

Terrorism and the North Caucasus: An Overview

The FBI has identified Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev as the prime suspects in the April 15 bombing of the Boston Marathon. Tamerlan was killed in an armed confrontation with police on April 19 and Dzhokhar was arrested later that day following a massive manhunt. The two brothers are ethnic Chechens but resided in the United States for approximately nine years; Dzhokhar is a naturalized U.S. citizen but his brother’s request for citizenship had not yet been granted at the time of his death. The Russian government alleged that the older brother had ties to militant groups in the Caucasus, and authorities are currently examining Tamerlan’s six month trip to Russia in 2012.

In this background report, START reviews the modern history of terrorism by groups and individuals operating in and around the North Caucasus as investigators and analysts work to confirm or deny possible ties to Tamerlan Tsarnaev.

BACKGROUND ON THE CONFLICT ZONE

After the fall of the Soviet Union, several Russian republics sought to establish independence, including the most violent and well-known case of Chechnya. While Chechnya achieved *de facto* independence when then-Russian President Yeltsin agreed to a ceasefire ending the First Chechen War (1994-1996), this status was short-lived. The Second Chechen War (1999-2009) began three years later, when Russian troops invaded Dagestan following a series of bombings by Islamic militants. Major military operations concluded in a matter of months, restoring Russian control over the region while spawning a prolonged and bloody insurgency.

The ideological and geographic character of the Chechen conflict shifted markedly in the years between the two wars. According to Dr. Jeffery M. Bale, a professor at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, the conflict in Chechnya “was originally an ethno-nationalist and ethno-cultural conflict in which one of the markers of Chechen cultural difference from Russia was the Islamic religion. However, historically, most Chechens have not embraced strict, puritanical, or radical interpretations of Islam. But that began to change in the mid-1990s, when local Chechen Islamists like Shamil Basayev (who travelled to Afghanistan to train in al-Qa’ida camps) and foreign Arab mujahidin, such as Amir Khattab, rapidly transformed the previously localized conflict in the Caucasus into a ‘front’ in the wider global jihad. From that point on, the main fighting organizations in the North Caucasus have espoused jihadist Salafism...echo[ing] the themes and tropes of al-Qa’ida and other global jihadist groups. The conflict has now become primarily a religious conflict.”

ATTACKS BY THE NUMBERS FOLLOWING THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SOVIET UNION

There are 1,415 terrorist attacks in the Global Terrorism Database attributed to groups or individuals from the North Caucasus between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2011. These attacks are enumerated by group, region, target type, and tactic type in the following tables and charts.

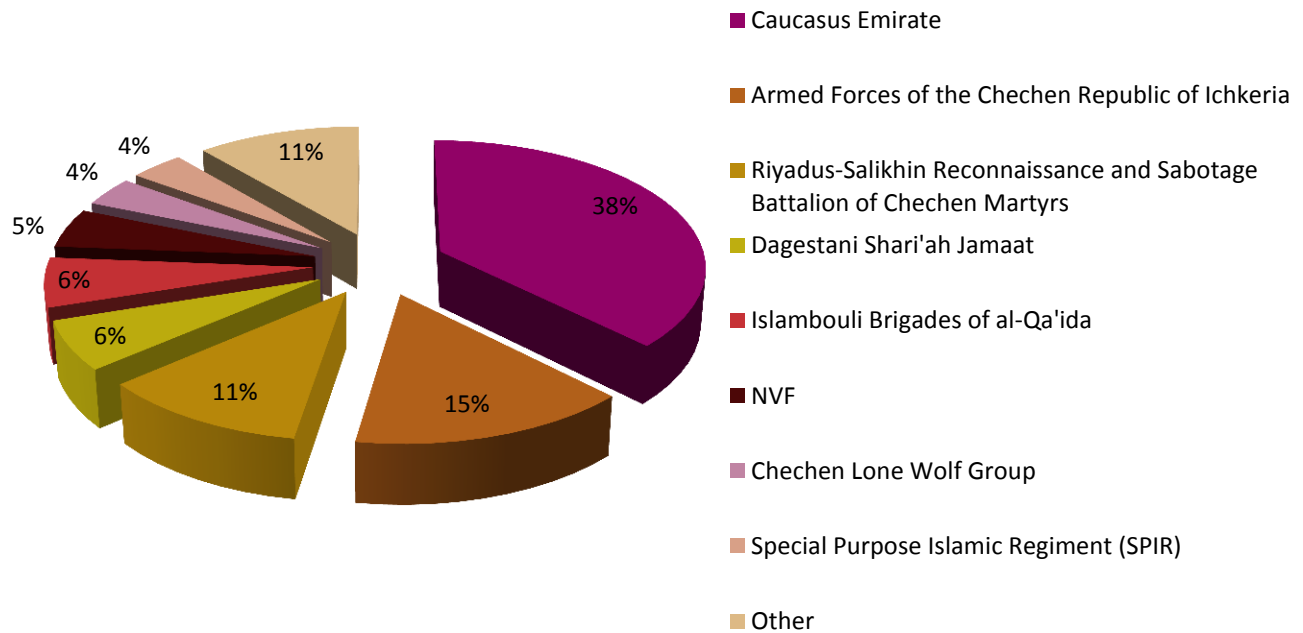
Active Groups in North Caucasus Region since the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

Only 80 of the 1415 attacks found in the GTD between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2011 are attributed to specific organizations. Among these groups, the Caucasus Emirate is by far the most prolific in terms of number of attacks. In addition to the organizations listed below, however, open sources attribute responsibility for another 324 attacks to the generic category of Chechen rebels. This low level of attribution is likely a reflection of the fluid and horizontal nature of terrorist networks operating in the North Caucasus region.

Group	# of Attacks
Caucasus Emirate	30
Armed Forces of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria	12
Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs	9
Dagestani Shari'ah Jamaat	5
Islambouli Brigades of al-Qa'ida	5
NVF	4
Chechen Lone Wolf Group	3
Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR)	3
Other	9

Attacks Attributed to Groups

n = 80



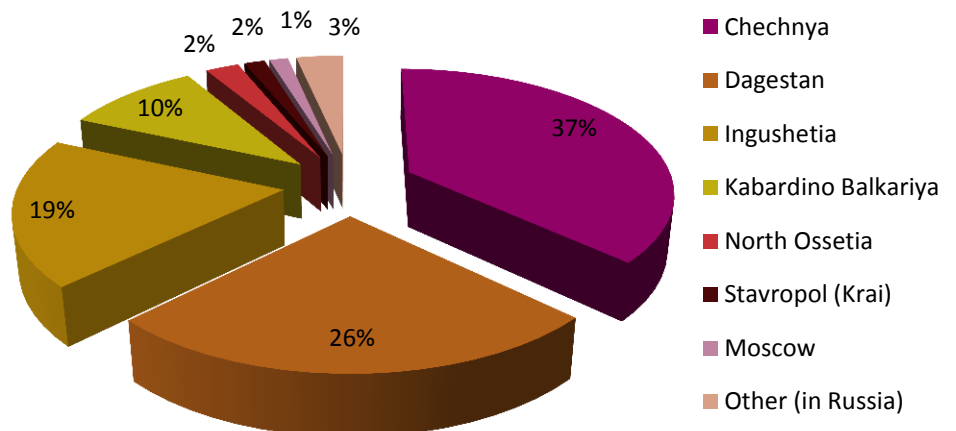
Attacks by Region

Of the 1,415 terrorist attacks in the Global Terrorism Database attributed to groups or individuals from the North Caucasus between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2011, all but five have occurred within Russia. Nineteen (19) of the attacks have targeted Moscow, but the overwhelming majority of the incidents have occurred in the North Caucasus themselves.

Attacks by Region

n = 1415

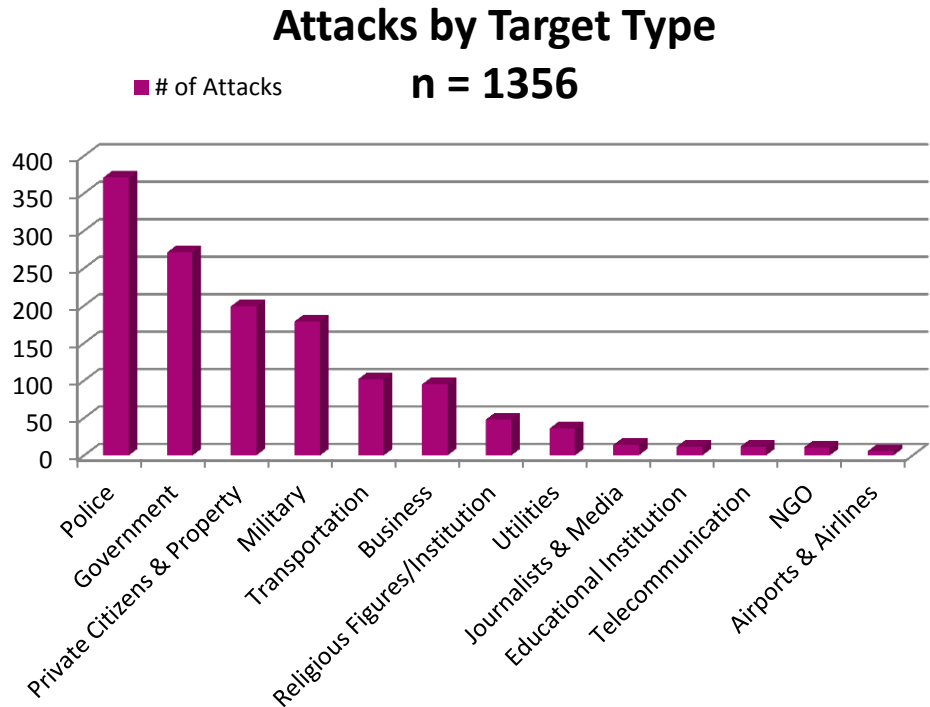
Province/State	# of Attacks
Chechnya	523
Dagestan	364
Ingushetia	268
Kabardino Balkariya	138
North Ossetia	34
Stavropol (Krai)	21
Moscow	19
Other (in Russia)	48



Attacks by Target Type

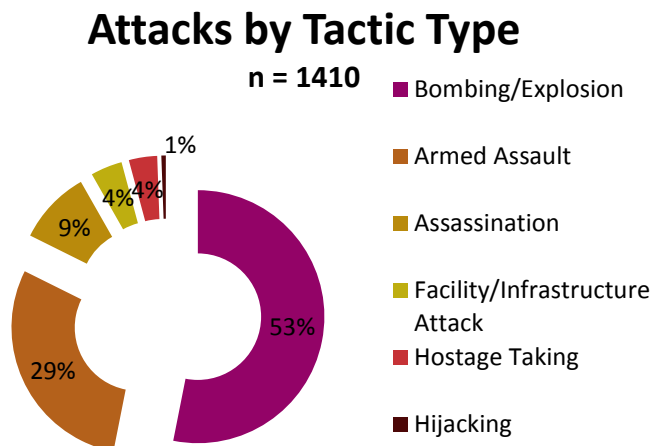
The GTD contains data on target type for 1,356 of the 1,435 attacks (96%) attributed to groups or individuals from the North Caucasus between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2011. Of these attacks, more than 60.5 percent target police (371), government targets (271) and the military (179), reflecting the broader context of insurgency in which these terrorist incidents took place. However, civilian targets also factor significantly in the mix, comprising just less than 40 percent of the remaining attacks.

Target Type	# of Attacks
Police	371
Government	271
Private Citizens & Property	199
Military	179
Transportation	102
Business	95
Religious Figures/Institution	48
Utilities	36
Journalists & Media	14
Educational Institution	12
Telecommunication	12
NGO	11
Airports & Airlines	6



Attacks by Tactic Type

Bombings/Explosions (749) and Armed Assaults (412) make up approximately 82 percent of the attacks found in the GTD attributed to groups or individuals from the North Caucasus between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2011. The relative frequency of bombing attacks in this sample is generally consistent with global averages for all terrorist incidents found in the GTD for this time period, while armed assaults are overrepresented in this sample when compared to the global average.



Attack Type	# of Attacks
Bombing/Explosion	749
Armed Assault	412
Assassination	133
Facility/Infrastructure Attack	57
Hostage Taking	51
Hijacking	8

MAJOR TERROR ATTACKS 1999-2011

Over the past 13 years, insurgency has simmered just below the surface of the region. Small-scale attacks have occurred consistently over this period, with occasional flare-ups of significant violence. A brief overview of these major attacks is listed below:

1999 VLADIKAVKAZ BOMBING

Sixty-four people were killed and 104 injured in a massive car bombing that targeted the central market in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, Russia, on March 19, 1999. An obscure, unnamed Wahhabi group with strongly suspected ties to al-Qa'ida, claimed responsibility; Osama Bin Laden or the Jordanian Chechnya field commander 'Hattab' are thought to have planned the attack.

1999 APARTMENT BUILDING BOMBING

In September of 1999, a wave of bombings by Chechen rebels targeted apartment buildings in Dagestan and Moscow and resulted in the deaths of 291 people, wounding hundreds more. Adam Dekkushev, 42, and Yusuf Krymshamkhalov, 37 were sentenced to life imprisonment in 2004 for their role in organizing and perpetrating the bombings. A similar attack in May of 1999 destroyed 18 apartment buildings, killing 4, in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia, Russia.

2000 ARGUN BARRACKS BOMBING

At least 50 Russian servicemen were killed and 81 were wounded by a suicide truck bomb on July 2, 2000. The truck was parked outside of a dormitory that housed Russian troops and special police units in Argun, Chechnya. Chechen rebels claimed responsibility for the incident in a call following the attack.

2002 MOSCOW THEATER ATTACK

On October 23, 2002, forty-one Chechen rebels attacked a theatre in Moscow and took 850 people hostage. The militants, members of the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR), demanded a complete withdrawal of all Russian military forces from Chechnya in exchange for the hostages. The siege continued for three days, until Russian special forces raided the theatre, killing 41 terrorists and 120 hostages.

2004 BESLAN SCHOOL SIEGE

On September 1, 2004, a group of thirty to thirty-five armed members of the Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs seized a school in Beslan in the Pravoberezhny district of North Ossetia, Russia. The militants, many of whom wore suicide bomber belts, took approximately 1,200 people hostage, including children, parents, and teachers. The standoff lasted for three days, ending when Russian forces entered the school using rockets and tanks. In total, 344 people, including over 100 children, died in the siege and an additional 727 were injured. The Beslan school siege remains the single bloodiest attack by a Chechen terrorist group.

2005 NALCHIK ASSAULT

In October 2005, approximately 150 Chechen rebels launched a two day armed intrusion into the Russian town of Nalchik. During the assault, a Russian Corrections Department office was raided. The attacks killed 85 people killed and injured more than 150 others. Chechen rebels claimed responsibility for the armed assault.

2009 BOLOGOYE TRAIN BOMBING

Three train cars were derailed when an improvised explosive device (IED) was detonated on the track between Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia on November 27, 2009. The explosion happened near the town of Bologoye, leaving 26 people dead, 100 injured and 18 unaccounted for. The bomb, equivalent to approximately 7kg of TNT, left a crater of 1.5 meters in diameter. The Chechen group Caucasus Emirate claimed responsibility.

2010 MOSCOW SUBWAY BOMBINGS

Two female Chechen suicide bombers detonated improvised explosive devices on the Moscow subway system on the morning of March 29, 2010. The blasts, which occurred less than an hour apart, targeted the Park Kultury and Lubyanka stations. The latter station was located directly below the headquarters of Russia's Federal Security Service. Forty people were killed and 95 wounded in the blasts. The leader of the Caucasus Emirate, Doka Umarov, released a video statement two days later in which he claimed responsibility for the double suicide attack. The two female bombers were both 'Black Widows': wives of militants who had been killed in Chechen conflict.

2011 AIRPORT BOMBING

On January 24, 2011, a suicide bomber detonated himself in the arrival zone of the Domodedovo Airport in Moscow, killing 37 people, and wounding approximately 168 others. The suicide bomber was identified as 20-year-old Magomed Yevloyev, from the village of Ali-Yurt in the Nazranovsky District of Ingushetia, Russia. The leader of Dagestan Front of the Caucasus Emirate claimed responsibility, stating that he had ordered the attack.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The primary author of this report is Mila Johns. Special thanks to Kathleen Perry for her invaluable assistance. Questions should be directed to infostart@start.umd.edu

The data presented here are drawn from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD). The GTD contains information on more than 104,000 terrorist incidents that have occurred around the world since 1970. For more information about the GTD, visit www.start.umd.edu/gtd.

The GTD is a project of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). START aims to provide timely guidance on how to reduce the incidence of terrorism and disrupt terrorism networks, as well as enhance the resilience of society in the face of terrorist threats at home and abroad. Additional information about START is available at www.start.umd.edu.



The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) is supported in part by the Science and Technology Directorate of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through a Center of Excellence program based at the University of Maryland. START uses state-of-the-art theories, methods and data from the social and behavioral sciences to improve understanding of the origins, dynamics and social and psychological impacts of terrorism. For more information, contact START at infostart@start.umd.edu or visit www.start.umd.edu.