

THE THIRD CHECHEN WAR?

The Islamic State's Imagined *Qoqaz* Caliphate and Russia's Fractious *Ciscaucasia*

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"And this my ancient dolorous agony, intensified by the dreadful centuries, is fastened upon my body, from which there fall, melted by the blazing sun, drops that unceasingly pour upon the rocks of *Kaukasos*." -- Aeschylus, *Prometheus Unbound* (Fragment 107)

"God forbid that the conquest of the Caucasus might leave a similar bloody legacy to Russian history, such as that left by [Pizarro or Cortés] to the history of Spain."-- Nikolai Nikolaivich Raevskii¹ (1841)

"Cossack! The night is dark, don't dream— a Chechen lurks across the stream."--Alexander Pushkin, "The Circassian song" from *A Prisoner of the Caucasus*

Until the outbreak of civil disorder in Ukraine last year, Europe's most violent, if less noticed armed conflict was in Russia's *Ciscaucasia* region.² Located a quarter-turn east of Ukraine on the compass face of the Black Sea, *Ciscaucasia* is Russia's only direct link to recently annexed Crimea, and faces Ukraine's Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts in the contentious *Donbas* across the narrow *Tahanroz'ka* gulf. The scene of two bloody conflicts in the last twenty years, it is unsurprising to learn that when Zeus sought to punish Prometheus, he bound him to a rock on the mythological *Mount Kaukasos*.

Author's note: The translation of all Russian, Chechen and Arabic source-material is by the author unless noted otherwise.

¹ Quoted in Austin Jersild (2002). *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

² Not that conflict in *Ciscaucasia* has abated: the Main Directorate of the Russian Ministry of Interior in the North Caucasus Federal District reported in April 2014 that it carried out 734 counterterror operations in the first calendar quarter of 2014, killing "76 militants including 14 leaders, detaining another 153 persons, and seizing large quantities of arms, ammunition, and explosives in 78 captured weapon caches. ["Боле 70 боевиков нейтрализовано на Северном Кавказе с начала года." http://spec-naz.org/news/boevaya_rabota/bole_70_boevikov_neytralizovano_na_severnom_kavkaze_s_nachala_goda/. Last accessed 13 August 2014] These numbers are comparable with the same period in 2013.

RUSSIA IN CISCAUCASIA: A PRISONER IN THE CAUCASUS³

It has been said the Caucasus, as Russians know it, did not really exist until Pushkin created it in his 1821 narrative poem.⁴ Pushkin wrote it at the time that *narodnost*⁵ or "Russian-ness" was emerging as a theme in Russian literature, and Yermolov⁶ was prosecuting his *Russification* campaign in the Caucasus, which eventually provoked a Sufi Islamic sect, the *Murids*,⁷ to declare *jihād*.⁸

Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region



Source: Library of Congress¹²

Ciscaucasia (Russian: *Северный Кавказ*) is a geographic territory that extends from the Caspian Sea west to the Black Sea, north of the Southern Caucasus⁹ states of Georgia (and its disputed enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and Azerbaijan.¹⁰ It includes two districts of the Russian Federation, the Northern Caucasian District and the Southern Federal District, respectively, that incorporate two territories or *krai*¹¹ of the Russian Federation and seven autonomous Russian republics. The region is part of Russia's Southern Military District, which recently enlarged with the addition of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol after that territory's April 2014 annexation by Russia.

Also referred to as the North Caucasus, the region's political and social alienation reflects Ciscaucasia's internal fragmentation and detachment (figurative, and in some instances literal, too) from the rest of the Russian Federation. It also endured an earlier iteration of contemporary Russia's "federalization" policy now promoted for Moldova and Ukraine: in a region where people traditionally identified themselves by clan and village rather than as a member of a

³ From the title of Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin's 1821 narrative poem (Russian: *Кавказский пленник*. Russian transl.: *Kavkazskiy plennik*).

⁴ Katya Hokanson (1994). "Literary Imperialism, *Narodnost*' and Pushkin's Invention of the Caucasus." *The Russian Review*. 53 (July 1994), pp. 336.

⁵ *Narodnost*' (Russian: *народность*) was a neologism coined in 1819 by Prince Pyotr Andreyevich Viazemskii, who wrote to the Russian statesman and historian Alexander Turgenev, "why not translate *nationalité* as *narodnost*?" He continued, "with us the word *narodnyi* alone answers to two French words, *populaire* and *national*." The word was meant to convey the "Russian-ness" of something, and came at the time Russians were demanding "national-historical" literature, of which Pushkin's narrative poem is a prime example.

⁶ General Aleksey Petrovich Yermolov (1777-1861), who served as Imperial Russia's commander-in-chief in the Caucasus.

⁷ From the Arabic *مريد*.

⁸ The Caucasian War (1817-1864) ended with Russia's annexation of Ciscaucasia. Ghazi Mullah (Russian: *Казы-Мулла*. Russian transl.: *Khazi-Mulla*) a/k/a Mullah Muhammad al-Ghazi [from the Arabic *غازي*, literally "the Warrior"] al-Kamrawi was proclaimed the first imam of the Caucasus Imanate in 1828 and declared *jihād* against Russia.

⁹ Also called *Transcaucasia* (Russian: *Закавказье* Russian transl.: *Zakavkazie*), the South Caucasus is comprised of the sovereign states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The name means "on the far side of the Caucasus Mountains," leading one writer to remark "the area is only 'trans' if you are standing in Ciscaucasia, that is, southern Russia." [Charles King (2008). *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*. (New York: Oxford University Press), xiii] Its geographic area corresponds to the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, a one-time (1922-1936) constituent republic of the Soviet Union.. Transcaucasia has its own share of ethnic and religious conflicts— witness the predominantly ethnic Armenian rump state of Nagorno-Karabakh [a/k/a Artsakh Republic (Armenian transl.: *Arts'akhi Hanrapetut'yun*)] within the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic— but these events are outside the scope of this paper.

¹⁰ Use of the English term *Circassia* as a synonym of *Ciscaucasia* errs by mapping a language identity (i.e., an Adyghe speaker) onto a territorial identity.

¹¹ Russian: *край*.

¹² [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/map_image.pl?data=/service/gmd/gmd7/g7121/g7121e/ct001614.jp2&x=1274&y=1491&res=3&width=318&height=372&lastres=3&jpegLevel=80)

[bin/map_image.pl?data=/service/gmd/gmd7/g7121/g7121e/ct001614.jp2&x=1274&y=1491&res=3&width=318&height=372&lastres=3&jpegLevel=80](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/map_image.pl?data=/service/gmd/gmd7/g7121/g7121e/ct001614.jp2&x=1274&y=1491&res=3&width=318&height=372&lastres=3&jpegLevel=80)

nation-state, Soviet Russia carved Ciscaucasia "into nearly a dozen pieces, lumping together unrelated peoples and fracturing natural alliances in an attempt to suppress opposition to rule from Moscow."¹³ Ciscaucasian ethnic grievances hardened with the region's de facto colonization by ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, and again with Stalin's 1944 mass deportations to Central Asia.

More recently, some have abandoned the nationalist cause and become *muwahideen*¹⁴ seeking a Ciscaucasian caliphate.¹⁵ According to the former deputy to the radical Chechen Islamist leader Shamil Basayev, "What drove people to this [Islamic separatism] is not Islamic education or emissaries from the Arab world but the state failure, anarchy, violence, and the hopelessness that reigns in the North Caucasus."¹⁶ As a result wrote Dmitri Trenin, while Russia "managed to pacify Chechnya," it left it "more a feudal khanate associated with Russia than a real part of the Russian Federation."¹⁷

Whatever the causes, Nikolai Patrushev,¹⁸ then Secretary of the Russian Security Council, warned in 2010 that al-Qaeda now considered Ciscaucasia part of its intended "Islamic Caliphate," noting "Chechnya is now routinely mentioned in the statements of bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and other radical Islamists."¹⁹ Indeed, al-Qaeda's current leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has direct knowledge of Ciscaucasia, which he visited incognito in 1997. He was arrested in Dagestan and deported by Russian Federation's Federal Security Service,²⁰ which is said to have failed at the time to determine his actual identity.²¹

It is small wonder that nearly half of Russians reportedly support recognizing Ciscaucasia's independence, in part to avoid the ongoing financial cost to mollify the region, reportedly totaling four trillion rubles through the year 2025.²² Russia has broader economic interests in the region, however. A hydrocarbon energy distribution network that feeds much of Europe crisscrosses Ciscaucasia, for which the Chechen Republic and Dagestan are a critical oil and gas transit corridor connecting Caspian Sea production fields and Russia's Black Sea export terminals. Three major pipelines transit Ciscaucasia:

- **Baku–Novorossiysk** oil pipeline (*a/k/a* Northern Route Export or Northern Early Oil pipeline) that runs from Baku, Azerbaijan, northward through Dagestan along the Caspian Sea, turning west toward Grozny and across Chechnya to its terminus at Novorossiysk on Russia's Black Sea coast. The pipeline also transports oil from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan that is delivered via tanker to the Caspian seaport of Makhachkala, Dagestan.
- **Mozdok–Makhachkala–Kazi Magomed**, a natural gas pipeline running from Azerbaijan through Chechnya and Dagestan to Mozdok, Republic of North Ossetia–Alania, where it connects with North Caucasus–Moscow line.
- **Makat–North Caucasus**, a natural gas pipeline transporting natural gas from Turkmenistani to the Caucasus and Ukraine.

¹³ George Kennan (2003). *Vagabond Life: The Caucasus Journals of George Kennan*, Frith Maier, ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press), p. 234.

¹⁴ The author's preferred transliteration over mujahideen.

¹⁵ For example, see: Dmitry Shlapentokh (2008). "The Rise of the Chechen Emirate?" *Middle East Quarterly*. XV:5 (Summer 2008), pp. 49-56.

¹⁶ Ilyas Akhmadov & Miriam Lanskoj (2010). *The Chechen Struggle: Independence Won and Lost*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 241.

¹⁷ Dmitri Trenin (2014). "Russia must not lose the war against terrorism." *The Daily Star* (Lebanon) 7 February 2014.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2014/Feb-07/246617-russia-must-not-lose-the-war-against-terrorism.ashx#axzz3BLR3MNYh>. Last accessed 24 August 2014.

¹⁸ Mr. Patrushev earlier succeeded Vladimir Putin as Director of Russia's Federal Security Service, known by its Russian acronym FSB (Russian: *Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации* (ФСБ). Russian transl.: *Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii* (FSB).

¹⁹ Gordon M. Hahn (2007). *Russia's Islamic Threat*. (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 85.

²⁰ More commonly known by its Russian acronym "FSB". Russian: *Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации*. Russian transl.: *Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii*.

²¹ "Один из наиболее разыскиваемых международных террористов, главный идеолог 'Аль-Кайеды' аль-Завахири был пойман в 1997 году в Дагестане." *MKRU* (online edition, 29 апреля 2003). <http://www.mk.ru/editions/daily/article/2003/04/29/137028-soratnik-ben-ladena-byil-v-rukah-fsb.html>. Last accessed 13 August 2014. The Russian language UmmaNews.com published an essay by him about this period: <http://ummanews.com/minbar/359--l-r.html>. Last accessed 13 August 2014.

²² To put this figure into further context, a recent report by the Russian Finance Ministry's Accounting Chamber (the function of which is comparable to the United States General Accounting Office) identified seven Russian regions in which federal transfers constituted 60 percent or more of the annual regional budget, of which four were in Ciscaucasia. See: «Высокодотационные регионы формально относятся к соглашениям, заключаемым с Минфином России» (10 июля 2014). http://audit.gov.ru/press_center/news/18116. Last accessed 13 August 2014.

Moreover, both the Chechen Republic²³ and Dagestan²⁴ have substantial hydrocarbon reserves²⁵ of their own, an important consideration if, as *Pravda* reported in 2013, "Russia has only 7 years before an energy crisis."²⁶ The depletion of Russia's Siberian production wells means that "Russia will have to increase its oil production at least by 40 million tons. At this time, the reserves of the opened oil fields are estimated at 10 million tons, which is about 67 percent of the substitution."²⁷

THE CAUCASUS EMIRATE (*IMARAT KAVKAZ*)

*The proud sons of the Caucasus fought on,
they suffered dreadful losses; but nothing could save them—
not the carnage they inflicted on us, not their fabled weaponry,
not their mountains, not their spirited horses,
nor their devotion to an untamed freedom.*²⁸

On 7 October 2007, the president of the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Doku Umarov *a/k/a* Dokka Abu Usman, proclaimed himself "Emir of the Muwahideen of the Caucasus, the leader of Jihad, and the only legitimate authority in all areas where there are Muwahideen." In declaring the *Imarat Kavkaz* or "Caucasus Emirate," he "outlawed ethnic, territorial and colonial zones called the North Caucasian republic" and declared Shariah law throughout the Emirate.

The *Imarat Kavkaz* divides Ciscaucasia into six *vilayets*²⁹ or administrative units each reporting to a provincial emir who belongs to the *Majlis al-Shura*, or consultative council. The six *vilayets* correspond generally to the political boundaries of Russia's North Caucasus republics, which extend west from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea:

- *Vilayat Nokhchicho*³⁰ was formerly the "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" and encompasses the territory of the Chechen Republic.³¹ Its provincial capital is Dzhokhar (Grozny), which doubles as the Emirate's capital.
- *Vilayat Ghalghaycho*³² encompasses the territory of the Republic of Ingushetia.³³ Its provincial capital is Magas.
- *Vilayat Iriston*³⁴ encompasses the territory of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania.³⁵ It was abolished by decree in May 2009 and made part of Vilayat Ghalghaycho.
- *Vilayat Nogai Steppe*³⁶ encompasses the territory of northern Krasnodar Krai³⁷ and Stavropol Krai³⁸, respectively. Its provincial capital is Nogai (Stavropol).

²³ Estimated at 350 million tons of oil and 67 billion cubic meters of natural gas. In 2006, the Chechen People's Assembly petitioned Moscow for an additional 2 per cent of shares in *Grozneftegaz*, oil-and-gas production enterprise of Rosneft that operates in the North Caucasian Federal District. This would have given the Chechen Republic a controlling, 51 per cent stake in the company. The People's Assembly claimed Rosneft gained some USD600M from selling oil produced in the Chechen Republic while paying it less than USD1 Million in royalties [*Caucasus Times* [online edition, 2 March 2006]. <http://www.caucasustimes.com/article.asp?id=8156>. Last accessed 26 August 2014] According to Rosneft's website, *Grozneftegaz* produced 4.7 million barrels of crude oil and 0.23bcm of gas in 2012, down from 7.4 million barrels of crude oil and 0.465bcm of gas in 2012.

²⁴ Estimated at 161 million tons of oil and 155 billion cubic meters of natural gas. Rosneft develops developing oil and gas fields in Dagestan through its subsidiaries, Dagneft and Dagneftegaz

²⁵ In addition to production fields in the Chechen Republic and Dagestan, Rosneft operates smaller oil and gas production facilities in Russia's Stavropol Krai through its operating subsidiary *Stavropolneftegaz*, and in Krasnodar Krai through its operating subsidiary *Krasnodarneftegaz*. Production from Stavropol and Krasnodar fields is transported via field pipelines to for further export to terminals on Russia's Black Sea.

²⁶ "Russia has only 7 years before an oil crisis?" *Pravda* [online edition, 13 September 2013]. http://english.pravda.ru/business/companies/13-09-2013/125651-russia_oil_crisis-0/. Last accessed 26 August 2014.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Pushkin, "Epilogue," *A Prisoner of the Caucasus*.

²⁹ *Vilayet* is Turkish (Russian: вилайат) for the Arabic word *ولاية* (Arabic transl.: *wilayah*) denoting an administrative unit or district, and the equivalent of a province in English or a *raion* in Russia (Russian: район). The use of the Turkish term *vilayet* by the Caucasus Emirate is explained by one analyst as "in deference to neo-Ottoman aspirations" and "to repudiate Tsarist, Soviet and Russian state-building efforts". See: Cameron Ross, ed. (2011) *Russian Regional Politics under Putin and Medvedev* (New York: Routledge), p. 119.

³⁰ Russian: *Вилаят Нохчийчоь*.

³¹ Russian: *Чеченская Республика*. Russian transl.: *Chechenskaya Respublika*.

³² Russian: *Вилаят Галгайче*. The Russian transliteration appears sometimes as "Galgaycho" or "Khalgaicho".

³³ Russian: *Республика Ингушетия*. Russian transl.: *Respublika Ingushetiya*.

³⁴ Russian: *Вилаят Иристон*.

³⁵ Russian: *Республика Северная Осетия-Алания*. Russian transl.: *Respublika Severnaya Osetiya*.

³⁶ Russian: *Вилаят Ногайская степь*.

³⁷ Russian: *Краснодарский край*. Russian transl.: *Krasnodarsky kray*.

³⁸ Russian: *Ставропольский край*. Russian transl.: *Stavropolsky kray*.

- *Vilayat Dagestan*³⁹ encompassing the territory of the Republic of Dagestan.⁴⁰ Its provincial capital is Shamilkala (Makhachkala).
- *The United Vilayat of Kabarda-Balkaria-Karacha*⁴¹ encompasses the territory of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic⁴² and the Karachay–Cherkess Republic,⁴³ respectively. Its provincial capital is Nalchik.

Despite its pretensions, the Caucasus Emirate "has no structure and no economic base on the ground. Its adherents are the heirs of the most desperate and zealous of the fighters who fought the two wars against the Russian state in Chechnya. They live in hiding across the North Caucasus, perpetually hunted by the security forces."⁴⁴

Chechen *muwahideen* have engaged in persistent infighting. One of the more serious incidents occurred in June 2014, when the new⁴⁵ leader of the *Imarat Kavkaz*, Emir Ebu Muhammed, slighted Musa Abu Yusuf al-Shishani (a/k/a Umar al-Shishani) in an online video.⁴⁶ Al-Shishani, a/k/a Tarkhan Batirashvili, is an ethnic Chechen from Georgia's Pankisi Valley and is thought to be the military commander of the group *Islamic State*.⁴⁷ Shishani's followers quickly retaliated, branding as apostates⁴⁸ any who are not part of the Islamic State and advising Ebu Muhammed "to stay there in the Caucasus and eat leaves." As one analysis put it:

"Thus, the initiative of the new Caucasus Emirate's emir, which could have resulted in achieving some form of reconciliation between the different factions of the North Caucasus militants, ended up having the opposite effect and only heightened tensions among the groups. As a result of this development, the ISIS accusation that other militants are apostates will only make reconciliation between ISIS and the other North Caucasus rebel groups nearly impossible. This is the first—and a very important strategic blunder—by the emir of the Caucasus Emirate since he was elected to his new position this past spring."⁴⁹

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S IMAGINED QOQAZ CALIPHATE



A Map of the Qoqaz Caliphate as Posted by the Islamic State

Musa Abu Yusuf has written that there are few prospects for *jihad* in the Caucasus outside of the Islamic State.⁵⁰ While its territorial ambitions in Ciscaucasia (as well as parts of Georgia and Ukraine) are clear, the Islamic State's ability to command undivided loyalty is given insufficient weight. As it is, oaths sworn by *muwahideen* to such organizations as *Imarat Kavkaz* are considered temporary and situational. On the other hand, those sworn to the Islamic State are permanent and binding. Thus, loyalty to all other organizations is subordinated to the Islamic State.

³⁹ Russian: *Вилайят Дагестан*.

⁴⁰ Russian: *Республика Дагестан*. Russian transl.: *Respublika Dagestan*.

⁴¹ Russian: *Объединенный вилайят Кабарды, Балкарии и Карачая*.

⁴² Russian: *Кабардино-Балкарская Республика*. Russian transl.: *Kabardino-Balkarskaya Respublika*.

⁴³ Russian: *Карачаево-Черкесская Республика*. Russian transl.: *Karachayevo-Cherkesskaya Respublika*.

⁴⁴ Thomas De Waal (2014). "Caucasus Emir Seeks a Re-Brand." *Eurasia Outlook* (2 July 2014). <http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=56062>. Last accessed 23 August 2014.

⁴⁵ His predecessor, Doku Umarov, was killed in June 2014. He was President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria until resigning in 2007 to found the Caucasus Emirate. In May 2011, the United States State Department designated the *Imarat Kavkaz* a "Specially Designated Terrorist" organization pursuant to Executive Order 13224, and authorized a \$5 million reward for information leading to Umarov's arrest.

⁴⁶ http://www.izlesene.com/video/ke-emiri-ali-ebu-muhammed-samdaki-fitne-ile-ilgili-ke-durusu/7581733?utm_source=player&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=player_clicktag_izlesene_embed. Last accessed 134 August 2014.

⁴⁷ Arabic: *الإسلامية الدولية*. Arabic transl.: *ad-Dawlah al-'Islāmiyyah*. The Islamic State was formerly called the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant", and earlier, the "Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham." It changed its name concurrent with its declaration of a caliphate in Syria and Iraq on the first day of Ramadan (27 June 2014).

⁴⁸ Arabic: *مرتد*. Arabic transl.: *murtad*.

⁴⁹ Vatchagaev, Mairbek (2014). "Statement by New Leader of Caucasus Emirate Creates Rift Among Chechen Groups Operating in Syria." *North Caucasus Weekly* (online edition, 11 July 2014). http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nc/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42610&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=759&no_cache=1. Last accessed 13 August 2014.

⁵⁰ His statement reads in the original Russian: "лично я, не вижу большей помощи и больших перспектив для джихада на Кавказе, кроме как в объединении с Халифатом". See: http://vk.com/id265282285?w=wall265282285_8. Last access 24 August 2014. See:

Citing Russian intelligence sources, Semyon Abramovich Bagdasarov⁵¹ estimates some 2,000-2,500 Russian Federation citizens serve in Islamic State combat forces in Syria and Iraq. Bagdasarov advocates "the introduction of a harsh visa regime with Central Asian countries and Turkey," which he claims are transit points. "If they return," he writes, "then we may have serious problems," a view he describes not as pessimistic but "realistic."⁵² Indeed, as Vitaly Naumkin⁵³ writes, "Russian jihadists need no training in brutality. I[slamic] S[tate] militants learned the slow and painful public beheading of their foes from the example of their like-minded supporters from the North Caucasus." Russia will be challenged to identify Islamic State fighters, however:

"They didn't come to Syria from Russia (where, after two wars in Chechnya, the situation has been stabilized through reconciliation), but from Georgia, Turkey and European countries that once provided them refuge as freedom fighters."⁵⁴

President Vladimir Putin declared in September 2013, "the terrorist threat in the North Caucasus remains" citing "anti-Russian activities of a number of foreign countries and international organizations that still consider the North Caucasus as a staging area from which to destabilize the situation in Russia."⁵⁵ Writing in the *New York Times*,⁵⁶ he warned that the action of one nation in one place— here, the United States in Syria— may unleash unintended effects elsewhere:

"Mercenaries from Arab countries fighting there, and hundreds of militants from Western countries and even Russia, are an issue of our deep concern. Might they not return to our countries with experience acquired in Syria?"

Historic grievances aside, the roots of the terrorist threat cited by President Putin are in Russia's First (December 1994-August 1996) and the Second (August 1999-April 2009) Chechen Wars with the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria,⁵⁷ which Chechen separatists declared independent in 1991. One sequela of these wars is the flow of *muwahideen*⁵⁸ from Ciscaucasia into Syria and Iraq. Today, an ethnic Chechen from Georgia's Pankisi Valley, Tarkhan Batirashvili a/k/a Umar al-Shishani, is thought to be the Islamic State's military commander.⁵⁹ And in early August, well-known *jihadi* theorist Abu Muhammad al-Maqqisi recorded a Russian-subtitled video message praising *Imarat Kavkaz* for sending *muwahideen* to Syria.

The implications for Russia are quite serious. A map issued recently by the Islamic State identified several caliphates it intends to establish within the next five years. One of these, the *Qoqaz*,⁶⁰ imagines a unified Northern and Southern Caucasus caliphate. As one analyst noted:

"Russians have enough to worry about for themselves as IS not only has significantly influenced regional geopolitics, but has served as inspiration for extremist sympathizers in other parts of the world, breathing new life into their activities, such as for the Caucasus Emirate (CE) operating in the Russian North Caucasus."⁶¹

⁵¹ Bagdasarov is a Russian parliamentarian and the director of Moscow's Center for Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies.

⁵² Александр Чуйков (2014). «Грабли для Америки.» *Аргументы Недели*. 31:423 (21 августа 2014). <http://argumenty.ru/society/n451/359937>. Last accessed 25 August 2014.

⁵³ Dr. Naumkin is director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, chair at the faculty of world politics at Moscow State University, and president of the Moscow-based Center for Strategic and Political Studies.

⁵⁴ Vitaly Naumkin (2014). "Russia keeps an eye of Islamic State." *AL-Monitor* (24 August 2014). <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/russia-iraq-monitor-situation.html>. Last accessed 24 August 2014.

⁵⁵ Телеканал «Звезда» (2013). "Владимир Путин провел расширенное заседание Совета Безопасности" (9 сентября 2013). http://tvzvezda.ru/news/vstrane_i_mire/content/201309091611-kjqe.htm. Last accessed 12 August 2014. For example, Felix Tsokov, the former head of the important crimes section of the Russian Investigation Committee of the North Caucasus Federal District, tells *Kavkaz-Uzel.ru* that the Caucasus Imamate is "a geopolitical project of the US and the West" directed against the Russian Federation in order to destroy its [territorial] integrity."

⁵⁶ Vladimir V. Putin (2013). "A Plea for Caution from Russia: What Putin Has to Say to Americans About Syria." *The New York Times* (11 September 2013). http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?hp&_r=1&. Last accessed 20 August 2014.

⁵⁷ The English name "Chechen Republic of Ichkeria" approximates the Russian transliteration *Chechenskaya Respublika Ichkeriya* (Russian: Чеченская Республика Ичкерия). In Chechen it is *Nóxçiyun Paçx'alq Noxçiyüçö*.

⁵⁸ For an interesting comparison of the terms *muwahideen* and *jihadi*, see: "Syria: ISIS Chechens- We're Not Jihadis, We're Muwahideen." <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=22065>. Last accessed 13 August 2014.

⁵⁹ The Islamic State was formerly called the "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant", and earlier, the "Islamic State of Iraq and as-Sham." It changed its name concurrent with its declaration of a caliphate in Syria and Iraq on the first day of Ramadan (27 June 2014).

⁶⁰ "Qoqaz" is a transliteration of the Arabic قوقاز.

⁶¹ Suchkov (2014).

The Islamic State's potential to change the trajectory of the Ciscaucasian *long war* is equally serious for Russia. As Maxim Suchkov shrewdly observed, "the people factor is the first 'bridge' between radical groups."⁶² That "bridge" is critical to understanding such adversaries as the Islamic State that "are not nation-states but rather dispersed non-state networks."⁶³ In the near-term, "Many of the leading jihadists of ISIS come from the Caucasus...If even a fraction of the vast amounts of money ISIS is said to have seized in Iraq makes a way back to the North Caucasus, it could boost the militants there."⁶⁴ Thus, the future described a decade ago by RAND analyst Brian Nichiporuk as the *Transnational Web*⁶⁵— "a situation in which the nation-state has lost a substantial amount of power to transnational actors, many of whom use the burgeoning Internet to coordinate their actions worldwide"⁶⁶— might reasonably be said to exist today.

It has served Russian short-term interests for Ciscaucasian *muwahideen* to join (and, they hope, to perish in) the civil conflict raging in Syria. As one analyst wrote:

"Chechens confirm their brand worldwide every year. Unfortunately, it is not a brand of high fashion, or new direction in art or science. Chechens are regularly depicted as the bad guys prepared to fight anywhere in the world."⁶⁷

This is, however, a double-edged sword for Russia since it has potential to lead to a dangerous trajectory described by analysts with the RAND Corporation's Arroyo Center as "*Major Muslim Nation Goes Bad*."⁶⁸

Moreover, to the extent the Syrian conflict tips into Nichiporuk's "worst-case future— Chaos/Anarchy" in which "the nation-state has lost considerable power" and where "power devolv[es] down to subnational actors" like the Islamic State, the prospect for support to flow back in to Ciscaucasia might worsen still. Indeed, Nichiporuk identified "three major 2025 zones of instability in this particular formulation" of which:

"The first is Russia/Central Asia. The breakup of Russia into four new and very weak nation-states in 2017 has caused enough instability to allow a steady flow of smuggled conventional, biological, and chemical weaponry into Central Asia, where a number of powerful warlords purchase a portion of this weaponry outright and then sell the remainder to international terrorists, ethnic factions, and fellow warlords in other parts of the world."⁶⁹

It is likely that the return flow would exceed the estimated 2000-2500 Russian Federation citizens in the Islamic State's ranks in Syria and Iraq. For example *Jamaat Ahadun Ahad* or "The Group of The One and Only,"⁷⁰ has four Chechen *Muhajir* combat brigades in Syria in the vicinity of Latakia. It is "an independent brigade [that] does not belong to any other faction," i.e., Islamic State, yet "despite having a North Caucasian leadership," its members do not "have *ba'yah* (allegiance) to the Caucasus Emirate as many other Chechen fighters in Syria do."⁷¹

⁶² Maxim A. Suchkov (2014). "Islamic State gains victory for Chechen separatists." *Al-Monitor* (17 July 2014). <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/islamic-state-chechen-caucasus-emirate.html#>. Last accessed 23 August 2014.

⁶³ From the definition of "enemies" in: United States Department of Defense (2006). *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (6 February 2006). (Washington, D.C.: USDOD), p. 9. <http://www.defense.gov/qdr/report/report20060203.pdf>. Last accessed 24 August 2014.

⁶⁴ Thomas De Waal (2014). "Caucasus Emir Seeks a Re-Brand." *Eurasia Outlook* (2 July 2014). <http://carnegie.ru/eurasiaoutlook/?fa=56062>. Last accessed 23 August 2014.

⁶⁵ Nichiporuk described *Transnational Web* as "the medium-bad world in our study and represents a more unorthodox view of the 2025 future." See: Brian Nichiporuk (2005). *Alternative Futures and Army Force Planning Implications for the Future Force Era*. Study Prepared for the United States Army by the RAND Arroyo Center. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), xiv. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG219.pdf. Last accessed 24 August 2014.

⁶⁶ Nichiporuk, op cit., xiv.

⁶⁷ Mairbek Vatchagaev (2014). "Understanding the Mysterious Appearance of the Chechen 'Vostok' Battalion in Eastern Ukraine." *North Caucasus Weekly* (online edition, 30 May 2014). http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nc/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42450&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=759&no_cache=1. Last accessed 13 August 2014.

⁶⁸ According to a study published by the RAND Corporation's Arroyo Center, the "*Major Muslim Nation Goes Bad*" trajectory for the long war describes a situation in which a critical state in the Muslim world is taken over by extremists who are sympathetic to al-Qaeda and its affiliates" or in this case, the Islamic State. See: Christopher G. Permin, Brian Nichiporuk, Dale Stahl, Justin Beck, Ricky Radaelli-Sanchez (2008). *Unfolding the Future of the Long War: Motivations, Prospects, and Implications for the U.S. Army*. Study Prepared for the United States Army by the RAND Arroyo Center. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), p. 69. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG738.pdf. Last accessed 24 August 2014.

⁶⁹ Lest it was lost on anyone, the scenario sketched by Nichiporuk makes clear that other nations, the United States included, are at-risk from the effects of Islamic State-fomented conflict in Ciscaucasia.

⁷⁰ *Jamaat Ahadun Ahad* self-describes as "not a new group. We collected foreign battalions that were struggling in the land of the Levant" (Arabic: ليست أحد أجد جماعة ل (ال) شام أرض في ي جاهون كانوا الذين المهاجرة الك تلب جمعنا نحن جديدة جماعة) that was "Created by the Shura Council of Muwahideen, who have already struggled in the territory of Chechnya and Afghanistan" (Arabic: أفغانستان والشد يشان أراضي في جاهوا أن لهم سد بق الذين ن، مجاهدي من مكون الشورى مجلس).

⁷¹ Hasan Mustafa (2014). "Muhajireen Battalion: Jamaat Ahadun Ahad." *From Chechnya to Syria* 9 [online edition, 16 August 2014]. <http://www.chechensyria.com/?p=22380>. Last accessed 25 August 2014.

WHITHER CRIMEA?

The fog of Ukraine's decade-long political strife between Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich allowed the pan-Islamic movement *Hizb ut-Tahrir*⁷² to find safe haven in Crimea. While in July 2014 Hizb ut-Tahrir rejected the Islamic State's declaration of *khilāfa*⁷³ or a caliphate in Syria and Iraq— it dismissed the Islamic State as a "militia" and denied that its declaration imposed a *farīdah*⁷⁴— it nonetheless itself is guided by a doctrine of *jihad*⁷⁵ against the *Dar al-Kufr* (land of disbelief)⁷⁶ and some unknown number of its Crimean followers volunteered to fight in Syria.⁷⁷

Many question whether Crimean Tatars will make common cause with the Islamic State. A foundation for such may already exist in Syria, where the leader of the Crimean Tatars' *jamaat* in Syria, Emir Abdul-Karim Krymsky, is deputy to Emir Salautdin, Chechen commander of Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar.⁷⁸ On 13 May 2014, Emir Krymsky openly called for Crimean Tatars and Ukrainian Muslims to "start on the path of jihad" like "our neighbors in the Caucasus [and] in Chechnya."⁷⁹

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To conjecture on what the future holds for Ciscaucasia is fraught with risk: it is not without cause that one of the most authoritative sources of news in the region is called *The Caucasian Knot*.⁸⁰ So instead, consider a sobering narrative offered by the historian, Dmitry Shlapentokh:

"What would be the implications of the small, dedicated bands of religious zealots in the Caucasus for Russia and ultimately the world? Here, comparison between Bolsheviks and jihadists is enlightening. Those who study the Bolshevik movement offer many arguments for its victory. Some credit Lenin's political genius; others, Marxist ideology or the centralized structure of the party. These elements played important roles, but there is another aspect of the story, which is the Bolshevik similarity to a religious movement. Bolshevik messianism led the movement to persist even when Russia's political and social order was stable...[T]he Bolsheviks faithfully believed both in their providential mission and in the instability of the global order and persisted. So when they appeared to be right, and the global order collapsed in the wake of WWI, they were quick to take advantage of the opportunity."

"The same could be said about the jihadists. If Russia remains stable, the jihadists' influence on Russia and global politics most likely will be marginal. But if a breakdown happens— what Russians call *katastroika*⁸¹— the extremists and jihadists, like the Bolsheviks before them, will play an important role in shaping events, at least in the North Caucasus. If this were indeed to happen, the present split in the Chechen resistance would be seen as important as the split between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks more than a hundred years ago."⁸²

⁷² Arabic: التحريد ر حزب.

⁷³ Arabic: خلافة. Khilāfa translates in English as "succession".

⁷⁴ Arabic: (فرض).

⁷⁵ The interpretation of Islam known as Salafi-jihadism rejects modernism, and emphasizes the concepts of *jihad* and *takfir*. The Arabic term *jihad* comes from the Arabic root-verb meaning "to strive" or "to fight." The exact meaning depends on the context, but Salafi-jihadists tend to use the term to refer to legally sanctioned warfare. *Takfir* is one of many religious legal precepts guiding the proper conduct of jihad. It refers to the process of declaring another individual an "unbeliever," who under Islamic law can be attacked and killed. Some scholars reject the use of the word "Salafi" to describe these groups (which bear little resemblance to the original *Salafist* movement), preferring instead the terms *Qutbists* or *Takfiris*.

⁷⁶ "The undertaking of jihad requires an army," according to Hizb ut-Tahrir. See: Hizb ut-Tahrir (2005). *The Institutions of State in the Khilafah: In Ruling and Administration*. (London: Hizb ut-Tahrir), p.78.

⁷⁷ According to one report, a retired Ukrainian intelligence officer claimed in 2013 there were 15,000 radical Islamists in the mountains of Crimea. While Ukraine apparently dismissed that report, it is said to have taken seriously reports that Islamist training camps exist in Crimea. [Paul Goble (2013). "Are There in Fact '15,000 Radical Islamists' in Crimea?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. 10:131. http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/253238/377689_de.html. Last accessed 23 August 2014] According to Maxim Suchkov, "Now that Russia has taken over its 'old new territory,' it inherits this Hizb ut-Tahrir legacy and has to deal with it." [Suchkov (2014). "Don't forget about Russia's Islamic challenge in Crimea." *Russia Direct* (8 April 2014). <http://www.russia-direct.org/content/don't-forget-about-russia-s-islamic-challenge-crimea>. Last accessed 23 August 2014]

⁷⁸ The name means "Army of the Emigrants and Supporters" (Arabic: والاذصار المهاجرين جيش). Founded in mid-2012 as *Kateab al-Muhajireen* or the "Muhajireen Brigade" it was renamed in March 2013 when it combined forces with combined forces with two Syrian groups, *Kataeb al-Khattab* ("Brigade of Khattab") and *Jaysh Muhammad* ("Army of Muhammad").

⁷⁹ "Интервью Амира Джейш Мухаджирин валь Ансар Салахаддина Шишани и наиба Абдул-Карима Крымского о боях в Лерамоне, ситуации в Джейш Мухаджирин валь Ансар, Крыме и Джихаде." *Akbar Sham* (online 13 May 2014). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrXE5YQ246E#t=106>. Last accessed 13 August 2014.

⁸⁰ <http://eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru>.

⁸¹ Russian: катастрофой.

⁸² Dmitry Shlapentokh, "The Rise of the Chechen Emirate?," *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2008.