Counter Extremism Project

Russia: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On July 27, 2020, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed that its officers foiled an alleged terrorist plot in Moscow. According to the FSB, an unidentified man—who was carrying a bag filled with grenades—was immediately shot dead when he opened fire on officers trying to arrest him in the outskirts of the capital. Additionally, it was reported the man was from a Central Asian country and reportedly had links to a terrorist group in Syria. Security officials have claimed that thousands of people from former Soviet republics in Central Asia or from Russia's Muslim-majority North Caucasus region have been plotting domestic terror attacks or have been fighting alongside militants in Iraq or Syria. (Source: Deutsche Welle [1])

In April 2020, the U.S. government announced its intention to designate the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) as a terrorist organization, making it the first white supremacist group to receive the designation. The government reportedly intended to designate three of RIM's leaders. RIM seeks to create a "mono-ethnic state" led by a "Russian autocratic monarchy," preferably descended from the Romanov dynasty that led Russia before the 1917 revolution. RIM has provided training and resources to other white national groups around the world. (Sources: *New York Times* [2], BuzzFeed News [3])

On December 31, 2019, two armed men struck a police officer with their car in Magas, the capital of the republic of Ingushetia. The assailants then attacked three other officers with knives, altogether wounding four before one of the attackers was shot dead and the other was wounded. ISIS claimed responsibility. (Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [4], Associated Press [5])

Overview

Established in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation is ruled under the authoritarian regime of Vladimir Putin and is comprised of Russia and some former Soviet territories, including the republics of Chechnya and Dagestan in the Caucasus region. Chechen separatism has been a primary driver of extremism in Russia, resulting in years of terror attacks in the name of Chechen independence. Since the early 2000s, far-right extremism has also spread through Russia, driven by extreme nationalism and backlash against Muslim immigrants seen as responsible for Chechen terrorism. Between 1992 and 2012, Russia ranked seventh in the world for total terrorist attacks and related deaths, according to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. (Sources: *Foreign Policy* [6], BBC News [7], CIA [8])

Russian has fought two wars against Chechen separatists, resulting in more than 100,000 deaths. During the 1990s and early 2000s, militants carried out major terrorist attacks across Russia, including within Chechnya and Dagestan. Among the most notable of these attacks were the October 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis, which left 129 dead. Dozens of Chechen suicide bombings also targeted the Russian metro system and other public places. Chechen separatists have continued to carry out terror attacks in Russia since the 2009 end of the Second Chechen War. Al-Qaeda and ISIS have established presences in the Caucasus and specifically recruited Chechens because of their advanced military training from years of fighting against Russia. ISIS has since carried out or claimed multiple terror attacks in Russia or on Russian interests, such as the October 2015 bombing of a Russian airliner over Egypt, which killed 224. More than a dozen suspected ISIS fighters have been arrested in Russia. Chechens make up one of the largest ethnicities among ISIS's foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria. (Sources: BBC News [7], *Washington Post* [9], Long War Journal [10], *New York Times* [11], Reuters [12], *Express* [13], CNN [14])

Russian speakers have made up one of the largest contingents of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. In December 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin estimated that 4,000 to 5,000 Russian nationals have joined ISIS. Russian security is reportedly monitoring more than 4,000 Russian citizens fighting on behalf of terrorist organizations in Syria. With ISIS's caliphate defeated, Russian officials are also concerned that returning foreign fighters could carry out domestic attacks. Russian security experts consider Sunni Islamist lone wolf attackers, and returning foreign fighters in particular, the primary security threat ahead of the 2018 World Cup. (Sources: Center for Strategic & International Studies [15], CNBC [16], TASS Russian News Agency [17])

Far-right ultra-nationalist extremism has been on the rise in Russia since the 1990s. According to a 2016 poll by the independent Levada Center, 52 percent of Russians support the idea of Russia for ethnic Russians. Violent soccer hooligan

gangs have adopted neo-Nazi symbols in pursuit of a xenophobic nationalist ideology. Some of these gangs have traveled beyond Russia's borders to carry out violent attacks, such as during the 2016 European soccer championship in France. (Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [18], Levada Center [19], *Guardian* [20])

At the request of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Russia began an anti-ISIS bombing campaign in Syria in 2015. Russia has faced international accusations that its military campaign is more focused on supporting Assad than fighting ISIS. The United States and others have criticized Russia for primarily targeting Syrian rebel groups—including some supported by the United States. Russia has also worked alongside internationally designated terror group Hezbollah and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) during its Syrian campaign. U.S. officials have further chastised the Russian government for support of the Taliban. (Sources: *Wall Street Journal* [21], CNN [22], BBC News [23], *Guardian* [24], *Guardian* [25], CNN [26], *Washington Post* [27], *Wall Street Journal* [28], Voice of America [29], ProPublica [30], Lawfare [31])

Russia has created a robust series of counter-extremism laws, which critics argue the government has used to restrict individual rights. In 2002, the Russian government passed the Federal Law of the Russian Federation on Countering Extremist Activity (Extremism Law), which allows the government to sanction individuals, groups and media organizations labeled as extremist, though it does not define extremism. The government expanded the law in 2007 to include non-violent groups, which led to the designation of international Islamist network Hizb ut-Tahrir. The Extremism Law has also been used to target Jehovah's Witnesses, which Russia has labeled an extremist movement. Russia has also used its counter-extremism laws to justify banning specific social media networks and messaging services such as LinkedIn and Telegram for failure to turn users' data over to the government. (Sources: Library of Congress [32], U.S. Department of State [33], *Washington Post* [34], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [35], Mashable [36], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [37])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Radicalization

Chechen separatism has been a primary driver of extremism in Russia, resulting in years of terror attacks in the name of Chechen independence. Since the early 2000s, far-right extremism has also spread through Russia, driven by ultra-nationalism and backlash against Muslim immigrants seen as responsible for Chechen terrorism. Additionally, the Russian government has been linked to multiple extremist organizations designated by the United States and others. (Sources: ProPublica [30], Lawfare [31])

In recent years, ISIS and al-Qaeda have capitalized on the Chechen independence movement to recruit foreign fighters in the Syrian theater as well as within Russia. In the Russian republic of Dagestan, imams who speak out against radicalism have reportedly faced violent repercussions from extremists. According to Human Rights Watch, police abuses have helped fuel radicalization and recruitment to ISIS. (Sources: BBC News [38], *Washington Post* [9], BBC News [39], Associated Press [40])

The North Caucasus

Russia invaded the North Caucasus region in the nineteenth century and has since occupied the predominately Muslim, formerly independent republics of Chechnya and Dagestan. Chechen separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev declared independence from Russia in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union. In December 1994, Russian troops invaded Chechnya, beginning the First Chechen War. Dudayev died in April 1996 in a Russian missile attack and was succeeded by Zemlikhan Yandarbiyev. That August, the Russian and Chechen governments signed a ceasefire. Yandarbiyev was replaced as president by Chechen rebel chief of staff Aslan Maskhadov, who signed a formal peace treaty with Russia in May 1997. A series of high-level kidnappings of Russian officials and foreigners in 1998 led Maskhadov to declare a state of emergency that June and begin imposing sharia (Islamic law) in Chechnya in January 1999. (Sources: BBC News [38], *Washington Post* [9], BBC News [39])

In 1998, Chechen militant Shamil Basayev and Saudi national Ibn al-Khattab formed the Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade (IIPB), which seeks the creation of a Chechen state in the Northern Caucasus based on the fundamentalist Wahhabist version of Islam. The U.S. government has accused the IIPB of channeling funding to Chechen

militants from al-Qaeda-linked financiers in the Arabian Peninsula. Together with the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR) and the Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs (RSRSBCM), the IIPB was responsible for the October 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis, which resulted in the deaths of 129 hostages. The United Nations has accused all three groups of links to al-Qaeda. (Sources: TRAC [41], U.S. Department of State [42], BBC News [7], U.S. Department of State [43], United Nations [44], United Nations [45])

Dagestan became an autonomous republic within the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Dagestan decided to remain within the Russian sphere. The federal territory has since been the site and victim of separatist violence led by rebels from neighboring Chechnya. During the summer of 1999, Chechen fighters increasingly began clashing with Russian soldiers. On August 7, 1999, the IIPB invaded Dagestan to support Dagestani rebels against Russian forces. On August 10, the Shura of Dagestan, a Islamic council not recognized by Russia, declared Dagestan to be an independent Islamic state and declared holy war against Russia. The declaration called for support for "the Muslims of Dagestan in their struggle against unbelievers for the liberation of the Islamic state of Dagestan from occupation." The IIPB withdrew two weeks later. (Sources: BBC News [46], BBC News [47], BBC News [48], *Washington Post* [9], CNN [49])

In the aftermath of the Shura's declaration, Islamist rebels clashed with Dagestani and Russian forces and successfully captured swaths of territory in the republic before they were expelled by Russian forces. Dagestani militants allegedly followed the extreme Wahhabi interpretation of Islam that had been exported from Saudi Arabia. Russia claimed in September 1999 that it had destroyed the Wahhabist movement in Dagestan, which outlawed Wahhabism shortly after. Dagestani militants would travel to neighboring Chechnya to join the fighting against Russian forces and play roles in major attacks on Russian interests. (Sources: *Guardian* [50], BBC News [46], United Press International [51], CNN [52], Jamestown Foundation [53])

Between September 4 and September 13, 1999, bombs destroyed four apartment buildings in Dagestan, Moscow, and Volgodonsk, Russia, killing 243 and wounding 1,742. Russia blamed Chechen rebels and launched a bombing campaign in Chechnya, marking the beginning of the Second Chechen War. In February 2000, Russian troops captured the Chechen capital, Grozny. Newly elected Russian President Vladimir Putin declared direct rule over Chechnya that May. (Sources: CNN [49], *Independent* [54], *Los Angeles Times* [55], *New York Times* [56], BBC News [38], BBC News [57], CBC [58], BBC News [39])

In October 2002, 42 Chechen rebels from the IIPB, SPIR, and RSRSBCM seized a Moscow movie theater, taking approximately 800 people hostage. The crisis ended after Russian forces filled the theater with gas and then stormed the building, killing all of the rebels and 129 of the hostages. Among the rebels were 19 women who belonged to an informal group of Chechen female terrorists dubbed "black widows" by the media for being widows of Islamic militants. The black widows first came to attention in 2000 when Khava Barayeva drove an explosives-filled truck into a Russian special forces building, killing 27. In November 2001, Elza Gazuyeva set off a suicide bomb, killing a Russian officer and his bodyguards. Between 2000 and 2013, at least a dozen black widows blew themselves up in Russia or the Caucasus. (Sources: BBC News [7], *Washington Post* [9], *Guardian* [59], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [60])

In May 2004, Basayev claimed responsibility for a Grozny bombing that killed newly elected Chechen President Akhmat Kadyrov. That September, Basayev ordered a siege of a school in Beslan that killed 330 people, half of whom were students. The FSB killed Basayev in a bombing in the Federal Republic of Ingushetia in July 2006, though the exact details remain unclear. After his death, al-Qaeda announced that Doku Umarov would take control of the Chechen jihad. In October 2007, Umarov declared the creation of the Islamic Caucasus Emirate (ICE) and declared himself emir. (Sources: BBC News [61], BBC News [39], BBC News [62], CNN [63], *Washington Post* [64], Long War Journal [65], Long War Journal [66], Associated Press [67])

Umarov claimed responsibility for orchestrating the March 29, 2010, double suicide attack on the Russia metro that killed 40, though Russia accused Dagestani militant Magomed Vagabov of organizing the attack. Two Dagestani women, both widows of Islamist militants, carried out the bombings. Russian forces killed Vagabov in Dagestan that August. On April 19, 2015, Russian security forces killed Ali Abu Muhammad al-Dagestani, then the leader of ICE. In August 2015, Russian forces killed the new leader of ICE, Abu Usman, during a counterterrorism raid in Dagestan. (Sources: Long War Journal [66], Long War Journal [68], *Foreign Policy* [69], BBC News [48], BBC News [70], *Guardian* [71], *New York Times* [72])

Dagestani rebel group Shariat Jamaat claimed responsibility for numerous attacks within Dagestan, including the

December 29, 2008, shooting death of Russian General Valery Lipinsky. Including Lipinsky, Shariat Jamaat killed 34 Russian Interior Ministry officials in 2008 alone. Chechen separatists created the precursor to Shariat Jamaat in Dagestan in the 1980s. The group remained nonviolent until 1999 when it militarized following the Russian invasion that summer. In interviews Shariat Jamaat spokesmen gave with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the group pledged allegiance to Chechen militant Umarov of ICE and sought to create an Islamic state in the entirety of the North Caucasus. The spokesmen justified targeting pro-regime Muslim and Russian Orthodox clergy, as well as security officials. In 2008, Dagestani newspaper *Chernovik* wrote, "Shariat Jamaat has little difficulty recruiting young Dagestanis who are unemployed, traumatized by cruelty endured in jail and motivated by propaganda promoting jihad and armed resistance." Russian authorities soon after shut down the newspaper for allegedly glorifying the terror group. (Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [73], Reuters [74])

Dagestani Imam Nadirshakh Khachilaev has been linked to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Khachilaev reportedly helped facilitate Zawahiri's travel to the Caucasus in the 1990s. Khachilaev is also suspected of aiding in the radicalization of Tamerlan Tsarnaev [75], an ethnic Chechen who, in April 2013, carried out the Boston Marathon bombing with his brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev [76]. The bombing killed three and wounded more than 250 others. The Tsarnaev brothers moved to the United States when they were young. Tamerlan Tsarnaev traveled to Makhachkala, Dagestan, in 2012, where he may have come into contact with Khachilaev, according to U.S. investigators. Upon his return to the United States, Tsarnaev began watching videos of Chechen extremists on YouTube and other social media. He further created his own YouTube channel collecting media highlighting terrorism in the Caucasus. (Sources: U.S. House of Representatives [77], CNN [78])

Russia declared an end to its military operations in Chechnya in April 2009. The Second Chechen War also saw the rise of al-Qaeda and other Islamist groups in the region, which eventually paved the way for ISIS to declare a Caucasus province in 2015. Chechen militants have continued to target Russia and Russian interests while also joining with other Islamist groups. In Dagestan, imams who speak out against radicalism have reportedly faced violent repercussions from extremists. According to Human Rights Watch, police abuses have helped fuel radicalization and recruitment to ISIS. (Sources: BBC News [61], BBC News [79], International Business Times [80], Associated Press [40])

Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Caucasus Emirate

Current al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri [81] spent time in the Caucasus region in 1996 prior to becoming second-in-command of the terror group. Zawahiri called for the Caucasus to be a "shelter" for jihadists from around the world. Dagestani security reportedly arrested Zawahiri in 1996 on charges of illegally entering the territory. He was reportedly released after six months because security forces were unfamiliar with his ties to al-Qaeda. According to an NBC News report, Osama bin Laden paid his bail. (Sources: U.S. House of Representatives [77], NBC News [82], BBC News [83])

Doku Umarov (a.k.a. Dokka Abu Usman) was an al-Qaeda-linked Chechen rebel leader who fought against Russia in both Chechen wars. Umarov also served as Chechnya's security minister from 1996 to 1999 during its brief independence. Once Russia took control of Chechnya in 2007, Umarov became the founding "emir" of the Islamic Caucasus Emirate (ICE) or Imarat Kavkaz, a regional jihadist umbrella organization seeking to expel Russian forces and form a caliphate in the Caucasus. In his declaration of an Islamic state in October 2007, Umarov declared that his group would target Russians and "anyone who wages war against Islam and Muslims." ICE has repeatedly declared allegiance to al-Qaeda and its leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri [81]. Umarov coordinated several domestic terrorist attacks, including the November 2009 bombing of a commuter train between Moscow and St. Petersburg, the March 2010 suicide bombings in the Moscow subway, and the January 2011 Moscow airport bombing. The United States designated ICE as a terrorist group in 2011. (Sources: Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium [84], Long War Journal [85], CBS News [86], BBC News [87], BBC News [88], *Economist* [89], U.S. Department of the Treasury [90], Long War Journal [66])

During popular street protests in Russia against Putin's rule in 2011 and 2012, Umarov ordered his forces to cease attacks on civilian targets. Umarov rescinded this order in 2013 when he threatened to bomb the Sochi Olympics, which he described as "a satanic dance on the bones of our ancestors." In July 2013, Umarov declared that ICE was part of "the global jihad." ICE carried out three suicide attacks in Volgograd ahead of the 2013 Olympics but did not succeed in attacking Sochi during the games. Umarov was erroneously reported dead multiple times, but ICE confirmed his death in March 2014. Umarov was succeeded by Dagestani militant Aliaskhab Kebekov, a.k.a. Ali Abu Muhammad al-Dagestani, who was later killed in April 2015. That July, ICE announced the ascension of Magomed Suleimanov, a.k.a. Abu Usman

Gimrinsky. Russian forces reportedly killed Suleimanov in August 2015 during a counterterrorism raid in Dagestan. Beginning in 2014, hundreds of ICE fighters defected to ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Because of mass defections compounded with a leadership crisis, ICE has been largely inactive since 2015. (Sources: CBS News [86], BBC News [87], BBC News [88], BBC News [48], BBC News [70], *Economist* [89], *Foreign Policy* [69], Long War Journal [91], Long War Journal [66], Long War Journal [92])

ISIS

With the collapse of ISIS's physical hold in Syria and Iraq in 2019, the group has shifted its strategy from territorial acquisition to insurgency. The group no longer encourages foreign fighters to travel to its so-called caliphate but to instead carry out independent attacks within their home countries. ISIS claimed responsibility for a July 2019 attack in Chechnya that killed a police officer. In December 2019, Russian intelligence captured two Russian ISIS sympathizers who were allegedly plotting terror attacks in St. Petersburg on New Year's Eve. Throughout 2019, ISIS claimed responsibility for multiple attacks against police officers by militants using knives, guns, and cars. (Sources: Defense Post [93], Associated Press [94], Reuters [95], Long War Journal [96], Defense Post [97], Defense Post [93])

In May 2018, ISIS [98] released propaganda calling for lone wolf vehicle and other attacks during the following month's World Cup tournament hosted by Russia. A poster, reportedly produced by ISIS's Wafa Media Foundation, directly threatened Russian President Vladimir Putin, promising he will "pay the price for killing Muslims." The poster featured a jihadist fighter against a soccer stadium background with Putin within the targeting sight of a firearm. ISIS has also released multiple propaganda pieces threatening international soccer players Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo, and others. (Sources: *Mirror* [99], CNBC [16], CBS Sports [100], News.com.au [101])

In 2014, several Chechen and Dagestani jihadists from the al-Qaeda-affiliated ICE pledged allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi [102]. In June 2015, ISIS announced the creation of Wilayat Qawqaz, a governorate in Russia's North Caucasus led by Muhammad al Qadarī and comprising former al-Qaeda militants in the region. In December 2015, ISIS released a video purporting to depict the beheading of a Russian spy. The executioner addressed Russians, saying, "You will not find peace in your homes. We will kill your sons … for each son you killed here. And we will destroy your homes for each home you destroyed here." (Sources: Long War Journal [10], International Business Times [80], Reuters [103], CNN [104], BBC News [105])

ISIS has since carried out or claimed multiple terror attacks in Russia or on Russian interests. On December 27, 2017, a small bomb in a supermarket locker wounded 13 in St. Petersburg, Russia. ISIS claimed responsibility without providing evidence. Police arrested Dmitry Lukyanenko, who reportedly belonged to a nationalist group and had received "psychiatric treatment" in the past. ISIS has been linked to shooting attacks in February and May 2018 that killed at least five and wounded at least eight. ISIS's Egyptian branch, Wilayat Sinai, claimed responsibility for the October 31, 2015, crash of a Russian airliner over Egypt, which killed all 224 passengers and crew. (Sources: BBC News [105], BBC News [106], *New York Times* [11], Reuters [12], Fox News [107])

Tarkhan Batirashvili, more commonly known as Omar al-Shishani [108] or Omar the Chechen, was ISIS's deputy leader and minister of war before his death in 2016. A former sergeant in the Georgian Army, Shishani was one of ISIS's most senior military commanders, a member of the group's elite Shura Council, and overall commander of its armies. Shishani moved to Syria in 2012 to lead a rebel brigade of Chechen fighters aligned with the Nusra Front [109], then al-Qaeda's formal affiliate in Syria. In March 2013, Shishani's group merged with other jihadists to form a larger and more structured group called Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (Army of Emigrants and Supporters). Shishani served as the commander. In May 2013, Shishani and some of his followers pledged allegiance to ISIS. Shishani was appointed ISIS's northern commander, overseeing military operations in Aleppo, Raqqa, Latakia, and northern Idlib province. By late 2013, Shishani was known as the emir (leader) of northern Syria, and in charge of the group's fighters from Chechnya and the Caucasus. In March 2016, the Pentagon claimed Shishani had been killed in an airstrike in Syria. That July, ISIS's Amaq News Agency reported that Shishani was killed during combat in Shirqat, Iraq. (Sources: CNN [110], NPR [111], *Daily Mail* [112], U.S. Department of the Treasury [113], BBC News [114])

Airat Vakhitov [115] is a Russian-born alleged member of ISIS who was previously incarcerated at the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and later incarcerated in Turkey on terrorism charges. In 1991, Vakhitov enrolled in a Russian madrassa called Yildyz to become an imam. Russian authorities closed Yildyz in September 2000 after several former

students were alleged to have carried out terrorist attacks. The United States designated Vakhitov as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in July 2016. On July 5, 2016, Vakhitov was among 30 individuals arrested and charged in Turkey in connection to the June 28, 2016, triple suicide bombings that killed 45 individuals and wounded over 230 at Istanbul's Ataturk airport. Russian authorities suspect Vakhitov of recruiting foreign fighters and fundraising for ISIS—as well as fighting in Syria and Iraq—prior to his arrest. (Sources: *New York Times* [116], Voice of America [117], Moscow Times [118], U.S. Department of the Treasury [119])

A 2015 investigation by the *Guardian* found that ISIS recruiters have specifically targeted migrant laborers in Russia, capitalizing on migrants' poor economic and social conditions to lure new recruits. In March 2015, Russian Orthodox Christian media outlet Tsargrad TV reported that ISIS is targeting Tajik laborers in Yekaterinburg, Russia, promising money and "carefree" lives. The report named a Tajik militant, "Umar," as responsible for recruiting laborers in the Yekaterinburg's markets and mosques. Security officials and analysts considered the report a mix of facts and fearmongering, but Tajik Interior Minister Ramazon Rakhimzoda had claimed earlier that month that at least 200 Tajik laborers had left Russia to fight for ISIS. In September 2015, 21-year-old Kyrgyzstan native Babur Israilov blew himself up in Syria on behalf of Imam Bukhari Jamaat, a militant group loyal to the Taliban. Israilov reportedly radicalized after moving to Russia in 2013 to become a laborer. (Sources: Bloomberg [120], *Guardian* [121], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [122], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [123], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [124])

ISIS has used social media to target potential recruits. In December 2014, Russia blocked the video-sharing site Vimeo for hosting ISIS propaganda. Russian ISIS supporters have used Russia's popular social media site VKontakte (VK) to communicate. VK's spokesperson George Lobushkin said in September 2014 that the site was "shutting down all communities and personal accounts that promote ISIS and have been found by our moderators or reported by users." Nonetheless, a small pro-ISIS presence remains on the site as of May 2018. In early 2015, ISIS also created its own Russian-language media outlet, Furat Media, which first announced the creation of its Caucasus province that June. (Sources: Mashable [36], *Guardian* [125], NPR [111], Rudaw [126], PRI [127], Mashable [128], VK [129], VK [130])

In July 2015, Chechen police arrested three teenage Muslim girls who had scammed online ISIS recruiters out of more than $3,000. The women spoke to the recruiters over social media and told them they had no money to travel to Syria. The recruiters promised to pay for their travel if the girls moved to Syria to marry ISIS fighters. The girls then blocked the recruiters after receiving the money, and repeated the scam several times until they were caught by the Chechen online crimes unit. The girls reportedly faced fraud charges. (Sources: Daily Beast [131], *Telegraph* [132])

More than a dozen suspected ISIS fighters have been arrested in Russia since the announcement of Wilayat Qawqaz. Chechens make up one of the largest ethnicities among ISIS's foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria. ISIS has sought to recruit Chechens because of their advanced military training from years of fighting against Russia. Past enmity between Russia and Chechnya, as well as Russia's links to Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, inspire Chechen foreign fighters to return and carry out domestic attacks against Russian interests. Since the collapse of ISIS's so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria in 2017 and early 2018, the group has continued to claim and carry out attacks in Russia and on Russian interests. The Russian government has claimed to have stopped several domestic ISIS attacks. (Sources: *Express* [13], CNN [14], Reuters [133], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [134])

Hizb ut-Tahrir

Russia has designated the global Islamist proselytization group Hizb-ut Tahrir [135] (HT) as a terrorist organization. Nonetheless, the group continues to operate within Russia. Authorities accuse HT of radicalizing youth and recruiting them to fight in Syria. Though HT claims to be non-violent, Russian security services accuse HT of attempting to carry out violent terrorist attacks while trying to capitalize on the insurgency in the Caucuses to recruit Muslim youth. In November 2012, for example, Russian authorities arrested an HT cell of 18 Russian and Tajik citizens allegedly planning bombings around Moscow. The cell had also allegedly planned a foiled 2010 bombing. In April 2018, the Federal Security Service (FSB) arrested 14 HT members in the Russian republic of Tatarstan. In July 2016, authorities placed Imam Makhmud Velitov of Moscow under house arrest for "public calls for terrorist activities or public justification of terrorism" in a 2013 pro-HT sermon. In February 2018, a Tatarstan court sentenced local HT leader Ilshat Battalov to 17 years in a high-security prison for arranging and participating in the activities of a terrorist organization. HT has accused Russia of an arrest campaign against Muslims and pledged to continue its activities within Russia. (Sources: Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation [136], Al Masdar News [137], Hudson Institute [138], Reuters [139], Hizb ut-Tahrir [140], Radio

Free Europe/Radio Liberty [141], Interfax [142], TASS Russian News Agency [143], U.S. Department of State [33], The Khilafah [144])

Far-Right Extremism

Neo-Nazism has been on the rise in Russia since the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union. Authorities are concerned that violent ultra-nationalist soccer hooligans will strike during the June 2018 World Cup tournament in Russia. Organized hooligan gangs train in mixed martial arts and indoctrinate to a xenophobic ideology that heavily employs Nazi symbolism. A 2017 BBC documentary called "Russia's Hooligan Army" followed some of these gangs, which declared themselves to be "Putin's foot soldiers." These gangs recruit at Russia's stadiums but have traveled beyond Russia's borders. During the June 2016 European Championship in France, approximately 150 Russian soccer hooligans violently attacked English fans, leaving dozens wounded. Russian officials praised the violence for sending a message of Russian strength. Some of the gangs have adopted Nazi imagery and language, such as the SS slogan "My honour is loyalty" or the German proverb "Jedem das Seine" ("To each what he deserves"), which was written above the gates of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Hooligans have also violently clashed with anti-fascist protesters. (Sources: *Guardian* [20], BBC [145], *Daily Telegraph* [146])

The Russian intervention in Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula has also driven far-right extremism in Russia and beyond its borders. Ethnic Russians make up approximately 60 percent of the autonomous Crimea region of Ukraine. Pro-Russian separatists carried out violent protests and occupied government buildings while calling for Crimea to become part of Russia. Russia invaded Crimea in March 2014 and annexed it soon after. Pro-Russian separatists continued to clash with Ukrainian forces, shooting down a military plane in June 2014, killing 49. That July, rebel forces shot down Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which was flying over eastern Ukraine, killing 298. According to Russian hate crimes watchdog Sova, far-right extremists have joined both sides of the conflict. The Slovak security think tank Globsec believes that the crisis has radicalized European right-wing extremists in much the same way the Syrian conflict has radicalized Islamists. Globsec's Ján Cingel told BuzzFeed in July 2017, "For us, in Central Europe … Ukraine is kind of our Syria. The only difference is [European nationalists] will not blow themselves up, but they are training in the woods with standard army rifles." (Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [18], BuzzFeed News [3], BBC News [147], BBC News [148], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [149])

Ultra-nationalist extremists have set up paramilitary training camps in Russia to teach weapons handling, bomb making, and other militaristic skills. The Russian Imperial Movement (RIM) runs one such camp in St. Petersburg, called Partizan, to train people for impending "global chaos." RIM seeks to restore a "mono-ethnic state" led by a "Russian autocratic monarchy," preferably descended from the Romanov dynasty that led Russia before the 1917 revolution. In late 2016 and early 2017, three members of the extreme right-wing Nordic Resistance Movement carried out a series of bombings in Sweden [150]. Two of the perpetrators, Viktor Melin and Anton Thulin, had previously attended Partizan and Swedish officials believe it aided in their radicalization. (Sources: Associated Press [40], Reuters [151], BuzzFeed News [3])

Russia has also become a source of financial and logistical support for some U.S.-based white nationalist groups such as The Base, a neo-Nazi, white-supremacist network that seeks to train their members for fighting a race war. In January 2020, media reports revealed The Base's leader, Rinaldo Nazzaro, to be a U.S.-born military contractor living in Russia. Russia scholars accuse the Russian government of supporting white nationalist extremist groups in the West in order to weaken Western governments and sow division within Western societies. U.S. intelligence officials have accused the Russian government of seeking to stoke racial tensions in the United States in order to influence the 2020 U.S. presidential election. According to FBI official David Porter, "Russia wants to watch us tear ourselves apart." (Sources: *Winnipeg Free Press* [152], *Guardian* [153], Homeland Security News Wire [154], *Survival* [155], *New York Times* [156])

The Russian government or Russian oligarchs have also allegedly funded far-right groups in Europe, such as the Night Wolves motorcycle club in Eastern Europe. Other Russian movements such as the RIM have provided weapons training to European far-right groups. In April 2020, the U.S. government announced its intention to designate the RIM as a terrorist organization, making it the first white supremacist group to receive the designation. (Sources: *New York Times* [156], *New York Times* [2])

Far-Left Extremism

Beginning in 2018, Russian forces have shifted their focus towards targeting and prosecuting antifascist and anarchist groups. However, human rights groups have claimed that the regime has fabricated the intentions and activities of activists and antiestablishment individuals to repress dissent. Russia labeled the anarchist group, "Set" in Russian or "Network" in English, as a terrorist organization in April 2020. According to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), Network members allegedly played airsoft—a game similar to paintball—as a form of training to attack the government. However, human rights organizations such as Memorial, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International have claimed that the group does not actually exist and was fabricated by the Russian government to incriminate and incarcerate political dissenters. Furthermore, most of the evidence used in court against alleged members of the Network were "confessions" resulting from interrogation processes that reportedly involved the use of torture. (Sources: *Guardian* *[157]*, Deutsche Welle [158], *Washington Post* *[159]*)

On February 10, 2020, a court in Penza sentenced seven members of the left-wing Network group to six and 18 years in prison, alleging that the group planned to carry out attacks inside Russia and overthrow the government. Dmitry Pchelintsev, the alleged founder of the group, was given the largest sentence of 18 years imprisonment. However, Pchelintsev claimed that although he and the others were anti-authoritarian activists, the Network did not actually have a leader and that it was not even a formal group. According to Pchelintsev, most of the accused did not even know each other, but were on trial due to their involvement in grassroot organizations that criticized the government. The prosecution for the case claimed the accused held meetings to discuss how to campaign among Muslims and how to implement sharia in everyday life. However, the prosecution did not have actual evidence of the defendants planning to carry out specific terror acts. (Sources: Guardian [157], Deutsche Welle [158], *Washington Post* *[159]*, Human Rights Watch [160])

On June 22, 2020, a military court in St. Petersburg sentenced two members of Network, Viktor Filinkov and Yuly Boyarshinov, to seven and five and a half years in prison. According to prosecutors, the two were behind plots for planning a series of explosions during both the 2018 presidential election and the 2018 World Cup. According to Russia's Council for Civil Society and Human Rights, both men were subject to torture during the interrogation process, which further questions the legitimacy of the suspects' testimonies. (Source: Deutsche Welle [158], Radio Free Europe [161])

The Tatars and the Mejlis

The Tatars are a largely Muslim Turkic-speaking ethnic minority in the Crimean Peninsula. The Mejlis is the Tatars' 33-member self-governing parliament, founded in 1991 and legally recognized by Ukraine in 1999. The Mejlis repeatedly spoke out against Russia after it invaded and annexed Crimea in February 2014. In September 2016, Russia banned the Mejlis and declared it an extremist organization after Russia-appointed Crimean prosecutor Natalya V. Poklonskaya accused it of "acts of sabotage" against the state. The Ukrainian government condemned the ruling as "a far-fetched pretext of 'fighting extremism.'" The Mejlis has continued to meet and speak out internationally against Russia's occupation of Crimea. Russian authorities have subsequently arrested Mejlis leaders for participation in an extremist group, leading to international outcry. The United States and European Union have both unsuccessfully called on Russia to reverse its designation of the Mejlis and end its persecution of the Tatars. (Sources: Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People [162], Associated Press [163], BBC News [164], Human Rights Watch [165], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [166], *New York Times* [167], European Union [168])

Taliban

Russia has designated the Taliban [169] a terrorist organization. Nonetheless, Russia has reportedly maintained contact with the Taliban since 2007. Russia claims that it is trying to get the group to engage in diplomatic negotiations. In December 2015, however, the Russian government declared that the Taliban's goals "coincide" with Russia's regarding ISIS. Afghan and U.S. security officials have called Russian contacts with the Taliban a "dangerous new trend" that gives Russia "malign influence" in Afghanistan. The Afghan Senate announced in December 2016 that it would begin investigating ties between the Taliban, Russia, and Iran. In a March 2018 interview with the BBC, U.S. General John Nicholson, the highest ranked U.S. military official in Afghanistan, accused Russia of providing material support, including weaponry, to the Taliban. Nicholson previously accused Russia of arming the Taliban in 2017. Other U.S. military officials have corroborated the reports and said that Russia had increased its supply of small arms to the Taliban. (Sources: BBC News [170], Voice of America [171], BBC News [172], Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation [136], *Washington Post* [173], Reuters [174])

General Curtis Scaparrotti, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Europe and the commander of U.S. European Command, warned in March 2017 of Russian influence "in terms of association and perhaps even supply to the Taliban." Taliban officials claim that Russia's role with respect to the Taliban does not go beyond "moral and political support." One senior Taliban official told Reuters in 2007 that they and Russia "have a common enemy" and the Taliban "needed support to get rid of the United States and its allies in Afghanistan and Russia wanted all foreign troops to leave Afghanistan as quickly as possible." According to Russian Special Envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov in December 2016, the Taliban "are fighting in Afghanistan against the people we fought in Syria, that's why our interests coincide." (Sources: Reuters [175], Voice of America [171], Associated Press [176])

On June 26, 2020, American intelligence officials reported that an unidentified Russian military intelligence unit secretly offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants to kill coalition forces in Afghanistan, including American troops. The Russian unit has been linked to attacks and covert operations meant to destabilize the West. According to American intelligence officials, successful attacks carried out by militants were provided with rewards from the Russian intelligence unit. Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, denied that the insurgents have "any such relations with any intelligence agency" and called the report an attempt to defame the Taliban. (Source: *New York Times* *[177]*)

Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

In November 2017, Iranian media reported on meetings in Tehran between Iranian and Russian military leaders. According to a November 2017 report by the Iranian Students' News Agency, Iranian Armed Forces General Mohammad Bagheri declared there is "good military cooperation" between the two nations. Bagheri oversees the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) [178] and the Iranian armed forces. The United States designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization in October 2017. (Sources: ISNA [179], *New Yorker* [180], U.S. Department of the Treasury [181])

In Syria, Russian forces have worked alongside IRGC members and, in particular, Qasem Soleimani [182]. Soleimani commands the IRGC's Quds Force, the IRGC's external wing responsible for liaising with Iran's global proxies. The United States, United Nations, and European Union have all sanction-designated Soleimani for involvement in either Iran's nuclear program or the Syrian civil war in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Since Russia entered the Syrian conflict in 2015, Soleimani has coordinated Russian and Iranian cooperation. Soleimani has made multiple trips to Moscow to meet with Russian officials in violation of international sanctions restricting his travel. After Soleimani reportedly traveled to Russia for military discussions in April 2016, the U.S. State Department confirmed that U.N. travel sanctions on Soleimani remained in effect despite the 2015 international nuclear agreement with Iran. (Sources: Fox News [183], Official Journal of the European Union [184], U.S. Department of the Treasury [185], United Nations [186], Reuters [187], *New Yorker* [188], Times of Israel [189])

Hezbollah

Russia has refused to designate the Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah [190] as a terrorist organization, instead providing the group with military and political support. During a November 2015 press conference, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov referred to both Hezbollah and Hamas as "legitimate societal-political forces." Bogdanov met with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [191] in Lebanon [192] in December 2014 to discuss the Syrian civil war and Lebanese stability. Russia entered the Syrian conflict on behalf of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in September 2015, and reportedly began working with Hezbollah soon after. On January 12, 2016, for example, Russian air support provided cover for Syrian and Hezbollah forces to capture the town of Salma. Russian airstrikes "turned around the situation" in Syria, according to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. In November 2016, the pro-Hezbollah website Al-Akhbar reported that Hezbollah and Russian leaders held their first official meeting in Aleppo at the behest of the Russian government. The report further alleged that coordination would continue between Russia and Hezbollah. The following month, a video appeared on YouTube video showing a Russian special forces soldier wearing the Hezbollah logo. (Sources: Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation [193], *Moscow Times* [194], i24 News [195], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [196], YouTube [197], Al-Akhbar [198])

Hezbollah military commanders have admitted to international media that Russia has provided them with offensive weaponry and equipment. A Hezbollah military leader identified only as "Commander Bakr" told the Daily Beast in January 2016 that Hezbollah and Russia are "strategic allies" and confirmed that Russia provides the terrorist group with weapons.

Bakr credited Russian airstrikes against Syrian rebels with aiding the advancement of Hezbollah's forces. Russian forces have also reportedly observed Hezbollah's training exercises. Israeli officials have accused Russia of using its permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council to provide Hezbollah with a diplomatic shield. In 2017, Russia reportedly threatened to veto the renewal of the mandate of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) if it included U.S.-approved references to Hezbollah's terrorist activities (Sources: Daily Beast [199], Washington Institute for Near East Peace [200], *Daily Star* [201], *Newsweek* [202], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [196], Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [203], Middle East Monitor [204], Times of Israel [205])

Foreign Fighters

Russian security experts view Sunni Islamist lone wolf attackers, and returning foreign fighters in particular, as the primary security threat to the country. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov estimated in May 2018 that Russian security forces are monitoring more than 4,000 Russian citizens who are fighting on behalf of terrorist organizations in Syria. Syromolotov further claimed that 3,700 of these foreign fighters are on Russia's most-wanted list and criminal cases have been filed against a majority of them. (Sources: Center for Strategic & International Studies [15], CNBC [16], TASS Russian News Agency [17])

In early 2017, Russian officials estimated that almost 50 percent of a total 9,000 foreign fighters from the former Soviet Union were Russian citizens. More fighters have traveled to Syria and Iraq from Russia and the former Soviet republics than from any other region in the world, according to a 2017 study by the Center for International and Strategic Studies (CSIS). A large majority of these fighters have joined groups fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. According to Russian media, authorities have returned at least 73 underage children and 24 women to Russia from Iraq and Syria since the summer of 2017. (Sources: Center for Strategic & International Studies [15], Daily Sabah [206], The Soufan Center [207], TASS Russian News Agency [208])

Further, the CSIS estimated in 2017 that a "substantial portion" of the approximately 2,500 Central Asian foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria were recruited in Russia. ISIS propaganda has directly targeted Chechens. A 2014 ISIS video promised to "liberate Chechnya and the Caucasus." Regional observers attributed a decrease in Islamism in the Caucasus in 2014 and 2015 to the high number of fighters migrating to the Middle East. In 2015, Dagestani officials reportedly began monitoring all known followers of Salafism. In February 2016, Chechen law enforcement estimated that between 3,000 and 4,000 Chechens had traveled to the Middle East to join ISIS. Chechens reportedly comprise the largest ethnic group of foreign fighters, though the exact number is difficult to accurately calculate given that ISIS's Chechen contingency includes Chechens who had moved to Europe and ethnic Chechens from neighboring Georgia. (Sources: Center for Strategic & International Studies [15], CNN [14], Rudaw [209], *New Yorker* [188], *Guardian* [25], Associated Press [40], Center for Strategic & International Studies [210], Center for Strategic & International Studies [15], *USA Today* [211])

ISIS recruitment efforts have also reportedly targeted educated young Russians, according to Russian officials. For example, a Moscow State University student disappeared in May 2015, only to reappear a week later trying to cross the Turkish border into Syria with 13 other Russians and four Azerbaijanis to join the terrorist group. (Sources: *USA Today* [212], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [213])

Iraq began prosecuting foreign fighters in September 2017. In the first such prosecution of its kind in Iraq, a court sentenced a 28-year-old Russian foreign fighter to death for joining ISIS. Iraq has since prosecuted more than a dozen Russian citizens. According to the Russian Foreign Ministry, Iraq held between 50 and 70 women and more than 100 of their children in the Baghdad criminal court prison as of April 2018. In April 2018, a court sentenced 19 Russian women to life imprisonment for joining ISIS. The following month, the Iraqi criminal court sentenced a Russian national to death for joining ISIS. (Sources: *Telegraph* [214], TASS Russian News Agency [208], Voice of America [215], Iraqi News [216], Al Jazeera [217])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

ISIS Bombing of Russian Airliner

On October 31, 2015, a Russian charter flight to St. Petersburg from the Egyptian resort area of Sharm el-Sheikh crashed

25 minutes after takeoff, killing all 224 passengers and crewmembers. ISIS's Egyptian affiliate, Wilayat Sinai (Sinai Province), claimed responsibility, though Russian and Egyptian investigators were initially skeptical. FSB chief Alexander Bortnikov confirmed on November 17 that traces of explosives were found in the debris. An investigation of the downed plane revealed it shattered in mid-air after the detonation of a bomb equivalent to up to 1 kg of TNT. ISIS's English-language magazine *Dabiq* claimed the group smuggled on board an improvised explosive device made out of a Schweppes soda can. In February 2016, the Egyptian government acknowledged that terrorists had caused the crash. In July 2016, the Russian government passed the Yarovaya Laws in response to the bombing, which criminalized the failure to report a crime. The laws also required digital providers to store users' data for at least six months and make records available to security services. Human rights groups and government watchdogs have criticized the laws. (Sources: ABC News [218], *Wall Street Journal* [219], *New York Times* [220], BBC News [221], Reuters [222], *New York Times* [223], *Economist* [224])

Chechen Violence

Russia fought two wars against Chechen separatists. An estimated 100,000 people died in the First Chechen War between 1994 and 1996. Following a series of terror attacks in 1999, Russian forces invaded Chechnya's capital of Grozny in February 2000, initiating the nine-year Second Chechen War. During this period Chechen militants conducted dozens of terror attacks in and around Russia. Though Russia declared an end to its military operations in Chechnya in 2009, Chechen militants have continued to target the country. For example, on March 29, 2010, two female suicide bombers exploded within an hour of each other at two different Moscow metro stations, killing 40 and wounding more than 60. Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov claimed responsibility for the bombings, telling Russians that "the war will come to your streets." Putin promised that the terrorists responsible would "be destroyed." (Sources: BBC News [39], BBC News [70], *Guardian* [71], *New York Times* [72])

2004 Beslan School Attack

On September 1, 2004, Chechen rebels wearing suicide belts, reportedly under orders from Chechen warlord Shamil Besayav, seized a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, Russia, taking hostage more than 1,200 students and teachers. On September 2, the militants released approximately 26 hostages. A few hours later, the militants executed 20 male hostages. On September 3, Russian commandos stormed the school and evacuated most of the hostages. At least 330 hostages—half of them children—were killed during the three-day siege. Nurpashi Kulayev was the only participant captured alive. In 2006, a Russian court sentenced Kulayev to life in prison on charges of terrorism and murder. In 2017, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Russian forces failed in their response to the hostage situation. The court also accused Russian officials of failing to act on intelligence ahead of the attack and secure the school. (Sources: BBC News [39], BBC News [62], CNN [63], BBC News [62], *New York Times* [225], *Washington Post* [64])

2002 Moscow Theater Hostage Crisis

On October 23, 2002, a group of Chechen rebels from the Islamic International Peacekeeping Brigade, Special Purpose Islamic Regiment, and Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs raided the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow and took approximately 800 hostages. The militants identified themselves as members of the 29th Division of the Chechen army and demanded that Russia withdraw from Chechnya. Also among the rebels were 19 women who belonged to an informal group of Chechen female terrorists dubbed "black widows" by the media for being widows of Islamic militants. (Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [60], BBC News [226], CBS News [227])

After three days, Russian forces filled the theater with an unidentified anesthetic gas and stormed the building, killing all of the terrorists and at least 129 hostages, who largely died from exposure to the gas. The international community was highly critical of Russian security services over the high number of civilian casualties during the rescue raid. Russian security did not immediately reveal the exact gas used, which made it difficult for doctors to treat patients in the immediate aftermath. The Russian Health Ministry later revealed the gas to be the opioid fentanyl, which can be hundreds of times more potent than morphine. (Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [60], BBC News [226], CBS News [227])

September 1999 Apartment Bombings

On September 4, 1999, a car bomb exploded in Buynaksk, Dagestan, destroying an apartment building housing Russian

soldiers and killing 65. Police discovered and defused a second car bomb before it exploded near a hospital treating the wounded. On September 9, a bomb exploded in an apartment building in Moscow, killing 94. On September 13, a bomb in a Moscow apartment building killed 124. The same day, Gennadii Seleznov, chairman of the lower house of the Russian parliament, received a note that an apartment had just been blown up in Volgodonsk. There were no explosions in Volgodonsk that day, but on September 16 an apartment building blew up there, killing 17 and wounding 69. Altogether the bombings killed 243 and wounded 1,742. The Russian government initially blamed Osama bin Laden, but suspicions shifted to Chechen warlords. Conspiracy theories have abided for several years that members of the FSB were involved in orchestrating the bombings. Russia eventually accused nine Islamic militants, five of whom were subsequently killed in fighting in Chechnya or by Russian security services. In 2003, Russia's prosecutor general closed the investigation into the bombings, though no one had yet to be convicted for the attacks. (Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [55], *New York Times* [56], BBC News [57], CBC [58])

- **December 31, 2019:** Two armed men in Ingushetia's capital of Magas strike a police officer with their car and then attack three other officers with knives, altogether wounding four before one of the attackers is shot dead and the other is wounded.
  ISIS claims responsibility. Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [4], Associated Press [5]
- **July 1, 2019:** An assailant kills a police officer with a hand grenade and a knife in the Chechnyan village of Bamut.
  ISIS claims responsibility the following day. Source: Defense Post [93]
- **June 23, 2019:** After police stop a car in Grozny, the driver attacks the officers with a knife, wounding two officers. The attacker is shot dead. ISIS claims responsibility through its Amaq News Agency and identifies the attacker as Abdullah al-Shishani while erroneously claiming he had attacked the Chechnyan presidential compound and wounded multiple people with a machine gun. Sources: Long War Journal [96], Defense Post [97]
- **June 22, 2019:** Two men in Dagestan open fire on police officers who stop their car.
  Police return fire and kill the two men. Police identify the two as "followers of the Islamic State" on their way to carry out an attack. Source: Defense Post [93]
- **August 20, 2018:** Two men armed with knives attempt to enter the Shali district police department in Chechnya. They wound two police employees before they are shot dead. In the Chechnyan village of Mesker-Yurt, a man with a backpack fails to execute a suicide bombing, resulting in no injuries. In Grozny, a man attempts to run over a police officer with his car and instead wounds two other officers before he is killed. ISIS claims responsibility for the attacks. Sources: Defense Post [228], Defense Post [97]
- **May 4, 2018:** A gunman opens fire on police after they stop him for a document check in Nizhny Novgorod. The shooter wounds three intelligence officers and flees to a rented apartment in the city. The FSB tracks the gunman to the apartment and shoots him dead after he refuses to surrender. Police provide photos of an AK-47 in the apartment and claim the gunmen is a member of ISIS. The Russian-language pro-ISIS Telegram channel Xalifat Xalifat claims the gunman as a "warrior of ISIS." Other ISIS propaganda sources also reportedly claim the gunman. The attack comes just over a month before Nizhny Novgorod is scheduled to host a match in the 2018 FIFA World Cup tournament. Sources: *The Sun* [229], FIFA [230]
- **February 18, 2018:** A gunman armed with a hunting rifle and a knife shouts "Allahu akbar" and opens fire on worshippers at a Russian Orthodox church in the village of Kizlyar in the Dagestan province, killing five and wounding five others before he is killed by security forces.
  ISIS claims responsibility through its Amaq News Agency and names the attacker as Khalil al-Dagestani. Russian security identifies the gunman as Khalil Khalilov, a 22-year-old resident of Dagestan. Sources: Jane's [231], Long War Journal [232], TASS Russian News Agency [233], BBC News [234], *New York Times* [235], Reuters [236]
- **December 27, 2017:** An improvised explosive device detonates in a supermarket in St. Petersburg, wounding 13 people.
  President Vladimir Putin authorizes Russian police to "take no prisoners" during terrorist attacks and "liquidate the bandits on the spot." ISIS claims responsibility but does not provide evidence of its claim. On December 31, Russia indicts Dmitry Lukyanenko on terrorism charges for setting the bomb. Lukyanenko admits to wanting revenge against the organizers and members of a mindset training session he had attended. Sources: CBS News [237], *New York Times* [238], Reuters [239]
- **April 3, 2017:** A suicide bomber blows up a subway car in St. Petersburg, killing 14 people and wounding 51. Authorities find and disarm a second bomb later in the day. Police identify the bomber as Akbarzhon Jalilov, a naturalized Russian citizen born in Kyrgyzstan. Sources: BBC News [240], *Wall Street Journal* [241], Sputnik News [242], *Moscow Times* [243]
- **December 19, 2016:** An off-duty police officer assassinates Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrey G. Karlov and wounds three others during an art exhibit opening in Ankara, Turkey.
  The gunman shouts "Allahu akbar" and a statement about seeking martyrdom for Aleppo during the attack, prompting suspicions of Islamic terrorism. Security forces shoot and kill the gunman, whom Turkish authorities later identify as 22-year-old Mevlut Mert Altintas, a local police officer. The Russian Foreign Ministry labels the shooting a terrorist attack. ISIS social media channels praise the attack and release contact information of other Russian embassy officials around the world. Sources: *New York Times* [244], *Politico* [245], *Telegraph* [246], *Express* [247]

- **October 31, 2015:** ISIS's Wilayat Sinai claims responsibility for the crash of a Russian airliner traveling from Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to St. Petersburg, Russia.
  Investigators say a bomb on board detonated after the plane was airborne, killing all 224 passengers and crew. Sources: *New York Times* [11], Reuters [12], Fox News [107]
- **December 3, 2014 - December 4, 2014:** Fighters from the Islamic Caucasus Emirate (ICE) launch an overnight raid on security forces and government buildings in Grozny, Chechnya, killing 10 police officers and wounding 28 others.
  An ICE statement calls the attack an "act of retaliation" for Russian oppression of Muslim women. Source: Long War Journal [92]
- **December 29, 2013 - December 30, 2013:** On December 29, a suicide bomber kills 18 and wounds 50 at the main rail station in Volgograd, Russia.
  On December 30, a second bomb kills 16 on a bus in Volgograd. Identical bomb materials in both attacks indicate a link. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Vilayat Dagestan, one of the groups within the Islamic Caucasus Emirate, claims responsibility the following month and threatens to attack the Sochi Olympics in February. Sources: *Guardian* [248], *Guardian* [249], *Los Angeles Times* [250], Reuters [251]
- **May 25, 2013:** A female suicide bomber blows up in Makhachkala, Dagestan's provincial capital, wounding at least 15. Police identify the bomber as Madina Alieva, a 25-year-old widow of two Islamic militants. Sources: BBC News [252], *Guardian* [59]
- **August 28, 2012:** A suicide bomber kills Sufi cleric Said Atsayev and at least six others at Atsayev's home in Chirkey, Dagestan.
  Police identify the bomber as black widow Aminat Kurbanova, who had posed as one of Atsayev's followers. According to police, Kurbanova was married to an Islamic militant and two deceased husbands had also been militants. Source: Reuters [253]
- **August 18, 2012:** Two masked gunmen open fire at a Shiite mosque in Khasavyurt, Dagestan, wounding at least six. The gunmen escape capture. Separately, a suicide bombing at a home hosting a funeral of a police officer in the Republic of Ingushetia kills seven and wounds 11. There are no immediate claims of responsibility for either attack. Sources: CNN [254], *Los Angeles Times* [250]
- **May 2012:** On May 3, a suicide bomber blows up in a car after police stop the vehicle for a document check outside of Makhachkala, the provincial capital of Dagestan.
  A second bomb explodes after emergency vehicles arrive on the scene. The twin bombings kill at least 12 and wound 110. Sources: Reuters [255], Voice of America [256]
- **January 24, 2011:** A suicide bomber explodes at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport, killing 35 and wounding 180. Russian investigators identify the bomber as a 20-year-old man from the North Caucasus. According to investigators, the bomber "first and foremost" targeted foreign citizens. Sources: BBC News [70], BBC News [257], *New York Times* [72], *Los Angeles Times* [250]
- **March 29, 2010:** Two female suicide bombers explode within an hour of each other at two different Moscow metro stations, killing 40 and wounding more than 60.
  Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov claims responsibility for the bombings, telling Russians that "the war will come to your streets." Sources: BBC News [70], *Guardian* [71], *New York Times* [72]
- **November 27, 2009 - November 28, 2009:** On November 27, a bomb on board the Moscow-St. Petersburg luxury train Nevsky Express causes the train to derail, killing 28 and wounding approximately 100.
  On November 28, a second bomb is remotely detonated near the site of the train derailment, wounding some investigators but causing no deaths. Authorities suspect Islamists from the Caucasus region. Sources: CNN [258], BBC News [70], *New York Times* [72], Agence France-Presse [259]
- **August 17, 2009:** A suicide bomber drives a truck into the gates of the main police station in Nazran, the largest city in the Russian Republic of Ingushetia, killing 20 people and wounding 138 others.
  Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov claims responsibility for the bombing. Source: Council on Foreign Relations [260]
- **August 21, 2006:** Homemade bombs explode at the Cherkizovsky Asian market in Moscow, killing 10 and wounding 40.
  Three days later, authorities arrest university students Oleg Kostyryov and Ilya Tikhomirov. The students confessed to targeting Asians because they wanted "revenge on the 'illegals' who are filling up Russia and carrying out terrorist attacks." Source: *Guardian* [261]
- **September 1, 2004 - September 3, 2004:** On September 1, Chechen rebels wearing suicide belts, reportedly under orders from Chechen warlord Shamil Besayav, seize a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, Russia, taking hostage more than 1,200 students and teachers.
  On September 2, the militants release approximately 26 hostages. A few hours later, the militants execute 20 male hostages. On September 3, Russian commando storm the school and evacuate most of the hostages. At least 330 hostages—half of them children—are killed during the three-day siege. Sources: BBC News [39], BBC News [62], CNN [63], *Washington Post* [64]
- **August 31, 2004:** A suicide bomber blows herself up on a Moscow metro station, killing 10 and wounding 50.
  The bomber is identified as a black widow. The Islambouli Brigades claims responsibility, calling the bombing a response to Russian President Vladimir Putin, "who slaughtered Muslims time and again." Sources: BBC News [70], CBS News [262], *New York Times* [263]

- **August 24, 2004:** Two Russian passenger planes are blown up almost simultaneously by two black widows, killing 90 people.
  One Tupolev Tu-134 airliner, flying to the city of Volgograd, crashes south of Moscow. Moments later another Tupolev airliner, Sochi-bound Tu-154, crashes near the port city of Rostov-on-Don. The authorities identify the two bombers as young women who illegally purchased their tickets from airline personnel. The little-known Islambouli Brigades claims responsibility and promises to continue attacks until "the killings of our Muslim brothers in Chechnya cease." Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [250], BBC News [70], BBC News [264]
- **June 22, 2004:** Chechen rebels seize an interior ministry building in the Republic of Ingushetia, near Chechnya.
  They also attack towns in the area, including Karbulak and Sleptsova. At least 92 people are killed, including acting Regional Interior Minister Abukar Kostoyev. Sources: Sky News [265], *Telegraph* [266]
- **May 9, 2004:** A bombing during a military parade at a stadium in Grozny kills Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov and 13 others and wounds more than 60.
  Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [250], *Telegraph* [267], *New York Times* [268]
- **February 6, 2004:** A female suicide bomber explodes in a Moscow subway car during morning rush hour, killing 41 and wounding more than 100.
  Chechen separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov denies responsibility. Authorities identify the bomber as part of the black widows. Sources: Huffington Post [269], CNN [270], *Telegraph* [266]
- **December 5, 2003:** A day before Russian parliamentary elections, a suicide bomber blows up on a morning commuter train just outside Yessentuki station in southern Russia, killing 46 and injuring 160.
  According to the FSB, the bomber was found with grenades still secured to his leg. He had boarded the train with three women, two of whom jumped off the train prior to the explosion. The third woman was injured but not expected to live. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Authorities suspect Chechen separatists. Sources: *Chicago Tribune* [271], *Telegraph* [266]
- **August 1, 2003:** A suicide bomber driving a truck full of explosives targets a Russian military hospital at Mozdok in North Ossetia, near the Chechen border.
  The blast kills at least 50 and wounds more than 100. Sources: *New York Times* [272], *Telegraph* [266]
- **July 5, 2003:** Two female suicide bombers explode at a music festival in Moscow, killing 15 and wounding 60.
  Sources: *New York Times* [272], CNN [273], *Telegraph* [266]
- **June 5, 2003:** A female suicide bomber explodes on a bus near Chechnya, killing at least 19 and wounding 16.
  The bus was carrying military personnel to the Prokhladny air base. Russian police blame Islamic extremists. Sources: *New York Times* [274], *New York Times* [275], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [276]
- **May 14, 2003:** Two female suicide bombers kill at least 28 and wound 150 at a religious festival in Iliskhan-Yurt, Chechnya.
  Source: *Guardian* [277]
- **May 12, 2003:** Suicide bombers drive an explosives-filled truck into a government compound in Chechnya's Nadterechny region, killing at least 59 and wounding almost 200.
  The bombing destroys the FSB headquarters in Nadterechny. It is the deadliest single attack to-date in the Chechen war. Sources: *Guardian* [277], *New York Times* [278], *Washington Post* [279]
- **December 27, 2002:** Three suicide bombers wearing Russian military uniforms drive two explosives-filled trucks into the Chechen government headquarters in Grozny, killing at least 80 and wounding 152.
  The Russian government blames international terrorists partnered with Chechen separatists. According to the Russian military, Chechen rebel warlord Shamil Basayev and Arab militant Abu al-Walid, who also belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood, ordered the attack. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt denies involvement in the attack. Sources: *Guardian* [277], CBS News [280]
- **October 23, 2002 - October 26, 2002:** A group of Chechen rebels, including 19 so-called black widows, raid the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow and take approximately 800 hostages.
  The gunmen identify themselves as members of the 29th Division of the Chechen army and demand that Russia withdraw from Chechnya. After three days, Russian forces fill the theater with an unidentified anesthetic gas and storm the building, killing all of the terrorists and at least 129 hostages, who largely die from exposure to the gas. Sources: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [60], BBC News [226], CBS News [227]
- **May 9, 2002:** A mine hidden in shrubbery explodes during a Victory Day parade in Kaspiysk, Dagestan, killing 44 and wounding more than 150.
  There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Separately, militants fire grenade launchers at a stadium in Grozny, Chechnya, hosting a Victory Day parade, wounding one police officer. Sources: BBC News [281], BBC News [282]
- **July 2, 2000 - July 3, 2000:** Five Chechen suicide bombers attack Russian bases in four Chechen towns within 24 hours, killing or wounding up to 200 Russian troops.
  One of the attacks, on a Russian police dormitory in Argun, kills at least 54. Chechen guerrilla leader, Khattab, claims to have 500 more suicide bombers at the ready to "die for Islam." Sources: *Guardian* [277], *Guardian* [283], BBC News [284]
- **June 7, 2000:** A suicide car bomb near the Chechen capital of Grozny kills two Russian police officers and wounds five.
  It is the first attack of its kind in Chechnya. Sources: CNN [285], *Guardian* [277]
- **September 4, 1999 - September 13, 1999:** On September 4, a car bomb explodes in Buynaksk, Dagestan, destroying

an apartment building housing Russian soldiers and killing 65.

Police discover and defuse a second car bomb before it explodes near a hospital treating the wounded. On September 9, a bomb explodes in an apartment building in Moscow, killing 94. On September 13, a bomb in a Moscow apartment building kills 124. On September 16, an apartment building blows up in Volgodonsk, killing 17 and wounding 69. Altogether the bombs kill 243 and wound 1,742. The Russian government initially blames Osama bin Laden, but suspicions shift to Chechen warlords. Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [55], *New York Times* [56], BBC News [57], CBC [58]

- **January 9, 1996 - January 18, 1996:**Some 250 Chechen fighters seize up to 3,000 hostages in a hospital in Kizlyar, Dagestan.
  The fighters demand that Russia withdraw from Chechnya. The militants release most of the hostages and move the remaining hostages by bus to the Russian village of Pervomayskoye on the Chechen border. Russian forces launch a rescue attempt, during which most of the rebels escape and 65 hostages and soldiers are killed. Sources: BBC News [286], *Guardian* [287], *New York Times* [288], CNN [285]
- **June 14, 1995 - June 19, 1995:**On June 14, up to 200 Chechen rebels invade the southern Russian town of Budyonnovsk and take hundreds of hostages in a hospital.
  The rebels reportedly execute five hostages at random overnight. The rebels demand that Russian troops withdraw immediately from Chechnya, that Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin begin talks with Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev, and that the rebels be permitted to meet with reporters. On June 17, three Russian commando raids kill more than 100 people during botched rescue attempts. On June 19, the hostages are released and the rebels go free after Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin promises a ceasefire in Chechnya and to allow the rebels' safe passage back. Sources: *Telegraph* [266], CNN [289], *New York Times* [290], BBC News [286], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [291], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [292]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

In May 2018, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov declared that Europe lagged 10 years behind Russia's capabilities to detect and control terrorists. Following the April 3, 2017, subway bombing in St. Petersburg, the Russian government praised its existing counterterrorism legislation as sufficient. The U.S. State Department 2016 Country Report on Russia found that the Russian Federation prioritized counterterrorism efforts in 2016. According to the U.S. State Department, Russia has taken a militarized approach to counterterrorism while criticizing soft power counter-extremism measures. Because of this, Russia has been slow to partner with international non-governmental organizations to counter extremist narratives. (Sources: TASS Russian News Agency [293], Sputnik News [294], U.S. Department of State [33], BBC News [38])

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) is the successor to the Soviet Union's KGB. It is charged with overseeing national security, counterterrorism, border security, and naval security. The FSB is accountable to the president of the Russian Federation. In coordination with the Russian government, the FSB maintains a list of designated domestic and foreign terrorist organizations. The FSB claimed credit for the 2006 death of Chechen militant Shamil Basayev, though pro-rebel media disputed the claim. Basayev was responsible for major terrorist attacks, including the September 2004 Beslan school attack and the 2002 Moscow theater hostage crisis. The FSB was publicly criticized after both incidents because of the high number of civilian casualties during rescue raids. (Sources: Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation [193], Government of the Russian Federation [295], BBC News [296], Agence France-Presse [297], Reuters [298])

Legislation

In 2002, the Russian government passed the Federal Law of the Russian Federation on Countering Extremist Activity (Extremism Law). The law allows the government to sanction individuals, groups and media organizations labeled as extremist. The law does not define extremism. It instead provides a list of 28 violent and nonviolent extremist activities, including: incitement of social, racial, ethnic or religious hatred; public justification of terrorism and other terrorist activity; public display of Nazi attributes or symbols; mass distribution of extremist materials; organization and preparation of extremist acts; and the forcible change of the foundations of the constitutional system and violation of integrity of the Russian Federation. (Sources: Library of Congress [32], U.S. Department of State [33])

The Russian government expanded the law in 2007 to include non-violent groups, which led to the designation of international Islamist network Hizb ut-Tahrir. The Extremism Law has also been used to restrict religious movements. The city of Taganrog cited the law in its 2009 decision to label Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist group for inciting religious hatred through "propagating the exclusivity and supremacy" of their religion. In May 2015, authorities confiscated books

from a Yekaterinburg school run by the Jewish Chabad-Lubavitch movement after a parent complained that the books taught hatred of non-Jews. In August 2015, the Sakhalin Regional Court in the Far East Sakhalin region banned an Islamic text that quoted passages from the Quran, but reversed the decision later in the year after protests from the Muslim community. In November 2015, Russia's parliament passed an amendment to the Extremism Law protecting Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist religious texts from being declared extremist. (Sources: Library of Congress [32], *Washington Post* [34], U.S. Department of State [33], *Independent* [299], RT [300], Jewish Telegraphic Agency [301], Jewish Telegraphic Agency [302])

Nonetheless, the Russian government has continued to use the extremism law to restrict Jehovah's Witnesses. In November 2015, a Taganrog court convicted Alexei Koptev and 15 others of attempting to revive the Jehovah's Witnesses movement in the city. In March 2017, the Justice Ministry added the St. Petersburg headquarters of Russia's Jehovah's Witnesses movement to a list of organizations "in connection with the carrying out of extremist activities" and called for it to be "liquidated." In April, the Russian Supreme Court declared Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist group. That May, armed FSB and police raided a Jehovah's Witness prayer group in Oryol, arresting participants. Some analysts have suggested a government conspiracy against the religious group because its international headquarters is in the United States. (Sources: *New York Times* [303], Moscow Times [304], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [35])

In 2014, Russia again expanded the Extremism Law to enable authorities to ban websites and social media companies without a court order. That December, Russia reportedly banned a number of Western analytical websites, including U.S. research analyst Aaron Zelin's Jihadology.net and Belgian analyst Pieter Van Ostaeyen's blog on the Syrian war. Between February and December 2015 alone, Russia banned 512 websites. In July 2016, the Russian government passed the much-criticized Yarovaya Law, which criminalized the failure to report a crime, including the preparation of terrorism. It also requires digital providers to store users' data for at least six months and make records available to security services. Rights groups have criticized ambiguity in the law, particularly in what constitutes preparation for terrorism. Others have accused the Russian government of waging a war against free speech. Human Rights Watch accused the legislation of taking "Big Brother surveillance to a whole new level." (Sources: Mashable [36], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [37], *New York Times* [305], *Economist* [224], *New York Times* [223], *Forbes* [306], Human Rights Watch [307])

Russia's communications regulator, Roskomnadzor, blocked professional networking platform LinkedIn in 2016 after that site's operators refused to provide access to users' data. The encrypted messaging service Telegram has also refused to provide access to its users' data. In April 2018, the Russian government attempted to block Telegram in the country, but Telegram has reportedly used a process called domain fronting to piggyback on Google and Amazon websites to mask its Internet protocol addresses, allowing it to continue to function within Russia. Because of domain fronting, Roskomnadzor inadvertently blocked other Google-based platforms in the country. (Sources: Reuters [133], Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [134], *New York Times* [305], Reuters [308])

The Russian government has criminalized the provision and collection of funds to terrorist organizations. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) noted an increase in prosecutions for money laundering between 2003 and 2006. According to a 2013 FATF evaluation, Russia's criminalization of terrorist financing does not extend to the theft of nuclear material, as mandated by the U.N. Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism. FATF concluded that "the Russian terrorist financing provision could be used more effectively." (Source: FATF [309])

International Sporting Events

Russia hosed the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi in February 2014 and is set to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament in June. Global extremists threatened both events and Russian security services uncovered several plots ahead of the games. (Sources: *Foreign Policy* [6], Reuters [310])

Russia received several threats ahead of the February 2014 Olympics. In July 2013, al-Qaeda-affiliated Chechen warlord Doku Umarov ordered his followers to do "their utmost to derail" the Olympics. A December 2013 twin suicide bombing in Volgograd killed 34. Vilayat Dagestan, one of the groups within the Islamic Caucasus Emirate, claimed responsibility and threatened to attack the Olympics. In January 2014, ISIS released a video threatening the Olympics. U.S. officials warned of insecurity at the games. Citing an al-Qaeda threat, U.S. Representative Michael McCaul, chair of the House Homeland Security Committee, called for organizers to consider the possibility of cancelation. British officials warned that attacks were "likely to occur." Russia reportedly spent billions of dollars on security, deploying at least 40,000 police and military

officers around Sochi in a so-called ring of steel. In addition, Russia set up blockades, checkpoints, anti-missile batteries, and a naval presence. Despite the threats, no attacks occurred during the Olympics. Nevertheless, speaking to media ahead of the Olympics, Russia expert Mark Galeotti of New York University believed violent extremists would claim the Olympics as a victory because the international community focused so much on Russia's insecurity rather than celebrating Russia. (Sources: Fox News [311], CNN [312], CNN [313], *Guardian* [248], *Foreign Policy* [6], *Hill* [314], BBC News [315])

In June 2018, the Russian Federation will host the 2018 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament in 11 different cities, drawing more than 1 million foreign visitors, according to government estimates. Russian security officials have warned that lone wolf jihadist attacks present the greatest security threat to the tournament. ISIS has released several propaganda pieces threatening the tournament. Officials also fear the tournament could be a target for Chechen separatist violence or violent protests against Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. A 2018 report by Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) found a high risk of violent Islamist terrorism during the World Cup due to Russian foreign fighters in Syria seeking revenge against Russia's campaign against ISIS. The BKA also cited a high risk of violence from Russian soccer hooligans. The FSB claimed it foiled several terrorist plots and confiscated numerous weapons ahead of the tournament. (Sources: Reuters [310], Agence France-Presse [316], CNBC [16], Deutsche Welle [317])

Russia has taken several—including some controversial—security measures ahead of the tournament. In November 2017, for example, the government announced it would shorten the academic year at some universities to allow police to use student dormitories, drawing criticism from student unions. Authorities have also installed facial recognition technology on some 5,000 CCTV cameras in Moscow, which political opponents of the Russian government fear could be used to further quash political dissent. (Sources: Reuters [310], Agence France-Presse [316], CNBC [16])

International Counter-Extremism

Syrian Intervention

In September 2015, Russia began a bombing campaign in Syria after a request from the Assad regime in Damascus. The U.S. government condemned Russia for acting independently of the international anti-ISIS coalition. The following month, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov called upon Russian President Vladimir Putin to send Chechen ground troops to Syria to defeat ISIS. Moscow has described its intervention as an effort to degrade ISIS forces and reduce the threat of terrorism. Putin announced in May 2018 that all foreign forces would withdraw from Syria as a political peace process developed, though he did not offer a timeline. (Sources: *Wall Street Journal* [21], CNN [22], BBC News [23], *Guardian* [24], *Guardian* [25], CNN [26])

Despite assertions that airstrikes are targeting ISIS positions, Russian strikes have targeted non-ISIS rebel forces opposed to the Assad regime. According to U.S. officials, these strikes have also targeted CIA-backed Syrian rebels. A May 2018 report by Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Center (JTIC) found that only 14 percent of 6,833 Russian and Syrian airstrikes between September 2015 and March 2018 targeted ISIS. The majority of the strikes targeted rebel positions in areas where there was little or no ISIS presence. The report also found that the Russian intervention helped the Assad regime triple its territorial hold in Syria within the three-year timeframe. (Sources: *Washington Post* [27], *Wall Street Journal* [28], Voice of America [29])

On March 5, 2020, Turkey and Russia—who back opposing sides in Syria's war—agreed to halt fighting in Syria's Idlib. In March 2020, the Russian-backed Syrian government forces attempted to retake Idlib, which prompted Turkey to back rebels seeking to oust President Bashar al-Assad. The ceasefire included an agreement to establish a security corridor with joint patrols. Idlib, the last stronghold of Syrian rebels, has been the scene of intense fighting as Russian-backed forces have tried to expel the rebels. The operation has resulted in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees fleeing towards the border with Turkey. On March 13, Turkey and Russia officially agreed to start joint patrols in Idlib, with the new measures taking effect on March 15. (Source: *New York Times* *[318]*, Reuters [319], CNN [320], Defense Post [321])

International Cooperation

The FSB maintains a presence in 49 countries around the world and has relations with security services in 104 countries. In March 2018, Russia and Indonesia agreed to enhance their counterterrorism cooperation. Though Russia and the West

share the goal of defeating ISIS and similar terror groups, some analysts have argued that Russia is not a legitimate counterterrorism partner. RAND Corporation analyst Colin P. Clarke argued in early 2018 that the Russian government consistently seeks to undermine the United States on the global stage. Anna Borshchevskaya of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy wrote in a December 2017 piece in *Foreign Affairs* that Russia's goal in Syria has been to support the Syrian regime instead of fighting terrorism. She further asserted that Russia will not hesitate to ally with terror groups that serve its interests. Russia's alliance with Hezbollah in Syria supports her point. (Sources: TASS Russian News Agency [322], Federal Security Service of the Russia Federation [193], RAND Corporation [323], *Foreign Affairs* [324])

In June 2017, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Russian diplomat Vladimir Ivanovich Voronkov to lead the newly created U.N. Counter-Terrorism Office. Russia is also a member of the Quartet of Mideast Peacemakers, along with the United States, European Union, and United Nations. The Quartet is tasked with aiding Palestinian economic and institutional development while mediating peace negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel. (Sources: United Nations [325], U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process [326])

Russia is a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Russia also belongs to the FATF-style regional organizations the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG) and the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism. Russia is a primary funding source for the EAG and provides technical assistance and other resources to enhance legislative and regulatory frameworks, according to the U.S. State Department. In 2015, the Russian government reportedly investigated more than 3,500 individuals suspected of involvement in international terrorist organization. The Russian government froze more than 3,000 accounts of approximately $610,000. (Source: U.S. Department of State [33], FATF [327])

Public Opinion

Security, Terrorism, and Syria

In a 2017 poll by the Pew Research Center, 81 percent of Russians viewed terrorism as a top concern in the country. However, issues such as rising prices (93 percent), crime (90 percent), corrupt political leaders (89 percent), lack of employment opportunities (87 percent), and the wealth gap (84 percent) concerned Russians more. Comparatively, only 66 percent were concerned by conflict between ethnic groups/nationalities. (Source: Pew Research Center [328])

The poll found that 58 percent of Russians viewed ISIS as the primary threat to their country. The poll also found that more than one-third of respondents supported the expulsion of Caucasus and Central Asian Muslims. The second major concern (38 percent) was the condition of the global economy. In a tie, 37 percent Russians were equally concerned about large numbers of refugees (specifically "A large number of refugees leaving countries such as Iraq and Syria") and U.S. power and influence. Only 34 percent view cyberattacks from other countries as a major threat. (Source: Pew Research Center [329])

Regarding Russia's involvement in the Syrian civil war, a plurality of Russians (46 percent) wanted the country's armed intervention to remain unchanged, according to a 2017 Pew poll on Vladimir Putin's policies. The poll found that 34 percent wanted Russia to decrease its military presence in Syria. Further, 45 percent of Russians held favorable views of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, versus 21 percent viewing the Syrian dictator unfavorably. Nonetheless, only 25 percent believe keeping Assad in power should be a top priority for Russia compared with limiting civilian casualties (72 percent) and defeating extremist groups (64 percent). (Source: Pew Research Center [330])

Xenophobia and Immigration

According to a July 2014 poll by the independent Levada Center, 54 percent of Russians support the idea of Russia for ethnic Russians. That percentage decreased slightly to 52 percent in Levada's August 2016 poll. Nonetheless, only 18 percent reported palpable interethnic tensions in their areas of residence in 2016, down from 23 percent in 2014. The 2016 poll found that 39 percent of Russians believed immigrants were destroying Russian culture, versus 27 percent who disagreed with the statement and 28 percent who neither disagreed nor agreed. Six percent thought it "difficult to say." (Sources: *Los Angeles Times* [18], Levada Center [19])

According to the same 2016 poll, 18 percent of Russians believed there should be residency restrictions on all nationalities/ethnicities except Russian, the highest percentage in the poll's 12-year span. In the 2016 poll, 34 percent voiced support for residency restrictions on people from the Caucasus, while 29 percent supported restriction on people from central Asian former Soviet republics. Levada also marked a steady decrease in support for residency restriction on Jews between 2004 and 2016. In August 2004, 15 percent of Russians responded that Jews should be subject to residency restrictions. Only 6 percent affirmed the belief in 2016. (Source: Levada Center [19])