



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER

at West Point



Doku Umarov, Founder of the Caucasus Emirate: From Secularism to Jihadism

Jihadi Bios Project

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THE JIHADI BIOS PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to contribute to the knowledge of the evolution of the jihadist landscape by exploring it through the lens of the worldviews and experiences of actors who have shaped it. While some states and organizations, wittingly or unwittingly, contributed to the growth of the jihadist enterprise, it may be argued that modern jihadism, as it continues to unfold, is also the product of individuals, who made it into the global phenomenon that it is.

As we study the biographies of jihadis, we are faced with a world crowded with different and differing worldviews. Beneath the banner of jihad that seemingly unites jihadis worldwide is a world marked not just by cooperation between groups and individuals, but also by competition and divisions. Some of the jihadis who occupy that world are characterized by a commitment to idealistic goals, by acumen, skills, and agility; others are driven by sectarianism, criminal disposition, and opportunism; while others manifest an odd combination of all. That is why the actions emanating from the jihadist landscape are the results of an amalgam of strategy, sophisticated planning and targeting, randomness, and juvenile enthusiasm. It is for these reasons and more that the complexity of the jihadist landscape requires different layers of analyses and a rigorous and patient approach to the subject. In short, the study of jihadism is about both the “forest” and the “trees;” and this series of biographies is a study of the “trees” as they are situated in the broader “forest.”

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Foreword

On September 30, 2015, Russia began to launch airstrikes from Khmeimim air base near Latakia in Syria against targets primarily connected to the Islamic State, but also against those of other armed insurgent groups in the country. Russia had several reasons to strike against insurgent targets, one of which was to prevent Russian citizens within the Islamic State from returning to Russia to carry out acts of terrorism.¹ This was hardly surprising; less than two weeks before the airstrikes, the Russian Security Service, FSB, reported that an estimated 2,500 Russian citizens had gone to Syria to join the Islamic State or other jihadist groups. In addition, some 3,000 Central Asian fighters, many of whom were Russian-speakers, had joined the jihadis as well, and might return to threaten the Central Asian republics, geographically and politically close to Russia.² Then, on October 31, a Russian airliner was destroyed in a suspected terrorist attack in Sinai, causing the loss of 224 lives.³ Vicious terrorist attacks took place in Paris on November 13,⁴ which focused international, in particular European, attention on the need to fight the Islamic State. On November 17, having determined that the airliner was indeed destroyed by terrorists, Russia extended its air campaign in Syria to include long-range aviation bombers, which began to carry out airstrikes from bases in Russia.⁵ Above and beyond the need to combat its own jihadis, Russia did not wish to see the Syrian government being overthrown by jihadi-led insurgents. Besides, some observers noted that the Russian initiative also might have been intended to reduce the tensions between Russia and the European Union and the United States because of Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimea and the ongoing unrest in eastern Ukraine.⁶

The United States and NATO protested against the Russian airstrikes and remained committed to regime change in Syria.⁷ Turkey protested as well and on November 24 shot down a Russian Su-24 fighter-bomber.⁸ As international tensions increased, it was easy to forget that the threat from Russian-speaking jihadis was real. Many of them had links with the Caucasus Emirate, a terrorist group in the North Caucasus founded by Doku Umarov.

Introduction

Doku Umarov (1964-2013), also known as Dokka Umarov and later Abu Usman, was the founder and leader of the Caucasus Emirate. An ethnic Chechen, he, like many North Caucasian jihadis, experienced an ideological slide from secularism and separatism to jihadism. Umarov personally described how he took up jihad, with the help of a relative, from a fully secular background in organized crime—stepping out of his luxury car, smoking cigarettes, and not knowing even how to pray.

From this unlikely beginning, Umarov rose to become the founder and leader of the Caucasus Emirate in 2007, when he declared jihad on all those conducting war against Muslims or their religion. In 2011, he announced that the days when he dreamed about an independent Chechnya were over; instead, he would liberate all Muslims in Russia. In effect, Umarov acknowledged that he had once been a nationalist but this was in the past. His evolution toward jihadism, clumsy as it might have been, had then reached its closing stage. In 2013, Umarov proclaimed the Caucasus Emirate's purpose was solely global jihad. Although Umarov made his statement in Russian, his organization made a

1 Reuters, "Russia begins Syria air strikes in its biggest Mideast intervention in decades," October 1, 2015.

2 Pervyy kanal, Novosti (News), September 18, 2015.

3 Reuters, "Russian airliner with 224 aboard crashes in Egypt's Sinai, all killed," October 31, 2015; FSB press release, November 17, 2015.

4 Reuters, "Timeline of Paris attacks according to public prosecutor," November 14, 2015.

5 Sputnik News, November 17, 2015.

6 *New York Times*, September 16, 2015.

7 *New York Times*, September 30, 2015; *Wall Street Journal*, October 8, 2015.

8 *Washington Post*, November 24, 2015.

point of providing an English summary of his speech through its English-language website, and the summary highlighted this part of his message so that the world would take note.

Most of what we know about Umarov is based on primary sources relating to his life, predominantly those published online by his followers.⁹ These sources can be divided into three general categories. For the early history of Umarov's life, we have to rely chiefly on news sources and in particular those that offer details from the criminal investigations of Umarov during his time in organized crime. Although these news reports are secondary sources, they at times cite information from court proceedings, which, when the crimes were of a non-political nature, probably come as close to contemporary primary sources as are likely to be found.

For information on Umarov's political life and terrorist activities, we have an abundant supply of primary sources in the form of statements, commentaries, and memoirs published in Russian and sometimes English on the Caucasus Emirate's dedicated website, Kavkaz Center, and other associated websites such as Hunafa, the website of the organization's Ingushetiyan Province, and Islamdin, the website of the United province of Kabarda, Balkariya, and Karachai. Kavkaz Center is one of the longest-running, best designed, and most stable websites in the history of jihadist agitation and radicalization. While some may argue that permitting the continued existence of Kavkaz Center is not sensible from a counterterrorism perspective as it continually encourages young Muslims to join terrorist groups, it is a boon for the historian because it preserves most statements by North Caucasian jihadis since the late 1990s.¹⁰

Finally, there is the traditional hagiography of the kind that grows around every long-lasting jihadist leader. In Umarov's case, his chief hagiographer was Abu Saad Said Buryatskiy (real name Alexander Tikhomirov, 1982-2010). Said Buryatskiy was a half-Russian raised as a Buddhist in Buryatia, who converted to Islam. Having studied radical Islamic theology in Egypt (Cairo) and elsewhere, reportedly Yemen or Kuwait, from 2002 to 2005, he moved to the Caucasus in May 2008 and joined the Caucasus Emirate, where he quickly became one of its major ideologues.¹¹ Said Buryatskiy related several stories of Umarov's feats in battle, leadership skills, and personal piety. Some of the stories include what appear to be genuine pieces of information on Umarov's personal life and thoughts. However, Said Buryatskiy only met Umarov late in life and much of what he wrote about Umarov's early career appears less than credible when compared to information from contemporary sources.

9 Although there are plenty of news summaries of Umarov's life, only one notable scholarly biography was previously published: Kevin Daniel Leahy, "From Racketeer to Emir: A Political Portrait of Doku Umarov, Russia's Most Wanted Man," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 4:3 (2010), pp. 248-270. Leahy's biography ends with Umarov's proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate in 2007.

10 The Kavkaz Center website was founded in 1999 by Movladi Udugov (b. 1962), who is another example of the ideological slide from secularism and separatism to jihadism. Udugov was the press secretary of the Chechen separatist government. In 1996, he was appointed First Deputy Prime Minister for state policy and information by Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, a radical promoter of Islamic extremism. Then, in 1999, Udugov created Kavkaz Center, Chechen Times, and several other websites. Shortly thereafter, at the outbreak of the 1999 war, he left Chechnya for Turkey but retained control of the websites. Udugov has since remained an ardent promoter of jihadism. His websites are accessed most easily through www.kavkazcenter.com. Kavkaz Center is a fairly large jihadist site. It is frequently updated with news and is professionally designed for ease of navigation. The web domain name was first registered in Udugov's name through an address in Turkey. Originally based in Chechnya, the site moved when the Chechen separatist government lost control of its capital, Grozny. The website first relocated to Estonia, then to Lithuania in 2003. In September-October 2004, the website was based briefly in Finland. On November 13, 2004, it reopened from Sweden. By then, it had already become devoted to global jihad. Udugov was supported by relatives in Sweden and Canada in his web activities. The Kavkaz Center website currently serves as the mouthpiece of the Caucasus Emirate, operates from several Western countries, and is published in five languages: Russian, English, Ukrainian, Arabic, and Turkish. The content differs depending on the language chosen, but all its sites promote hatred toward Russia and the West and frequently serve as platforms for communiqués from international jihadist groups, in particular the Caucasus Emirate for which the website operates as a dedicated news agency. It has also offered extensive translations from the works of al-Qa'ida's *Inspire* online publication, including from the works of Anwar al-Awlaki. Kavkaz Center is on Twitter as well. Michael Fredholm, "Daydreams and Nightmares: Dreaming of Al-Qaeda and the Once and Future Caliphate—Extremist Narratives on Globalised Islam," Anita Sengupta and Suchandana Chatterjee (eds.), *Globalizing Geographies: Perspectives from Eurasia* (New Delhi: KW Publishers, 2015), pp. 131-56, on pp. 138-139. While Kavkaz Center retains a large archive, it would be incorrect to say that all statements have been retained. Certain statements that can be regarded as unfavorable to Udugov have been deleted.

11 See, for example, news site Rosbalt, March 5, 2010; Kavkaz Center, March 7, 2010, citing Hunafa, now defunct.

In particular, the stories of Umarov's personal piety remain impossible to verify, and there are reasons to believe that perhaps Umarov's religious thoughts were not quite as pure as could be desired by a jihadist theologian.

Umarov the Young Racketeer

Doku Khamatovich Umarov was born in Kharsenoy in the present Shatoy (then Sovetskiy) district of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR on May 12, 1964.¹² He was an ethnic Chechen, born to the *teip* (clan) Mulkoy. His father, Khamat Umarov (c. 1935 - c. 2007) had several children, including at least five sons (Isa, Ruslan, Akhmad, Doku, and Vakha) and apparently at least three daughters.¹³ There is nothing to suggest that the Umarov family was very different from most other Soviet families, many of which were becoming increasingly secular as the Soviet Union introduced industrialization and a Western education system. For instance, Khamat Umarov gave two of his sons Muslim names (Isa and Akhmad), another two traditional Chechen names (Doku and Vakha), and one son and one daughter Russian names (Ruslan and Natalya). Doku Umarov later described his family as being part of the Soviet intelligentsia, and there is no information to contradict this claim.¹⁴

Following middle school, Umarov attended higher vocational education in construction, graduating from the Grozny Petroleum Institute.¹⁵ However, he turned to crime as a young man. At some point in the 1980s, according to some as early as 1981,¹⁶ he was convicted under Article 106 of the 1960 RSFSR Criminal Code (manslaughter). Freed from prison, Umarov started a small business, Tyumen-Agda F-4, that dealt with construction materials in Tyumen Oblast together with his cousin, Musa Atayev, nicknamed "Mosol." The use of such non-standard nicknames suggests that he was a regular member of a criminal group. Umarov began to call himself commercial director of the company. According to police information, in July 1992 Umarov and Atayev had a dispute with two men who lived in the village of Patrushevo. Umarov and Atayev made their way into the house of one of the men. There they found the man's father, Alexander Subbotin. The two Chechens shot and wounded Subbotin with a pistol (he survived), then killed his wife, Tamara Subbotina, and Oleg Krivoy, a friend of the family. Umarov and Atayev stole whatever valuables they found and made their escape. The police soon identified Umarov and Atayev as the perpetrators, and on July 13, 1992, the Prosecutor's Office of Tyumen Oblast charged Umarov and Atayev *in absentia* under Article 102 of the 1960 RSFSR Criminal Code (premeditated murder under aggravating circumstances). However, by then the two had fled to Chechnya, where due to the ensuing political developments—Chechnya's first president,

12 Interpol, Wanted Persons, n.d.; based on information from the Russian government and a 2000 international arrest warrant. Several sources instead indicate his date of birth as April 13, 1964. See, for example, United Nations Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning al-Qa`ida and associated individuals and entities, Al-Qaida Sanctions List, August 6, 2015, which offers four different dates; U.S. Department of State, Rewards for Justice – Doku Umarov Reward Offer, May 26, 2011. The term district (without a capital D) is used here as a translation of the Soviet and Russian administrative unit *rayon*.

13 Information on Umarov's family is scattered and most of it has been summarized in the Caucasian Knot website, March 18, 2014. Information on Khamat Umarov's daughters is very vague in most cases. One, named Natalya (or possibly Natishat), married a certain Khumaidov; another may have married one Atayev; and a third reportedly named Zaman married an elderly man called Turko Masuyev and might have been one of the older offspring in fact. The name Atayev is common, but it would not be surprising if this were Musa Atayev, a cousin who in the early 1990s worked with Doku Umarov in criminal ventures in Tyumen Oblast (see below) and in the 2000s functioned as Umarov's representative in Istanbul where he was assassinated in February 2009. Kavkaz Center, March 1, 2009. Zaman is known mainly from an interview in IWPR's Caucasus Reporting Service, No. 252, September 8, 2004, after she allegedly was briefly detained in relation to the Beslan attack.

14 Interview with Umarov in mid-June 2005, in Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), July 28, 2005.

15 Press release from the Operations Staff in the Republic of Chechnya, in Grozny-Inform Information Agency, September 21, 2007; Rosbalt, December 22, 2010. Leahy suggests that Umarov instead was a criminal already while in his teens. Leahy, "From Racketeer to Emir," 249. While Umarov certainly turned to crime early, there seems to be no credible information that he spent his late teens in prison, which Leahy suggests, instead of the Grozny Petroleum Institute.

16 *Izvestiya*, March 1, 2004.

Dzhokhar Dudayev (1944-1996), had declared independence—they evaded arrest.¹⁷

Umarov in the First Chechen War

The fact that Umarov was involved in crime was later acknowledged by the Caucasus Emirate and his hagiographer Said Buryatskiy. “Before the first jihad, Abu Usman Doku Umarov was a racketeer in Russia, and this is not a secret to anybody. But when fighting broke out, he went to Chechnya, leaving everything he had behind to take up jihad in the way of Allah. He told me this: ‘When the war began, I came to Chechnya, hearing Dudayev’s call. My distant relative was Hamzat Gelayev, and I immediately went to see him. I arrived in a Mercedes, wearing shoes and with a cigarette in my mouth, and offered my support, to take part in jihad with him. Gelayev looked at me and asked, did I perform Islamic prayer? I answered that I did not, but if necessary, I would learn. He did not want to take me in immediately and sent me to another amir. But later he called for me, and included me in his unit.’”¹⁸

Following this decidedly non-jihadist beginning, Umarov served as a Chechen commander in both Chechen wars before he experienced the ideological slide that also characterized the struggle for Chechen independence itself. In this, Umarov indeed mirrored the story of the rise and fall of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya, so called after the traditional name for the Chechen highlands, the core region for Chechen culture as it is perceived today.

With the decline and fall of Soviet power in 1991, several North Caucasian republics, most of them nominally Muslim and all part of the Russian Federation, declared sovereignty. Chechnya’s first president, Dudayev, went further and declared independence under the name of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya (ChRI).¹⁹ The formation of the Chechen republic was inspired by separatism, not jihadism. However, the Russian leaders could accept the break-up of the Soviet Union—but not the Russian Federation. The opposing Chechen and Russian policies ultimately led to the First Chechen War, which lasted from 1994 to 1996 and during which Dudayev was killed. Chechnya successfully defended its independence, although unrecognized by the international community.²⁰ Sadly, the economic carnage brought about by the war caused the new Chechen president, Aslan Maskhadov (1951-2005), to lose control over parts of Chechnya that subsequently fell under the sway of organized crime, Islamic extremists, and jihadis.²¹

Jihadism arrived in Chechnya in 1995 during the First Chechen War. Already before the war began,

17 Reportedly, the criminal case was closed in 2010 as criminal responsibility allegedly had expired in 2007 under the 15-year statute of limitations. Instead, in 2008, Umarov was charged under Articles 282 (inciting hatred or enmity as well as abasement of human dignity), 208 (organization of an illegal armed formation or participation in it), 209 (banditism), and 210 (organization of a criminal group or participation in it) of the 1996 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. Press release from the Operations Staff in the Republic of Chechnya, in Grozny-Inform Information Agency, September 21, 2007; Rosbalt, December 22, 2010. An interview with Alexander Subbotin appeared in a documentary by the TV station Rossiya in 2007, which was posted on YouTube on March 7, 2012.

18 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009; first published in Hunafa, May 18, 2009, now defunct. Original text: Да, до начала первого джихада Абу Усман Докку Умаров был рэкети́ром в России, и это ни для кого не секрет. Но когда начались боевые действия, он приехал в Чечню, оставив все, что у него было для того, чтобы совершать джихад на пути Аллаха. Он рассказывал мне так: «Когда началась война, я приехал в Чечню, услышав призыв Дудаева. Моим дальним родственником был Хамзат Гелаев, и я сразу отправился к нему. Я приехал к нему на «Мерседесе», в туфлях и с сигаретой во рту и предложил свою помощь, принять участие в джихаде вместе с ним. Но Гелаев посмотрел на меня и спросил, совершаю ли я молитву? - и я ответил, что нет, но если надо, то научусь. Но он не захотел сразу брать меня к себе и направил к другому амиру. Но позже он навел про меня справки, и записал в свой отряд». Umarov’s relative was the Chechen field commander Ruslan “Hamzat” Gelayev (1964-2004). By all contemporary accounts, Umarov had returned to Chechnya already in 1992, not when the war broke out in 1994, so Said Buryatskiy may have embellished what he had been told.

19 In Russian: Chechenskaya Respublika Ichkeriya, ChRI.

20 The literature on the Chechen wars is vast. See, for example, Carlotta Gall and Thomas de Waal, *Chechnya: A Small Victorious War* (London, U.K.: Pan, 1997); Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998); Stasys Knezys and Romanas Sedlickas, *The War in Chechnya* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999).

21 Michael Fredholm, “The Prospects for Genocide in Chechnya and Extremist Retaliation against the West,” *Central Asian Survey* 19:4 (2000), pp. 315-27.

well-funded missionaries from the Middle East, so-called Wahhabites,²² had operated in the Caucasus. The missionaries typically began by setting up mosques and Islamic boarding schools (madrasas), often for orphans. Next, the Wahhabites began to send young people abroad to study, with groups of between 15 to 30 young men going, for instance, to Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, or Jordan. Upon their return, the students would drive from one village to another to propagate the faith among other young people. They would distribute the appropriate literature and call upon Muslims to fight for the purification of Islam and evict the unbelievers from the villages. The Wahhabites then set up local communities that banned music as well as traditional celebrations, weddings, and funeral practices. After war had broken out, the most notable among the Middle Eastern Wahhabites was the commander known as Khattab (1969-2002). He arrived in Chechnya with a small group of foreign jihadis in the spring of 1995. Members of the Khattab group had already fought in places as diverse as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Bosnia as well as Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ingushetiya in the Caucasus. Khattab himself had fought in Afghanistan and Tajikistan since 1988 and possibly Nagorno-Karabakh as well. In Chechnya, he became the main commander of foreign jihadis.²³

There is no evidence that Umarov had much to do with the foreign jihadis at the time. In the First Chechen War, Umarov served in the Chechen special forces regiment *Borz* ("Wolf"), under his relative, field commander Ruslan Gelayev (1964-2004), who in addition was commander of the southwestern front.²⁴ He led a group of fighters in his native Shatoy district.²⁵ Umarov also got married, to Rumisa (Raisa), the daughter of another Chechen field commander, Daud Akhmadov (d. 2001), who was the councilor and close associate of President Dudayev and commander of the southern direction of the southwestern front.²⁶ The couple eventually had four children.²⁷ Akhmadov is widely held to have been involved in kidnappings during and in particular after the war.²⁸ If so, it was hardly surprising that Umarov the racketeer and field commander soon became involved in this business as well, as will be shown.

According to Umarov's later hagiographer Said Buryatskiy, Umarov spent the First Chechen War mostly in Grozny, where he played a very active combat role, personally destroying no less than 23 armored vehicles with presumably an RPG (rocket propelled grenade) launcher. As many as nine of

22 Wahhabism is the dominant Islamic sect in Saudi Arabia, from which many of the missionaries came. In Russia and Central Asia, the term Wahhabite was adopted in the early 1980s by local theologians, ordinary believers, and eventually those in the state structures as well, after which the term—following the dissolution of the Soviet Union—was turned into a derogatory categorization and used fundamentally as a synonym for Islamic extremist. See, for example, Michael Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism as a Political Force in Central Asia: A Comparative Study of Central Asian Extremist Movements* (Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm University, Asian Cultures and Modernity 12, 2006); Michael Fredholm, *Islam and Modernity in Contemporary Central Asia: Religious Faith versus Way of Life* (Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm University, Asian Cultures and Modernity 14, 2007).

23 Igor Dobaev, "Islamic Radicalism in the Northern Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 6 (2000), pp. 76-86, on p. 79. Dobaev refers to newspaper articles including one by Umar ben Ismail, emir of the Wahhabite Jamaat of Urus-Martani. For a biography of Khattab, see Muhammad al-'Ubaydi, *Khattab* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, n.d.).

24 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009; Rosbalt, December 22, 2010. Earlier, the London-based Chechen separatist leader Akhmed Zakayev (b. 1959) had told a different story, claiming that Umarov instead had served under him in his capacity as commander of the southwestern front. Zakayev also claimed that Umarov had been the commanding officer of the Borz regiment. RFE/RL, June 21, 2006. Since this was before Umarov founded the Caucasus Emirate and declared for global jihad, Zakayev may have exaggerated his own importance to and control over Umarov when he provided information to RFE/RL, which would have been easy since he apparently was the RFE/RL's main source of information on Chechnya.

25 *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007.

26 RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007; Rosbalt, December 22, 2010. When his father-in-law Daud Akhmadov died, Umarov assumed command of his unit. Rosbalt, December 22, 2010.

27 Kavkaz Press website, December 12, 2011. Umarov later married a second wife, Zharet Mukhayeva, with whom he had at least two children. In total, Umarov is believed to have had six (or possibly seven) children. Caucasian Knot website, March 18, 2014. Most, or all, of these were eventually taken in, while quite young, by his younger brother Vakha Umarov, who when the tide of war turned against the Umarov family found a safe haven for himself and his brother's six children in Istanbul, Turkey. Thomas Grove, "Interview - Local Chechen officials help rebel chief-brother," Reuters, January 25, 2010.

28 See, for example, ChRI website Waynakh, October 11, 2011.

these he destroyed during the first brutal battle of Grozny in the winter of 1994-1995.²⁹ Regardless of whether this claim is exaggerated, there is no reason to doubt that Umarov took active part in combat operations during the war.

Umarov in Chechen Government Service

After the war, Umarov joined the government structures of then de facto independent Chechnya. He had been appointed brigadier general in 1996 by the first President of Chechnya, Dudayev, and was decorated with the highest decorations of the ChRI, “Къоман сий” (Honor of the Nation) and “Къоман тупнал” (Hero of the Nation). He had also received a personal weapon from President Dudayev.³⁰ In June 1997, the new president, Maskhadov, appointed Umarov secretary, and head, of Chechnya’s Committee for State Security, an office directly under the President with the task to lead the republic’s intelligence and security service.³¹ From November 1997, Umarov at the same time was also head of the headquarters tasked to coordinate the fight against organized crime. This was akin to appointing the fox to guard the henhouse. Already in 1998, a few months after Umarov’s appointment, Maskhadov removed his new security chief from all posts because of Umarov’s involvement in kidnappings and in an attack on officials of the Chechen Public Prosecutor’s office.³² Umarov’s hagiographer, Said Buryatskiy, much later instead claimed that Umarov had tried to leave his post, but Maskhadov had then refused to sign the decree of his dismissal.³³ It does indeed seem likely that Maskhadov fired Umarov, although the fact that Umarov had strong backers may have made it difficult to enforce the order. Besides, for whatever reasons, Maskhadov had to tolerate the criminal activities of his subordinates.³⁴ After all, this was in the period when Chechnya gradually fell under the sway of criminals, Islamic extremists, and jihadis. There was at least no reason for Maskhadov to believe that Umarov was betraying him. Bereft of any foreign support except that of radical Muslims, Maskhadov struggled to assert secular rule—and eventually failed.

Umarov was not yet a jihadi. By late 1997, he had not yet grown either mustache or beard. He was reportedly quite belligerent, including at times toward President Maskhadov, but there are no contemporary reports yet that he was particularly pious.³⁵ However, he may have been set on this path by Ruslan Gelayev, his relative and mentor. Gelayev worked with Khattab and grew increasingly extreme in his religious beliefs. In addition, he became close to the increasingly radical Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev (1952-2004), who between 1996 and 1997 served as acting president of Chechnya, before the election of Maskhadov. Yandarbiyev appointed Gelayev deputy prime minister in April 1997. After the First Chechen War, Gelayev went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, took the Arabic name Hamzat, and also visited

29 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009. Said Buryatskiy is weak on technical details and might equally well have meant another type of grenade launcher, but the RPG is the most likely weapon.

30 *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007.

31 The appointment took place on June 1, 1997. Kavkaz Center, September 6, 2011; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007. Some referred to Umarov’s post as Secretary of the Security Council (секретарь совета безопасности). *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; Rosbalt, March 31, 2008. Others referred to it as Secretary of the Committee for State Security, that is, the equivalent of the Soviet KGB (секретарь комитета госбезопасности). Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009. Either way, Umarov led what in effect was Chechnya’s intelligence and security service, and he reported directly to the president, Maskhadov.

32 *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007; Rosbalt, March 31, 2008. The information ultimately derived from the Russian special services.

33 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009.

34 See, for example, Vyacheslav Izmailov, “The Drama Behind ‘Nord-Ost,’” *Perspective* 13: 2 (2002). Izmailov, a military observer for *Novaya Gazeta*, was a former officer of the Soviet and Russian army and a veteran of Afghanistan and the First Chechen War who from 1996 onward negotiated the freeing of hostages.

35 Interview with Vyacheslav Izmailov, Voice of America, February 8, 2011. See also Vyacheslav Izmailov, in *Novaya Gazeta*, January 31, 2002.

the World Muslim Congress in Pakistan in February 1998.³⁶ According to Said Buryatskiy, Umarov followed Gelayev to Pakistan, where they met with radical jihadis.³⁷ Although no other source seems to describe Umarov's visit to Pakistan, Said Buryatskiy's story is plausible, since Pakistan then gathered large numbers of radical Muslims in its project to support the Afghan Taliban government.³⁸

Nevertheless, during the interwar period, Chechnya was plagued by kidnappings. Umarov was held responsible for several kidnappings from late 1996 onwards, along with the then better known Arbi Barayev (1974–2001), whose criminal activities and support to anti-government jihadis was a major cause of the general lawlessness that gradually undermined the Maskhadov government.³⁹ The most notable kidnapping for which Umarov was among those held responsible was the abduction in March 1999 of General Gennadiy Shpigun, the Special Representative of the Russian Interior Ministry to Chechnya, for whose release the kidnappers demanded 15 million dollars.⁴⁰ Umarov was not the one who subsequently held Shpigun; this was a field commander named Baudin Bakuyev (d. 2000), linked to Barayev.⁴¹ However, although Umarov may not have participated personally in the kidnappings (and he claimed that there was no evidence that he had⁴²), he was in an excellent position to act in the role of *krysha* ("roof"), the common term within Russian-speaking organized crime for a high-ranking or influential individual who can offer protection against law enforcement investigation and the actions of other criminal groups. Umarov later appears to have known sufficiently about the fate of Shpigun to be able to point out his grave.

Said Buryatskiy's jihadist hagiography does not mention kidnappings and other criminal activities in the interwar period. By then, he claimed, Umarov had already transformed into a jihadist commander, eagerly preparing for the next war. Umarov organized a training camp in Kharsenoy, procured weapons and ammunition in the arms markets, recovered and renovated abandoned Russian howitzers, AGS automatic grenade launchers, DShK machine guns, and BTR armored fighting vehicles.⁴³ While the pious motivation for this attributed by Said Buryatskiy may be questionable, the hoarding of weapons in preparation for further conflict need not be.

Umarov in the Second Chechen War

By the end of the 1990s, Chechen president Maskhadov was rapidly losing control. Crime was abundant, and Islamic extremists grew increasingly powerful. A similar process was underway in neighboring Dagestan, another Russian North Caucasian republic with a Muslim population that was susceptible to Wahhabite preachings. In August 1999, Khattab and his Chechen associate Shamil Basayev (1965–2006) spearheaded and assumed control over a Wahhabite uprising in Dagestan. This soon turned into a full-scale Chechen jihadist invasion of Dagestan. The resulting fighting ultimately provoked a Russian invasion of Chechnya and the Second Chechen War, which independent Chechnya

36 Cerwyn Moore, "The Tale of Ruslan Gelayev: Understanding the International Dimensions of the Chechen Wars," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, May 28, 2008. Moore downplays some events in Gelayev's life, including the Kodori episode, which makes some of the conclusions less persuasive. On the visit to Pakistan, see Valery Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 182.

37 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009.

38 Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, in this order, had recognized the Taliban Emirate of Afghanistan in May 1997, and the Taliban government in turn recognized the separatist government of Chechnya in January 2000. AFP, May 25, 1997 (Pakistan's recognition of the Taliban Emirate on May 25); *The News International*, May 27, 1997 (Saudi Arabia's recognition of the Taliban on May 26); AFP, May 28, 1997 (UAE's recognition, last of the three); Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, June 1, 2000 (Taliban recognition of Chechnya).

39 Vyacheslav Izmailov in *Novaya Gazeta*, July 22, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007; Rosbalt, March 31, 2008.

40 RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007. General Shpigun was abducted on March 5, 1999, at Grozny Severnyy Airport.

41 Vyacheslav Izmailov in *Novaya Gazeta*, March 18, 2002.

42 Interview with Umarov in mid-June 2005, in RFE/RL, July 28, 2005.

43 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009.

lost.⁴⁴ The ChRI collapsed and since then only remains as a government in exile. Although at first largely secular, the perceived lost cause of the ChRI caused many of its former supporters to abandon the lost, secular struggle for independence and instead turn toward the cause of radical Islam.

Umarov certainly participated in the Second Chechen War, but sources differ on what part he played. Said Buryatskiy related that Umarov already in August 1999 led his unit in support of the fighters in the Tsumadinskiy district of Dagestan, that is, took part in Khattab's and Basayev's jihadist invasion. Umarov was also said to have participated in the second incursion into Dagestan in September 1999, where he reportedly employed heavy equipment, if so presumably his artillery or BTR armored fighting vehicles, in the Novolaksk district.⁴⁵

However, Khattab's and Basayev's invasion failed. When the Chechens had been driven out of Dagestan, Russian forces in return invaded Chechnya. Umarov definitely took part in the desperate winter 1999-2000 defense of Grozny. As the city fell to the Russians, the Chechen fighters dispersed. Umarov was among those who escaped, in January⁴⁶ or February 2000,⁴⁷ but during the retreat, he was seriously wounded. According to a tale later published by Said Buryatskiy, Umarov got into a minefield, where an exploding mine damaged his leg to the extent that he never again walked normally.⁴⁸ Even though Umarov, in an interview, denied that he had suffered any leg wound,⁴⁹ he was indeed wounded. Shards from an explosion struck his head, shattering his jaw. Said Buryatskiy described the situation as desperate, without access to medical care.⁵⁰

Yet Umarov survived. Seriously wounded, he was taken to a hospital, where his medical treatment was extensive. Artificial teeth and a jaw were installed.⁵¹ Umarov was later described as having lost part of the tongue in the explosion, for which he suffered a speech defect.⁵² With such serious wounds, Umarov was lucky to get proper treatment. According to Said Buryatskiy, Umarov escaped into Georgia, where he received extensive medical treatment.⁵³

This is unlikely, and in fact contemporary witnesses told quite a different story. Russian sources later related that in late February 2000⁵⁴ Umarov was treated in a hospital in Nalchik in southern Russia via a deal with the Russian security service FSB facilitated by officers from the MVD (Interior Ministry, which includes the police). In exchange for medical treatment, Umarov disclosed the fate and burial place of the kidnapped General Shpigun (whose grave was indeed found on March 31, 2000), ordered or negotiated the release of several Polish and French hostages, and provided certain other services (which were not described but may have included the betrayal and handing over of a former comrade

44 See, for example, Michael Fredholm, "The Prospects for Genocide in Chechnya and Extremist Retaliation against the West," *Central Asian Survey* 19:4 (2000), pp. 315-27.

45 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009.

46 Vyacheslav Izmailov, "The Drama Behind 'Nord-Ost,'" *Perspective* 13:2 (2002); Vyacheslav Izmailov, in *Novaya Gazeta*, July 22, 2006.

47 *Novaya Gazeta*, September 17, 2001.

48 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009. In fact, it was Basayev who stepped on a mine during the January 2000 retreat from Grozny, suffering a wound that ultimately cost him his foot and part of his leg. Said Buryatskiy may have borrowed the story for dramatic effect.

49 Umarov explained that his last leg wound had occurred in 1995, in effect dispelling the dramatic effect of Said Buryatskiy's tale. Umarov no doubt realized that Said Buryatskiy's exaggeration looked bad since so many already knew that it was Basayev who had suffered the grievous leg wound. Interview with Umarov, Prague Watchdog, July 4, 2009.

50 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009.

51 Ibid.

52 United Nations Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning al-Qa`ida and associated individuals and entities, Al-Qaida Sanctions List, August 6, 2015.

53 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, July 24, 2009.

54 *Novaya Gazeta*, September 17, 2001.

fighter and kidnapper, Salautdin Temirbulatov⁵⁵). After medical treatment, Umarov was allowed to go, or at least managed to avoid arrest. He then went to Georgia.⁵⁶

Umarov was not alone in seeking refuge in Georgia. Many Chechen refugees and fighters fled across the border into Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, which already contained an indigenous population of ethnic Chechens known as Kists with only limited contacts with the rest of Georgia. In December 2000, a Russian press conference gave the information that Umarov was among those Chechen leaders who had taken refuge in the Pankisi Gorge.⁵⁷ Among them was also Umarov's relative and mentor, Gelayev.⁵⁸

Umarov in the Turmoil after the War

The Pankisi Gorge already served as a major transit channel for smuggling across the Georgian-Russian border. Some of the smuggled goods constituted supplies and particularly money for the Chechen jihadis.⁵⁹ But more was going on in the Pankisi Gorge than mere smuggling. Senior Georgian state officials were involved in illicit activities in the Gorge, receiving payments from Chechen field commanders in order for them to be able to maintain the training camps used by Chechen and foreign, primarily Arab, fighters. At the same time, there was evidence of drug trafficking in the Pankisi Gorge.⁶⁰

At the time, the Pankisi Gorge also hosted an al-Qa`ida terrorist cell. This was the hub of the international poison cell network, which U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell brought to light in his presentation to the United Nations in February 2003.⁶¹ There is little doubt that Gelayev, Umarov, and the group around the al-Qa`ida cell knew of each other. The Pankisi Gorge covered a relatively small geographical territory and was even known locally as Pankisistan because of the presence since the 1990s of men such as Gelayev, Khattab, and other jihadis (and indeed remains being called so).⁶²

Umarov likely remained in the Pankisi Gorge for at least a year until some point in 2001. In 2001 and 2002, many Chechen fighters returned to Chechnya from Georgia, where some had lived in the Gorge and others in the capital, Tbilisi. By the end of 2002, after the Chechen hostage-taking in the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow (see below), Georgia began to apply pressure on the Chechen fighters who had taken refuge there, in fact extraditing a few to Russia. This was a direct threat to Umarov's operations, and he reportedly sent a letter to a newspaper, in which he warned of violence in Georgia if more fighters were extradited to Russia.⁶³ It is unknown whether Umarov himself remained in Georgia at the time. According to Said Buryatskiy, Umarov was one of the first to return to Chechnya (but certainly not the first since he was still recuperating at the time), together with an admirably

55 Temirbulatov was arrested in March 2000 and sentenced to prison for several murders and kidnappings in 2001. Robyn Dixon, "Russia Convicts Chechen Rebel Commander Shown in Taped Execution," *Los Angeles Times*, February 16, 2001. For the attribution of Temirbulatov's arrest to the information provided by Umarov, see Vyacheslav Izmailov, "The Drama Behind 'Nord-Ost,'" *Perspective* 13:2 (2002).

56 Vyacheslav Izmailov, in *Novaya Gazeta*, July 22, 2006; interview with Vyacheslav Izmailov, Voice of America, February 8, 2011; Marina Perevozkina, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, September 19, 2010, referring to an interview with the late GRU Lieutenant Colonel Anton Surikov, who had known Basayev in 1992 during the war in Abkhazia. On Surikov, see an interview with him by news agency Stringer, July 10, 2002. On Shpigun's grave, see *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 16, 2000.

57 *Kommersant*, February 5, 2005, citing a December 6, 2000, press conference with Sergei Yastrzhembskiy, then President Vladimir Putin's chief spokesperson.

58 News website NewsRu, March 26, 2002.

59 Colleen M. Traughber, "Terror-Crime Nexus? Terrorism and Arms, Drugs, and Human Trafficking in Georgia," *Connections* 6:1 (2007), pp. 47-63, on p. 48 and p. 58. Traughber cites the Director of the Police Academy, Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

60 Traughber, p. 57. Traughber cites the head of the Counterterrorism Center, Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Counter-Trafficking Program Officer, International Organization for Migration.

61 U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, Address to the United Nations Security Council, February 5, 2003.

62 Aleksey Mukhranov, tourist website Грузия для всех, July 2013.

63 IWPR'S Caucasus Reporting Service, No. 159, December 12, 2002.

heavily-armed unit of 20 men, including four with grenade launchers (presumably RPG), four with machine guns, and four snipers. However, the 2002-2003 winter was very difficult, and some of the fighters abandoned the struggle and moved to Europe to claim asylum.⁶⁴

It would get worse. The Muslim world was forgetting the Caucasus. With all attention focused on Afghanistan and, from 2003, even more so Iraq, neither funding nor volunteers were as plentiful as in the past. This was later described vividly by the Ansar al-Mujahideen English Forum website: "Since the Crusaders launched their brutal war of terror on Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in March 2003 the eyes of the Ummah [Muslim community] have moved away from Chechnya and the Caucasus, who have continued to suffer from an assault which at least equals the brutality of the ones launched on Iraq and Afghanistan. . . . And so, following the Crusader invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the number of Muhajireen waging Jihad in the Caucasus decreased, as the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan were closer, and easier to reach. The flow of zakat [funding] from the pious Muslim masses also switched to these new directions, and away from the Caucasus."⁶⁵

The lack of funding posed a serious difficulty for what little remained of the ChRI. Chechen President Maskhadov had little in common with Khattab and the jihadis. Yet, support from the West was not forthcoming. Since the ChRI never received any real international support, nor political recognition, its government had to accept whatever support was available, and such as it was came from Muslims, in particular of the Arabian Peninsula. Islamic extremists accordingly gained increasing power and influence, and in similarity to what happened to many other separatist movements in Muslim regions, the jihadis in time hijacked the struggle for independence and transformed it into a jihad for a religious state.

The turning point came during an expanded July-August 2002 meeting of the ChRI government, presumably the first consolidated meeting since it had been driven out of Grozny. Both President Maskhadov and Basayev attended. During the meeting, the jihadis gained control. A new order based on sharia was introduced on July 4, 2002, and a new governing body with an Arabic name, the Majlis ul-Shura, was established in accordance with sharia. The ChRI constitution was amended as well to bring it in line with sharia.⁶⁶

Since his return in 2001, Umarov had been commander of the southwestern front.⁶⁷ In conjunction with the ChRI government meeting in August 2002, Maskhadov appointed Umarov commander of the western front.⁶⁸ Umarov was also made a member of the Majlis ul-Shura.⁶⁹ He remained in these posts until March 2004, when he additionally declared himself the successor of the late Gelayev, who had been killed, and assumed control of the units in the Achkhoy-Martan, Urus-Martan, and Shatoy

64 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, July 24, 2009. As usual, Said Buryatskiy is poor on technical details. He presumably meant the RPG but might have meant the AGS.

65 Ansar al-Mujahideen English Forum, "Announcing the Start of a new Campaign in Support of the Caucasus Emirate," December 4, 2010, posted on the Russian-language Al-Ansar website and various others and preserved by Jihadology. The Russian-language Al-Ansar website (now defunct) was created in July 2010 in a partnership between Islamdin and the international jihadist website Ansar al-Mujahidin. Islamdin, July 20, 2010.

66 Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 40-41. See, for example, the message from Maskhadov, Kavkaz Center, March 8, 2010; Kavkaz Center, September 6, 2011. Although we know little about Maskhadov's genuine feelings about sharia at that point in time, there is little doubt that the process by then in any case was unstoppable. Maskhadov's widow, Kusama Maskhadova, soon after the Kavkaz Center publication of a message from her late husband published a response in the form of her memories from the time. However, she said nothing about her husband's views on sharia. Kusama Maskhadova, "The Other Side of the Coin: Intrigues Behind the Scenes," Chechen Press, April 19, 2010.

67 Said Buryatskiy, Kavkaz Center, July 24, 2009; statement from Umarov, Kavkaz Center, August 30, 2011.

68 Kavkaz Center, August 1, 2004. Subsequently, this position was widely reported. See, for example, *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007; Rosbalt, March 31, 2008; interview with the aforementioned Vyacheslav Izmailov, Voice of America, February 8, 2011.

69 Statement from Umarov, Kavkaz Center, August 30, 2011.

districts.⁷⁰ From that point onward, Umarov was a rising star. In August 2004, President Maskhadov again appointed him head of the ChRI security service, and in May 2005, Maskhadov's successor as ChRI President, Abdul-Halim Sadulayev (1966-2006), confirmed Umarov's position as commander of the western front. Umarov held the post as head of the security service until June 2005 concurrently with the position of brigadier and front commander.⁷¹

By then, his methods had increasingly become those of terrorism, although kidnappings too remained part of his repertoire. Umarov was, for instance, among those held responsible for the December 2002 kidnapping of Nadezhda Pogosova and Alexei Klimov, two employees of the (Moscow-loyal) Chechen Public Prosecutor's office.⁷²

However, there is no evidence that Umarov was involved in the October 2002 hostage-taking in the Dubrovka Theater in southern Moscow. A unit of mostly Chechens, linked to Basayev and including many women, took close to a thousand civilian hostages. An estimated 130 people were killed during the rescue attempt by Russian security forces.⁷³ Nor is there any reason to connect Umarov with the subsequent use of female suicide bombers, so-called black widows, in Moscow in July 2003 when two women exploded bombs during a rock concert at Tushino in Moscow.⁷⁴

Instead, Umarov was likely involved in various attacks in the North Caucasus, including the September 2003 explosion of two bombs planted under the railway line between Kislovodsk and Mineralnyye Vody, which killed seven and injured more than 50 people, and the bombing soon after of the Ingushetiyan FSB building in Magas, which killed three and injured more than 20 people.⁷⁵ He was also likely involved in the attack on Nazran in Ingushetiya in June 2004 and the attack on Grozny in August the same year.⁷⁶ Umarov may have been involved in the September 2004 hostage-taking in a school in Beslan in North Ossetiya. At Beslan, the terrorists took more than a thousand hostages, the majority of them children. In excess of 300 hostages, more than half of them children, were killed in the siege.⁷⁷ The real planner of the attack on the school was Basayev, who also claimed responsibility for it.⁷⁸ Although Umarov reportedly was identified by one of the child hostages at Beslan,⁷⁹ there is

70 *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007.

71 Kavkaz Web, May 9, 2006. As usual, sources differ on what President Maskhadov by then called his security service. This is hardly surprising: the Maskhadov government lived on the road and had no real permanent structures of the kind that had existed in independent Chechnya. Russian sources referred to Umarov's new post as either director of the national security service (директор Службы национальной безопасности ЧРИ, SNB) or minister of state security (министр госбезопасности Ичкерии, MGB). *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007.

72 *Novyye Izvestiya*, November 17, 2003. Pogosova and Klimov were abducted on the road from Grozny to Mozdok airport on December 27, 2002, and freed during the night between November 13 and 14, 2003.

73 The literature on the October 23-26, 2002, Dubrovka terrorist attack is vast, since so many hostages died. See, for example, John B. Dunlop, *The 2002 Dubrovka and 2004 Beslan Hostage Crises: A Critique of Russian Counter-Terrorism* (Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem, 2006). However, the Western literature mainly focuses on the Russian handling, or bungling, of the crisis and appears to downplay that Basayev's men deliberately took civilians hostage.

74 See, for example, Michael Fredholm, "The New Face of Chechen Terrorism," *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst*, September 2003 (Johns Hopkins University); Anne Speckhard et al., "Research Note: Observations of Suicidal Terrorists in Action," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16:2 (2004), pp. 305-27.

75 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, September 22, 2004; RFE/RL, September 15, 2003; *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007. The railway bombing occurred on September 3, 2003, and the Magas bombing took place on September 15, 2003.

76 RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007. The attack on Nazran in Ingushetiya took place on June 22, 2004, and the attack on Grozny on August 21, 2004.

77 The literature on the September 1-3, 2004, Beslan terrorist attack on in School No. 1 is vast since so many hostages were killed. Of the 1,128 hostages, as many as 317, including 186 children, were killed. See, for example, John B. Dunlop, *The 2002 Dubrovka and 2004 Beslan Hostage Crises: A Critique of Russian Counter-Terrorism* (Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem, 2006); John B. Dunlop, *The September 2004 Beslan Terrorist Incident: New Findings* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, CDDRL Working Paper 115, July 2009). However, again most of the Western literature focuses on the Russian handling, or bungling, of the crisis and appears to downplay that Basayev's men deliberately took civilians, including children, hostage.

78 Statement published by Kavkaz Center, September 17, 2004.

79 *Izvestiya*, September 4, 2004.

actually little reason to link him to the attack. Neither Umarov nor his hagiographer Said Buryatskiy ever commented on the identification. Whether this was because Umarov was not involved or whether this sordid affair did not befit the image of someone who would become Emir, remains unknown. However, one thing that points against his involvement was that President Maskhadov, who spoke out against the Beslan attack, had again appointed Umarov head of the ChRI security service. Clearly, Maskhadov trusted Umarov, and there seems to be little reason to believe that either Maskhadov, who was killed early the following year, or Umarov, had been in favor of the Beslan attack.

Umarov as Vice President and President of ChRI

The death of Maskhadov in March 2005 was a turning point in the war since he had been the only Chechen leader who might have been able to represent the ChRI as a reasonably credible negotiation partner, if negotiations with Russia ever took place. His death also led to calls for retaliation. In May 2005, Doku Umarov announced that his men would begin small- and large-scale operations beyond Chechnya, something he claimed had been avoided earlier due to the insistence of Maskhadov.⁸⁰ This was, strictly speaking, untrue since Maskhadov had stated already in 2004 that they would carry out military operations in Russia itself.⁸¹ The new emphasis was perhaps most clearly articulated by Maskhadov's successor Sadulayev, who in May 2005 decreed the setting up of six fronts: four within Chechnya, one in Dagestan, and one for the rest of the North Caucasus.⁸²

On June 2, 2005, Sadulayev also appointed Umarov vice president of the ChRI. In addition, Umarov retained the post of head of the ChRI security service.⁸³

In fact, Umarov later claimed that Maskhadov had already made arrangements in his last will for Umarov to become vice president in the case of Maskhadov's death since Sadulayev then would become president. This is likely to be correct and not merely a self-serving statement for the following reasons. Maskhadov had a very secular background. Certainly he was under constant pressure from the jihadist leaders to adopt sharia, and his later statements include a number of Islamic references. Yet there is no real evidence for him ever becoming a genuine Wahhabite or jihadi. Maskhadov had to tolerate the jihadist excesses of Basayev because of the power wielded by the jihadis and because the only funding available came from jihadist sources in the Arabian Peninsula. Maskhadov no doubt feared that Basayev would take charge and proclaim an emirate as soon as he was dead, and he had to take precautions against this eventuality or the hope for Western support would be irrevocably lost. Umarov too testified that Maskhadov had continued to hope for Western support until the very end, despite his then frequent Islamist statements. Umarov claimed to have discussed the situation at length with Maskhadov. According to Umarov, Maskhadov had based his policy to confront those who firmly insisted on Islamicization on the situation in the world and matters of politics, still hoping for support from the West against Russia. Certainly Maskhadov had been disappointed in the lack of Western response. According to Umarov, Maskhadov had said that in his heart, "he knew the value of all these Western leaders." Umarov also wanted to testify that Maskhadov was "a true Muslim brother and he loved Islam." And for this reason, Umarov claimed, Maskhadov had chosen Sadulayev in 2002 as his deputy (*naib*) and successor, and at the same time, in case of his death and Sadulayev's succession, chosen Umarov as Sadulayev's deputy (*naib*) and successor. Umarov understood the reason for this choice as follows: "Why did Aslan [Maskhadov] choose me, why did he build this chain? Because my beliefs were still not firmly decided, even though I knew the value of the unbelievers. Aslan knew of my relationship with [Akhmed] Zakayev and therefore hoped that this line could still try to establish some sort of process through which the West would ease the plight of the people. For this reason

80 Chechen Press, May 9, 2005.

81 Kavkaz Center, August 1, 2004.

82 RFE/RL, June 21, 2006, citing Chechen Press, June 17, 2006.

83 *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007.

I was chosen Abdul-Halim [Sadulayev]’s naib.”⁸⁴ In other words, Maskhadov had to compromise with the jihadis by first appointing as his successor Sadulayev, since 2002 the Chairman of the Majlis ul-Shura Sharia Committee and head of the ChRI Sharia Court,⁸⁵ then making Sadulayev promise to name Umarov as *his* successor.

It was not strange that Maskhadov chose his head of intelligence as eventual successor. As late as 2002, Umarov was by his own admission still not very clear on the religious imperatives for the war. Umarov (later, when already Emir) explained his position at the time of the mid-2002 ChRI government meeting on introducing a sharia system: “At that time, I especially in such things did not go deep, I was not thinking about it. So I [merely] listened as behoove an Emir of the Southwestern Front, a member of the Majlis.”⁸⁶

There had certainly been tensions between Umarov and Basayev on the issue of succession. Umarov later related that the two had discussed which of them would succeed Sadulayev. It was already certain that an emirate would be formed. Umarov referred to a taped message from Sadulayev that an emirate would be formed as soon as negotiations with former ChRI ministers Islam Khalimov and Zakayev concluded and the hope for foreign support exhausted. Both Basayev and Umarov agreed that it was time to establish an emirate.⁸⁷ But, who would become emir? Considering the relative positions of Basayev and Umarov at the time, Basayev was the overall military commander of the ChRI and far better known than Umarov, who simultaneously only led a front and what amounted to the security service. So in effect it was a debate between the military commander-in-chief and the security chief who would become president, a debate which Umarov ultimately won by the mere fact that he outlived his rival. While Basayev possibly might have been satisfied with remaining commander-in-chief under Umarov as president, subsequent events showed that Basayev already made preparations for naming himself the emir of the future emirate. As emir, he would have combined the roles of military and political supreme leader.

Umarov’s rise within the ChRI hierarchy also brought personal repercussions. Although the Beslan attack on schoolchildren in September 2004 was a particularly low point in the long history of vicious acts of revenge and terrorism in the Caucasus, Caucasian power politics had always been personal and vendettas and blood feuds played a role. Akhmad Kadyrov (1951-2004), Chief Mufti of the ChRI during and after the First Chechen War, had joined the Russian side at the outbreak of the Second Chechen War. From July 2000, he acted as head of the pro-Russian Chechen administration and then became president of the (pro-Russian) Chechen Republic on October 5, 2003. However, he was assassinated by a bomb in May 2004. As a result, Kadyrov’s son Ramzan Kadyrov (b. 1976) gradually assumed power in Chechnya. In retaliation for the murder of the elder Kadyrov, several of Umarov’s relatives were abducted and imprisoned. Umarov’s cousin Zaurbek Umarov and nephew Roman Atayev had been seized already in 2003 and 2004 in events not necessarily connected to Umarov personally. In the winter of 2004-2005, Umarov’s aunt and wife’s brother went missing, and he implied that they had been abducted.⁸⁸ In May 2005, pro-Russian forces abducted Umarov’s 70-year-old father, wife, and six-month-old son. Within a few months, Umarov’s brother Ruslan and sister Natalya Khumaidova were abducted, too. According to Chechen websites, all were imprisoned by Ramzan Kadyrov

84 Statement from Umarov, Kavkaz Center, August 30, 2011.

85 See, for example, Kavkaz Center, March 12, 2005.

86 Statement from Umarov, Kavkaz Center, August 30, 2011.

87 Ibid.

88 Interview with Umarov in mid-July 2005, in RFE/RL, July 28, 2005.

in Khosi-Yurt.⁸⁹ Said Buryatskiy later claimed that Umarov's uncle had been abducted as well, but he implied that of all these people, only Umarov's father died in captivity.⁹⁰ The assumption would be that the others were eventually released. Even so, in 2005, Umarov's younger brother Vakha Umarov (b. 1966) found it prudent to move to Istanbul where he found a safe haven for himself and his brother Doku Umarov's six children.⁹¹

Umarov Establishes the Caucasus Emirate

On June 17, 2006, Sadulayev was killed, and Umarov became president of the ChRI.⁹² On June 23, he addressed the nation in a speech published by the U.K.-based website Chechen Press, which was close to Zakayev. In it, Umarov promised that he would form a special unit that would hunt down and kill traitors and Russians whom he regarded as guilty of war crimes against the Chechens. However, Umarov said, like his predecessors he would not condone attacks on civilian targets.⁹³ As for Basayev, he was killed within a month (on July 10, 2006) so there really was no time for serious rivalry to emerge between them. However, by then, the ChRI military formations were formations on paper only, each consisting a few fighters who fought a war that had degenerated into hit-and-run raids and mere terrorism. Besides, the ChRI, with its Chechen nationalist vocabulary, meant little for the jihadis, who were the most motivated fighters. Umarov's western front at the time consisted of only a few dozen fighters, and it was clear that the fighters outside Chechnya would not acknowledge anything but an emirate, that is, complete separation from the international order of nation-states. The ChRI had played out its role as a unifying symbol.⁹⁴ Umarov must have realized this; on July 8, 2006, he decreed the formation of two new military fronts, the Ural front and the Volga front, both deep within European Russia, and also appointed commanders to the new fronts.⁹⁵

Perhaps because of these internal difficulties, Umarov did not really raise his profile as president until October 3, 2007, when he issued a final string of decrees. Among others, he decreed that the late Sadulayev and Basayev would be honored by having districts renamed after them. In addition, Basayev was posthumously promoted to the newly instituted rank of Generalissimo. Finally, the two, together with several other fallen leaders, were decorated with “Къоман сий” (Honor of the Nation). The late Arbi Barayev, responsible for many kidnappings, was honored as well with the posthumous rank of brigadier general and Amir of the Islamic Special Forces Regiment.⁹⁶ Several appointments were also made.⁹⁷ As Umarov's last known acts as president of the ChRI, the decrees gave the impression that he wished to honor old comrades, confirm a number of loyalists in their positions, and placate those who might remain uncertain about him.

Four days later, on October 7, 2007,⁹⁸ Umarov abolished the ChRI and proclaimed the Caucasus

89 See, for example, *Kommersant*, August 19, 2006. There is some confusion on exactly which relatives were abducted; this text relies chiefly on the summary provided by the Caucasian Knot website, March 18, 2014. See also the interview with Umarov in mid-July 2005, in RFE/RL, July 28, 2005. Umarov's words seem to imply that he was aware of the abductions of his father, wife, and son, but he does not describe them as his relatives.

90 Kavkaz Center, May 18, 2009. Khamat Umarov was abducted on May 5, 2005, and reported dead in April 2007, a few months before Umarov proclaimed the Caucasus Emirate. Others claimed that he died already in 2006. Kavkaz Press website, December 12, 2011.

91 See Grove. On Vakha Umarov's year of birth, see Kavkaz Press website, December 12, 2011.

92 Daymohk, June 23, 2006; ChRI website Chechen Press, June 27, 2006.

93 ChRI website Chechen Press, June 27, 2006.

94 Statement from Umarov, Kavkaz Center, August 30, 2011. In fact, Umarov had admitted to certain difficulties in an interview already in April 2006, although he then showed a brave face. Kavkaz Center, April 18, 2006.

95 Decrees by President Umarov published by Kavkaz Center, July 9, 2006.

96 In Russian: Амир Исламского полка особого назначения (ИПОН).

97 Decrees by President Umarov, October 3, 2007, published by Kavkaz Center, October 8, 2007.

98 25 Ramadan 1428, i.e., October 7, 2007. However, the proclamation was only released on November 21, 2007.

Emirate (*Imarat Kavkaz*) as its successor. In a video message directed to the Muslims of the Caucasus, Idel-Ural (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in the Urals), Siberia, and other Muslim regions “occupied” by Russian unbelievers he reminded them of their holy duty to carry out jihad against their enemies and that the religion could only be spread by force of arms. He also listed the new provinces (*wilayah*) of the Caucasus Emirate— Dagestan, Nokhchiycho (Ichkeriya), Ghalghaycho (Ingushetiya), Iriston (Ossetiya), Nogay Steppe (Stavropol region), and the United Kabarda, Balkariya, and Karachai—thus encompassing the entire North Caucasus. He was outspoken that he did not specify the borders of the Emirate, thus leaving open whether Idel-Ural, Siberia, or any other once or presently Muslim region were meant to be included as well.

Umarov did, however, proclaim that when the Caucasus had been liberated from unbelievers, he would go on to liberate all other regions that once had been inhabited by Muslims. His vision encompassed all Muslims, and he reminded his followers that their Muslim brothers currently fought in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Palestine. In effect, he declared jihad on all those who conducted war against Muslims and their religion. The English version of his announcement made this clear: “Today in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Palestine our brothers are fighting. Everyone who attacked Muslims wherever they are are our enemies, common enemies. Our enemy is not Rusnya [a derogative term for Russia] only, but everyone who wages war against Islam and Muslims. And they are our enemies mainly because they are the enemies of Allah.” Thus, Umarov implicitly declared war on the United States, Britain, Israel, and their allies since their soldiers fought in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, and also those who upheld the nation-state against jihadis, including Muslim-majority states. Finally, Umarov outlined his authority: “I am the Emir of the Mujahidin of the Caucasus, being the only legitimate authority in all areas where there are Mujahidin sworn to me as the leader of the Jihad.” This bold statement in effect meant that those who had sworn *bay`a* to him would have to obey his commands even when they were in other parts of the world, including in Europe, Turkey, and (later) Syria and Iraq, something which he may or may not have envisaged upon issuing the proclamation.⁹⁹

In response, the Investigation Department of the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor’s Office of the Chechen Republic opened a new criminal case against Umarov in 2008, under Articles 282 (inciting hatred or enmity, as well as abasement of human dignity), 208 (organization of an illegal armed formation or participation in it), 209 (banditism), and 210 (organization of a criminal group or participation in it) of the 1996 Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁰

The decision to proclaim an emirate was not a sudden one. Nor was this development unknown to the jihadis in the North Caucasus. In fact, all necessary documents and the seal of the Emirate had already been prepared by Basayev, perhaps unknown to Umarov and possibly intended for Basayev’s own use.¹⁰¹ Besides, leading ideologues had long been arguing for the need to replace the secular and democratic structures of the ChRI with those of an Islamic emirate. Anzor Astemirov (Amir Seyfullah,

99 Kavkaz Center, November 21, 2007. The English-language version was released by Kavkaz Center, November 22, 2007. There was a minor but eventually significant difference between the original Russian and the official translation into English of the sentence in which Umarov outlined his authority. The Russian original was “Я Амир моджахедов Кавказа, являюсь единственной законной властью на всех территориях где есть моджахеды присягнувшие мне, как предводителю Джихада.” Thus, he claimed authority over the “mujahidin of the Caucasus,” wherever they might be. However, the English translation stated, “I am the Amir of Mujahideen in Caucasus and the only legitimate power in all territories where there are Mujahideen who gave an oath to me as the leader of Jihad.” In effect, the English version claimed authority only over the mujahidin currently fighting in the Caucasus, not those of the Caucasus who might fight elsewhere. Because of this ambiguity, the predominantly Chechen jihadist group Jaysh al-Muhajireen wa’l-Ansar (JMA) in Syria was divided in 2013 on the issue of swearing bay`a to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Many felt unable to do so since they regarded Umarov as their Emir, even when abroad. In the Russian language, Umarov had the choice of fundamentally three expressions, translated as, respectively, “of the Caucasus” meaning those who came from the Caucasus; “in the Caucasus,” which was used in the English translation and implies a geographical boundary; and “from the Caucasus” which would suggest those who had traveled beyond the geographical boundary of the Caucasus. He chose the first. Whether he actually considered this choice in detail remains unknown.

100 Rosbalt, March 31, 2008; Rosbalt, December 22, 2010.

101 Statement by Umarov, Kavkaz Center, August 30, 2011.

1976-2010), head of the Supreme Sharia Court in ChRI and Amir of Kabardino-Balkariya (2005-2010) and the Caucasus Emirate's first Sharia Court *qadi* (judge) in a letter dated November 11, 2007, asserted that the proclamation had not been a sudden development. Umarov's decree, he explained, abolished the 1992 ChRI constitution, which stated that power emanates from the people, as well as all unbeliever institutions such as parliaments, presidents, and the entire democratic system. Sharia demanded no less, Astemirov continued, since power emanates from God, not the people. Astemirov also described the background to the proclamation. In the summer of 2005, the jihadis of Ingushetiya and Kabardino-Balkariya had agreed to join those of Chechnya and Dagestan in a unified Caucasus front. Basayev had called upon them to become citizens of the Islamic State of Ichkeriya. Astemirov had then, he said, soon afterward written to Umarov and urged him to declare an emirate by his own authority, stating that the Majlis ul-Shura was not needed for this, and indeed a vote on the issue was against sharia. In response, Umarov had written that he already planned to establish an emirate, but that time was not yet ripe. Umarov had implied that he still followed Maskhadov's policy of hoping for support from the West. However, Astemirov had asserted, after the death of Maskhadov in March 2005, the question of international recognition of the independence of the ChRI was closed. In fact, he asserted, even though Western countries wanted to use the Chechens to topple the Russian government (so he said, going as far as stating that "other people" had offered them a lot of money and international support if they raised the people under the banner of the Orange Democratic Revolution in Ukraine in 2004-2005), the support from the West was not needed. Besides, the main source of funding the jihad in Chechnya was the donations of Muslims of the Arabian Peninsula, he concluded.¹⁰²

Although Astemirov's explanation was self-serving, Umarov later acknowledged that Astemirov had indeed urged him to proclaim an emirate.¹⁰³ Further discussions between Astemirov and Umarov on the subject no doubt took place when the two met in November 2006 and April 2007. In fact, Umarov may have spent the winter with Astemirov.¹⁰⁴

Astemirov was not the only ideologue who wrote to Umarov, demanding an emirate. In 2007, and for much the same reasons, so had Magomedali Vagabov (Amir Seyfullah Gubdenskiy, 1975-2010), the Caucasus Emirate's second Sharia Court *qadi* and the Amir of Dagestan (2010).¹⁰⁵

Therefore, while an emirate had been under serious discussion since at least the death of Maskhadov, and Umarov's close associates in the Caucasus had known in advance about the proclamation, the exile leaders had not, even though they cannot have failed to see it coming. The proclamation left the exile leaders out in the cold, and nobody more than Zakayev who for years had lived in Britain. For a number of years, the ChRI exiles had received considerable political support and enjoyed the sympathy of the Western media, yet they had failed to get any real support from the West, for which Maskhadov had hoped. They had also grown increasingly out of touch with events in the Caucasus, and if they properly understood the slide toward jihadism they had certainly failed to warn their Western supporters. Now, they were hopelessly sidelined.

More was still to come. In early November 2007, Kavkaz Center published a thinly veiled threat from what was still described as the General Mission of the ChRI abroad. It noted that anti-state activities were going on among certain officials of the ChRI government and that the Sharia Court would deal

102 Kavkaz Center, November 20, 2007.

103 Statement from Umarov, Kavkaz Center, August 30, 2011.

104 Checheninfo video, April 23, 2007.

105 Kavkaz Center, August 13, 2010.

with them.¹⁰⁶

In response to the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate, the ChRI parliament in a press release a few days later in November stated that it refused authority to Umarov as President of the ChRI and Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers.¹⁰⁷ On November 22, Zakayev informed the media that the remaining members in exile of the 1997 parliament had voted instead, by telephone, to appoint him, as the former special representative of Maskhadov to states in the West, as new head of government.¹⁰⁸ However, Zakayev's new exile government had no influence in Chechnya, no territory, and no military force at its disposal. Of the ChRI, hardly anything remained beyond a couple of websites and a few increasingly isolated exiles.

Even so, Umarov struck back with new proclamations. On November 23, Umarov announced that the case of the former foreign minister Zakayev would be handed over to the security service of the Caucasus Emirate because of his alleged anti-government and anti-Muslim activities, and the Supreme Sharia Court would judge his alleged anti-Islamic activities.¹⁰⁹ The following day, Kavkaz Center published another press release, this time identified as emanating from the press service of the Emir of the Caucasus Emirate. Umarov said that the *mukhabarat* (security service) of the Caucasus Emirate was investigating the deaths of Maskhadov and Sadulayev because of the possible involvement of some former members of the ChRI government living abroad. Moreover, the press release claimed, the provocative uproar by some former members of the ChRI government living abroad, in connection with the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate, had been used by the Russian special services in an attempt to assassinate Umarov. However, his security service had averted the threat.¹¹⁰ Whether there was any truth in these allegations remains unknown to outside observers. (As for Zakayev, he was eventually sentenced to death *in absentia* by Supreme *Qadi* Astemirov in the latter's role as head of the Caucasus Emirate's Supreme Sharia Court.¹¹¹)

But, others disagreed too on the proclamation of an emirate. Shamsuddin Batukayev (b. 1956), who early on had been appointed sharia judge already by Dudayev and also was so appointed by Maskhadov, conferred with other *ulama* and expressed his concern that Umarov's proclamation of an emirate may have been in contravention of sharia. Batukayev and his colleagues also fully realized that Umarov's proclamation was also a declaration of war against the entire world. Batukayev explained the background as follows: "Some guys from Kabardino-Balkaria [primarily Astemirov], Ingushetiya [primarily Vagabov], had put pressure on him [Umarov]. They say, we do not want to fight for the independence of Chechnya. It is not sharia, it is not jihad. . . . And you must declare an 'Emirate' and install a leadership completely in line with sharia. We declare that all unbelievers are our enemies." Batukayev, who was in Azerbaijan's capital Baku at the time, received the news of the proclamation of an emirate from Zakayev before Umarov's proclamation was made public. Batukayev accordingly went to Istanbul to forward a letter to Umarov, by way of the latter's brother Isa who lived there. However, Umarov only responded that Batukayev should follow orders. Batukayev later noted that Umarov had made the proclamation in front of the fighters and their leaders, and nobody had objected. On the

106 Kavkaz Center, November 3, 2007. Whether this order came from Umarov or Udugov, who controlled the website, remains unknown to outsiders. Oddly enough, it still referred to the ChRI. Once before, a similar order had been published by Kavkaz Center, on July 9, 2006, when according to this message the Majlis ul-Shura had authorized the Chechen president to order the Chechen special services to apprehend and eliminate "international terrorists and military criminals guilty of genocide of the Chechen people" outside the borders of Chechnya itself. The press release included a photograph of Umarov but no comment or actual order by him. Instead, the comment was published by Basayev. Presumably, the message was inspired by the execution in June 2006 by jihadis of Russian diplomats in Iraq.

107 Chechen News, November 6, 2007 (now defunct). See also RFE/RL, November 15, 2007.

108 *Kommersant*, November 24, 2007.

109 Kavkaz Center, November 23, 2007.

110 Kavkaz Center, November 24, 2007.

111 Islamdin, August 24, 2009; Kavkaz Center, August 25, 2009.

other hand, Batukayev added, “In front of him [Umarov] nobody speaks against him. Maybe behind [his back] someone will voice objections.”¹¹²

Umarov as Emir of the Caucasus Emirate and the Abdication Crisis

The first years of the Caucasus Emirate resulted in few major attacks in Chechnya, even though jihadis were by then active in other regions of the Caucasus as well and overall violence in fact was on the rise again already before the proclamation of the Emirate. The number of attacks increased in each of the first three years of the Caucasus Emirate—2008, 2009, and 2010. The number of Caucasus Emirate-associated terrorist incidents rose from 373 in 2008 to 583 in 2010, with several hundred officials and civilians killed each year.¹¹³ Most attacks were hit-and-run ambushes, targeting law enforcement and at times military units. There were also targeted assassinations of military, law enforcement, and civilian officials, as well as the occasional assassinations of private individuals deemed by the jihadis to have acted against the cause or against the religion. There were also numerous improvised explosive device (IED) or mine attacks against these targets. Most attacks took place outside Chechnya. However, some of those who claimed loyalty to Kadyrov still hedged their bets in case of a shift of power and were thus prepared to offer support to the jihadis.¹¹⁴

Umarov no doubt felt confident that jihadis would rise in other Muslim regions as well. In February 2010, he vowed to broaden the zone of combat activities into the Russian cities, where blood would be spilt in the homes of ordinary Russians. The Russians would no longer think that the war took place only on television, in the distant Caucasus, Umarov announced.¹¹⁵ In March 2010, he issued a statement claiming that the Caucasus Emirate would liberate Krasnodar, Astrakhan, and the Volga region after the Caucasus. He also made extravagant claims about the number of jihadis, claiming some 30,000 who would fight under him.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile, Russia worked to rebuild war-torn Chechnya, since February 15, 2007, under the direct leadership of Ramzan Kadyrov who ran the republic under conditions of considerable autonomy from Moscow and thus to a certain extent had achieved what the ChRI had attempted. But the separatist cause was perceived as lost, except among the handful of ChRI leaders in exile and those within the media who listened to them.

The antiterrorist operation in Chechnya was finally declared over in April 2009.¹¹⁷ While Chechnya had been pacified, this did not mean that the other regions of the Caucasus were free of jihadis, nor that Umarov and the Caucasus Emirate were deemed inconsequential. In November 2009, the Russian special services allegedly attempted to assassinate Umarov while in the Achkhoy-Martan district by first poisoning food products intended for Umarov, then launching a missile attack against his presumed position. However, Umarov survived (even though he went into hiding without communications until February 2010).¹¹⁸ Kinetic attacks against terrorist leaders remained a favored Russian antiterrorist policy. A year later, in April 2010, then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev declared: “We must deliver pinpointed, lightning strikes against terrorists, kill them and destroy their hideouts; we must help those who decided to leave the terrorists’ ranks; we must develop the economy, educa-

112 ChRI news agency Daymohk, October 4, 2010. Although Batukayev had disagreed with the proclamation, he still supported Umarov and was eager to explain that he was absolutely not among those who thought that the proclamation had been against sharia. Interview with Batukayev, Kavkaz Center, January 28, 2008.

113 Gordon M. Hahn, *The Caucasus Emirate Mujahedin: Global Jihadism in Russia's North Caucasus and Beyond* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 2014), pp. 102, 103, 107, 109, 124.

114 Grove. The interview was published in Russian by Kavkaz Center, January 26, 2010.

115 Interview with Umarov, Kavkaz Center, February 14, 2010.

116 Statement by Umarov, Kavkaz Center, March 8, 2010.

117 RIA-Novosti, April 16, 2009; “Russia ‘ends Chechnya operation,’” BBC News, April 16, 2009.

118 Rosbalt, December 22, 2010.

tion, culture; we must strengthen the moral and spiritual aspects.”¹¹⁹

Still, as Medvedev’s message showed, Russian policy by then was primarily focused on the economic development of the North Caucasus. In September 2010, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin launched a Strategy of Socio-economic development of the North Caucasus Federal District until 2025, which primarily addressed the need to improve the economy of the region.¹²⁰ The Caucasus Emirate was a terrorist threat, not a military threat. Having neither territorial control nor governance nor widespread popular support outside the jihadist movement, there was no way in which Umarov could take political power.

While the exile leaders enjoyed fairly lenient conditions in their foreign sanctuaries, whether they were in favor of the Caucasus Emirate or not, in the Caucasus Umarov and his men were mostly on the run. The strains caused by such a life eventually seem to have got to Umarov. On July 24, 2010, he announced that he had appointed Aslambek Vadalov (b. 1971), commander of the eastern front, his deputy (*naib*) and successor in the event of his death. At the same time, he appointed Hussein Gakayev (1970-2013) Amir of the Chechen Province of the Caucasus Emirate.¹²¹ It seemed that Umarov was putting his house in order in case of his imminent death. Then, on August 1, 2010, Umarov suddenly abdicated as Emir of the Caucasus Emirate for reasons of poor health, handing over command to Vadalov, according to a video message published on Kavkaz Center by the department of strategic information of the Caucasus Emirate.¹²² Whether this was the result of a moment of weakness in Umarov’s convictions, a misunderstanding on whether the message was for internal use only or for publication, or an attempted coup remains unknown to outside observers. It seems that Umarov’s resignation video was real but had been part of his arrangements to secure the succession.

It soon became clear, however, that Vadalov *wanted* to assume command and possibly thought that he and Umarov had had an understanding. The head of Kavkaz Center, Movladi Udugov (b. 1962) may also have played a part, since it seems that it was he who decided to make the abdication video public. Whatever the reason, Umarov changed his mind. Already on the next day, Umarov issued a video in which he claimed that the information of his step down was fabricated and that he would not resign, leading first to an update of the first Kavkaz Center statement and then, a few days later, to a full retraction of the message of resignation.¹²³ On August 3, Kavkaz Center went as far as to quote his secular rival Zakayev in an attempt to reinforce Umarov’s rule and discredit Vadalov. Zakayev was quoted as saying that Vadalov was against attacks on civilian targets and in addition was not a Wahhabi.¹²⁴

To accuse Vadalov of such leniency was certain to arouse righteous fury against him in any genuine jihadi. On August 4, the late Astemirov’s website of the United province of Kabarda, Balkariya, and Karachai, Islamdin, proclaimed loyalty to Umarov.¹²⁵ This was followed, on August 5, by the publication by Kavkaz Center of another statement by Zakayev, arguing that Vadalov wanted negotiations with Russia and that the jihadis had not allowed Umarov to retire.¹²⁶ On August 5, Kavkaz Center also published the view of Radio Liberty, voicing a statement by Zakayev that the jihadis of Kabardino-Balkaria had refused to swear allegiance to Vadalov.¹²⁷ This was, of course, what Islamdin had just announced.

119 RIA-Novosti, April 1, 2010.

120 Стратегия социально-экономического развития Северо-Кавказского федерального округа до 2025 года (Strategy of Socio-economic development of the North Caucasus Federal District until 2025), Government of the Russian Federation Directive 1485-r, September 6, 2010.

121 Kavkaz Center, July 24, 2010.

122 Kavkaz Center, August 1, 2010.

123 Kavkaz Center, August 4, 2010.

124 Kavkaz Center, August 3, 2010.

125 Kavkaz Center, August 4, 2010.

126 Kavkaz Center, August 5, 2010.

127 Ibid.

Finally, on August 5 (but published on the following day), Umarov allegedly issued an order to Udugov, stating that in connection with the violation of discipline, manifest in the publication without consent of video materials for internal use, not for public disclosure, he ordered the Director of the Information and Analytical Service of the Caucasus Emirate, that is, Kavkaz Center head Udugov, suspended from office to clarify all the circumstances of the incident.¹²⁸ What Umarov actually said by this order was that his resignation video had been real but only ever intended for release to the public at a later date, possibly after his death. The arrangement was apparently regarded only as an internal matter intended to negotiate an eventual succession.

But, the matter was not yet settled. On August 6, Hunafa, the website of the Emirate's Ingushetiyan Province, too proclaimed allegiance in an open letter to Umarov.¹²⁹ On August 13, Magomedali Vagabov, Astemirov's successor as *qadi* of the Caucasus Emirate and Amir in Dagestan, too proclaimed for Umarov, naming him the "sole legitimate ruler."¹³⁰ Umarov had thus, with the help of his non-Chechen associates, regained control over all vital components of the Emirate—but not yet its Chechen Province, which to the extent that it recognized the Emirate at least in part was held by Gakayev. When Chechen *ulama* were inconsequential, unable, or unwilling to assist, the Caucasus Emirate leaders called for a *fatwa* from the Middle East. In response to a telephone call, the London-based Syrian cleric Abu Basir al-Tartusi (real name Abd-al Mun'em Mustafa Halimah, b. 1959) agreed to issue a *fatwa* in support of Umarov.¹³¹ Finally, no less an authority within global jihad than the Jordanian-Palestinian cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (real name Aasim Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi, b. 1959) intervened on the side of Umarov, offering a *fatwa* in his support.¹³²

The abdication crisis was over, and Umarov remained in charge. However, the crisis had revealed serious differences within the movement, and it took until July 2011 before the two main leaders opposed to Umarov, Vadalov and Gakayev, again recognized Umarov's authority. The end of the split was announced then in English as well.¹³³ But they had not been alone. A third key leader who had opposed Umarov was the Arab commander Abu Anas Muhannad (real name Khaled Yusuf Muhammad al-Amirat, 1970-2011; apparently a Jordanian).¹³⁴ Muhannad did not live long enough to reconcile with Umarov; first he was named as having been in the wrong by al-Tartusi as turning against his Emir Muhannad had caused *fitna* (strife) among the fighters,¹³⁵ then he was killed in battle in April 2011.¹³⁶

Umarov and Operations in Turkey and Georgia

With all these tensions and rivalries, Umarov cannot be blamed for suffering from a certain amount of fatigue. In January 2011, Umarov suddenly announced his ideas for an official language of the Caucasus Emirate. He noted that he would settle for either Arabic, the language of the prophet Muhammad

128 Order from Umarov, dated August 5, 2010, and posted on the ChRI website Ichkeria.info. Reportedly first released on Kavkaz Center, August 6, 2010, but since removed. It should be noted that some of the pro-Umarov statements released by Kavkaz Center during the abdication crisis had web addresses that differed from the usual ones, although all could be accessed through the main site, www.kavkazcenter.com. By 2010, Kavkaz Center had positioned servers and web masters in several Western countries as well as in Turkey, where Udugov had been based since 1999. A possible explanation for the unusual web addresses is that these statements were not released by Udugov but by pro-Umarov Kavkaz Center web masters in Western Europe.

129 Kavkaz Center, August 6, 2010.

130 Kavkaz Center, August 13, 2010.

131 Islamdin, September 5, 2010; Kavkaz Center, September 5, 2010; Kavkaz Center, September 20, 2010, citing Al-Tartusi's website.

132 Islamdin, September 10, 2010; Kavkaz Center, September 10, 2010. This was not the first time al-Maqdisi wrote in support of Umarov and the Caucasus Emirate. About a year before, Kavkaz Center published an English translation of his endorsement. Kavkaz Center, September 18, 2009.

133 Kavkaz Online, July 23, 2011; Kavkaz Center, July 25, 2011.

134 *Kommersant*, April 23, 2011.

135 Kavkaz Center, October 4, 2010.

136 Kavkaz Center, April 22, 2011.

and the duty of all Muslims to know, or Ottoman Turkish, that is, the fundamentally dead language formerly used by the Ottoman Empire and consequently the Caliphate. However, he also noted the need to consider the matter carefully and take the cultural and political situation into account.¹³⁷ In other words, his message does not really say much about his personal piety at the time, or any perceived need to be grateful for support from Turkey, a long-time supporter of the Chechen cause, which may have been the key issue at hand because soon afterward, persistent rumors, possibly emanating from the Russian special services, indicated that Umarov had taken refuge in Turkey, somewhere on the Black Sea coast.¹³⁸ Umarov certainly had a brother, Vakha Umarov, in Turkey, living in Zeytinburnu, a working-class municipality and district on the western side of the old city wall of Istanbul.¹³⁹ Vakha Umarov had moved to Istanbul in 2005, by his own account remained in contact with his brother, and in addition, as noted, took care of the latter's six children.¹⁴⁰ The rumors suggesting that Umarov was in Turkey continued in 2012, again noting the Black Sea coast, but this time also with links to Georgia.¹⁴¹

Umarov certainly had both personal and operational links to Turkey. While Vakha Umarov took care of his brother's children, another Umarov brother was by then probably the Caucasus Emirate's official representative to first Turkey, then Georgia. This was Akhmad Umarov (b. 1962), the elder brother of Doku Umarov. In late 2012, Akhmad Umarov appears to have visited Georgia. Both the Georgian Foreign Ministry and Kavkaz Center were adamant that Akhmad Umarov did not *live* in Georgia, the latter even quoting Akhmad Umarov as stating that he did not live in Georgia and that "all intelligence services in the world, friends and enemies are well aware about me and my place of residence." However, neither denied that Akhmad Umarov at the time *was* in Georgia's capital Tbilisi, although they clearly stated that he was not a resident there.¹⁴² The reason for Akhmad Umarov's visit to Tbilisi would seem to be connected to what was later reported by the Georgian Public Defender's office, which in an official report noted that the Georgian Ministry of the Interior, on orders from Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili, until August 2012 equipped and trained more than 100 North Caucasians for a terror campaign against Russia. The North Caucasians were met at Tbilisi airport, received apartments in Tbilisi, trained at two Georgian military bases near Tbilisi, and were given weapons, ID documents, and other supplies. The Georgian plan did not end well, however, since eventually a gunfight took place between the North Caucasians and Georgian troops.¹⁴³ The information provided by the office of Georgia's Public Defender was later confirmed by the ChRI exile leaders. In June 2013, the ChRI presented its own report on the issue. The ChRI report fundamentally reaffirmed the facts

137 Kavkaz Center, January 22, 2011. For previous reports on the issue, see Kavkaz Center, November 11, 2010; Kavkaz Center, November 21, 2010.

138 See, for example, the news website MK.ru, May 12, 2011, citing an ultimate source within Chechnya's FSB; the news website Argumenty.ru, May 25, 2011, citing two anonymous sources within the Russian intelligence community, including one in Turkey. One of these sources also reported that Udugov, who had prepared the Turkish residence, then had moved on to live in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. Although Caucasian jihadis were active in Prague, the latter seems unlikely.

139 Kavkaz Center, October 10, 2011. In addition to its Chechen community, Zeytinburnu was also the home of other exile communities, including Central Asians of the Eastern Turkistan movement. See, for example, the Dogu Türkistan website, www.doguturkistan.com.tr.

140 Grove. Vakha Umarov claimed that there were approximately 1,500 Chechen refugees in Turkey. He also claimed that they had around 3,000 fighters in Chechnya and a total of 5,000 throughout the north Caucasus, but these figures appear highly exaggerated and may, if accepted, possibly be taken to mean Caucasus Emirate sympathizers, not fighters. Vakha Umarov further claimed that every year an average of 10-15 young Chechen men returned from refugee families across Europe and Turkey to join the Caucasus Emirate. This number appears more likely since it is known that a number of young Chechens, having achieved asylum in Europe or Turkey, subsequently returned to fight.

141 Versiya, June 3, 2012.

142 News website Trend, September 10, 2012, citing the Georgian Foreign Ministry; Kavkaz Center, September 12, 2012, citing Akhmad Umarov.

143 Civil Georgia, April 1, 2013; Civil Georgia, October 22, 2013; RFE/RL Caucasus Report, April 28, 2013. What appears to be a translation into English of the Public Defender's initial report from March 2013 on the matter can be found in the Democracy & Freedom Watch website. The Public Defender's final report was published on December 1, 2014. See also *Georgian Times*, October 7, 2013.

as presented by the Public Defender of Georgia. The Georgian Ministry of the Interior had, with the approval of President Saakashvili, made an agreement with Doku Umarov and the Caucasus Emirate. The latter had, on behalf of Georgia, recruited up to two hundred fighters among Caucasus Emirate sympathizers from Belgium, France, Austria, the U.K., Norway, Turkey, and Egypt. Upon arrival, the fighters had been given flats in Tbilisi and in the Pankisi Gorge, money, and necessary documents including driver's licenses. They had also been given military training at Vaziani and Shavnabada military bases. The recruitment drive had been organized by Akhmad Umarov, who had gone to Georgia for this very purpose.¹⁴⁴

Georgia's provision of terrorist training was no light matter. By the time when the Umarov brothers operated from Turkey and Georgia, in the years of 2011 and 2012, Doku Umarov appears to have changed radically his views on, and choice of, targets for acts of terrorism. No longer content to attack targets in the Caucasus, Umarov may have decided to follow in the footsteps of the late Basayev who carried out bloody attacks in Moscow. Already in May 2009, Umarov had declared that this would be the year of the offensive and confirmed that Russian civilians would be targeted, since they provided for the army and the FSB with their taxes, and also announced the recent restoration (in late 2008) of Basayev's old suicide commando, the Riyad us-Salikhiyn Brigade of Martyrs.¹⁴⁵

Umarov, in no uncertain terms, claimed responsibility for the subsequent November 27, 2009, bombing of the high-speed Nevsky Express train linking Moscow and St. Petersburg in which 28 people were killed.¹⁴⁶ A few months later, Umarov also claimed responsibility for the March 29, 2010, suicide bombings of two Moscow subway stations, which killed 40 people.¹⁴⁷

Umarov was then growing increasingly vocal about global jihad. The aforementioned abdication crisis may have played a role in this. On October 18, 2010, Umarov addressed those Muslims who carried out jihad anywhere in the world, in a long statement that deliberately set out to clarify the situation after the abdication crisis. The entire statement, with its plentiful religious references and global outlook, might perhaps be seen as an attempt to regain control by positioning himself firmly on the side of global jihad. Umarov particularly singled out those in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, and in "many, many places" because they were his brothers and like them, the Caucasus Emirate insisted on establishing the laws of God on this earth.¹⁴⁸

And, within a few months, he claimed responsibility for the January 24, 2011, terrorist attack at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport, a suicide bombing in the arrival lounge that killed 37 people and wounded some 170, many of them foreign visitors.¹⁴⁹ There was no doubt that Umarov by then regarded foreign nationals as equally valid targets as Russians.¹⁵⁰ In a subsequent, highly emotional message a month later, he also confirmed that the Russian population and all other unbelievers were his enemies, pointing out that a "total war" was fought between Muslims and the enemies of God, and that the Muslims

144 Доклад Государственной Комиссии Чеченской Республики Ичкерия о результатах расследования инцидента в ущелье Лопота Республики Грузия 29 августа 2012. The ChRI report was signed by ChRI Foreign Minister Usman Ferzauli, a nephew of Chechnya's first president, Dudayev, dated May 3, 2013, and made public on June 1, 2013.

145 Kavkaz Center, May 17, 2009. On the restored Riyad us-Salikhiyn, see also Kavkaz Center, November 15, 2008, citing Hunafa, November 15, 2008 (now defunct). See also the interview with Umarov, Kavkaz Center, February 14, 2010.

146 Kavkaz Center, December 2, 2009. Later in the month, Umarov concluded that the attack on Nevsky Express was only the beginning. Kavkaz Center, December 28, 2009. In the latter message, he also stated that the entire Caucasus Emirate leadership remained based in Chechnya, seemingly in an attempt to hide the fact that terrorist activities were declining there. Umarov also has been linked to the August 13, 2007, bombing on the Nevsky Express, which injured more than 30. RIA-Novosti, June 30, 2009. However, he never claimed responsibility for this particular attack.

147 Kavkaz Center, March 31, 2010.

148 Statement by Umarov, Kavkaz Center, October 18, 2010.

149 RIA-Novosti, February 24, 2011.

150 First, Umarov published a video showing himself and the person later identified as the suicide bomber. Kavkaz Center, February 4, 2011. Then, he issued a statement in which he claimed the attack. Kavkaz Center, February 7, 2011.

of the Caucasus and Russia should strike against their enemies wherever they could reach them.¹⁵¹

This became even clearer in May 2011, when Umarov concluded: “The days when we wanted to secede and dreamed of building a small Chechen Kuwait in the Caucasus are over. . . We must reconquer Astrakhan, Idel-Ural, Siberia – these are indigenous Muslim lands. And then, God willing, we shall deal with Moscow.” In case anybody failed to get the message, in the same statement he also commented on the death of al-Qa`ida’s leader Usama bin Ladin, describing him as a defender of Islam.¹⁵²

The comments on bin Ladin notwithstanding, Umarov was still not above using public statements for tactical political gains. On February 2, 2012, he suddenly ordered his followers not to attack civilian targets because of what he perceived to be popular protests in Russia against the government.¹⁵³ It is unlikely that this was a sincere gesture; in the following year, on July 3, 2013, Umarov withdrew the moratorium on attacks on civilian targets in Russia and instead vowed to disrupt the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games. The message was communicated in English as well.¹⁵⁴ In this video, Umarov reconfirmed his insistence on global jihad. Although Umarov spoke in Russian while making the statement, the Emirate made a point of providing an English summary of his speech through the website’s English-language site—and the summary highlighted this part of his message so that the world would take note: “Caucasus Emirate is only a part of the global Jihad.”¹⁵⁵

Umarov as an International Terrorist

Because of the continued media activities of the ChRI exiles and the recurrent periods of poor relations between Russia and the Western world, it took some time before the international community took note of Umarov and his organization’s slide in ideology from secular separatism to jihadist terrorism. However, from 2009 onwards, U.S. President Barack Obama sought to reset relations with Russia and reverse what he called a “dangerous drift” in this important bilateral relationship.¹⁵⁶ This also led to certain initiatives in counterterrorism. In February 2010, the Russian Supreme Court declared the Caucasus Emirate a terrorist group and outlawed it.¹⁵⁷ On June 23, 2010, the day before Presidents Obama and Medvedev officially reset relations,¹⁵⁸ the U.S. Department of State nominated Umarov as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.¹⁵⁹ On March 10, 2011, the United Nations Security Council included Umarov in the Al-Qaida Sanctions List.¹⁶⁰ In May 2011, the U.S. Department of State authorized a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the location of Umarov and named him “the senior leader and operational commander” of the Caucasus Emirate (CE), whose stated goal was “to establish an Islamic emirate through violence in the North Caucasus, Southern Russia, and Volga regions of the Russian Federation.” The press release continued: “Under Umarov’s leadership, CE has conducted suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism. CE has launched terrorist attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-borne IEDs, and suicide bombers. . . . Umarov has issued several public statements encouraging followers to commit violent acts against CE’s declared enemies,

151 Statement by Umarov, Kavkaz Center, March 3, 2011.

152 Interview with Umarov, Kavkaz Center, May 17, 2011. An English version of the interview was released on the same day.

153 Kavkaz Center, February 3, 2012.

154 Statement by Umarov, Kavkaz Center, July 3, 2013.

155 Video clip statement by Umarov, Kavkaz Center, July 3, 2013.

156 See, for example, U.S.-Russia Relations “Reset” Fact Sheet, press release, The White House, June 24, 2010.

157 *Kommersant*, February 9, 2010. The decision was taken on February 8, 2010.

158 See, for example, CBS News, June 24, 2010; U.S.-Russia Relations “Reset” Fact Sheet, press release, The White House, June 24, 2010.

159 U.S. State Department website, June 23, 2010.

160 United Nations Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning al-Qa`ida and associated individuals and entities, Al-Qaida Sanctions List, March 10, 2011.

which include the United States as well as Israel, Russia, and the United Kingdom.”¹⁶¹

Umarov certainly was a terrorist leader, and there is no denying that he initiated a number of operations, which resulted in many civilian deaths. With his confirmed links to global jihad, there was certainly no reason not to include him and the Caucasus Emirate in the Al-Qaida Sanctions List. However, to be fair, by the time of the U.S. designation in 2010, he had not really aimed to attack foreign targets, and it seems likely that the proximate reason for such designation was political rapprochement with Russia. The January 2011 terrorist attack on Moscow’s Domodedovo Airport was the first that can be linked to him in which he definitely aimed to inflict deaths on foreign as well as Russian nationals.

Be that as it may, the international attention mattered little. In 2011 and 2012, the number of terrorist incidents associated with the Caucasus Emirate fell each year, although the number still remained higher than in 2008.¹⁶² By 2013, Umarov’s capability to launch major terrorist attacks was declining. His vow that the Caucasus Emirate would disrupt the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games failed miserably, with not a single attack taking place during the event. And by then, Umarov was already dead—from food poisoning.

Umarov’s Death in 2013

Umarov had been announced dead on many occasions, the first already on March 27, 2000, by the command of the Joint Group of Forces in the North Caucasus.¹⁶³ The information proved to be false. On numerous other occasions, there were again false rumors about Umarov’s death. Yet fate caught up with him in September 2013. In January 2014, an anonymous representative of the Caucasus Emirate subsequently identified as Aliaskhab Kebekov (1972–2015) announced the death of Umarov in an audio recording published on YouTube.¹⁶⁴ Two months later, the information was confirmed when the same Kebekov confirmed the death of Umarov in a statement issued by Kavkaz Center. The statement also informed the audience that Kebekov indeed was the successor of Umarov as the Emir of the Caucasus Emirate.¹⁶⁵ But because of previous rumors, not everybody was convinced. For this reason, Alexander Bortnikov, head of the Russian security service FSB, in early April confirmed Umarov’s death.¹⁶⁶ However, no photographs had been published. In July, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov published a photograph of the dead Umarov on Instagram as final proof of his death.¹⁶⁷ On the following day, a video of the funeral of Umarov was finally published. In the video, Aslan Byutukayev (Amir Hamzat; b. 1974), who had been the one in operational charge of the 2011 Domodedovo terrorist attack, said that Umarov had died at dawn on September 7, 2013, after contracting food poisoning a few weeks before, on August 16, 2013 (others had suffered the same fate, and four had previously died from the same incident).¹⁶⁸ It was obvious that Kadyrov’s photograph was derived from the funeral video.

161 U.S. State Department, Rewards for Justice, May 26, 2011.

162 Hahn, *Caucasus Emirate Mujahedin*, pp. 134–36.

163 See, for example, *Kommersant*, February 5, 2005; *Kommersant*, June 19, 2006; RIA-Novosti, October 31, 2007.

164 Audio message published on YouTube, January 16, 2014. The unknown representative was identified later as Aliaskhab Kebekov (Ali Abu Muhammad) from Dagestan. Kebekov, who had replaced the late Vagabov as *qadi* of the Caucasus Emirate after his predecessor was killed by Russian forces in August 2010, had sent the recording to a Caucasus Emirate representative in Turkey who then published it. Anonymous posting on LiveJournal blog, January 30, 2014, citing an Arab-language audio message on YouTube, January 30, 2014.

165 Kavkaz Center, March 18, 2014 (no longer available since Twitter account has been suspended); Kavkaz Center, March 18, 2014. Previously on the same day, a short obituary was published in English as well (which showed that hagiography by then had overshadowed real events, by claiming that Umarov in 1994 had given up his lucrative business in Russia to go to jihad in Chechnya). Kavkaz Center, March 18, 2014.

166 “Internationally-wanted terrorist Doku Umarov and his gang ‘neutralized’ – FSB chief,” RT News, April 8, 2014.

167 “‘I told you he’s dead!’ Chechen leader posts photo of terrorist Doku Umarov’s body,” RT News, July 19, 2014.

168 First published on YouTube (no longer available), then republished by one Murad on Kavkazpress.ru, July 20, 2014.

Kebekov was killed in April 2015.¹⁶⁹ He was succeeded by Magomed Suleimanov (Abu Usman Giminskiy, 1976-2015) who was killed a few months later.¹⁷⁰ As for Byutukayev, he had by then, on June 12, 2015, published a video in which he renounced his vow to the Caucasus Emirate and instead swore allegiance to the Islamic State.¹⁷¹ Perhaps it was fitting that the Chechen jihadi who announced the death of and buried Doku Umarov also was one of the first of the Caucasus Emirate jihadis in the Caucasus who took Umarov's affirmation of global jihad to its logical conclusion and declared for the new Caliphate, proclaimed by Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in the summer of 2014.

North Caucasians in Syria

It was not only in the Caucasus that the jihadis by then were growing divided in their loyalties. Although Umarov had claimed authority over his followers even when they were abroad, this had only created additional strife. From March 2012, there was a significant North Caucasian presence in Syria. A certain Abu Omar al-Shishani ("Abu Omar the Chechen," real name Tarkhan Batirashvili; b. 1986), who hailed from the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, soon thereafter formed the Kataib al-Muhajireen, which included contingents, often Russian-speaking, from several countries, including many from the Caucasus.¹⁷² In March 2013, the Kataib al-Muhajireen joined with several other groups to form the Jaysh al-Muhajireen wa'l-Ansar (JMA).¹⁷³ Because of its ethnic and linguistic composition, the JMA swore allegiance to Umarov, as Emir of the Caucasus Emirate.¹⁷⁴ However, from the summer of 2013 Abu Omar al-Shishani increasingly cooperated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). In early August 2013, for instance, the JMA and ISIL carried out joint operations in Latakia.¹⁷⁵ Yet, strife developed between the Chechen JMA leaders on the question of allegiance. Abu Omar al-Shishani pledged allegiance to ISIL, but not all JMA fighters agreed. As a result, Seyfullah al-Shishani (d. 2013), another Pankisi Chechen, and Abu Omar's second-in-command, left the JMA.¹⁷⁶ He attempted to form a new organization. Emir Seyfullah, as he then was known, first attempted to name the group something along the lines of the Caucasus Brigade or Mujahidin of the Caucasus and the Levant. However, because of his conflict with JMA, Emir Seyfullah received no support from Umarov, something he likely had sought.¹⁷⁷ Unrecognized by the major organizations, Emir Seyfullah's group in December 2013 swore allegiance to Jabhat al-Nusra, which by then had sworn allegiance to al-Qa`ida. Emir Seyfullah was killed days later.¹⁷⁸

At around the same time, in December 2013, the divide between the JMA and ISIL grew insurmountable. Because of the group's existing allegiance to Umarov, the JMA refused to swear allegiance to ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Abu Omar al-Shishani then left the JMA with some of his men, instead becoming an ISIL commander.¹⁷⁹

169 Gabriela Baczyńska, "Russia says kills head of North Caucasus Islamist insurgency," Reuters, April 20, 2015.

170 "Chechnya profile – Timeline," BBC News, August 11, 2015.

171 Caucasian Knot website, June 13, 2015.

172 Murad Batal al-Shishani, "'Obligated to Unite under One Banner': A Profile of Syria's Jaysh al-Muhajireen wa'l-Ansar," *Terrorism Monitor* 11:8 (April 2013), pp. 4-5; U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Designates Twelve Foreign Terrorist Fighter Facilitators," September 24, 2014.

173 Kavkaz Center, March 26, 2013.

174 Batal Al-Shishani.

175 Human Rights Watch, "You Can Still See Their Blood:" Executions, Indiscriminate Shootings, and Hostage Taking by Opposition Forces in Latakia Countryside" (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

176 "Разъяснения по поводу фитны," FI Syria, August 3, 2013 (no longer available in original); Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Influence of Chechen Leader of North Caucasian Fighters in Syria Grows," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10:148 (August 9, 2013); YouTube video.

177 Aaron Y. Zelin, "Azerbaijani Foreign Fighters in Syria," jihadology.net, January 28, 2014.

178 Kavkaz Center, February 15, 2014.

179 U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Designates Twelve Foreign Terrorist Fighter Facilitators," press release, September 24, 2014.

In late March 2014, the JMA (then under Salahuddin al-Shishani, yet another Chechen, also known as Feyzullah Margoshvili or Giorgi Kushtanashvili¹⁸⁰) swore allegiance to Kebekov, Umarov's successor.¹⁸¹ Salahuddin al-Shishani remained the leader of the JMA, working to remain neutral in the ongoing conflicts among Syrian jihadist groups, until June 2015, when he was ousted and replaced by a Tajik, Abu Ibrahim Khorasany.¹⁸² In July 2015, Khorasany swore allegiance to Suleimanov, Kebekov's successor as Emir of the Caucasus Emirate.¹⁸³ However, Khorasany was replaced already in September 2015 by a Saudi commander, who took control over the JMA.¹⁸⁴ One of the latter's first actions was to swear allegiance to Jabhat al-Nusra.¹⁸⁵

As a result, the North Caucasian jihadis in Syria were divided among several groups. Many had joined the Islamic State. Others fought for Jabhat al-Nusra. There was even a smaller, third contingent, the Junud ash-Sham under Murad Margoshvili (Muslim Abu Walid al-Shishani, b. 1972), yet another Pankisi Chechen.¹⁸⁶

Umarov's Piety and Legacy

It is no easy matter to assess Umarov's piety or views on religion. He emerged from a fully secular background, and as late as in 2002 when, in the face of total defeat, the ChRI introduced a sharia-based system, Umarov was not yet a particularly religious man. On the surface, and based on his public statements, Umarov appeared like a case study in jihadist radicalization, beginning as a secular racketeer who did not even know how to pray, then progressing along the path of jihad until he fully committed himself to nothing but global jihad against all who did not share his (or his *qadi's*) religious beliefs.

On the other hand, we know surprisingly little about what Umarov really thought about jihadist ideology. All his statements on religion or jihad were conventional ones, used by jihadis everywhere, and it is indeed hard to see how Umarov could have remained in charge of an organization increasingly dominated by jihadis had he not voiced these commonplaces, which were necessary to placate his most radical supporters. Some of Umarov's public statements, such as those relating to the establishment of the Caucasus Emirate, do suggest that he said and did certain things, not because he genuinely believed in them, but because he felt there was no other way. *Ulama* such as the radical Astemirov and the somewhat more cautious Batukayev were no doubt correct in their assessment that there had been pressure on Umarov, from them and the jihadis among his fighters, and that after the death of Maskhadov, the persistent hope to receive funding and support from the West had died. Henceforth, there was no other choice but to join the global jihadist community and to rely on the funding from Muslims of the Arabian Peninsula—for no other source of funds was available. As a jihadist thinker, Umarov left no legacy because he remained fundamentally a patriotic bandit, never an ideologue. He was not a weak leader. As Batukayev reminded us, none of Umarov's men would speak out against him in his face. Presumably, Umarov could have retired into exile in Turkey, but for whatever reason, he chose to continue to fight.

As a jihadist leader, Umarov was in charge of and claimed responsibility for a long list of gory acts of terrorism, resulting in the death of thousands of innocents, the destruction of considerable property, and the arousing of hatred in a considerable share of the population in both the North Caucasus and

180 Joanna Paraszczuk, "Who is Salakhuddin Shishani aka Feyzullah Margoshvili (aka Giorgi Kushtanashvili?)," *From Chechnya to Syria*, April 15, 2015.

181 Kavkaz Center, March 30, 2014.

182 Joanna Paraszczuk, "JMA Has (Another) New Emir, & He's Saudi," *From Chechnya to Syria*, September 4, 2015.

183 Kavkaz Center, July 9, 2015.

184 Joanna Paraszczuk, "JMA Has (Another) New Emir, & He's Saudi."

185 Reuters, September 23, 2015.

186 "Ethnic Kist Murad Margoshvili on the Specially Designated Global Terrorists List," *Frontnews*, September 25, 2014.

the rest of Russia. During 2008-2012 alone, under Umarov's leadership, the Caucasus Emirate was responsible for close to 2,500 terrorist attacks and violent incidents, including close to 50 suicide bombings. The death toll was nearly 1,900 killed and 2,800 wounded civilian officials and military or law enforcement personnel, as well as some 350 killed and approximately 1,000 wounded civilians.¹⁸⁷ These figures do not include incidents from Umarov's pre-Caucasus Emirate period, which was no less violent and lasted considerably longer than the five years for which statistics are available. As a result, his legacy as a terrorist is a successful and lasting one, which no doubt will inspire yet more acts of violence. Arousing hatred was Umarov's greatest achievement in his chosen career, whether he intended it or not.

Finally, Umarov left a personal legacy in the form of his many children, who apparently are growing up in Turkey. It remains to be seen how they will cope with the legacy of their well-known father. An all-too-common destiny of the offspring of Caucasian jihadist leaders is to attempt to follow in their fathers' footsteps. The fate of Rustam Gelayev, the son of Umarov's relative and mentor Ruslan Gelayev, was a sobering reminder of the cost in living up to a famous name. Young Rustam eventually moved from Russia to Georgia, where he married. When a child was born, the young family moved to Belgium, where they received asylum. After a few years, the young man decided to learn about Islam, so he moved to Egypt. From there, he went to fight in Syria from June to August 2012, when he was killed.¹⁸⁸

Postscript

Like ripples in a pond, the activities of Umarov's Caucasus Emirate continued to affect the wider world long after his death. In Turkey, the increasingly Islamist Erdogan government continued to give refuge to many North Caucasians, including Caucasus Emirate notables such as Vakha Umarov. Unsurprisingly, this continued to affect relations with Russia in a negative way. That Turkey and Russia supported opposing sides in the Syrian civil war compounded the problem further.

In Syria, North Caucasian jihadis continued to play a significant role. However, by September 2015 they were hopelessly divided among several rival groups, including both the Islamic State and al-Qa`ida affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra. Just like in the Caucasus itself, there was no longer any unified leadership. It was not only for political reasons that Moscow chose not to distinguish between the different insurgent groups. Former members of the Caucasus Emirate could be found in most of them, and they were hostile to Russian interests.

In the United States, the two brothers Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnayev had detonated bombs at the Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013, killing three and injuring more than 260. Of Chechen origin, Tamerlan had recently visited the North Caucasus, where he appears to have had contacts with extremists linked to the Caucasus Emirate, carried out online activities, or perhaps displayed personal behavior that worried Russian counterterrorism officers to the extent that they informed the American authorities.¹⁸⁹ The subsequent attack showed that terrorism carried out by North Caucasians was no longer limited to targets in Russia and Europe.

In Georgia, President Saakashvili, who according to the office of Georgia's Public Defender and the ChRI exile leaders had equipped and trained more than a hundred North Caucasians for a terror campaign against Russia, lost power in 2013. After a spell in the United States, he moved to Ukraine to avoid criminal charges in Georgia. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in 2015 appointed Saakashvili governor of Ukraine's southwestern Odesa region and granted him Ukrainian citizenship so that

187 Hahn, *Caucasus Emirate Mujahedin*, pp. 134-36. Hahn's work is one of few that employs a standardized and credible methodology for assessing the Caucasus jihad and the resulting casualties.

188 News site NewsRu.com, August 23, 2012.

189 See, for example, RFE/RL, April 19, 2013; *Independent*, April 23, 2013.

he could not be extradited.¹⁹⁰

Saakashvili's appointment followed a string of other employments of foreign nationals, noted for their opposition to Russia, to positions where they could play political or military roles in the struggle in eastern Ukraine. So were, for instance, foreign far-right extremists and neo-Nazis from a variety of mainly European countries included in the Azov Battalion, the emblem of which was a Nazi symbol, and in several other similar volunteer units fighting alongside Ukraine's military against the pro-Russian separatists.¹⁹¹ One such Ukrainian volunteer unit was the Dzhokhar Dudayev Battalion, which was formed in Odesa by Isa Munayev (1965-2015), formerly linked to the ChRI government and with political asylum in Denmark, and Adam Osmayev (b. 1981), who had been wanted for terrorism since 2007 for alleged links to separate plots to kill Russian President Putin and Chechen President Kadyrov. Osmayev was released from a Ukrainian jail after the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution. A yet more radical Ukrainian volunteer formation was the Sheikh Mansur Battalion, led by one Muslim Cheberloyevskiy, another Chechen from Denmark. It was formed from North Caucasian extremists linked to the Caucasus Emirate who had acquired asylum in a variety of European countries but remained fiercely anti-Russian in outlook. The Sheikh Mansur Battalion shared a base with a volunteer unit belonging to the Ukrainian ultranationalist Pravyi sektor, an organization with a neo-Nazi stance.¹⁹² The use of such appointments and volunteer units was interpreted in Russia as something close to state-sponsored terrorism, and it was bound to impact on the possibilities to resolve the conflict between the two countries. To complicate matters further, Chechens also fought for the pro-Russian separatists. One such unit was the Death Battalion of Chechens loyal to President Kadyrov, commanded by Aпти Bolotkhanov, another veteran fighter.¹⁹³

It is hardly a brave assessment to argue that tensions between countries such as Ukraine, Turkey, and the United States on one side, and Russia, the Syrian government, and their allies on the other, will remain deep-seated in the foreseeable future. North Caucasian terrorism is only one source of this friction, but it is not a negligible one, nor did it end with the death of Doku Umarov.

190 RFE/RL, May 29, 2015.

191 See, for example, among many similar media reports, *Irish Times*, July 17, 2014.

192 *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, February 28, 2012; *Kommersant*, April 13, 2012; Chechen News, March 3, 2014; Golos Ichkerii website, n.d.; *Guardian*, July 24, 2015; *Expressen*, July 27, 2015.

193 *Guardian*, July 24, 2015.

