



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

# CTC SENTINEL

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## About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

# The Islamic State Raises Its Black Flag Over The Caucasus

By Derek Henry Flood



People inspect the damage after a December 4, 2014 attack by insurgents in Grozny, Chechnya. ELENA FITKULINA / GETTY IMAGES

In the early hours of December 4, 2014, a group of militants staged a brazen attack in the heart of Grozny, the Chechen capital. They stormed a government media building and a significant part of the edifice was engulfed in flames. Clashes lasted for some 12 hours before the authorities regained complete control of the area.<sup>1</sup> The December incident belied the hard-won image that Chechnya had largely been pacified. The Grozny attack made headlines in part because Chechnya had largely dropped out of the news because the number of attacks within the republic had declined even as the violence seeped into other areas to the east and west.

The timing and location of the attack was significant for several reasons. Targeting a government building in

the region's capital and the death of state security forces demonstrated conclusively that this long-running conflict has not been resolved, despite the message implied in the policies of Ramzan Kadyrov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's hand-picked leader in Chechnya. He has gone to great lengths to suppress religious and political violence and has greatly reduced terrorism and insurgent activity in the area under his direct control. His tactics though have also led to the diffusion of radicalism into the neighboring republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria in particular which have made of up the core of the Caucasus Emirate, known locally as Imarat Kavkaz.

The December attack took place the same day Putin was to give his State of the Nation address to Russian parliament and also occurred a week before the December 11 anniversary of the start of the first Russo-Chechen war that began

<sup>1</sup> Musa Sadulayev and Vladimir Isachenkov, "Islamic militants attack Chechen capital; 20 dead," Associated Press, December 4, 2014.