

Caucasus Emirates

The threats against the 2014 Winter Olympics put a spotlight on the Caucasus Emirates, a separatist Islamic extremist group in the Russian Federation loosely aligned with Al Qaeda.

Although the Emirates' purported primary aim is to create a state independent of Russia, its increased incorporation of extremist ideology and anti-Semitism into its mission heighten its inclination for acts of terrorism, while providing fodder for its growth.

Founded in 2007 by Doku Umarov, former president of a self-proclaimed Chechen secessionist government, the Caucasus Emirates serves as an umbrella group for a number of smaller extremist and separatist organizations operating out of the Caucasus area, which includes Chechnya and Dagestan. Its stated goal is to create an independent Islamist theocracy in the Muslim-populated areas of Russia.

The organization brought together a number of independent groups that had been fighting Russia for independence for decades, but whose leadership had been largely decimated by Russian forces. Although it was founded in 2007, the only emerged as a more active organization with a series of claimed attacks between 2009 and 2011.

These attacks included a June 2009 sniper attack on the Dagestan Ministry of the Interior that resulted in three deaths; a September 2009 suicide bombing in Makhachkala, Dagestan that resulted in twelve deaths; the bombing of a train that resulted in 27 deaths and 100 injuries; a March 2010 bomb of the Moscow metro that resulted in 40 deaths and 100 injuries; an August 2010 attack by 60 militants

on a Chechen village that resulted in 6 deaths and 24 injuries; and a January 2011 bombing of the Domodedovo airport in Moscow that resulted in 37 deaths and 180 injuries. The U.S. State Department designated the Caucasus Emirates a foreign terrorist organization in 2011.

The relationship between the Caucasus Emirates and Al Qaeda provides a unique case study of the power of Al Qaeda's central organization's ideology and name-brand alongside its inability to exert strong control over its affiliate groups. By most accounts, levels of Salafi Wahhabi belief, for which Al Qaeda is known, are not high among Emirates members and leadership.

Emirates's leadership is neither well trained nor well versed in Islamic theology or jurisprudence, and the organization itself was originally founded as a nationalist, rather than religious movement.

Some of its leaders, such as Dzhokhar Dudayev, the former Chechen president and founder of a self-proclaimed independent state, have been affiliated with Sufist, rather than Salafist strains of Islam. Nonetheless, the Emirates claim affection for Al Qaeda, providing it with a means of acquiring notoriety and recruits.

Al Qaeda leadership regularly include the Caucasus as an important front in the global *jihad* and, conversely, the Caucasus Emirates acknowledges the importance of other international battles, placing itself in the context of a global struggle. The Kavkaz Center, the organization's propagandist news site, regularly posts articles about Al Qaeda activity worldwide.

In line with this ideology, the Caucasus Emirates utilizes anti-Semitism and virulent anti-Israel rhetoric as part of its efforts to attract followers, which is very much in line with Al Qaeda's strategy. Articles on the Kavkaz Center site deny the Holocaust and advance anti-Semitic conspiracy theories as in articles alleging, "Jewish women kill Gentile children, they don't regret it," specifying that the children murdered were Palestinians killed because "Jews are born with an idea that all Gentile children, when they grow up, become enemies of Jews," and noting

that “while killing children, some of the ‘Israeli’ soldiers ate chocolate and crisps.” Similar articles, such as one titled, “Jews kidnap children to plunder their internal organs,” are common.

The Kavkaz Center site has also reported favorably on anti-Semitic incidents internationally. For example, it published an article about the so-called “knockout” attacks that appeared to target Jewish individuals in New York City in the fall of 2013, which included favorable examples such as, “Her daughter told her Jewess mother was knocked out ...by an Aryan young man who hit her with his fist on the top of her Jewish head.”

Official Caucasus Emirates statements often contain similar sentiment; Eurasia expert Sergey Markedonov has noted that, “Anti-Semitism is a compulsory element of all North Caucasus Islamic radicals’ proclamations,” citing leaflets stating that, “Jews have succeeded in their skill of destroying peoples with the help of feminine temptation and charm,” and, “Studying the historical past of the Jews has led Muslims to believe that we cannot rest our hopes on the people whose history consists of such events. During the long centuries this nation has deterred and deteriorated.”

Despite the groups’ shared rhetoric, the Emirates has occasionally taken pains to distance themselves from Al Qaeda’s universalist brand of terror. Following speculation after the April 2013 [Boston Marathon bombing](#) that [Tamerlan Tsarnaev](#) had connections with the Emirates, the group issued a statement that said, in part:

“The Command of the Province of Dagestan indicates in this regard that the Caucasian Mujahideen are not fighting against the United States of America. We are at war with Russia... Also, remember that even in respect to the enemy state of Russia, which is fighting the Caucasus Emirate, there is an order by the Emir Dokku Umarov, which prohibits strikes on civilian targets.”

Whether such distancing will continue is subject to debate. Prior to the Sochi Olympics, Doku Umarov revoked his ban on targeting civilians, encouraging attacks to stop the Olympics from taking place on land he claimed for Muslims. His words were heeded, with two suicide attacks in Volgograd, Russian Federation that killed 34 individuals and threats of additional attacks.

There is a possibility that more extremist factions of the Caucasus Emirates such as the small faction that carried out the Volgograd attacks, empowered by immediate violent successes, the Olympics, and Umarov's death, may attempt to fill the leadership void – increasing the organization's violence against Russia and its alliances with the global terrorist movements.