes. The Chechen authorities, meanwhile, have been particularly active in targeting the relatives of those suspected of involvement in the insurgency destroying their houses and/or instigating their expulsion from native villages. These measures are a violation of domestic and international law, but arguably have produced short-term gains in domestic security. Their illegality, however, makes it doubtful whether the Chechen model of counterinsurgency can serve as a model for other areas, and on-going social unrest casts doubts on the long-term 'success' of that model.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: OFFICIAL ESTIMATES OF NUMBERS FIGHTING IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

Russian, Federal			
Date	Official, agency	Figure	Source URL
16/12/14	Yevgeniy Ilin, National Antiterrorism Committee	850	http://itar-tass.com/politika/1649861
16/1/15	Ilyas Rogachev, Foreign Ministry	800	http://echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/1474324-echo/
20/2/15	Aleksandr Bortnikov, Federal Security Service (FSB)	1,700	http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/516282.html
28/5/15	Gennadiy Gatilov, Foreign Ministry	500	http://tass.ru/politika/2001185
22/6/15	Nikolay Patrushev, Security Council	1,000	http://kommersant.ru/doc/2752250
30/6/15	Oleg Syromolotov, Foreign Ministry	2,200	http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/sps/9EAC23E7E71A3EAF-43257E7400362B32
9/7/15	Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Ministry	2,000	http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/525373.html
18/9/15	Sergey Smirnov, FSB	2,400	https://eadaily.com/news/2015/09/18/fsb-na-storone-ig-voyuyut-svyshe-2400-grazhdan-rossii
15/10/15	Aleksandr Gorovoy, Interior Ministry	2,500	http://www.interfax-russia.ru/main.asp?id=662733
19/11/15	Oleg Syromolotov, Foreign Ministry	2,719	http://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/1698091.html
17/12/15	Aleksandr Bornikov, FSB	2,900	http://www.currenttime.tv/content/article/27428128.html
17/3/16	Vladimir Makarov, Interior Ministry	3,417	http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/279282/
18/4/16	Aleksandr Bastrykin, Investigative Committee	1,000	http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2961578
8/6/16	Yuriy Chayka, General Prosecutor's Office	3,500	http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/571515.html

27/7/16	Aleksandr Bortnikov, FSB	2,900	http://kavpolit.com/articles/bortnikov_v_svjazjah_s_terroristami_na_blizhnem_vo-27232/
21/11/16	Ilya Rogachev, Foreign Ministry	3,200	https://ria.ru/incidents/20161121/1481772465.html
23/2/17	Vladimir Putin, Russian President	4,000	https://www.gazeta.ru/army/news/9721685.shtml
19/4/17	Nikolay Patrushev, Security Council	2,700 (North Caucasus only)	https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20170419/1492554605.html
Russian, Local			
25/7/14	Sergey Kmennyy, FSB, Kabardino-Balkaria	60	http://regnum.ru/news/1829616.html
16/6/15	Apti Alaudinov, Interior Ministry, Chechnya	405	http://ria.ru/world/20150616/1071864684.html
29/10/15	Yunus-bek Yevkurov, head, Ingushetia	30	http://www.kp.ru/daily/26452.4/3321798/
19/11/15	Ramazan Abdulatipov, head, Dagestan	600	http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/11/18_a_7900145.shtml
11/12/15	Abdurashid Magomedov, Interior Ministry, Dagestan	900	http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2867295
19/10/16	Yunus-bek Yevkurov, head, Ingushetia	87	http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/291176/
13/12/16	Yunus-bek Yevkurov, head, Ingushetia	97	http://kavkasia.net/Russia/2016/1481683747.php
13/1/17	Abdurashid Magomedov, Interior Ministry, Dagestan	1,200	http://www.riadagestan.ru/news/society/glava_mvd_po_respublike_dagestan_vstretilsya_so_studentami_daggosuniversiteta/
26/1/17	Unidentified official, Interior Ministry, Chechnya	600	https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/296610/

26/1/17	Yuriy Muravyev, Interior Ministry, Ingushetia	200	http://kavtoday.ru/27039
28/2/17	Igor Romashkin, Interior Ministry, Kabardino-Balkaria	175	http://www.interfax-russia.ru/South/news.asp?id=811297&sec=1671
Commonwealth of Independent States			
29/3/16	State Security Service, Georgia	50	http://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/279924/
1/4/16	Interior Ministry, Kyrgyzstan	508	http://www.interfax.ru/world/501481
19/9/16	Ramazon Rakhimzod, Interior Ministry, Tajikistan	1,100	https://rus.ozodi.org/a/28001676.html
22/9/16	Nurgali Bilisbekov, National Security Committee, Kazakhstan	Unknown	https://kapital.kz/gosudarstvo/53853/knb-dlya-kazahstana-opasnost-predstavlyayut-vernuvshiesya-boeviki.html
3/3/17	Madat Guliyev, State Security Service, Azerbaijan	900	https://sputniknews.com/middleeast/201703031051224692-azerbaijan-iraq-syria-terrorists/

APPENDIX B: OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN 'RUSSIAN-SPEAKING' GROUPS

This appendix provides a brief overview of the main groups that have involved citizens from former Soviet states. Such groups have frequently split, united, or renamed themselves, creating challenges in tracking their heritage. Furthermore, most of the groups have ceased to maintain a durable online presence due to website and social media account shutdowns and the deaths of media operatives. Instead, their digital presence is often maintained through more closed platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp, making the groups harder to track. Much of the limited media reporting on the groups is reliant on unverifiable self-reporting via private channels; although it pays lip service to the limitations of the information, this often does not carry through to the analysis and the in-depth contextual knowledge required to critically examine it is often lacking. Finally, some groups publish material in languages such as Chechen and Uzbek, as well as Arabic, which the authors of this report do not speak and therefore cannot evaluate. To aid readability, throughout the paper individuals are only referred to by either their real name or *kunya*.

Jaysh al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar (JMA)

JMA was formed in March 2013 when Katibat al-Muhajirin (the Migrant Brigade), led by Umar al-Shishani, merged with several smaller groups. It was the primary destination for Russian-speaking foreign fighters until late 2013. However, the first of many fractures within the group occurred in August 2013, when Seyfullakh al-Shishani broke away in acrimonious circumstances to form his own group (see Seyfullakh's Jama'at). When Umar al-Shishani pledged allegiance to IS (then still ISIL) in November 2013, he took a considerable number – possibly a majority – of JMA's Russian-speaking fighters with him. Those who refused to join IS took on the JMA name, under the leadership of Salakhuddin al-Shishani, and the group initially remained one of the key destinations for Russian-speaking fighters. Over time, however, non-Russian speakers came to dominate JMA and, with the ouster of Salakhuddin and his military emir, Abdul-Karim Krymskiy, in mid-2015, it ceased to be a significant player among fighters from former Soviet countries.

Jaysh al-Khilafah al-Islamiya

Seyfullakh al-Shishani was one of the most prominent figures in JMA-produced material until he either left or was ejected (proffered reasons for his departure include disagreements with the leadership over strategy, excessive self-promotion, being overly enthusiastic in declaring others to be infidels, and embezzlement). Seyfullakh established a small group, comprised mainly of defectors from JMA, which went through several name changes in a short period of time, including Jaysh al-Khilafah al-Islamiya. After Seyfullakh's death in Aleppo in February 2014, the faction was led first by Mokhammad al-Khorasani and then Abu Ubayda al-Shishani, and was also known by the name Seyfullakh's Jama'at. Under Seyfullakh, the group enjoyed good relations with Jund al-Sham and Ansar al-Sham (with which it temporarily merged), but ultimately joined Jabhat al-Nusrah.

Islamic State (IS)

IS became one of the main groups featuring 'Russian-speaking' fighters with Umar al-Shishani's defection from JMA and his subsequent appointment as Northern Sector commander, attracting both North Caucasian and Central Asian fighters. Fighters have concentrated into numerous smaller units, including Kavkazskiy Dom, the Abu Khanif Jama'at, the Azerbaijani Jama'at, the Sabri Jama'at and the Akhmad Battalion. The proclamation of the 'caliphate' appeared to result in a significant recruitment boost, but the Russian-speaking groups also suffered significant losses, such as in fighting around Kobani. Significant figures include Abu Dzhikhad, an ethnic Karachay responsible for overseeing IS' Russian-language output, and Akhmad Chatayev, implicated in IS attacks in Turkey.

Imarat Kavkaz in Syria (IKS)

Salakhuddin al-Shishani and Abdul-Karim Krymskiy established IKS following their removal from JMA in mid-2015, explicitly subordinating his remaining Russian-speaking followers to the Imarat Kavkaz (IK) in the North Caucasus at a time when the IK was collapsing. There is little evidence to suggest that the group, which operated mainly around Aleppo and in Latakia, had a significant impact on the dynamics of the conflict. Much like JMA, it is rumoured to have suffered from internal divisions linked to the decline of the IK and contestation among its surviving representatives in Turkey (Paraszczuk, 2016). Salakhuddin was removed from his leadership role in December 2015.

Jaysh al-Usro

Upon his departure from IKS, Salakhuddin established Jaysh al-Usro with a handful of North Caucasian fighters and a few hundred local allies and continued to operate around Aleppo and in Latakia (Paraszczuk, 2016). The perpetual divisions within groups led by Salakhuddin have not had a positive impact on their influence, and Jaysh al-Usro is an even more marginal player in the conflict than IKS was.

Jabhat al-Nusrah

In addition to Seyfullakh's Jama'at, fighters from the former Soviet Union are also present in the Turkish Jama'at. There is limited open source information available as to the strength of Jabhat al-Nusrah's Russian-speaking contingent.

Adzhnad al-Kavkaz

Adzhnad al-Kavkaz is a relatively small group led by Abdul Khakim al-Shishani that has operated mainly in the Latakia region. It has enjoyed good relations with Jaysh al-Khilafah al-Islamiya and Jund al-Sham. Its military emir is Khamza al-Shishani. Its media output is mainly in Chechen and Arabic, and recruitment appears mainly to occur through trusted personal networks in refugee communities, particularly in Austria.

Jund al-Sham

Jund al-Sham is another relatively small group led by Muslim al-Shishani that has operated mainly in the Latakia region. It has enjoyed good relations with Jaysh al-Khilafah al-Islamiya and Ansar al-Sham – it temporarily merged with them in 2014 – as well as Adzhnad al-Kavkaz (Jund al-Sham's military emir, Abu Bakr al-Shishani, may have joined Adzhnad). The group has extensive links to German Salafi communities in Bonn, Berlin and Frankfurt (Steinberg, 2016) and has published propaganda material in German as well as Russian, English, and Arabic Muslim has repeatedly complained that the group lacks resources and called for the unification of non-IS groups.

Tarkhan's Jama'at

Also known as Katibat Ibadu ar-Rakhman, Tarkhan's jama'at is a small group under the command of Chechen rebel commander Tarkhan Gaziyev. In an interview, a representative of the group claimed that they left Chechnya for medical treatment in 2012 but want to return there if the opportunity arises. The representative also reported they are collaborating with the AQ-aligned Jaysh al-Fatah (now Tahrir al-Sham) and that Gaziyev himself is unable to travel to Syria for health reasons (Sham Center, 2016;he is believed to be in Turkey).

Imam Shamil Battalion

A statement claiming responsibility for the 3 April 2017 suicide attack on the St Petersburg metro claimed that the perpetrator, Akbarzhon Dzhalilov, carried out the attack 'under the direction of Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri – may God preserve and care for him – and the Al-Qaeda Organization' (Ani.mr, 2017). The authors have not observed any group to operate under this name in Syria; if such a group does exist, it may have been created specifically for the attack.

Islamic Jihad Union

The Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) is an Uzbek group based in Waziristan along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border that broke away from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in 2002 after the fall of the Taliban; it was linked to planned attacks on the US Ramstein base and Uzbek and US consulates in Germany in 2007 and has cooperated closely with the Taliban and AQ (Wigen, 2009). The group has expressed support for insurgents in the North Caucasus, as well as encouraging Muslims in Russia to wage 'solitary jihad' (Islam Din, 2014). It has released video footage of its training camps in Syria.

Turkistan Islamic Party

The Turkistan Islamic Party – also known as the Turkistan Islamic Movement and the East Turkistan Islamic Party – is a predominantly Uighur organisation that also has Uzbek members. It has historical links with the IMU, the IJU, the Taliban and AQ (Potter, 2013). and consists of Uighur and Uzbek militants and has reportedly joined the AQ-aligned Tahrir al-Sham coalition (Botobekov, 2017).

Imam Bukhari Jama'at

The Imam Bukhari Jama'at is a predominantly Uzbek group that is effectively the Syrian affiliate of the IMU. The group split in October 2014 when its leaders pledged allegiance to IS, despite the IMU's long-standing relationship with AQ and the Taliban; however, following retaliatory action against Uzbek militants in Afghanistan, the group appears to have reversed its position and joined the AQ-aligned Tahrir al-Sham coalition (Botobekov, 2017). Most of the group's propaganda is in Uzbek and therefore inaccessible to the authors.

Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad

Katibat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad is a group which consists mainly of ethnic Uzbeks from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and which has joined the AQ-aligned Tahrir al-Sham coalition (Botobekov, 2017).

Ansar al-Jihad

Ansar al-Jihad, a group with Uzbek, Uighur, and Turkish members, has released video footage of the fall of Aleppo.

APPENDIX C: KEY REBEL LEADERS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS AND SYRIA & IRAQ

Syria			
Name	**Nom-de-Guerre/Kunya**	**Position**	**Status**
Atabiyev, Islam	Abu Dzhikhad	IS propagandist	Killed October 2017
Azhiyev, Rustam	Abdul Khakim al-Shishani	Adzhnad al-Kavkaz emir	Active
Batirashvili, Tarkhan	Umar al-Shishani	IS Northern Sector emir	Killed 7/2016
Chatayev, Akhmed	Odnorukiy	IS operative	Active
Ruslan Machaliashvili	Seyfullakh al-Shishani	Emir of group that defected from JMA, known by multiple names	Killed 2/2014
Margoshvili, Feyzulla (also known as Georgiy Kushtanashvili, Feyzul Baysarov)	Salakhuddin al-Shishani	Jaysh al-Usro emir (former JMA, IKS emir)	Unknown
Margoshvili, Murad	Muslim al-Shishani	Jund al-Sham emir	Active
Unknown	Abu Musa al-Shishani	Ansar al-Sham emir or military emir	Active
North Caucasus			
Abdulayev, Gadzhi	Mukhammad Abu Dudzhana Gimrinskiy	IK Dagestan Wilayah Mountain Sector emir	Killed 8/2015
Abdullayev, Gasan	Abu-Yasir	IS/CW Dagestan Wilayah Southern Sector emir	Killed 6/2016
Abdullayev, Supyan	Abu-Supyan	IK deputy emir	Killed 3/2011
Asilderov, Rustam	Abu Mukhammad al-Kadari	IS/CW emir	Killed 12/2016
Astemirov, Anzor	Seyfullakh	IK United Wilayah of Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay emir	Killed 3/2010
Basayev, Shamil	Abu Idris	Rebel leader, various official positions within ChRI;	Killed 7/2006
Byutukayev, Aslan	Khamzat	IS/CW Nokhchiycho Wilayah (Chechen Province) emir	Active
Gaziyev, Tarkhan		Chechen rebel leader (no formal rank in IK or IS/CW)	Active
Kazimagomedov, Kamaldin	Abu Abdulla Kasumkentskiy	IK Dagestan Wilayah Southern Sector emir	Killed 5/2016
Kebekov, Aliaskhab	Ali Abu Mukhammad	IK emir	Killed 4/ 2015
Samer Sahil Abdallah al-Suwaylim	Ibn Khattab	Leader of the Arab foreign fighter movement in the North Caucasus	Killed 3/ 2002
Maskhadov, Aslan		ChRI President	Killed 3/ 2005.
Sadulayev, Abdul-Khalim		ChRI President	Killed 6/2006

Saidov, Makhran	Makhran, Yakub	IS/CW Nokhchiycho Wilayah (Chechen Province) Eastern Sector emir	Active
Shebzukhov, Zalim	Salim	IK United Wilayah of Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay emir	Killed 8/2015
Suleymanov, Mag-omed	Abu Usman Gimrinskiy	IK emir	Killed 8/2015
Taziyev, Ali	Magas	IK G1alg1ayche Wilayah (Ingushe-tian Province) emir	Arrested early 2010
Umarov, Dokka	Dokka Abu Usman	IK emir	Killed 9/ 2013
Vadalov, Aslambek		Chechen rebel leader (no formal rank in IK or IS/CW)	Active

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