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Suuntaus project  
**CURRENT STATUS OF INSURGENCY IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS AND PERSECUTION  
BY THE AUTHORITIES**

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This theme report is part of the ERF-funded 'Suuntaus' project of the Country Information Service of the Finnish Immigration Service, the purpose of which is to identify major country information topics and to better anticipate future information needs. The method used is the systematic review of interview minutes, using a purpose-designed form template. The countries examined are Nigeria, Iran, Iraq and Russia; stateless persons are also examined. The theme of the present report is one of the most frequently quoted reasons for seeking asylum, according to the minutes analysed. The data in this report are derived from public sources.

## 1. Background

### 1.1. From the Chechen Wars to the Caucasus Emirate

The First Chechen War was fought between 1994 and 1996 when Russia sent its troops to Chechnya, which was seeking independence. After the peace treaty, Aslan Maskhadov was elected as the President of Chechnya.<sup>1</sup> Russia launched the Second Chechen War in 1999 after hundreds of people were killed in bombings in Russia and the authorities blamed the attacks on the Chechens. The end of the Second Chechen War is difficult to determine: Armed resistance still has not ceased altogether. In 2009, however, Russia announced that the situation in Chechnya had improved to such an extent that it felt able to end its military operation in Chechnya.<sup>2</sup> The Chechen resistance developed a noticeably more religious, Islamist undertone during the Second Chechen War.<sup>3</sup>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, power in Chechnya has been held by the pro-Moscow Kadyrov family, and the current President as of 2007 is Ramzan Kadyrov, who has been functioning as the country's *de facto* ruler since his father was assassinated in 2004. Kadyrov has been relatively successful in calming the situation in Chechnya, but his methods have been ruthless. Chechnya is effectively a dictatorship ruled by Kadyrov, where human rights violations against anyone suspected of supporting the insurgency are common. Kadyrov is supported by police and security forces commonly referred to as the *Kadyrovtsy*.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of the Second Chechen War, the Islamist insurgency has, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, also spread to other republics in the area, especially Ingushetia, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria. With regard to Ingushetia, the first significant events were the Galashki ambush in 2000, which involved Ingush volunteers, and a raid on the town of Nazran in June 2004, in which Ingush militants played a major role. The growing insurgency was fuelled by the removal of President Aushev and the instalment of the pro-Kremlin Murat Zyazikov as well as the brutal "special preventive operations" of the federal security services against Islamists.<sup>5</sup>

Doku Umarov, leader of the then unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, resigned as President in 2007 and announced the creation of the so-called Caucasus Emirate. The aim of the Caucasus Emirate is to expel the Russian presence from the North Caucasus and to establish an independent Islamic emirate in the region, governed by Sharia law and with close links to the

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<sup>1</sup> BBC 9.12.2014.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Górecki 2014, p. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> BBC 9.3.2015; RFE/RL 19.1.2015; Tshelysheva 2010, p. 24–25, in *Novaja Gazeta* 2010.

<sup>5</sup> McGregor in "Volatile Borderland", 2011.



countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East.<sup>6</sup> The Caucasus Emirate is a virtual Islamic state made up of *Vilayats* (provinces), which largely correspond to existing North Caucasian republics, although the Emirate has renamed some regions and towns. In practice, the Emirate is a loosely structured union of independent groups of militants who share a common idea and loyalty to the Emirate's leader. The fact that the militants are dispersed on the one hand makes it difficult for the Emirate to organise large-scale operations but on the other hand makes it harder for the authorities to combat the insurgency.<sup>7</sup>

The history of the Emirate can be divided into periods: Having initially continued the guerilla warfare which had previously been waged by the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the Emirate began, in 2009, to carry out high-profile attacks against both the authorities and regular citizens both in the North Caucasus and elsewhere in Russia. This caused many people in the Caucasus to turn against the Emirate.<sup>8</sup> In 2012, Umarov ordered the militants to refrain from strikes on civilian targets and called on them instead to focus their attacks on the security forces and those in power. This new tactic increased support for the Emirate among the local population. In 2013, Umarov withdrew his moratorium on attacks in Russia proper and called on the militants to disrupt the Sochi Olympics.<sup>9</sup>

A new phase began in the history of the Emirate and the resistance movement when Umarov died in the autumn of 2013 and Aliaskhab Kebekov, a native of Dagestan, was announced as his successor in the spring of 2014. Kebekov condemned strikes against civilians once more. It was around this time that North Caucasian militants began to take part in conflicts in Syria. These developments are discussed in Chapters 3.2 and 3.3.

## 1.2. On the sources and the regions featured

Human rights organisations and the free press have limited influence in the North Caucasus, as it is difficult for outsiders to get in. It is consequently difficult to obtain reliable information about the status of human rights in the area and the authorities' fight against the insurgents. This report is primarily based on comprehensive human rights and security reports and analyses drawn up in the 2010s, which have been complemented by news reports of interest. Most of the information comes from international sources that monitor local media and other local sources and attempt to form an overall picture of the situation on that basis.

The report focuses on the situations in Chechnya and Ingushetia, as these regions have featured the most prominently in the interviews connected to the Suuntaus project.

## 2. Development of the conflict in the 2010s and current situation

The intensity of the conflict has decreased, as the insurgents are no longer able to carry out high-profile strikes claiming several dozens of lives.<sup>10</sup> In the light of news reports, the security situation in the North Caucasus has calmed down considerably, especially towards the end of 2014 and at the beginning of 2015. Reports of armed conflicts and casualties have decreased. According to the online news site Caucasian Knot, a total of 341 people were killed and 184 wounded in the North Caucasus in 2014. Dagestan had the most victims, with Chechnya, Ka-

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<sup>6</sup> Caucasian Knot, 29.12.2014; Górecki 2014, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Górecki 2014, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Falkowski 11/2014. p. 5.



bardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia following in that order. Most of the casualties were militants. Civilian casualties numbered 37, i.e. just under 11%.<sup>11</sup>

This is a clear change from before: The number of casualties was 529 in 2013 and approximately 750 in 2010, which means that the number of victims in the hostilities has been halved in a matter of a few years. The number of people wounded in the hostilities has dropped even more sharply during the same period. The percentage of civilians among the casualties and especially among those wounded has dropped significantly since the beginning of the 2010s.<sup>12</sup> This trends appears to be continuing in 2015 so far: According to Caucasian Knot's statistics for the first three months, only 39 people were killed and 12 people wounded in the entire region. Almost all the victims were in Dagestan or Chechnya, although there were also isolated incidents in Kabardino-Balkaria and in the Stavropol Territory. No people were reported killed or wounded in Ingushetia during the first three months of 2015. Only two of the victims were civilians.<sup>13</sup>

Researcher Mairbek Vatchagaev from the Jamestown Foundation estimated at the beginning of 2015 that the conflict is transitioning from a military phase to a political one. According to Vatchagaev, radical Islam is becoming increasingly widespread among the population, including the local intelligentsia. This has caused the population to question Russia's authority.<sup>14</sup>

Ingushetia in particular has calmed down considerably. This may be thanks to improved intelligence, the shifting of insurgents' activities to other territories (especially Dagestan) and greater willingness on the part of local residents to cooperate with law enforcement agencies. In addition, preventive measures by local authorities have been effective in dissuading young people from joining armed groups and reintegrating some of those who have given up associations with the insurgency back into society.<sup>15</sup> Improvements in the last year could also be thanks to the deaths of a number of important insurgent leaders. The authorities have managed to neutralise the insurgency in Ingushetia especially after the death of Emir Abdullah (Arthur Getagazhev) in May 2014.<sup>16</sup> Ingush President Yunus-bek Yevkurov stated in May 2015 that the insurgency in Ingushetia had been defeated. According to Yevkurov, there were only 14 militants left in the republic, who he claimed were trained by foreign intelligence services and can draw on a network of support personnel and relatives.<sup>17</sup>

However, several sources, including Alexander Cherkasov from the Memorial Human Rights Centre, Varvara Pakhomenko from the International Crisis Group and Polish researcher Maciej Falkowski, believe that the improvement in the situation in the North Caucasus is temporary and that more violent times could be just around the corner. The main reasons for the partial stabilisation of the situation in the region include ideological changes in the militants' camp and the related leadership crisis in the Caucasus Emirate, Moscow's uncompromising policies in Chechnya, financial subsidies, and the security operations of unprecedented scale carried out prior to the Sochi Olympics. The milder policy adopted in Ingushetia and Dagestan and more peaceable attitudes towards Salafis have also yielded results in these areas. However, these changes have not eliminated the region's chronic political, social and economic problems, which are the actual cause of the instability there.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Caucasian Knot, 31.1.2015.

<sup>12</sup> Caucasian Knot, 19.2.2015.

<sup>13</sup> Caucasian Knot, 27.4.2015.

<sup>14</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 30.1.2015.

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 9.1.2015.

<sup>17</sup> RFE/RL 19.5.2015.

<sup>18</sup> Caucasian Knot, 7.1.2015; Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 5-6, 27-29.



Another reason for the calming down of the situation is the outflow of militants from the North Caucasus to Syria. Many fight in the ranks of the Islamist extremist group Islamic State (also known as IS, ISIS and ISIL). According to Cherkasov, militants who have left the North Caucasus for Syria may return equipped with new experience and ideological attitudes. This may result in IS gaining more influence in the North Caucasus. If the authorities respond with force, this could make the situation worse. Pakhomenko believes that although the method of force adopted by power agents on the eve of the Sochi Olympics looked very effective, it led to antagonism between the population and the authorities and the growth of radicalisation in the longer term.<sup>19</sup>

Falkowski also believes that a serious political or economic crisis in Russia could cause the problems to escalate once more. The same could happen if Kadyrov's dictatorial rule in Chechnya were to end for any reason, as this would throw the present power system into disarray.<sup>20</sup> Mairbek Vatchagaev from the Jamestown Foundation also believes that insurgency in Kabardino-Balkaria could intensify due to convictions that were recently handed down for an attack carried out in 2005, which are considered to be unfair and biased.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Changes in the insurgency

#### 3.1. Operations and tactics of insurgency groups

The insurgency is no longer able to carry out attacks on the scale of violence that it did before and has come to the realisation that its earlier large-scale strikes were counter-productive. It now mainly uses assassinations and improvised explosive devices against security services and local officials as well as bombing infrastructure and public transport. Individuals involved in semi-official religious structures and the judiciary are also sometimes attacked. Civilians only become victims if they happen to be at the scene of an attack. Radicals have also targeted shops and cafés that sell alcohol or provide other "un-Islamic" goods or services.<sup>22</sup> The insurgents appear to know that people are forced to sign confessions and act as informants and do not usually retaliate against civilians. However, there are differences among the insurgency groups.<sup>23</sup> In Ingushetia, the insurgents have mostly carried out attacks and assassinations on the forces of the police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>24</sup>

In 2014, the entire North Caucasus region was estimated to contain between close to one thousand and several thousand militants.<sup>25</sup> Estimates of the number of insurgents in Chechnya vary between as few as a dozen or so and just over one hundred. Some experts believe that they are mostly found in the border regions of Dagestan and Ingushetia, mostly operating in these neighbouring republics. The insurgents are mainly active in Dagestan, and in previous years they have also been active in Ingushetia.<sup>26</sup> Chechen insurgents are generally reluctant to conduct attacks in Chechnya, as the Chechen authorities always retaliate with special operations. There are small independent groups and individuals in the towns who may be able to carry out attacks.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Caucasian Knot, 7.1.2015.

<sup>20</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 5-6, 27-29.

<sup>21</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 16.1.2015.

<sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 15, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> McGregor in "Volatile Borderland", 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Górecki 2014, p. 18-19.

<sup>26</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 01/2015, p. 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p. 25-27.



According to Vatchagaev, Chechen insurgents are separated in three groups all hiding in areas characterised by dense forests and mountains: in the forests close to the administrative border to Ingushetia, in the Vedensky District in the Black Mountains (Пастбищный Хребет) and in the mountain forest near the border to Dagestan.<sup>28</sup> It is difficult for insurgency groups to operate in Grozny and other large cities, as the police is present in large numbers.<sup>29</sup> In the other republics, the insurgents live and operate in the cities. The Chechen insurgents who hide in the mountains and the forests are referred to as “forest brothers” and enjoy much respect from the other insurgency groups, as they are considered to represent the true resistance.<sup>30</sup>

Although the North Caucasian authorities report hundreds of militants killed each year, the number of militants has remained stable, which means that new fighters join the militant groups at the same rate as others are killed or detained. Recruitment is aided by an extensive information network, especially the insurgency news website Kavkaz Centre. Material from the Kavkaz Centre is downloaded to mobile phones or onto USB memory sticks to distribute to those who cannot access the website. Recruiters work actively with youth in and around mosques, on university campuses, in gyms and at the workplace. The average age of militants is currently estimated at 21–23 years, while a few years ago it was at least 25 years. Few now have experience from the Chechen Wars. The average duration of active service from the time individuals join a militant unit until they are killed or detained has been getting shorter: It is currently estimated at around 18 months.<sup>31</sup> The Polish researcher Wojciech Górecki mentions extortion money paid by businessmen from the region as the main source of funding for the insurgency, while the France-based Chechen expert Mairbek Vatchagaev believes that the Chechen insurgents are financed by sympathisers within the Chechen diaspora primarily in Cairo and Istanbul.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.2. Changes in the Caucasus Emirate

By the mid-2010s, the North Caucasus resistance movement has become religiously motivated and evolved from a local militant organisation into a branch of the worldwide militant Islamist movement.<sup>33</sup> According to the Polish researcher Maciej Falkowski, the insurgents identify with the global *umma* – the worldwide community of Muslims – and the most essential element of their present ideology is ‘Islamicness’.<sup>34</sup> According to articles published by Novaya Gazeta journalists Olga Bobrova and Yulia Latynina in 2010, the Caucasus Emirate differs fundamentally from the resistance movement of the Dudayev era. Secular separatism has been replaced by religiousness, the founding of an Islamic state and so-called defensive jihad, which strives to expel infidels from Muslim land.<sup>35</sup>

However, with regard to Chechnya, the sources disagree on the degree to which nationalism and separatism really have fallen to the background. With regard to the rest of the North Caucasus, it appears clear that the current insurgency is religiously motivated. The insurgency suffered a split during the years after the creation of the Caucasus Emirate, as many Chechen insurgents preferred to continue focusing on regional separatism. In 2010–2011, four Chechen commanders resigned from Umarov’s transnational emirate and declared that they sought an

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 24–25.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25–28.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23–27.

<sup>31</sup> Górecki 2014, p. 19; ICG 19.10.2012, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Górecki 2014, p. 19–20; Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Esim. Falkowski 11/2014; Górecki 2010; Danish Immigration Service 1/2015; ICG 19.10.2012; Tshelysheva 2010, Bobrova 2010 ja Latynina 2010 in Novaya Gazeta 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 13–14.

<sup>35</sup> Bobrova 2010, p. 38–39; Latynina 2010, p. 54, in Novaya Gazeta, 2010.



independent, Islamic state of Chechnya. Some nevertheless later reaffirmed loyalty to Umarov. According to some experts, the Chechen insurgents are still motivated by nationalism and separatism, while the religiously motivated jihadist movement is much more popular in Ingushetia and Dagestan. Others argue that the insurgency in Chechnya is no longer a fight for regional freedom either, but that the militants are religiously motivated.<sup>36</sup>

Many militants have also left Chechnya for Syria and Iraq in the name of worldwide militant jihad.<sup>37</sup> A probable conclusion from the sources is that the supporters of the insurgency in Chechnya are divided into those motivated by nationalist separatism and those who identify with the global Islamist movement. Islamist motivations appear to be common in Chechnya as well.

According to Falkowski, the globalisation of Caucasian jihad has alienated the military underground from the local communities. Although these communities identify with the Muslim world, their local ethnic identity is more important to them. Furthermore, the Caucasian communities do not accept the religious radicalism of the insurgents or their criticism of Sufism, the traditional form of Islam in the region. Only a few percent of Caucasians are Salafis, although Salafi ideas are gaining popularity.<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, according to the International Crisis Group, many young people are frustrated by the brutality of the authorities, the weakness of the justice system, corruption and ineffectiveness. Many believe that a state built on Islamic principles would be more just than the current system, which is why they support the insurgents. They start by aiding the insurgents and end up joining them.<sup>39</sup>

According to Maciej Falkowski, the military struggle in the North Caucasus has been diluted ideologically in global jihad, has lost its uniqueness and has been marginalised since top priority is now reserved for the Syrian and Iraqi fronts. Those who want to fight now head to Syria instead of joining the North Caucasian guerilla troops. This is a radical change, as Caucasians have never before participated on a mass scale in jihad outside the Caucasus.<sup>40</sup>

Alongside and partially related to these ideological changes, the insurgency has been recently shaken by changes in its leadership. Doku Umarov, the founder of the Caucasus Emirate, died in September 2013. Umarov's death is believed to have been a serious blow to the Emirate. The long interregnum, which lasted until spring 2014, may be evidence of disagreements among the militants. It appears that Chechens were lobbying for a Chechen commander to become Umarov's successor, which the militants from the other republics opposed.<sup>41</sup>

Aliaskhab Kebekov, an Avar from Dagestan, known by his nom de guerre Ali Abu Mukhammad, was elected as the new Emir in 2014. Kebekov was the first non-Chechen to head the Emirate and its first leader with no experience of combat. He was a theologian and had studied religion, and he emphasised the ideological and political dimensions of jihad instead of construing it as just an armed insurgency. Kebekov's already weak position as the leader of the Emirate eroded further due to his conciliatory views on jihad.<sup>42</sup> The Emirate has also become divided over the fact that some of the militants support the goals of the Islamic State. Many commanders left the

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<sup>36</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 01/2015, p. 23-25; ICG 19.10.2012, p. 13; Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 15-16.

<sup>37</sup> See Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 15-16; Caucasian Knot, 27.11.2014.

<sup>38</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup> RFE/RL, 20.4.2015; Falkowski 11/2014 p. 22.





Caucasus Emirate especially towards the end of 2014 and at the beginning of 2015 to join the ranks of IS.<sup>43</sup> The Emirate and IS are not on good terms with each other.<sup>44</sup>

How many militants have changed sides is unclear, but Kebekov warned of a significant split within the Emirate's ranks. One of the suspected reasons for the split is that at least Dagestani commanders felt that Kebekov's approach to the military component of jihad was too moderate. The split within the insurgency ranks could also be a generational one, as some of the renegade commanders are younger.<sup>45</sup> These transfers of allegiance have not yet affected the security situation in the region, but that does not mean that consequences should not be expected.<sup>46</sup>

The insurgency in the North Caucasus is dying down at the moment, as the militants are short of recruits, money and public support. Military actions initiated by the insurgents are less and less frequent and they are on a much smaller scale than the spectacular strikes and terrorist attacks of the past. The only larger terrorist attacks in recent years were the bombings in Volgograd in December 2013, which, according to Maciej Falkowski, were staged by a local group from Buynaksk in Dagestan without instruction from the Caucasus Emirate.<sup>47</sup>

The unclear status of the Caucasus Emirate has been undermined further by the fact that Kebekov was killed in a security forces operation in Dagestan in April 2015.<sup>48</sup> The effect of Kebekov's death on the Emirate is still unknown. The schism within the ranks of the North Caucasus insurgents could deepen, as commanders who had vowed loyalty to Kebekov may not renew their vows to his successor and could side with IS instead. Some Russians actually believe that the Emirate is now practically dead. Even if this was the case, unrest in the region is unlikely to end, as militants and commanders keep switching their allegiances to IS. The Emirate also has a large number of militants in Syria. Kebekov's death does not affect their vows of loyalty to Salahuddin Shishani, their commander in Syria. Shishani has more militants under his command than all the militants of the North Caucasus put together.<sup>49</sup> There is currently only speculation as to who will succeed Kebekov. One candidate is the Chechen Field Commander Aslambek Vadalov.<sup>50</sup>

Vatchagaev estimates that before long both the Caucasus Emirate and IS will carry out attacks in the North Caucasus. Russia is likely to be more concerned about IS due to its methods.<sup>51</sup> At the end of April, Russian security authorities reported having killed militants who had pledged allegiance to IS in Dagestan. In a video address published the same month, ethnic Karachay IS ideologue Abu Jihad called on potential militants in Dagestan to join IS-linked groups there in order to fight the Russians. This was the first time that an IS militant has openly called on North Caucasians to join the group at home, rather than in Syria or Iraq. The timing of the call suggests that IS militants are attempting to exploit the leadership vacuum left by Kebekov's death and get militants of the Caucasus Emirate to join IS groups.<sup>52</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that IS could also be gaining ground in Ingushetia. The Ingush website Galgayche.org reported in May 2015 that the commander of Ingushetia's insurgents will soon release a video clip in which he will pledge his allegiance to IS.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 16.1.2015; Jamestown Foundation, 30.1.2015.

<sup>44</sup> Jamestown foundation, 30.1.2015.

<sup>45</sup> RFE/RL / Caucasus Report, 2.1.2015.

<sup>46</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 27.2.2015.

<sup>47</sup> Falkowski 11/2014, p. 9-10.

<sup>48</sup> RFE/RL, 20.4.2015; Jamestown Foundation, 24.4.2015.

<sup>49</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 24.4.2015.

<sup>50</sup> RFE/RL 20.4.2015.

<sup>51</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 30.1.2015.

<sup>52</sup> RFE/RL, 27.4.2015.

<sup>53</sup> RFE/RL 19.5.2015.



### 3.3. International associations

#### 3.3.1. Syria and IS

Foreign Islamist fighters, most famously a Saudi jihadi called Ibn al-Khattab, fought in the ranks of the resistance movement during the Chechen Wars. In recent years, however, the North Caucasus insurgency has not attracted many new outsiders.<sup>54</sup> Instead, Chechens and other North Caucasians are increasingly leaving to fight outside the Caucasus.

In the spring of 2015, Sergei Melikov, the Kremlin's presidential envoy to the North Caucasus, urged universities to keep an eye on young people. According to Melikov, IS is actively recruiting students of North Caucasus state universities, although he did not specify which universities were affected. Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty commented that while there has been a handful of reports about individuals who have become radicalised during their studies and of recruiters allegedly associated with IS, there have been no previous reports of IS recruiting systematically in the region.<sup>55</sup>

Recent reports indicate a significant number of militants already. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) estimates that IS has approximately 1,700 Russian nationals in its ranks. In February 2015, a Chechen official talked about more than 3,000 young people fighting on the side of the radicals. It is not clear from the context whether the official meant militants from all over Russia or only Chechens. One possible explanation for the disparity between FSB's and the Chechen authorities' figures is that the Chechen officials could have also been referring to Chechens living in other countries. It is also possible that FSB was trying to downplay the level of danger that the figures represent. It should be noted that if the 3,000 militants include only Chechens, hundreds of people from Dagestan, the Volga region and Moscow should be added to it. The actual figure could therefore be around 4,000; in April 2015, a figure of 5,000 was reported. Mairbek Vatchagaev believes that, if the current trend continues, Russia could become the main supplier of manpower for the jihadists in the Middle East by the end of 2015.<sup>56</sup>

Most Chechen fighters enter Syria via Turkey. At the beginning of 2014, Murad Batal al-Shishani from the Jamestown Foundation wrote that the majority of Chechen fighters in Syria at the time were former students who had been studying in Syria and Egypt before the upheavals of the Arab Spring. Many refugees and second-generation immigrants have left for Syria from Western Europe. A total of between approximately 150,000 and 200,000 Chechen refugees live in EU Member States. Syria represents an opportunity to honour Islam for the Chechens who cannot return to their homeland. Many active fighters, including some commanders, have started leaving the Caucasus, especially Chechnya and Dagestan, for Syria. Other Chechen fighters in Syria have arrived from the Chechen community in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge (see next section).<sup>57</sup>

Chechen fighters see Syria as a training ground where they can gain combat experience in preparation for returning to the North Caucasus. Strict border controls have made it more difficult to

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<sup>54</sup> IGC 19.10.2012, p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> RFE/RL / Under the Black Flag, 23.3.2015.

<sup>56</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 27.2.2015; Jamestown Foundation, 17.4.2015.

<sup>57</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 7.2.2014. Caucasian Knot 27.11.2014. Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 15.



enter Syria from Chechnya via Turkey.<sup>58</sup> According to Maciej Falkowski, leaving Europe has become more difficult as a result of closer cooperation between European and Turkish secret services. More and more fighters are entering Syria from Russia. This is facilitated by the visa-free regime between Russia and Turkey as well as good transport links.<sup>59</sup>

Chechens in Syria are divided into three camps: The first faction are followers of IS and Abu Omar al-Shishani, whose real name is Tarkhan Batirashvili. Batirashvili, aka Abu Omar al-Shishani, is one of the highest-ranking officials in IS and the best known commander of Chechens in Syria.<sup>60</sup> The second faction, Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (JMA), are followers of the Caucasus Emirate and Emir Salautdin, aka Salahuddin al-Shishani. The third faction, Junud al-Sham, operates in Latakia under the command of Emir Muslim Abu Walid al-Shishani, whose real name is Murad Margoshvili. All three commanders are from the Chechen community in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge.<sup>61</sup> JMA's base in Syria is in Haritan in Aleppo Province, north of Aleppo city.<sup>62</sup> Junud al-Sham, which is mostly based in Latakia, participated in capturing Jisr al-Shughour, a major town in Idlib Province, in April 2015.<sup>63</sup>

JMA's previous leader Abu Omar al-Shishani left the faction to join IS in November 2013. Large numbers of militants began to defect from JMA to IS in March 2014. There are many reasons for the defections, but one is that JMA is in an alliance with democratic forces from the Free Syrian Army (FSA).<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the three largest factions, at least the following Chechen groups also operate in Syria:

- Ajnad al-Kavkaz, (led by Rustam Azhiyev / Abdul Hakim Shishani)
- Ahadun Ahad, (led by Al Bara Shishani)
- Tarkhan's Jamaat, (led by Tarkhan Ismailovich Gaziyeu)<sup>65</sup>

### 3.3.2. Georgia

Ethnic Chechens, who are also known as Kists, compose 75% of the 11 000 people settled in the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia. Kists mostly settled in the area in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and their language and culture are almost identical to those of Chechnya today. Thousands of Chechen refugees also fled to Pankisi at the beginning of the Second Chechen War, and although most returned after the war, several hundred remain in the area.<sup>66</sup> During the Second Chechen War, Chechen commander Ruslan Gelayev used Pankisi as a base for attacks until 2002, when pressure from the US – which claimed al-Qaeda was present there – forced Georgia to clean up the region of Chechen guerillas. Gelayev was killed during the war, but his wife still lives in Pankisi and his son was buried there in 2012.<sup>67</sup>

Before the uprising in Syria, many Georgian Chechens, aka Kists, fought under the banner of the Caucasus Emirate in the North Caucasus. Since 2011, an increasing number of them have

<sup>58</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 7.2.2014.

<sup>59</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 16.

<sup>60</sup> RFE/RL 9.4.2015; Jamestown Foundation 9.1.2015; RFE/RL / Under the Black Flag, 27.4.2015.

<sup>61</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 17.4.2015; RFE/RL / Under the Black Flag, 27.4.2015.

<sup>62</sup> RFE/RL 27.2.2015.

<sup>63</sup> RFE/RL 29.4.2015; RFE/RL / Under the Black Flag, 27.4.2015.

<sup>64</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 9.1.2015; RFE/RL 27.2.2015.

<sup>65</sup> RFE/RL / Under the Black Flag, 27.4.2015.

<sup>66</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014 p. 16; Irish Times 4.10.2014; Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst 29.4.2015.

<sup>67</sup> Irish Times 4.10.2014.



travelled to Syria.<sup>68</sup> Pankisi was recently dubbed a hotbed of radicalism, from where many fighters travel to Syria and Iraq to join the ranks of IS. The area's reputation stems at least partially from the fact that several high-profile Chechen commanders in Syria are from Pankisi. Reports regarding the number of fighters originating from Pankisi vary from just 50 to 200, but then there are less than 10,000 Chechens living in the area.<sup>69</sup>

Many of the commanders of Chechens fighting in Syria are from Pankisi, including Abu Omar al-Shishani (leader of the Chechen IS group), Salahuddin al-Shishani, Abu-Musa al-Shishani and Muslim Abu Walid al-Shishani. The names are noms de guerre: Shishani means Chechen in Arabic.<sup>70</sup> According to a Georgian non-governmental organisation, the main reason for the high number of young boys leaving the area to fight in Syria is Abu Omar al-Shishani (Batirashvili), the most prominent of the Chechen commanders. Other Caucasians from Chechnya and Dagestan, for example, also specifically want to fight under his command.<sup>71</sup>

The potential radicalisation of Georgian Chechens has become a concern especially since the autumn of 2014, when a teenager from Pankisi died while fighting in Syria. He was at least the sixth young Muslim from the Pankisi Gorge to die there. According to the locals, many young boys in the area talk openly about going to fight in Syria and Iraq.<sup>72</sup>

Experts say Pankisi offers potentially fertile ground for extremism due to the area's vast economic problems, unemployment and frustration among young people there. On the other hand, the warrior tradition is strong among the local population, and the presence of Chechen guerillas and refugees in the area during the Second Chechen War has strengthened the Islamisation of the local youth. Salafism, a more fundamentalist form of Islam not traditionally found in the Caucasus, has become more widespread in the area in recent years. In addition, travel to Syria and Iraq is easy.<sup>73</sup> Kists have called on the Georgian Government to put measures in place at border crossings to stop young people travelling to Syria.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.3.3. Ukraine

Chechens have also been involved in the Ukrainian conflict. Reports emerged in the spring of 2014 that there were Chechens fighting alongside the pro-Russian separatist forces. These fighters are apparently from the various police and security forces subordinate to Ramzan Kadyrov, and they are either volunteers or were sent there. Estimates of the number of fighters vary: Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty wrote in August 2014 that the figure may be as high as 1,000 and that dozens of corpses have been sent back to Chechnya. Mairbek Vatchagaev from the Jamestown Foundation, on the other hand, estimated in January 2015 that the figure would be as low as a few dozen. According to RFE/RL, unconfirmed reports suggest that the Chechens fighting on the side of the Russians have not distinguished themselves in battle and that many have surrendered or deserted.<sup>75</sup>

According to a report on the War in Ukraine compiled on the basis of information gathered by slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, the Chechens fighting alongside the pro-Russian separatists have played a prominent role in the war. The report claims that they had filled the ranks of the rebel Vostok Battalion and taken part in the battles over the Donetsk airport. Chechens

<sup>68</sup> BBC, 20.11.2013.

<sup>69</sup> Irish Times 4.10.2014; Falkowski 11/2014; RFE/RL 7.4.2015, 9.4.2015; Civil.ge, 25.4.2015.

<sup>70</sup> RFE/RL 14.10.2014; Falkowski 11/2014 p. 16-17; Irish Times 4.10.2014;

<sup>71</sup> RFE/RL 9.4.2015.

<sup>72</sup> Irish Times 4.10.2014.

<sup>73</sup> Irish Times 4.10.2014; Falkowski 11/2014, p. 16-17.

<sup>74</sup> RFE/RL, 7.4.2015; 9.4.2015.

<sup>75</sup> RFE/RL, 30.8.2015; Jamestown Foundation, 9.1.2015; Jamestown Foundation 19.3.2015.



first appeared in Ukraine in May 2014, and a second wave arrived in August 2014, when the conflict gained momentum.<sup>76</sup>

By the autumn of 2014, Chechen fighters were also appearing on the Ukrainian side. The pro-Ukraine Chechen Jokhar Dudaev Battalion was led by Isa Munaev, who served as a Chechen general during the Chechen Wars, until February 2015. Munaev was killed near Debaltseve in eastern Ukraine in February, and Adam Osmaev took over the command of the battalion.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.4. Supporters

The insurgency relies heavily on its network of supporters, who are vital for the insurgents to survive in the mountains. Local communities provide food, transport, medical help and sometimes even shelter to the insurgents. The existence of the insurgency proves that it is being supported. It is extremely difficult to estimate the number of supporters, especially as support is not always given for ideological reasons but out of a sense of loyalty to family members, relatives or neighbours. Chechens are traditionally bound by a duty to help anyone in need, especially a family member. Even strangers cannot be refused help if they ask for it.<sup>78</sup>

According to Mairbek Vatchagaev, it is difficult to estimate the number of active supporters of the insurgency, as people are very scared to speak about the insurgents even with people whom they know well.<sup>79</sup> Writing for the Jamestown Foundation in February 2015, Vatchagaev estimated that, based on a video published by the insurgents, the militants are running low on supplies because their supporters are scared and fleeing to the West.<sup>80</sup>

Supporters of the insurgency usually operate in the same areas where the insurgents themselves are hiding.<sup>81</sup> Sources interviewed by the Danish Country Information Service strongly agree that, for support, the insurgents only turn to people whom they know well and whom they can trust: members of their own family, friends from the same village, school or mosque, or widows or other family members of killed insurgents.<sup>82</sup>

There have, however, been cases where people who have been gathering wild garlic in the forests have been approached by unknown insurgents in need of food. The season for collecting wild garlic begins in February and ends in late April, and people go to the forests in groups, set up camps there and stay for some time. Gathering wild garlic is the main source of income to some extremely poor people.<sup>83</sup> According to a 2012 report by the International Crisis Group, local communities in the mountainous areas where the insurgents are hiding provide them with recruits, supplies and shelter, sometimes voluntarily, other times out of fear: The best way to respond to armed men is to tell them to take what they need.<sup>84</sup>

According to Mairbek Vatchagaev, the insurgents have an advanced system of couriers or intermediaries for communicating with each other. The system is based on trustworthy women who are usually relatives of the insurgents or widows of killed insurgents. The woman meets with the insurgents in their hideout and passes the message on to another trustworthy woman.

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<sup>76</sup> RFE/RL 12.5.2015.

<sup>77</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 9.1.2015; Jamestown Foundation 19.3.2015.

<sup>78</sup> Danish Immigration Service, p. 34. Górecki 2014, p. 19. International Crisis Group 19.10.2012, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 28-29.

<sup>80</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 27.2.2015.

<sup>81</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 28-29.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid*, p. 27-29.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>84</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 25.



The chain of communication can have several intermediaries. In the same way food, medicines and other supplies are delivered to the insurgents.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4. Salafism and its links to militant activities

##### 4.1. Salafism as a religious movement

Salafism in the North Caucasus is a reformist religious movement that aims at a reform of local Islam, rejecting pagan beliefs and rites, and calls for the return to the foundations of Islam. It is not necessarily an extremist movement, although it is often linked to extremism. In Russia, Salafism is identified with Wahhabism, which has given the movement a negative connotation.<sup>86</sup> Wahhabism actually refers to the historic school of Quranic law and the political movement which laid the foundations for modern Saudi Arabia. In the North Caucasus, however, Wahhabism is understood as the local armed Islamist movement, and it is *de facto* a synonym of terrorism.<sup>87</sup>

The most notable characteristics of Salafism are strict adherence to the monotheism, rejecting and condemning the veneration of sheikhs and holy places (associated with North Caucasian forms of Sufism), purging Islam from later influences that originate in local traditions, strict observance of Sharia principles, advocating equality of all Muslims regardless of their ethnic origins or property status, praise of studies and a positive attitude towards science. Due to these principles, Salafism appeals to many different population groups, such as poor people and educated people.<sup>88</sup>

Many people in the North Caucasus do not differentiate between Sufism and Salafism in practice and most call themselves “just Muslims”. They are neither members of Sufi orders nor declared Salafis, and often they are simply unaware of the differences between the two.<sup>89</sup>

##### 4.2. Salafism and militants

The militants are usually Salafis and recruit among other Salafis, but this does not mean that all Salafis are militants and approve of their actions. Many Salafis do not support terrorist methods and consider them harmful to all Muslims, and many have nothing to do with the Caucasus Emirate.<sup>90</sup> A part of Salafis nevertheless support the militants or helps them by providing food or hiding them. These Salafis believe in the better future in an Islamic State that the militants postulate.<sup>91</sup> The moderate peaceful Salafis of the North Caucasus do not take part in the jihad, believing that it is not part of their religious obligations. In turn, the region’s radical warring Salafis want to fulfil their demands through armed struggle and the use of violence.<sup>92</sup>

The militants also include educated persons, although generally speaking they are not highly educated or elitist.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 28.

<sup>86</sup> Kaliszewska, p. 51-53; Falkowski 11/2014, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 19.

<sup>88</sup> Kaliszewska 2010, p. 54.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid*, p. 57.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*, p. 57; Górecki 1/2014 p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> Kaliszewska 2010, p. 53.

<sup>92</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014 p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> Kaliszewska 2010, p. 55.



### 4.3. Attitudes of the authorities and the media towards Salafis

The official view of Salafis varies from one North Caucasian republic to the next. In Dagestan, the authorities strive to establish a dialogue with Salafis, as the movement is strong there and a dialogue is hoped to give it a constructive place in society. In Chechnya, Salafis are called Wahhabis and equalled with militants. Salafis often do not reveal their beliefs, and they are afraid to show off the external features of their movement, such as adhering to the Salafi dress code or wearing a long beard without a moustache. Such an appearance has got people arrested in the past. On the other hand, there are Salafis in the Chechen Government, and their status keeps them safe from persecution.<sup>94</sup> Radical Islam reached Ingushetia only during the Chechen Wars. Many young people have turned to Salafism, and although the authorities did not react to them at first, Salafis are now harassed by the authorities in various ways. People accused of religious radicalism are frequently kidnapped.<sup>95</sup>

## 5. Actions of the authorities

### 5.1. Authorities and their roles

After the Second Chechen War, counter-insurgency has transformed from a military operation to one requiring primarily law enforcement and counter-terrorism efforts. Responsibility has largely shifted from the Ministry of Defence to the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to both federal and republican units. Some experts say the efforts of these two main actors are often disconnected, and coordination between branches of the security establishment, federal and local forces and republic civilian authorities is poor. In 2012, army units once more became involved on a limited scale in local anti-terror operations.<sup>96</sup>

There are differences between the republics. Chechnya is the only republic where responsibility for counter-insurgency measures has been mostly handed down to local forces. The Chechen FSB is led by an ethnic Russian, whereas the rank-and-file Chechen FSB officers are likely a mix of Russians and Chechens. The Chechen FSB is only rarely directly involved in anti-terrorist operations. Mostly the police and police special forces (OMON) are responsible for that kind of operations. The Chechen police and OMON include very few ethnic Russians as well as other nationalities: These forces are almost entirely made up of Chechens.<sup>97</sup>

A report from the Danish Immigration Service's fact-finding mission names at least the following Chechen law enforcement agencies that fight against the insurgents and at times commit major human rights violations:

- Chechen OMON (police special forces)
- Chechen ROVD, i.e. Shali, Kurchaloi and Urus-Martan Districts of the District Office of Internal Affairs
- Regiment of patrol police No 2 (PPSM-2; named after Ahmad Kadyrov
- and so-called oil regiment)

These units have carte blanche to do as they please and they enjoy almost complete impunity; with regard to ROVD, this applies to the Shali, Kurchaloi and Urus-Martan Districts. Most Chechen OMON, "oil regiment" and PPSM-2 officers are poorly educated. Other police units do not have the same kind of power. The Investigative Committees have employed relatively well

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, p. 66-68.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>96</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 21; Górecki 2014, p. 25-26.

<sup>97</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 01/2015, p. 32.



educated Chechens who dislike the police impunity system but are helpless when confronted with police units close to Kadyrov.<sup>98</sup> One well-known case is that of Islam Umarpashaev, who was arrested by the Chechen OMON and ill-treated for several months from 2009 to 2010.<sup>99</sup>

Chechnya's police force is vast: The republic has more than twice as many police officers as Dagestan, which has a population three times as large as Chechnya.<sup>100</sup> According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, approximately 90% of the police are Chechens and the remaining 10% stem from other regions of the Russian Federation. Special groups within the Ministry of Internal Affairs are responsible for arrests of people who are under suspicion of being affiliated with the illegal armed forces. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, non-Chechen officers do not conduct arrests on their own as they are always accompanied by Chechen officers.<sup>101</sup>

A 2012 report by Amnesty International (AI) gives a detailed account of what is known of the so-called counter-terrorism operations of Ingushetia's various competent authorities. There are no reports of the system having changed fundamentally since that time.<sup>102</sup> According to AI, relatively little is known about the methods and working arrangements of the law enforcement agencies involved in security operations. The architecture of law enforcement agencies in Ingushetia, as elsewhere in the North Caucasus, is complex and opaque. Their members are commonly referred to collectively as *siloviki*. They can be either local residents representing the local police force or employed by other security agencies operating on the territory, or be officers temporarily deployed from other regions of the Russian Federation. Law enforcement officials deployed in Ingushetia from other regions are referred to colloquially as *federaly*. Both local *siloviki* and *federaly* ultimately belong to federal-level law enforcement structures. These structures include the Federal Security Service Directorate for Ingushetia, the Interior Troops (*Vnutrennie voiska*) and various specialised forces and units, such as the Centre for Combating Extremism, under the authority of the Ingush Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the military (including structures such as the Chief Intelligence Directorate, or GRU).<sup>103</sup> Some of the law enforcement officials operating on the territory of Ingushetia may in fact be *siloviki* stationed in the neighbouring republics, particularly North Ossetia and Chechnya. This may in part be explained by concern that security operations may be compromised if locally recruited officers are involved on account of their family links or clans.<sup>104</sup>

Owing to the federal nature of law enforcement agencies, Ingushetia's political leadership has no direct formal control over any of the law enforcement officials on the republic's territory. However, its political influence is significant.<sup>105</sup>

Activities relating to combating armed groups as well as intelligence-gathering and surveillance are, in theory, coordinated by the National Antiterrorist Committee at the federal level and an Antiterrorist Commission at the level of the republic. The Antiterrorist Commission of the Republic of Ingushetia is headed by the Head of Ingushetia and includes representatives of all law enforcement agencies. Planning and control of security operations in Ingushetia is formally the task of the Operations Staff attached to the Antiterrorist Commission. The Operations Staff brings together representatives of the FSB, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and several other ministries, and its decisions are binding. There is, however, virtually no information in the public domain on the work of the Operations Staff, apart from its decisions to impose or lift the so-

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<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>99</sup> HRW, 3.4.2011.

<sup>100</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 01/2015, p. 32.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Amnesty International, 06/2012, p. 16-18.

<sup>103</sup> Amnesty International, 06/2012, p. 16.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.





called counter-terrorist operation regime in a certain territory. There is also only minimal public information on the role of specific agencies in specific security operations.<sup>106</sup>

Information relating to the agencies and units involved in operations and search activities as well as their means, methods and tactics are classified as state secrets. These operations may be conducted by a variety of law enforcement agencies, and, according to Amnesty International, they are not necessarily agreed on by, or even disclosed to, the Operations Staff. Nor are they necessarily coordinated between the different agencies that have the authority to conduct them. At least some security operations, therefore, are conducted by some forces without the knowledge of others. These agencies do not necessarily share information about their activities. Each has an interest in enhancing its own influence, but none – not even the FSB – appears willing to take overall responsibility. The political leadership of Ingushetia, which bears the overall political responsibility in the republic, may not be aware of some specific security operations at all.<sup>107</sup>

When officials from any one particular law enforcement agency deny knowledge of a specific human rights violation, such a denial may be entirely genuine, as the agencies are not always aware of each other's actions. The alleged perpetrators of specific violations may be either local *siloviki* or *federaly*, and even local *siloviki* may be from Ingushetia or from a neighbouring republic. Human rights violations are typically committed by masked law enforcement agents displaying no identifying insignia and often operating from unmarked vehicles. In the absence of a central controlling agency, it is extremely difficult to establish which agency may have been responsible for a specific violation. Although this situation makes things difficult for investigators and prosecutors, it is not a situation that they appear to be very strongly motivated to address. Any complaints addressed to federal-level authorities are invariably forwarded back to the relevant authorities in Ingushetia.<sup>108</sup>

There are many problems associated with the actions of police forces operating under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The system is corrupt, abuses of official credentials are common, and the situation has not improved as even reforms have mostly been used to get rid of those who refused to be part of corruption schemes or had personal issues with their commanders. According to the International Crisis Group, the situation has caused acute resentment among police cadres, some of whom in recent years have reportedly joined or assisted the insurgency.<sup>109</sup> The reports of police officers having joined the insurgency have been confirmed by the Ingush Government: Ingushetia's Interior Minister told the republic's Parliament in the spring of 2015 that the Ingush insurgency wing and its support personnel included several police officers. One of the men killed together with the insurgent leader Arthur Getagazhev in May 2014 was a policeman who had previously helped his fellow fighters and sheltered them in his home.<sup>110</sup>

## 5.2. Tactics and operations

The counter-insurgency strategy is heavily reliant on killing insurgents and especially insurgent leaders. Little attention is given to identifying the motivations of the insurgents or to preventing radicalisation. Disproportionate force is often used to kill, rather than capture, insurgents. Russian security forces have at times been suspected of having assassinated prominent insurgent leaders even outside the federation's borders.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> *ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>109</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 23.

<sup>110</sup> RFE/RL, 19.5.2015.

<sup>111</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 23, 26.



Many of the people that the Danish Country Information Service interviewed during its fact finding mission stated that the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov could end the resistance movement in Chechnya if he so wished. However, keeping up a degree of threat from militants is useful, as it justifies Chechnya's huge security set-up, which benefits Kadyrov and his regime.<sup>112</sup>

The Chechen police operate an extensive network of informers throughout the republic. The informers are often individuals who have had run-ins with the law and can therefore be forced by the police to cooperate. The police can also pressure relatives of insurgents or their supporters to enrol as informants in connection with police interrogations or questioning.<sup>113</sup>

Many of the experts interviewed in connection with the Danish Immigration Service's fact finding mission estimated that although the security situation has improved significantly over the years, the human rights situation is poor and the fear among the general population has increased. This is due to the authorities' use of collective punishment of family members to suspected insurgents as well as psychological pressure by e.g. fabricating criminal cases. According to the experts interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service, illegal arrests have increased and the violence involved in them has worsened. However, others claim that the authorities do not currently need to use as much violence or make as many illegal arrests as in previous years because the climate of fear keeps the population under control. In order to maintain a level of fear amongst the general population, however, the authorities occasionally need to feed the fear with violence.<sup>114</sup> The weakening of the insurgency may have led to a decline in the number of arrests and killings in practice, but they have not stopped altogether. The number of arrests is difficult to estimate, as relatives are pressured not to report them.<sup>115</sup>

Human rights violations, such as killings, disappearances, torture and fabricated criminal charges are common in the context of counter-insurgency law enforcement in the North Caucasus.<sup>116</sup> Although the approach prevents some terrorist attacks, the human rights abuses undermine the authorities' perceived legitimacy, reduce communities' willingness to cooperate, and contribute to the spillover of the conflict from Chechnya to other republics.<sup>117</sup> Contrary to other sources, the Polish researcher Wojciech Górecki stated in his 2014 report that the situation has improved in recent months. He believes that this is due to the fact that ever fewer police officers have their origins beyond the North Caucasus and local police officers have to take note of public opinion at least to a minimum degree.<sup>118</sup> The heavy-handed approach of the authorities has increased the insurgents' popularity among the public.<sup>119</sup>

Enforced disappearances are among the most typical human rights violations in the region: They involve abduction and taking victims to an unofficial detention facility. The abductors are a group of armed people usually wearing camouflage uniform and often balaclavas or face masks, in most cases no insignia which would allow the identification of either the individuals involved or even the agencies which they belong to. They present no identity documents or any documents authorising their actions, and typically offer no explanation for their actions.<sup>120</sup> The victims are held incommunicado as well as intimidated, pressured and often tortured in many

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<sup>112</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 01/2015, p. 24-25.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, p. 50.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, p. 9-11.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid*, p. 31.

<sup>116</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 19; Danish Immigration Service, 01/2015.

<sup>117</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 19.

<sup>118</sup> Górecki 2014, p. 28.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid*, p. 27-28.

<sup>120</sup> Amnesty International, 06/2012, p. 23; Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 34-40; International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 27.



ways. The objective is to extract confessions from the victims. Only after a confession has been signed, the victims are officially arrested and transferred to an official detention facility. Some victims are taken to other areas or republics to complicate the search. Others are never found.<sup>121</sup>

Torture is used in both official and unofficial detention facilities, especially against relatives and neighbours of suspected insurgents as well as Salafis. Human rights organisations have documented thousands of cases of information and confessions extracted under torture.<sup>122</sup> Many different methods of torture are used. These include beatings, electrocution, placing plastic bags over victims' heads and taping their mouths, threatening victims with rape and videotaping the rape, tying them up, and refusing food. The authorities also develop their methods and have learned to torture their victims without leaving marks. Examples of other kinds of ill-treatment include transporting victims in car boots and covering their eyes during transport and in some cases also during questioning.<sup>123</sup>

Victims whose arrests become official are allowed to see a lawyer and a doctor. If, however, there are marks left by torture on a victim's body, the authorities usually wait until those have healed before making the arrest official. The cases then go to court, where the forced confession is usually the sole piece of evidence. The conviction rate in these cases is close to hundred percent.<sup>124</sup>

At times human rights violations have even been admitted on an official level. Yury Chaika, the Prosecutor General for the Russian Federation stated in an official report published in 2009 that law enforcement agencies in the North Caucasus are corrupted and lack the appropriate training, and that it is common for unsolved crimes to be blamed on alleged militants who have been killed by law enforcement authorities. Chaika also claimed that documents are forged and crime reports falsified.<sup>125</sup> The Ingush President Yunus-bek Yevkurov admitted in 2011 that there had been several abductions in the region and that there were signs of secret services and law enforcement agencies having been involved. Law enforcement agencies have never admitted to the involvement of their personnel in individual cases, and no one has ever been prosecuted, let alone convicted, for an enforced disappearance. In the whole of the North Caucasus, Amnesty International was aware of only one enforced disappearance in Chechnya that had led to a conviction.<sup>126</sup>

Extrajudicial executions have been reported in the 21<sup>st</sup> century throughout the North Caucasus. According to AI's report from 2012, there are only three cases which have resulted in prosecution of the alleged perpetrators, and all three belong to the period of the Chechen Wars. In most cases, official law enforcement agencies report having attempted to stop a suspicious car or apprehend an individual or a group of people for an identity check. The suspects are described as having opened fire on the law enforcement officials and been killed in the ensuing shoot-out. Extrajudicial executions are difficult to prove, but there is still strong evidence of many cases. Cases where the victims have been in official custody before being shot are especially suspicious.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 34-40; International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 27.

<sup>123</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 24-40; Amnesty International, 6/2012, p. 38-41; Human Rights Watch, 3.4.2011; Reiter & Kalyapin, 8.9.2011; Tshelysheva 2010 p. 30-31

<sup>124</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 34-40; International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 27.

<sup>125</sup> Tshelysheva, p. 31-32, teoksessa Novaja Gazeta 2010.

<sup>126</sup> Amnesty International, 06/2012, 19-20.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid*, p. 30-33.



During interviews conducted by the Danish Immigration Service, local human rights activists emphasised that the Chechen authorities do not need any logic in their behaviour. There is no clear rule of who is at risk of being subjected to fabricated terrorism-related charges. It can happen to anyone if the police want to show results of their work.<sup>128</sup> One problem is the inherited Soviet legal system, in which the result of the work of the police is only seen in figures: The ones that are promoted are the ones who can produce the highest number of arrests or convictions. In addition to that there is a strong tradition of the police never admitting to a mistake, and once arrested and accused of a crime, it is very unlikely that a person would not be convicted even if they are known to be innocent. This inheritance is one of the reasons why even today people are convicted of having provided support to the insurgents in Chechnya, even though there are almost no insurgents left to support in the republic.<sup>129</sup>

Several dozens of people suspected of supporting the insurgents are arrested every year, and nine out of ten arrests in Chechnya are connected with suspicion of support to the insurgents. According to many of the experts interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service, in most cases the charges are fabricated. Cases where accusations of supporting the insurgents are legitimate were more common in Chechnya before.<sup>130</sup>

Collective punishment of family members of insurgents has been unofficially in use across the North Caucasus for some time, especially in Chechnya, where many relatives of insurgents have had their homes and property burned.<sup>131</sup> Kadyrov ordered in December 2014 that relatives of militants be expelled from Chechnya with no right to return and that their homes be demolished.<sup>132</sup> The Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed during a press conference that although he found Kadyrov's emotional reaction to the bombings in Grozny understandable, he did not approve of Kadyrov's planned extrajudicial reprisals. According to human rights activists, several homes had been torched in various towns across Chechnya and not all of them belonged to the families of the men killed during the security operation following the Grozny attack.<sup>133</sup> The Ingush President Yunus-bek Yevkurov stated during a press conference in December 2014 that he does not support the use of illegal persecution methods against insurgents' relatives despite having previously appeared to be in favour of extrajudicial reprisals.<sup>134</sup>

Today women in detention are more likely to be exposed to ill-treatment and torture as opposed to the situation some years ago when violence against women was considered to violate Chechen tradition. When it comes to women, there is often no need for the police officers to bring any official charges, as they can simply contact family members of any women who are believed to have committed a crime or behaved in an inappropriate matter. Family members may eventually kill their female relatives for being detrimental to the family honour. Female family members of suspected insurgents or alleged supporters also risk being raped. However, such cases are almost never reported as that would destroy the future of the rape victim.<sup>135</sup>

It is difficult to find reliable information about the number of cases where non-high-profile individuals suspected of supporting the insurgents have been returned to Chechnya or elsewhere in the North Caucasus from other parts of Russia. The Danish Country Information Service has asked local experts about this during their fact-finding missions. High profiled insurgents have been killed even abroad, and there are reports of suspected insurgents having been extradited

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<sup>128</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 38.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12, 38- 39, 45, 51.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34-35, 38.

<sup>131</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 28.

<sup>132</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 12.3.2015.

<sup>133</sup> RFE/RL 18.12.2014.

<sup>134</sup> Caucasian Knot, 27.12.2014.

<sup>135</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, 43, 51.



from other parts of Russia and from neighbouring countries, such as Ukraine and Belarus. Most of the experts interviewed by the Danish Country Information Service in 2014 had not heard of cases where non high profiled individuals suspected of supporting the insurgents had been returned to the North Caucasus from elsewhere in Russia and could not give a definitive answer as to whether this happens. However, a representative of the International Crisis Group was aware of some cases where people suspected of being involved in or supporting the insurgency had been arrested and returned to Chechnya from other areas. The Chechen police occasionally arrest people in other parts of Russia, and sometimes local authorities assist them. The Anti-extremism Department of the Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs is controlled by Kadyrov and his regime, and it has powers to operate anywhere in Russia. One of the reported cases related to supporting the insurgents at the beginning of the Second Chechen War in 1999.<sup>136</sup>

It can be difficult for wanted persons to move from one part of Russia to another, at least if they are wanted on a federal level, as travellers are obliged to present their internal passport when purchasing train tickets and information about passengers' identity is accessible to the police. However, different law enforcement agencies do not communicate well with each other. Whether or not the relevant authorities are notified and react to information received appears to be very "ad hoc" in Russia, and it also depends on which authorities have initiated the search of an individual and whether or not it is a federal or a local search. It is difficult for people who are on the federal search list to leave the Russian Federation legally, except perhaps through the land border between Russia and Belarus.<sup>137</sup>

The Chechen authorities may not use the official channels for returning suspects to Chechnya and may instead use unofficial methods. Even representatives of Chechen law enforcement agencies have admitted that they rarely make use of federal searches, as the procedure is very cumbersome. They did not, however, admit to using unofficial methods but stated that persons suspected of supporting the insurgents are easier to find in Chechnya than outside the republic.<sup>138</sup>

### 5.3. Legal redress and impunity

According to many sources, there is no rule of law in the republics of the North Caucasus and especially Chechnya, and if someone is ill-treated by the authorities, there are no real avenues to seek redress. Normal people are afraid to contact the authorities as they fear the authorities. Corruption also lessens their willingness to turn to the authorities.<sup>139</sup> Souhayr Belhassen, President of FIDH, told the Human Rights Watch in 2011 that impunity for abductions and torture in Chechnya has been rampant for many years. Only one police officer has been punished for torturing a detainee, and no law enforcement or security officials under Kadyrov's control have ever been brought to account for such crimes.<sup>140</sup> In practice, Chechnya remains outside of the Russian legal order. Ingush and Dagestani politicians speak less daringly than Kadyrov about legal matters, but it does not mean that the federal law is observed on the territory of those republics either.<sup>141</sup> According to human rights activists, in the North Caucasus the law is not the aim in itself but a means in the fight for power.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68-72, 98-102.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68, 71-72.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68-72.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12; Kaliszewska, 2010, p. 32, 77-78; Górecki 2014, p. 29; Amnesty International, 06/2012.

<sup>140</sup> Human Rights Watch, 3.4.2011.

<sup>141</sup> Kaliszewska, p. 77.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*



The vast majority of court cases involving support to the insurgents or relating to the insurgency otherwise are based on fabricated criminal charges. The experts interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service estimated the figure to be around 90%. The conviction rate in these cases is close to hundred percent. A forced written confession is often the only evidence. The events recounted in confessions and the names of the people involved are often the same in multiple cases, which clearly indicates that the police do not even bother to fabricate new stories for different cases. In practice, judges may realise that the charges are fabricated and impose the mildest possible sentence. Independent lawyers can also influence sentencing by their actions, while lawyers appointed by the state are generally not interested in helping their clients. Suspects are often charged on multiple different counts, such as participation and support to illegal armed groups, terrorism and illegal possession of firearms. Independent lawyers sometimes manage to reduce the charges, but the accused are always found guilty of at least one crime. However, diligent lawyers can sometimes bring the sentence down to just 2–3 years in prison instead of the 15–20 that could be imposed for all the charges.<sup>143</sup>

The authorities strive to prevent independent lawyers from taking cases that are related to the insurgency. In addition, lawyers who defend insurgents as well as judges and juries that return non-guilty verdicts are sometimes pressured and intimidated.<sup>144</sup> The police and other authorities would rather an innocent person was convicted than admit to a mistake.<sup>145</sup>

The law stipulates up to five years in prison for support to the insurgency. Typical sentences are between one and a half and two years. The length of a sentence depends on many different factors, such as cooperating with the authorities (people who admit their guilt are given a milder punishment), evidence of torture and whether the accused has young children. Chechens usually serve their prison sentences in prisons located in Chechnya.<sup>146</sup> Courts do not generally have cases involving members of the insurgency, as apprehended insurgents are usually killed with no court judgment.<sup>147</sup> There have also been reports recently of people having been charged with supporting the insurgency in Chechnya and being given prison sentences. In September 2014, a man was sentenced to one year of imprisonment for supplying food to the insurgents.<sup>148</sup>

There is usually no redress through the court system for torture, abductions and other abuses committed by the authorities. To pursue one's rights through the court system is not considered at all sensible, as the courts are not believed to be independent. Most people therefore try to solve their problems primarily through connections or bribes. Efforts are sometimes made to get abducted individuals released through relatives who work in the power structure or by paying bribes.<sup>149</sup>

The actions or inaction of any competent state authorities can be challenged in court. However, in the experience of many victims, this remedy is ineffective, as the courts generally sanction the actions of the authorities. Appealing to a higher-level court is a time-consuming process and the outcome is often no different. Most victims therefore give up and do not take their cases to court unless it is their specific intention to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights or another international court that can grant large monetary awards.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, p. 14, 18-19, 34-51.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38, 45.

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45-46.

<sup>147</sup> Kaliszewska, p. 81.

<sup>148</sup> RFE/RL 19.3.2015.

<sup>149</sup> Kaliszewska, p. 78-80.

<sup>150</sup> Amnesty International, 06/2012, p. 57; Kaliszewska, p. 78-80.



Appealing to the Russian Federation also appears to be ineffective. According to Amnesty International, federal-level authorities consistently pass complaints from victims of rights violations downwards to regional authorities, and these send them on in turn to local ones. Complaints are passed around the system without anyone appearing to take responsibility for conducting an investigation. This can go on for months or even years, in the course of which leads go cold. Eventually, victims are typically informed that the investigation of their case has been discontinued or closed or that a decision has been taken not to open an investigation at all.<sup>151</sup>

According to representatives of the Committee Against Torture, the Committee, which operates in five regions of the Russian Federation, first began to receive complaints about the local law enforcement agencies of the North Caucasus around the year 2007. It soon transpired that Chechen prosecutors were too scared to act against the local forces that answered to Kadyrov's Deputy Adam Delimkhanov, Deputy Chairman of the Chechen Republic Government Magomed Daudov or the Head of the Chechen special forces OMON Alikhan Tsakayev. Prosecutors told human rights activists that if they took up these cases, they and their relatives would be intimidated, tortured and murdered.<sup>152</sup>

Activist Nataliya Estemirova at the charity Memorial previously took on cases that even the Committee Against Torture felt were too dangerous, but this ended with her murder. Human rights activists started using joint mobile teams to investigate illegal arrests and represent victims. The teams comprise lawyers from other regions of Russia who come to Chechnya, working on a shift basis and keeping constantly in touch with each other to minimise security threats. Cases investigated by the teams have involved illegal arrests and torture by agencies such as the so-called oil regiment and the Chechen OMON. The oil regiment is commanded by Adam Delimkhanov's brother; the Delimkhanov clan is extremely influential in Chechnya. The oil regiment was established to protect Chechnya's oil industry sites and pipelines. The oil industry was almost completely destroyed during the Chechen Wars, however, so there is very little work to be done in this area, and the divisions of the regiments therefore do whatever they like. In practice, the oil regiment is a whole army, and it has its own unofficial detention centres.<sup>153</sup>

The cases that make it to the courts or human rights organisations are generally only those that involve kidnapping or murder. Torture cases are often hidden away, as torture brings dishonour to victims. Especially mortifying for a man would be to reveal that he has been the victim of sexual abuse, which is one of the forms of torture used by those in power. Victims generally try to avenge themselves in some way on their torturers.<sup>154</sup>

One case that the authorities have investigated thoroughly is that of Islam Umarpashaev, a Chechen who was arrested and tortured by OMON. The original plan had been to label Umarpashaev as an insurgent and kill him, but he was released because his arrest had been reported in the media and even got the attention of the European Court of Human Rights, which meant that Umarpashaev could not be framed in a credible way. Activists had also found out where he was being held. Umarpashaev lodged a complaint with the local prosecutor, but he was intimidated and ordered to withdraw his complaint. To protect Umarpashaev, the case was transferred to the federal prosecutor. Novaya Gazeta reported that the Head of OMON had threatened to open fire against the criminal investigators if they were to enter OMON premises. The investigators struggled to get security escorts from other authorities for their visit to OMON. According to the Human Rights Watch, Umarpashaev, his family and the human rights workers who handled his complaint were in grave danger due to the complaint. The publicity that was

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<sup>151</sup> Amnesty International, 06/2012, p. 56-57.

<sup>152</sup> Reiter & Kalyapin, 8.9.2011.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Kaliszewska, p. 79.



successfully created around Umarpashaev's case is why the case ended up being properly investigated.<sup>155</sup>

#### 5.4. Reintegration of former insurgents into society

A system has been put in place in Ingushetia whereby members of armed groups who have not committed serious crimes – i.e., in practice, not killed anyone – can turn themselves in and return to normal civilian life. Efforts to rehabilitate former insurgents and reintegrate them into society have apparently yielded promising results, and the less intense presence of security personnel has improved the area's security. Although many of the details that are known of the system are based on statements by the Ingush authorities and are therefore of dubious credibility, organisations such as Amnesty International and the International Crisis Group see the system as having had a positive impact.<sup>156</sup>

The system was originally developed in Dagestan and then adapted to Ingushetia's needs. In Dagestan, however, it was discontinued in 2013. The system had apparently yielded good results: In 2012, the Dagestani Commission for the Rehabilitation of Fighters considered 44 applications and approved 35, in addition to which it reviewed more than 100 complaints relating to rights violations committed by law enforcement agencies. Initially all applications were from people suspected of supporting insurgents or under surveillance for possible involvement with the insurgency, but eventually insurgents themselves began to approach the Commission. In Dagestan the success of the system was compromised by its stipulation that fighters had to repent publicly on television, which many insurgents did not want to do. Many civil society figures criticised the system for its role as a propaganda tool.<sup>157</sup>

In Ingushetia the system has operated more informally and less publicly. Among the methods used are negotiations with insurgents, including through kinship ties. According to its leader Ahmed Kotiyev, the Chairman of the Ingush Security Council, the Ingush Commission focuses on the reintegration of insurgents who have served sentences. The strategy is to first negotiate with insurgents and reintegrate them into society and only then publish their stories on television with their consent. According to Kotiyev, the Commission has already reintegrated a militant who had spent eight months in Doku Umarov's guard, and he has been granted state protection.<sup>158</sup>

The Ingush President Yunus-bek Yevkurov told Amnesty International in 2012 that the system is based on family members bringing their relatives whom they suspect are members of armed groups to the authorities from where the suspects are taken to the FSB for questioning. Such questioning sessions can lead either to the individual's arrest and formal charging, or the closure of the case and the individual's release. If no criminal investigation is brought, the individual is promised employment or a place at an educational institution. A Commission was set up to facilitate the system in September 2011, which is designed to help former fighters to adapt to civilian life. The Commission can also resettle families of former insurgents in other regions of the Russian Federation if this is deemed necessary to ensure their security. This is presumably to help them live without the fear of blood vengeance.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> HRW, 3.4.2011; Reiter & Kalyapin, 8.9.2011.

<sup>156</sup> Falkowski, 11/2014, p. 25-26; International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 30-31; Amnesty 6/2012, p. 12.

<sup>157</sup> International Crisis Group, 6.9.2013, p. 1-2, 21, 24; International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 30-31; Amnesty 6/2012, p. 12.

<sup>158</sup> International Crisis Group, 19.10.2012, p. 31 (see footnote 174).

<sup>159</sup> Amnesty, 2012 p. 12.





In the summer of 2014, Yevkurov reported that 67 individuals had turned to the Commission. Eight of them were given long prison sentences for their involvement in the insurgency, but the remaining 59 were given work and were able to return to normal life. According to Yevkurov's statements to the Kommersant newspaper, only one of the 67 had later returned to the insurgency. To the Caucasian Knot website, however, Yevkurov told that the facts still needed a recheck.<sup>160</sup> In May 2015, Yevkurov stated that a total of 80 young fighters had laid down their arms in the previous four years and had been amnestied.<sup>161</sup>

Adam Tsechoev, Head of the Malgobek District of Ingushetia, stated in January 2015 that the Adaptation Commission had successfully returned a man who had been on his way to join the ranks of IS in Syria, back to Ingushetia. The man had already made it to Turkey where he was undergoing training. His relatives contacted the Adaptation Commission, and the authorities were able to get to him in time and bring him home, where he is now attempting to return to a peaceful life and settle the matter with the authorities.<sup>162</sup>

In a television programme in March 2015, Yevkurov was asked why a former insurgent who had been amnestied through the Adaptation Commission had been later sentenced to a long prison term in Chechnya. Yevkurov replied that the man had failed to tell everything about his activities to the Ingush authorities and urged that persons appealing to the Adaptation Commission abide by the rules and tell the whole truth.<sup>163</sup>

In his article published in June 2014, Mairbek Vatchagaev from the Jamestown Foundation took a sceptical view of the Commission and considered it to be primarily a tool for propaganda: He based his view on the relatively modest figures recorded over a period of three years. According to Vatchagaev, the Commission has never identified an insurgent who was on the FSB wanted list and the rehabilitated people were most likely individuals who were blacklisted as Salafist supporters rather than real insurgents.<sup>164</sup>

## 5.5. High-risk groups

According to Amnesty International, in the cases of enforced disappearance in Ingushetia and elsewhere in the North Caucasus, the abducted person often, though not in all cases, belongs to a certain 'risk group':

- Relatives or associates of known or suspected members of illegal armed groups
- Persons who have been previously detained and questioned or briefly abducted and released
- Those known to be particularly devout Muslims<sup>165</sup>

With regard to religion, other sources provide more detail and state that those perceived to be followers of radical Islam or Salafis are particularly likely to be targeted by the authorities and more likely to become victims of arrests, body searches, abductions and fabricated charges.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Caucasian Knot, 2.7.2014.

<sup>161</sup> RFE/RL 19.5.2015.

<sup>162</sup> Caucasian Knot, 25.1.2015.

<sup>163</sup> Caucasian Knot, 22.3.2015.

<sup>164</sup> Jamestown Foundation, 31.7.2014.

<sup>165</sup> Amnesty International, 06/2012, p. 22.

<sup>166</sup> Kaliszewska 2010 p. 73, Danish Immigration Service 1/2015 p. 32-33, 42.



Men are usually in more danger than women. The overwhelming majority of those allegedly abducted by the authorities in Ingushetia are men (less than 5% of the persons counted as abducted between 2002 and 2011 were women), and all those officially reported as killed in security operations were men.<sup>167</sup> However, women too are at more risk of being tortured today than before, and in Chechnya especially Kadyrov's security forces carry out honour killings of their own female relatives with impunity.<sup>168</sup>

According to the experts interviewed in the course of the Danish Immigration Service's fact finding mission, the problems also affect relatives of suspected insurgents and relatives of alleged supporters of the insurgents. They risk losing their jobs or becoming victims of fabricated criminal cases, and they sometimes receive threats of violence even involving their children. They can be called in for questioning, which can involve various degrees of violence. They can also be pressured into becoming informants in connection with police interrogations.<sup>169</sup>

Close family members still face as much pressure as before even though the number of insurgents has decreased. According to an IGC researcher and local human rights activist interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service, only close relatives, i.e. fathers, brothers, mothers and sisters, are pressured and intimidated. Male relatives are the most likely to be subjected to pressure. Chechen authorities rarely pay attention to more distant relatives; even male cousins very rarely come in the spotlight. One case is known, however, of a suspected insurgent's entire family, including his uncles, having been forced to leave the republic.<sup>170</sup>

## 6. Summary

Insurgency in the North Caucasus has turned religious since the Chechen Wars. With regard to persecution by the authorities, this is evidenced especially by the fact that Salafis or people who are thought to be Salafis now also have to suffer arrests, questioning and the kind of torture otherwise reserved for suspected insurgents, people suspected of supporting insurgents and their relatives. The authorities' methods have remained largely unchanged over the years. Among the most notable changes is that, at least in Chechnya, fabricated criminal cases that are based on confessions extracted by torture have replaced forced disappearances. Although the insurgents have become less active and the authorities therefore have less to do in combating the insurgency, the human rights situation in the region remains challenging and there are few remedies for rights violations committed by the authorities.

The security situation has improved in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the intensity of the insurgency has decreased. However, there are several reasons for this loss of intensity and some of them may be temporary, such as the leadership crisis in the Caucasus Emirate, deaths of prominent insurgent leaders and the shifting of militants' focus to Syria. The fact that the insurgency has become increasingly motivated by Islam has also increased the insurgents' interest in fighting in the name of Islam elsewhere in the world. On the other hand, this trend has caused a rift among the insurgents, as especially some Chechens still consider regional separatism an important motivation. The rising popularity of the jihadi extremist militant group IS among North Caucasian insurgents is one of the most notable recent trends and may change the situation in the North Caucasus if groups fighting according to IS's principles replace or join the Caucasus Emirate.

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<sup>167</sup> Amnesty International, 06/2012, p. 20, 22.

<sup>168</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, 43, 51.

<sup>169</sup> Danish Immigration Service, 1/2015, 50-52.

<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51-53.



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