

STEFFANY A. TROFINO

Dagestan: Moscow's Risk Versus Gain

With the conclusion of the 2008 Georgia–Russia conflict, America's media spotlight moved away from the Caucasus region, and the continued destabilization throughout that region. Bombings, murders, and kidnappings occur frequently, yet often go unnoticed. No more is this a daily occurrence than within the small republic of Dagestan. For decades, Dagestan has been plagued by unrest, most stemming from Chechen insurgents crossing over Dagestan's porous border. Helping to further aggravate an increasingly fragile region, Russia announced an end to its "anti-terrorist operation" in neighboring Chechnya. As *The Irish Times* reported, "After announcing the end of anti-terrorist operations in Chechnya in April [2009], the Kremlin has been forced to admit that the security situation is deteriorating rapidly across the north Caucasus, which has been a hotbed of resistance to Moscow's rule since Tsarist days."¹ A former Kremlin advisor commented in *The Sunday Times* (London) on the increase in violence, stating, "It's embarrassing but above all it's alarming because clearly the heavy-handed tactics used so far are not working."² And Chechen militants often attack Dagestan's local law officials in an

Steffany A. Trofino is a Fellow with the Foreign Military Studies Office under the auspices of the United States Army Training and Doctrine Command located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Holder of a Master's Degree in Strategic Studies from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, she has written several White Papers on terrorism and counterterrorism, including assessments of terrorist organizations operating in the Horn of Africa and Iranian missile defense systems. Currently, Ms. Trofino is focusing on security issues pertaining to the Caucasus Republics of the former Soviet Union.

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effort to destabilize what they consider to be a loyal yet vulnerable ally of Russia.

A semi-autonomous republic, Dagestan is eighty percent subsidized by Russia and highly loyal to the Kremlin. As Russia's national security interests throughout the Caucasus region (particularly Dagestan) grow, so too will its security and military presence within the region in order to help protect and insulate those interests. But every action systematically causes a reaction. As acts of terrorism increase throughout Dagestan, Russia's crackdown on dissidents becomes more widespread, causing many Dagestanis to live in even greater fear. Human rights activists state that kidnappings by Russia's Federal Security Service, or *Federalnaya sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federaciyi* (FSB), have substantially increased over the past two years. According to a 2010 U.S. State Department report on Russia, the number of extrajudicial killings and disappearances has increased markedly, as have the number of attacks on law enforcement personnel. Local government and insurgent forces reportedly engaged in killing, torture, abuse, violence, politically motivated abductions, and other brutal or humiliating treatment, often with impunity.³ *The Taiwan News* reported, in August 2009, that "Riot police in Dagestan beat and detained several people who were protesting abductions and other alleged abuses Wednesday in the volatile Russian province."⁴ As Alexander Cherkasov, a member of the Board of the Human Rights Centre (HRC) "Memorial" explained, "a system of violence has formed in Northern Caucasus, where torture, kidnappings, illegal prisons, and extrajudicial executions are integral elements."⁵

Russian National Security doctrine indicates that the Russian government's primary objective is to keep its citizens safe from harm, or the threat of harm, no matter where this threat may originate—foreign or domestic. Pursuant to this objective, the FSB has been tasked to investigate internal security matters throughout Russia and former Soviet Union republics. Furthermore, Russia's has a highly advanced foreign military intelligence directorate, the *Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye* (GRU), tasked to handle intelligence matters beyond Russian borders.

Russia has used this national security doctrine to assert dominance wherever it deems necessary. Thus, an attack on Russian citizens anywhere in the Caucasus region gives Moscow justification to insert and use its security or military apparatus to protect its national security interests. The Georgia–Russia conflict of August 2008 illustrates the implementation of this doctrine. During that summer, multiple allegations were made of Russian citizens of South Ossetia being highly oppressed by the Georgian government. A substantial escalation in tensions culminated in a six-day Russian military offensive.

The continued destabilization throughout the Caucasus can be attributed to several factors. First, conflicts travel short distances. Second, Dagestan state security is contingent upon neighboring state security. And finally, the perception of power within Dagestan dictates how power will be used to generate fear and intimidation as a tactical tool, perpetrated by both militant and local security forces. Chechnya, along with the neighboring republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia, has had an increase in violence in recent years, with attacks on authorities and government forces being reported almost daily.⁶ Dagestan has experienced a large portion of the increase due to its loyalty to the Kremlin.

INCREASED TENSIONS: THE CHECHEN FACTOR

Dagestan is the oldest, largest, and most ethnically diverse Islamic republic within Russia. Security experts suggest that the increase in violence within Dagestan is due to inter-ethnic conflict among rival ethnic groups vying for power over land, resources, and employment. But a June 2008 International Crisis Group (ICG) report on Dagestan suggested that the increase of violence is not due to inter-ethnic rivalry but more the result of the spillover effect of militant extremists filtering over the Chechen–Dagestan border after the cessation of the of the second Chechen war of 1999. A distinctive link exists between Chechen and Dagestan insurgents who work together to destabilize Dagestan. Islamist militant groups, such as *Shariat Jamaat*, have forged close ties with Chechen separatists to launch terrorist attacks against the government in an effort to unite Muslims across the North Caucasus.⁷ The ICG report concluded that “Violence in Dagestan today is mainly caused by jihadi fighters, not inter-ethnic tensions.”⁸

During the 1999 conflict Chechen militants launched a military invasion against Russian-supported Dagestan. The invasion resulted in Russia seizing the Chechen capital of Grozny during May 2000, and Moscow’s forces subsequently fought militant Chechens in sporadic offensives until April 2009 when antiterrorist operations officially ended within Chechnya.

Capitalizing on opportunities, Chechen militants seek to prey upon the economically weak Dagestan, whose police have limited resources. When facing a weak republic that is ill-equipped to combat ongoing terrorist activity inside its borders, militants will continually seek to establish themselves as a hegemonic presence within the vulnerable region. In doing so, militants aim to provide potential belligerents with such basic necessities as security, medical attention, or food and shelter where these had previously been lacking or not substantial enough to be considered adequate, thereby fostering loyalty among the populace. As a result, militants gain a core of support to draw from in times of need. Militants

understand that every action causes a reaction. The more violence in Dagestan, the more severe the Russian FSB crackdown throughout the region, with innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. This response erodes trust between Dagestanis and the perceived overreaching FSB. Militants then move into weaker districts and establish themselves as a security force to protect Dagestani citizens from the harsh tactics of the FSB, portraying themselves as protectors, rather than instigators.

International Society Memorial researcher Alexander Cherkasov states that “Dagestan, a new flashpoint in the North Caucasus, has seen 25 kidnappings since February 2009, by Memorial’s count, and in 12 of those cases the victims were murdered. The security forces are out of control.” Cherkasov added: “Clandestine fighters exist and are active but the current anti-terror policy simply fuels the problem.”⁹ According to several human rights organizations, young men are systematically targeted by local police and security forces within Dagestan, which in turn makes them highly susceptible to recruitment by militant groups. *The Times* of London reports, “Some young men had been radicalized by repressive police measures against separatists, official corruption and widespread unemployment.”¹⁰ As Tony Halpin of *The Times* of London notes: “The Kremlin says it is fighting terrorism but, in reality, it is giving birth to it.”¹¹

According to Magomed Shamilov, head of the Dagestani police union, “This is an escalating, unofficial Russian war that the Kremlin lost control of.”¹² The level of violence throughout Dagestan, although unsettling to the outside world, is commonplace and routine throughout the Caucasus. Many FSB officers are veterans of both Chechnya and the Afghanistan–Soviet War, where extreme levels of violence, instigated by both sides, were routine.

A LOOK BACK TO THE COLD WAR

Today’s FSB is the successor of the KGB. During the later part of 1991, the KGB’s domestic security functions were reconstituted as the Federal Counterintelligence Service (FSK) and placed under the control of President Boris Yeltsin. Originally, the FSK was known as the Ministry of Security. On 3 April 1995, President Yeltsin signed a federal law which renamed and reorganized the FSK as the present day FSB. This law granted the FSB powers beyond those provided to its predecessor, enabling it to enter private homes and conduct more extensive intelligence activities, not only within the territory of Russia, but also abroad, in cooperation with the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR).¹³ Russia’s Supreme Court in late 2009 reported that “during intelligence operations within the first six months of 2009, officials opened 115,000 letters, and listened in on 64,000 personal phone conversations. They also

broke into 11,000 private flats or houses—apparently searching for compromising material.”¹⁴ As Moscow State University Professor Yuri Rogulyov subsequently explained, “The country is still in the process of searching for its own identity and is changing, and it’s a very contradictory process.”¹⁵

The FSB is responsible for the Russian state’s internal security matters, which include counterespionage, counterterrorism, and the fight against drug smuggling and organized crime. A large organization, it combines powers similar to those exercised separately in the United States by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Protective Service, Secret Service, National Security Agency, Customs and Border Protection, Coast Guard, and the Drug Enforcement Administration. In addition to its extensive network of law enforcement personnel, the FSB commands a contingent of *Spetsnaz* (Russian special forces), and a large network of civilian informants, which many suggest are unregulated and a cause for concern throughout the Caucasus. The human rights organization Memorial suggests that this unregulated extension of the FSB indiscriminately targets civilians at will, without judicial process or evidence proving terrorist activity. As journalist Tony Halpin comments, “The new trend in the fight against terror here [Dagestan] is to kill a man and then say that he was a terrorist without the necessity to prove that he was.”¹⁶ Evidence supports the assertion that a new, more aggressive breed of FSB officer is being assigned throughout the region. The organization itself has evolved into a younger, more adaptable, highly capable structure, implementing hard-line tactics to counter increasing threats, but with only mixed results. While hard-line tactics seem effective, with analysts noting a containment of violence within Dagestani borders, such violence can also lead to an increased resistance among Dagestani citizens against the perceived Russian suppression.

WHAT'S WORKING: CONTAINMENT

Multiple FSB operations during 2009 were effective in eliminating the leaders of the al-Qaeda organization operating throughout Dagestan. During an FSB special operations raid in August 2009, an Algerian native and known al-Qaeda leader in Dagestan, known only as “Doctor Mohammad,” was killed near the Chechnya border. Mahmoud Mahammad Shaaban, an Egyptian-born al-Qaeda leader in Dagestan and Doctor Mohammad’s predecessor, was killed by FSB officers in early 2010. Vyacheslav Shanshin, head of the Dagestan FSB, stated, “one of the founders of the al Qaeda network in the North Caucasus . . . and a gunman accompanying him were eliminated as they put up an armed resistance.”¹⁷ In 2009, eighteen significant FSB operations took place throughout Dagestan, resulting in 150 militants being “liquidated.”¹⁸

While Russian hard-line tactics seem disturbing to Westerners, from Russia's perspective, they are not only necessary, but working. In a meeting at the Kremlin on 8 January 2010 with FSB Director Aleksandr Bortnikov, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev indicated that his country must maintain a firm response in suppressing militants within Dagestan, stating that "they should simply be eliminated, it should be done firmly and systematically, that is to say regularly."¹⁹

Medvedev acknowledged that reform is needed inside Dagestan, explaining that "the upsurge of violence over recent months is the country's single biggest domestic political problem."²⁰ Recent important political changes are taking place within the republic, however. President Mikhu Aliyev's presidential term expired on 20 February 2010, and Medvedev nominated Magomedislam Magomedov, a professor of economics, for the post. Mogmedov was unanimously confirmed by the Dagestani People's Assembly as President Aliyev's successor.

FROM REFORM TO MANAGED DEMOCRACY

During the past several years, the majority of ethnic republics of the Northern Caucasus underwent substantial changes in their leadership, including Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, and Adygeia. Vladislav Surkov (referred to as the Kremlin's "Grey Cardinal") was Russia's highest-ranking official in charge of Caucasus political reconstruction, which the Kremlin expected would alter the local political situation and strengthen the hand of Federal authorities. Surkov, a loyal ally to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, was widely reported to have been a founding architect of Russia's newly established doctrine, known as Sovereign Democracy, and expeditiously sought to implement this doctrine throughout the Caucasus.

In sum, the doctrine implements substantial reform over the republics' electoral processes, a tightening of control over political parties, and the "appointment" of governors rather than their direct election. But Sovereign Democracy is simply a new brand name for managed and centralized political development, and might be considered to be the highest (and possibly last) stage of Managed Democracy.²¹

Sovereign Democracy was first institutionalized within Dagestan during February 2006 through Moscow's direct appointment of Mukhu Aliyev as president, with the objective of controlling the growing threat of instability throughout the region. Ironically, the opposite result occurred. The region became mired in corruption, inter-ethnic conflict, and rising crime, while attacks and bombings organized by resistance movements continue to occur almost daily. Despite the attempts of high-ranking political figures in Dagestan's capital of Makhachkala to hide problems with Moscow's

appointees and local opposition, the tensions are difficult to ignore. The key relationship between the now-former President Aliev and Dagestan's Minister of Internal Affairs, Adilgirei Magomedtagirov, clearly reflects the overarching problems in the relationship between Russia's central and regional authorities.²²

Currently, Dagestan more closely resembles a war zone than a functional, law-abiding Russian republic. Ali Magomedov, Dagestan's Interior Minister, claimed that foreign Islamist forces were fomenting violence. He explained, "Certainly, what is happening now is being exacerbated from outside, beyond the Russian borders. There can be no other explanation. Dagestani people do not need to kill one another."²³ Though Magomedov suggests the root cause of the current situation within Dagestan stems from outside influences rather than internal deterioration of the rule of law, many Dagestanis suggest that widespread corruption of local law enforcement, high unemployment rates, and a rapidly deteriorating security infrastructure factor more predominantly in present-day conflicts.

According to the former Vice Chairman of the Dagestani parliament, Bagaudin Akhmedov, 80 percent of Dagestan's budget is subsidized by the Russian federal government.²⁴ Out of the approximate \$18 billion Dagestan receives from Moscow, most is earmarked for regional development. However, an estimated 70–80 percent of the money is stolen.²⁵ Corruption within present-day Dagestan is systematic and an integral part of the republic's political and economic infrastructure. The Dagestani government controls nearly 70 percent of the republic's main assets, holding a 56 percent share of manufacturing, 58 percent of construction, and 88 percent of agriculture. For example, Said Amirov, the mayor of Makhachkala, controls the majority of city housing and public transportation via multiple small businesses. Ironically, many Dagestanis view the widespread corruption as a result of the large budgetary subsidies Dagestan receives from Moscow: 92 percent in 2005 and 87 percent in 2006. In 2008, the Dagestani budget totaled 37.7 billion rubles (approximately \$1.5 billion), of which 30.3 billion came from the Russian federal budget (80.37 percent).²⁶

CORRUPTION AFFECTING FSB OPERATIONS INSIDE DAGESTAN

Simple observation suggests that the inherent corruption that permeates Dagestan's economy and government significantly affects FSB operations in-country by indirectly spurring criminal activity. The ICG expressed concern with the routine abduction and physical abuse of peaceful young Muslims in Dagestan in the name of combating religious extremism. In 2008, the ICG's "Russia's Dagestan: Conflict Causes" concluded that multiple factors, including clan-based corruption and police brutality, were

causing young Dagestanis to join the radical Islamic movement.²⁷ The ICG report suggested that corruption had fueled terrorism and attacks on police, indicating that many young Dagestanis had switched from their moderate Suni beliefs to Salafism because it offered an ideological structure that could counter the old, corrupt political elite that monopolizes economic resources.²⁸

But it also suggested that, in ignoring the corruption, the Russian federal government was facilitating the exclusion of those on the fringes of society who express their dissatisfaction through violence.²⁹

Russian analyst Ali Aliev stated: “The situation in Dagestan won’t change for the better. Partisan warfare is going to continue endlessly in the North Caucasus, and one of the main reasons for that is the corruption and clan mentality of the leading agencies in the country, which encourage all this.”³⁰

In late 2008, the Dagestan FSB’s Director, Vyacheslav Shanshin, publicly admitted that it was losing the ideological war to the underground. He indicated that local authorities were not capable of offering clear alternatives to corruption, and further suggested that the most likely reason the FSB was having difficulty ending the violence was that the “Dagestani officials are no less corrupt now than before the FSB began their Dagestani operations.”³¹

THE SYSTEM OF CORRUPTION

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, and especially in the last decade, conditions throughout the former Soviet republics have substantially deteriorated. President Medvedev has acknowledged that Russia has fundamental problems that, if left unresolved, will doom it to further degradation. He described the region as having “an inefficient economy, semi-Soviet social sphere, fragile democracy, negative demographic trends and [an] unstable Caucasus,” along with “endemic corruption.”³²

The roots of modern-day corruption throughout Russia and the Caucasus can be attributed to the beginning of the Soviet Union at the turn of the twentieth century. During that era, corruption flourished in an environment of want. In its early days, the Soviet Union’s state-run economy left many citizens lacking basic goods. As a result, small groups of entrepreneurs capitalized on the opportunity to provide items otherwise not readily available. As a consequence, the formation of the Soviet black market came into existence with the 1917 Revolution. As years passed, the stability of both the Soviet state and organized crime allowed for a balance that kept crime and violence at a minimal level. Under Communism, corruption was institutionalized under the aegis of the Communist Party and strictly controlled by the Party machinery.³³

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the beginning of the new Russian Federation, however, the situation rapidly deteriorated. Economic stability became the highest priority of the new Russian government. Yet the majority of Russian workers went unpaid, social services slowly became nonexistent, and poverty seemed epidemic. As a young American college student living in Russia during 1992, I recall the mood throughout Moscow was one of uncertainty, fear, and desperation. Currency quickly lost value. In an environment where citizens were accustomed to standing in lines for necessities—and no longer had this option—corruption and the black market took on a new, heightened role. During this transitional period, many Russian citizens quickly realized that the only stable way available to receive goods was through criminal groups.

As the Soviet Union collapsed and a new Russian Federation began to emerge, elements within the government called on organized crime to facilitate reform. In the process, the difference between legitimate business and the underworld became significantly more blurred and, some argue, nonexistent. Authorities within the new Russian government believed that stifling the black market would ultimately have a negative impact on the country's progression toward capitalism. Competition, even if nefarious, seemed to provide economic growth in a newly established capitalist market.

Unfortunately, corruption is partly the result of basic want and is not merely a Russian problem, but a global problem. To a large extent, it stems from the inability or the unwillingness of weak/failed governments to provide for the basic necessities of their citizens. The measurement of corruption can be associated with the measurement of the ability of weak governments to provide basic needs such as food, shelter, and employment to their constituents. Thus, in weak or vulnerable regions of the world, such as the Caucasus, corruption flourishes. And, statistically, in an environment of high corruption, crime rates increase.

FSB ANTITERRORISM CAMPAIGN IN DAGESTAN

The FSB has significantly enhanced its counterterrorism capabilities since 2002 by implementing a wide variety of security policies to counter the growing threat of terrorism within Russian borders. Prior to 2002, the FSB appeared disorganized, ill-equipped, and ill-trained. Russia was never able to disrupt the militants' command-and-control system, despite the losses sometimes inflicted on the insurgents' rank and file.³⁴ Then, on 23 October of that year, Russia encountered its largest terrorist attack in modern history when Chechen rebels seized the Nord-Ost theater in Moscow. The FSB used a sleeping gas introduced into the building through the ventilation system in order to subdue the terrorists and recapture the

theater. Unfortunately, this also resulted in the death of 192 hostages along with all 39 Chechen rebels.

Moscow's need to enhance its counterterrorism capabilities was underscored yet again when, on 1 September 2004, in the small republic of North Ossetia, Chechen rebels seized a school in the town of Beslan, capturing over 1,100 hostages—most of whom were children. The FSB used brute force to storm the Beslan School, resulting in 385 civilian casualties, 16 Russian FSB Special Forces officers killed, and all but one hostage-taker fatally wounded.

As a result of both terrorist attacks, then-President Putin became increasingly aware of the changing dynamics of security throughout the Caucasus. The absence of a grand systemic project for Russia's modernization, as well as vagueness and inarticulate formulation of "the Putin course," can be justly viewed as one of Russia's major problems during Putin's presidency.³⁵ In an effort to curtail violence throughout the region, President Putin, with the full support of the Dumas, enacted into federal law the appointment by Moscow of political representatives throughout the Caucasus rather than the direct election of officials. This was the first step of what Russia now refers to as its Sovereign Democracy Doctrine for modernizing and enhancing its political control over the Caucasus.

INSURGENCY VERSUS TERRORISM

Ironically, the more control Moscow exerted throughout the Caucasus, the greater the escalation of violent attacks. Security is relative, as it depends on who is defining security to determine what is secure and what constitutes a threat. Multiple definitions for which acts of violence constitute terrorism have been provided to the global security community over the past several years. The United Nations defines terrorism as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes."³⁶

As compared to the United Nations definition, Russia defines terrorism as "an explosion, arson or other actions, frightening the population and endanger the lives of people, causing significant property damage or other serious consequences, in order to influence decision-making authorities or international organizations, as well as a threat to commit such acts in same purpose."³⁷ Russia has additionally defined its counterterrorism operations as "a set of special, fast-martial, military and other events with the use of military equipment, weapons and special means to prevent a terrorist act, neutralization of terrorists, the security of individuals, organizations and agencies, as well as to minimize the consequences of a terrorist act."³⁸

Placing into context the sets of ongoing circumstances within Dagestan in order to apply the appropriate countermeasures is important. Is the violence inside Dagestan terrorism or insurgency? Undoubtedly, terrorism is a tactical tool used to destabilize society, with "society" being the operative word, because innocent civilians are the primary target. The usual hallmark characteristics of terrorism have some form of revolutionary cause associated with the violent act. While widely used throughout the world to help further a cause, terrorism is merely one tool in the "toolbox."

Insurgency has similar characteristics to terrorism, yet very different objectives. Within insurgency, the primary target is the government or the power in place of government, with the objective being to remove this power and replace it with the insurgents' own form of power or security structure. The assumption about the current violence within Dagestan should place it within the reach of terrorism since innocent civilians are indeed being killed. But the primary targets are predominantly local police and government officials, which indicate that the acts of violence resemble an insurgency rather than terrorism. Thus, Russia has implemented a harsh counterterrorism campaign in Dagestan, justified by the "collateral damage" (i.e., civilian casualties), in attempting to enhance Moscow's security policies and as a means of implementing controlled democracy throughout the region.

Clearly, both the 2002 Nord-Ost theater attack and the 2004 seizure of School Number One in Beslan were acts of terrorism. In both cases, innocent civilians were specifically targeted and used as tools to help support a revolutionary cause, which called for the removal of Russian troops from Chechnya. What continues to happen inside Dagestan today does not resemble the hallmark characteristics of terrorism. So why does Russia continue to apply counterterrorism tactics when, in fact, what is occurring is insurgency?

MOSCOW'S STRATEGY

Experts tasked with assessing Russia's national security objectives agree that maintaining Russian nationalism is as important to the Russian government as national security itself. Indeed, nationalism helped shape the early years of Russian strategic doctrine extensively throughout the reconstruction period of the early 1990s. President Yeltsin recognized early the need to improve the quality of life for the average Russian citizen, in an effort to keep the public satisfied with the transition being managed by the new Russian Federation.

Today, Moscow understands that maintaining a favorable national image in the global security community is paramount in achieving Russia's strategic objectives. These objectives include trade and economic partnerships with neighboring states such as Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. In

steering away from applying the insurgency label to disruptions in Dagestan and elsewhere, which has a negative connotation, Russia is indicating to its neighboring states that there is no public discord with its governing practices throughout region, and that all republics remain relatively content. This naturally diminishes any notion of internal problems or conflicts within Dagestan's appointed political structure. The existence of an insurgency would most probably be recognized as a failure on Russia's part to implement effective rule of law or a failure within its Sovereign Democracy policy. Influential Kremlin aide Vladislav Surkov stated that Sovereign Democracy is a Kremlin coinage that conveys two messages: first, that Russia's regime is democratic and, second, that this claim must be accepted, period. Any attempt at verification will be regarded as unfriendly and as meddling in Russia's domestic affairs.³⁹

Russia's reluctance to term the various acts of violence as an insurgency clearly indicates Moscow's need to disguise from the rest of the global security community any ongoing fractures in its national security policy or any discord within Dagestan on how Russia chooses to implement its security policies.

A DELICATE STRATEGIC CHOICE

Multiple variables factor into the deteriorating security infrastructure within Dagestan today. Corruption, political changes implemented by the Kremlin and finally, the hard-line tactics of the Russian Federal Security Service have unique consequences on contemporary stability operations. In analyzing the current situation inside Dagestan, global security experts have a unique opportunity to assess Russia's newer hybrid FSB tactics, giving analysts a glimpse of possible vulnerabilities within the organization that have not otherwise been noticed. While disturbing, the FSB's hard-line tactics are relatively effective in containing the spread of extremism within Dagestan. The ratio of FSB operations within Dagestan (resulting in the elimination of two al-Qaeda leaders and 150 militants during 2009) compared to the retaliations perpetrated by militant groups outside Dagestan's borders is remarkably low. So far, a delicate balance between risk versus gain is being maintained. For Moscow, the gain is a reasonable expectation of containing the insurgency. But the risk may prove costly. An old Russian saying implies that Russians do not learn from making mistakes—they learn from others who make mistakes. Insurgents do not necessarily need to win battles; they simply need to outlast their opponents. Yet to be determined is whether Russia realizes that the harder it suppresses, the harder those being suppressed may continue to fight, even beyond Dagestan's borders.

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