

DAGESTAN: A NEW FLASHPOINT IN RUSSIA'S NORTH CAUCASUS

Alexey Malashenko
Scholar-In-Residence
Carnegie Moscow Center

Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe
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MR. PARKER: Good morning. Does this work and everybody can hear? I'd like to welcome everybody to this morning's Helsinki Commission briefing on the situation in Dagestan. We'd like to get started here because how we sort of envision a briefing is really an opportunity for an informal discussion with members of the audience and questions. At the commission, we receive a lot of groups -- a lot of delegations, NGOs -- from Russia and regions we cover and this is sort of our way of opening it up to the public and having that reception and that discussion publicly. The remarks are transcribed and do become part of our official record.

So Dagestan, the most populated and largest of the North Caucasus republics in Southern Russia, has been in the news quite a lot lately -- not a whole lot of the news is good. I was sort of reading Tatyana Lokshina's piece from a couple of days ago and she says here: "There's never a quiet moment in Dagestan. There are all the counterterrorism operations where entire houses are destroyed and helicopters fire away into mountain gorges. There are explosions in the streets, and finding bombs that have not gone off yet has become a routine event.

"Dagestan provides a lot of news, none of it any good. And, yet, few people really understand what is happening there. It is hard to get an objective picture of events in such a complex place, home to more than 30 ethnic groups speaking numerous languages. In fact, it is all but impossible, even more so when the media propagate myths that are often beyond absurd."

I certainly hope today's discussion helps us to better understand this very complex region. And we have three distinguished experts who have just arrived, I believe, from Russia a couple of days ago. We're very happy to have them here and would like to especially thank Freedom House and Ele Asoyan for helping us to put this together. We often have to rely on who's here in Washington to brief us and sometimes you get tired of the same old experts and the same old pundits we have. So it's nice to have some serious expertise from the region.

We may be joined today by our chairman, Alcee Hastings. And I think we'll try to keep -- we do have to go through an interpreter, so let's try to keep remarks to about 10 minutes per panelist, and I think we'll finish all three presentations and then move to question and answer. Hopefully, we can have a lively discussion following the presentations. And I would like to start with Svetlana Gannushkina.

SVETLANA GANNUSHKINA: It's okay?

MR. PARKER: Yeah. And I assume everybody has had a chance to pick up the witness biographies. I won't spend any time on them. But you can read about our distinguished panelists in the handouts. And there are some out there if anyone didn't get any.

(Note: Ms. Gannushkina's remarks are delivered via translator.)

MS. GANNUSHKINA: Good morning. When we talk about Northern Caucasus, we mean primarily a number of ethnic provinces. And they are Chechnya, Ingush Republic, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Dagestan. Cumulatively, the population of the entire region is not more than 6 million people, but the most populous of these provinces is Dagestan, with a population of about 2.5 million people.

Dagestan is the most complex, multiethnic province. But all of these provinces have a lot of commonalities that more or less characterize the overall situation in the region. There is a high level of unemployment, and the highest level of unemployment is in Dagestan -- up to 80 percent -- also, poverty, which is more typical for Dagestan rather than to other republics. Unbelievable level of corruption exceeding the average corruption level throughout Russia by a few times. I can quote President Medvedev, who said that corruption affected the entire government -- the bureaucracy of Russia -- from the top down to the bottom.

There is also arbitrariness on behalf of the government officials, both at the federal level and provincial and local level, and the absence of rule of law -- and I'm talking primarily about federal law -- because the only trait and characteristic that is valued there is obedience and allegiance to the Kremlin. This allegiance is attained through strong-arm methods because, unfortunately, there are no other ways of persuasion available to our law enforcement.

In their actions, law enforcement is akin to a criminal gang. They kidnap people; sometimes people vanish without a trace. Sometimes, they would take justice in their own hands and would put to death somebody without a verdict. There is a widely reported use of torture in interrogation and during the investigative process. There are also charges that sometimes were invented or trumped up.

And even though sometimes these abuses are revealed through the judicial procedure, the sentences and verdicts are often unjustified and harsh. And I will elaborate a little bit more on the techniques that are used. It is quite understandable why this type of behavior causes some resistance. Sometimes, this resistance becomes an armed resistance; people are not able to express their opposing views and political opposition and cannot use legitimate means of expressing this opinion or dissent.

In all of the provinces, but particularly in Chechnya, in Ingush Republic and Dagestan, we have armed, underground resistance. So far, it's a big question for me how well it is organized. But what's obvious for me is that initially, there were small groups that were acting independently from each other, but steadily, they are getting more and more organized in a uniform structure, finding the same underlying ideology. The government tries to persuade us that members of this underground movement are those fighters and insurgents who came to these areas after the defeat of -- the war in Chechnya.

But this is not true, based on the fact that those who get captured or killed in the firefights appear to be local villagers and not visitors from outside of those provinces. It's understandable that this type of underground movement would need some sort of underlying ideology, and now, Islam increasingly becomes that underlying ideology. And it's not clear what comes first is that the overall campaign by Russian government against Islam was caused by these Islamic resistance or underground movement, or the outright assault on Islam by the government caused this type of Islamic resistance. It's not quite clear for me. But I know one thing: that these are interrelated processes.

What is evident is that not just in the North Caucasus, but throughout Russia, there are a number of trials going on and a number of trials that already were concluded where people standing trials are accused of not just following or adhering to Islam, but following or professing the wrong kind of Islam. This contributes to the further spread of Islam, its radicalization and transformation of Islam as a form of a protest. At the same time, the ruling cliques at the helm of each of these ethnic provinces would try to claim Islam as their own. So they would profess the correct, or the right kind of Islam and all the other kinds would be considered wrong.

This causes an internal strife -- a conflict between various denominations within Islam. It is accepted, or it is common, to refer to that form of wrong Islam as "Wahhabi Islam," regardless of the religious philosophy of each of these Islamic movements. And because of this fear that has its hold on Moscow and because of the views of Wahhabi Islam by the majority of Russian populace and the work of mass media, there is pretty much an equals sign between Wahhabi Islam and terrorism and fundamental radicalism. This is, overall, characteristics that are common for all of the North Caucasus provinces.

At the same time, there are certain distinct characteristics in each of them. There's a totalitarian rule in Chechnya where the government pretty much has a monopoly on lawless acts. And so-called "Chechen stability" entirely rests on this premise. Ingush Republic is another, entirely different ethnic province where, starting in 2002 after President Zyazikov became the head of the province, this formerly tranquil and stable ethnic province turned to be a hotbed for various fighting factions. And in Kabardino-Balkariya, where all the resistance and opposition movement was suppressed, right now there's a trial going on there. There are basically 59 people who were scapegoated -- they were yanked out of the crowd that was storming the presidential palace in Kabardino-Balkariya.

But the largest and the most complex province is the Republic of Dagestan. And their ministry of internal affairs -- their entire law enforcement establishment -- behaves and acts, and in effect, it transformed itself into a criminal gang. They commit murders on a daily basis. On June 5th, the minister of the internal affairs himself was assassinated. And we also need to give some historical background. There is an inter-ethnic conflict. And the seeds of this conflict were planted during the great movement of people that was inspired by Stalin.

Chechens, who were one of the largest minorities in Dagestan were, during Stalin's time, deported from the valley, and Avars -- another ethnic group -- was resettled on that territory. They were brought in from up high in the mountains. And now Chechens are repatriating to that area and they demand that this land would be cleared of the Avars. But the Avars have

no place to go, because back in the mountains there is no infrastructure and a modern person cannot survive up there anymore. The civil society there is very weak.

There is only one nongovernmental organization there that is dealing with the issue of human rights. They are fighting the trend of kidnapping people in Dagestan and it's called the Mothers of Dagestan Against Kidnapping. I'm sorry -- and the name of the organization is the Mothers of Dagestan for Human Rights. The organization was formed in 2007. It was the peak of a wave of kidnappings in Dagestan at the time; pretty much all these mothers lost their children in these kidnappings. And this organization is persecuted by the government officials. And it is still in business only because a lot of other nongovernmental organizations and advocacy groups are supporting and helping it out.

The only way to defeat trumped-up charges and fabricated charges in criminal cases is through the jury trials. I would say that almost 100 percent of people who were kidnapped by law enforcement agencies and then interrogated and tortured were acquitted later by jury. And now, they abolished the jury trials for the defendants that are charged with these specific crimes and violations. So we lost all hope for fair and impartial trials. Thank you for your attention.

MR. PARKER: Thank you, Svetlana. Before moving on to Professor Malashenko, I'd just like to take a moment and recognize Congressman Joseph Pitts of Pennsylvania, who has joined us.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPH PITTS (D-PA): Thank you, I don't have any statement. I came to listen and learn. I want to thank the witnesses for their briefing today. Thank you.

MR. PARKER: Thank you, Congressman. Professor Malashenko?

ALEXEI MALASHENKO: Okay, well, I'll try to say a couple of words in English. I hope you will understand me. I don't want to repeat what my colleague, Gannushkina, has already told, so a little bit -- some remarks about the general situation in the Northern Caucasus and, in general, in the Caucasus.

I don't want to go into details, because my second colleague, Milashina Elena, will tell you more mainly about Dagestan. So as I told, I'll try to make some generalizations. First, what is the Northern Caucasus? To my opinion, it is a certain, semi -- almost totally, a traditional society. We have to pay attention to this point. A modernization under the Soviet regime was successful. So, yes, we have to recognize it. But, anyway, it didn't reach -- it didn't accomplish all of the targets. So it wasn't finished, it wasn't finished.

In the Soviet regime, some communists -- they weren't able to remake, totally, Caucasian society. Maybe that's because of lack of time; maybe it's because of Soviet system. But anyway, the society in the Northern Caucasus is semi-traditional. Next, point number two. Now, the main process in the area -- in particular in Dagestan, in Chechnya, in Ingushetia -- the Eastern republics of the area -- is so-called de-modernization or archaization. Well, it's up to you for what kind of notion to choose. But no modern sector of economy anywhere.

For instance, you ask a specialist in economy, what about economic situation in Ingushetia or in Chechnya? The answer will be no economy. The lack of education system -- of course, you may find in Ingushetia, in Dagestan, everywhere, in Chechnya, a lot of schools and institutions and some institutes -- mostly Islamic. But the level of education -- the level of modern education -- is extremely low, extremely low. It needs, of course, a special explanation, but believe me, it is so.

Next problem -- also mentioned -- Islamization. Well, I could call it the second wave of Islamization. What does that mean? The first wave took place in '90s, just at the end of perestroika and the 10 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. That was quite normal. Why? Because it was in reaction against Soviet ideology -- against Soviet official atheism. So all kinds of Islamic trends, movements, ideas emerged in the Northern Caucasus, including Sufi Islam -- by the way, prohibited by communists -- Wahhabi Islam, fundamentalist Islam -- well, it makes no difference. Anyway, that was an Islamic rebirth or renaissance.

What we have now about mentioned second wave -- it means that Islam is becoming more and more a political factor, social factor and a factor of regulation of relations inside societies -- inside Chechnya, inside Dagestan, a little bit, some less, in Ingushetia. but anyway, it's a global trend for the area. I have nothing against Islam, anyway; that's normal. But when more and more Islam, as well as the Caucasian traditions, so-called at that, becoming the main pillars of behavior in the societies -- after the communism, after an aborted modernization -- I think it's a problem. Because the Northern Caucasus -- even Dagestan, even Chechnya -- it's not Saudi Arabia. It's a step back and not forward. I repeat, I have nothing against Islam.

Well, of course, there is Islamic opposition. It was mentioned, Islam is used as a tool by secular administration. It's funny -- after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is a certain Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of Chechnya, who is a secular president recognized -- or said that he recognized -- that Chechnya is a part of Russia and so on, but at the same time, he pretends to be a spiritual leader. It's Islamic tradition.

Of course, he doesn't want to become a mullah or imam, but who knows what we'll have in the future because it's not a problem of Caucasus. But in Tajikistan, president of Tajikistan, a very respected Emomali Rahmonov -- former member of Communist Party -- he pretends to become an imam -- a religious leader. So it's a trend. It's a tendency that covers not only Caucasus but, in general, the post-Soviet space.

It's funny, but it's so.

Well, once again, I repeat that Svetlana mentioned the problem that federal law doesn't work in Chechnya, in Dagestan -- well, practically everywhere. This is a principle of relations between clans, between families, between groups of interest which dominate. And this is, I would say, a political basement, or bed-ground, of the relations between locals. What are the relations between federal center in Northern Caucasus?

If federal law doesn't work in Northern Caucasus -- and, by the way, at the same time it doesn't practically work in Russia, itself; to justify my opinion, I can mention the case of Khodorkovsky and I think it's enough -- and from that point of view, some presidents in

Northern Caucasus try to imitate, in Caucasian style, what Putin is doing, or Medvedev, or whom -- I don't know, maybe both.

Well, so, what is the main principle of the relations between Moscow and the rest? Well, if you grant, as in Moscow, stability, you may do, in your republics, everything you want -- everything you want. So it means that you are responsible for Moscow only as far as the stability is concerned. And then you may use Islam, Adat, Shariah -- do all that.

This is a principle that I told before -- but it seems like this principle failed, or begins to fail. I don't know about future; I don't want to predict anything. But I cannot imagine how it can be continued because, let's imagine that some of you are presidents of the republics of Northern Caucasus, and you are dealing all the time with a weak center -- weak, federal center. So Ramzan -- he constructs, he builds his relations with Moscow on this idea.

Well, I am responsible here. I am very strong! So I can do here everything, and if you are against, well, you may choose someone else. And I don't know what is the option of Moscow if, for instance, Ramzan Kadyrov, disappears from political scene or from the earth. It will create a lot of problems for everybody, believe me.

Anyway, we talked about special relations between federal center and local elites. We mentioned the problem of absence of law. We mentioned a lot of times, Islam, Islamization, the second wave, next wave, and so on. What it means, in general? Sometimes I hear about separatism -- about renaissance of separatism in Dagestan, in Chechnya. I don't believe. They will stay in the frames of Russian federation, because nobody needs -- in Europe; I don't know about the United States -- but nobody needs a totally independent Chechnya. As well as, nobody needs completely independent semi-Wahhabi, semi- Islamist, semi-traditional Dagestan. So what to do with it -- with them?

So they will stay. All of them will stay in the frames in the boundaries of Russian federation. But from the point of culture, from the point of your mentality, from the point of the organization of their societies, they are flouting from federal center. They are driving from Russia. Well, it's different societies in Siberia and in Dagestan. And by the way, in Siberia, nobody wants to talk about Dagestani problem -- that's your problems; that's problem of Moscow, of Caucasus, and it's not a problem of Siberia -- of Urals, and so on.

So the domestic abroad -- or inner-abroad -- is emerging on the territory of Russian Federation. This is a problem sometimes understandable for scholars, but practically not understandable for (tandem ?). I beg your pardon. So what about the future? As usual, we are asked, what do you think will happen in a year? I don't know.

It depends on a lot of things. In particular, getting to my opinion, it depends on how the crisis -- economic crisis -- will develop. If it's bad, we'll have some -- I don't know -- not the Grand Revolution, of course, but some riots in Dagestan and Chechnya because of lack of money, because of unemployment, standard of living, and so on. I cannot admit it; it is quite possible.

What the Kremlin proposed to avoid such evolution? As usual, to pay local elites, to send money from federal budget, and so on. They don't think of the possibility of modernization.

Even more, if suddenly -- I can't believe it, I can admit it -- but anyway, if they put forward some idea of modernization of Northern Caucasus, I think it will be senseless because the time is missed.

And to finish, it's a Russian problem, I mean -- the Northern Caucasus -- and so on. But don't forget that this is in Muslim territory. It is part of the Muslim world. Nowadays, of course everybody, even very -- some lazy politicians in Moscow or here -- they speak about Iran, Afghanistan, Palestine -- that's normal, that's true. But if Caucasus -- if Chechnya, if Dagestan -- are ignored, that will be a very big mistake, because, as I think, while there is not a Muslim space, not a Muslim solidarity or something else, there is a Muslim, I would say, soup. Yes?

And so many ties between different parties, between different groups, between Chechnya and Talibs, between Dagestan and also, by the way, Talibs -- there are some people there; some in Afghanistan -- between Islamic radicals in Central Asia -- I can continue, I can continue. So the point is, don't forget about Northern Caucasus. We shouldn't forget about it because -- (in Russian) -- sometimes it seems to me that, after two Chechen wars, people begin to think that everything is okay and there is no war. It's a big mistake -- very big mistake. Look at this part of the Caucasian part of Russia. And now I give the floor to Elena who will talk about some Dagestan -- the incredibly difficult situations in this republic. So don't forget about Caucasus, despite Iran, despite the victory of Ahmadinejad.

ELENA MILASHINA: Hello, I'm sorry. I will speak Russian because it's a little bit of a tough subject for me.

(Note: Ms. Milashina's remarks are delivered via translator.)

I will offer you my view of a reporter because as a reporter, I'm always wondering how the entire agenda is formed for mass media and how the situation is covered and expressed through the eyes or through the palette of a media outlet. I actually noticed that a long time ago that in covering North Caucasus region, there would be always one ethnic province that will be dominating the news for one or another reason.

And usually, the number one topic covered on the agenda is the fight against Wahhabi Islam. They would be saying something to the effect of, yes, there is a problem of emerging Wahhabi Islam in the particular ethnic province, but there is a counterterrorist operation going on to counter these forces of Wahhabi, radical Islam, and these forces have a final objective of separating this ethnic province from Russia.

We observed this in coverage of the situation in Chechnya. There was a lot of talk about Wahhabi radicalism and counterterrorism prior to Ramzan Kadyrov acceding to power there; as soon as he took the helm, there were reports on things calming down. And the same thing happened in Ingushetia: Just two years ago, also, they were talking about the dangers of Wahhabi Islam, and then when, two years ago, there was a transfer of power from the President -- and so this campaign in mass media started about two years ago, but as soon as there was a transfer of presidential authority from President Zyazikov to President Yevkurov, things calmed down.

And now I see Dagestan and a situation in this ethnic province on the top of the agenda and this is a characteristic sign of a power struggle going on in Dagestan right now because the future of the presidency is at stake. Therefore, we have to really separate these two issues. One is the real situation in the Northern Caucasus as far as the withstanding of religious fundamentalism as I call it -- some people or refer it or brand it as Wahhabi Islam -- and its grip on the society there and the other issue.

Then the second issue is clearly a political one; it's a political struggle, a fight between various clans for political influence. This fight against radical Islam or against Wahhabis becomes a bargaining chip. It's a way to appeal to the federal center in Moscow to demonstrate the current government authority in the province is very weak, not being able to resist or withstand and counter religious fundamentalism, so there is a need for a new leader for the province. So this is a way to bring about the change and replacement of the political elites.

And I would like to give you a little historical background on the current situation in Dagestan. First of all, I must say that Dagestan was not mentioned as a hotspot until 1999, as far as terrorism and religious fundamentalist activities.

In August of 1999, the ideologues of so-called "pure Islam" of Chechen background, Basayev, and also somebody named Khattab, made an incursion into Dagestan -- in the high mountains of Dagestan -- and were trying to impose these religious laws on that particular area.

The idea was to separate from Russia and, as a result of this incursion, a law was enacted within the ethnic province banning and prohibiting Wahhabi Islam. In this particular sense it is a unique region where it's the only regional party to the federation in Russia that has this specific law prohibiting Wahhabi Islam.

But it's a curious thing because no legal scholar can give a definition of Wahhabi Islam, at least as it is put in the law. And this confusion is prevalent, not just for the Russians but also for Dagestan itself. And therefore somebody who is professing a different form of Islam -- not the mainstream form of Islam -- can be branded a Wahhabi and brought on trial on charges of a radical Wahhabi Islam, even though these people might be very far from trying to get that particular region separated from Russia.

And it's been almost 10 years since this law was enacted. In September there will be exactly 10 years since the law was passed. And we can state the obvious that under the guise of this law there is a very serious interdenominational strife and conflict when followers of Islam of different denominations are fighting against each other.

Usually the ideologues of this fight are Sufi Muslims but they perpetuate this fight and they get support from the law enforcement primarily, from the local law enforcement community. And the methods and techniques used by law enforcement agencies against so-called Wahhabi Muslims are very abusive and violent. I can give you just one example. There is a person whose name is Magomedshakir Magomedov. He is a 44-year-old gentleman.

He was kidnapped on March the 2nd this year when he went to his native village to register his kids. And the next day he was shown on TV, there was a machine gun lying next to him, and the announcer said that the person was captured as he was covering up the retreat of an armed gang of insurgents and he was shooting at the troops of the interior ministry until the very last bullet.

The relatives were able to create enough momentum and noise so eventually the body of this 44-year-old man was given to them. It was done primarily through the efforts of this nongovernmental organization in Dagestan that Ms. Gannushkina referred to. It was Mothers of Dagestan for Human Rights. So that organization was instrumental in helping the relatives to get the body.

Then the Mothers of Dagestan followed the same routine that they use when the bodies of the deceased are transferred from the law enforcement custodies to their relatives. They invited a forensic specialist and they videotaped the entire process of forensic analysis of the body.

I saw the tape and it was very vivid tape that looked at the trauma to the body of the deceased. I had an impression that his flesh was cut off his body while the person was still alive. They drilled through his teeth and pierced his earlobes by hot needles.

And, unfortunately, this is a pattern that we've seen, a number of these tapes. These are methods and techniques that are used by law enforcement agencies that by stature are supposed to protect human rights and liberties and rule of law.

And these actions are taken with the sense of impunity because I don't remember if anybody in law enforcement community was brought to justice for using abusive interrogation or torture techniques on those suspected in Wahhabi activities. So this causes evident and obvious opposition and adverse reaction on behalf of the population.

So what this fight against Wahhabi Islam in Dagestan burns down to is police officers torture and kill those they suspect in Wahhabi activities and, in turn, the relatives of the deceased take up their arms and kill those who perpetrated these things against their relatives.

And the last thing, there is a lot of crime in Dagestan and particularly alarming is the rate of contract killings, and sometimes they are also presented as the activities of Wahhabi Muslims.

I am inclined to think that this latest assassination of the minister of internal affairs of Dagestan was a contract killing and the primary purpose of it was to destabilize the internal political situation Dagestan. Thank you.

MR. PARKER: Thank you all for your presentations; we now have time to turn it over to you, the audience. And we have a microphone over here and I would ask that you identify yourself and organization, if you're representing one. We have an opportunity for questions and also I recognize that there is a fair amount of expertise in the audience, so if you have a brief comment that you would like to add, please feel free to do so.

Let me get things started off myself then here. You know, as I listen to everybody's presentation, it's such a complex mess there in the Caucasus -- I mean, it's just so many different actors, so many different factions, whether -- you have violence that seems to be coming from radical Islam, some of which appears to be sort of indigenous Islam, some which appears to be some foreign influence.

I think here in Washington, at least our most recent experience in looking at this part of the world comes from the second Chechen war. And here, particularly in Congress, there are so many issues that are vying for the attention of members of Congress and policy-makers, and certainly this is far down the list on those things that sort of appear in the news, particularly without a major war. And even the war in Chechnya was not widely covered.

And so I think at least here, from a Washington audience's perspective, sort of understanding the real differences between Dagestan and Chechnya; understanding just what -- what does the future hold? It seems to me from the presentations and from what I've been able to follow and read and conversations that the prospect of separatism isn't very real in Dagestan probably because of the complex ethnic makeup.

You have sometime like 30 major ethnic groups, and probably more, and speaking roughly 30 different languages that are related but not mutually intelligible, and sort of this Jamaat structure from the way Dagestan was settled, which obviously has to do with the high mountains; Dagestan really being the cradle of Islam in Russia -- you know Derbent is the oldest city in the Russian Federation. Compared to at least Chechnya's history, Islam is much older in Dagestan and this structure around the Jamaat and sort of the local village council. That being the case, are we looking at sort of just perpetual violence and instability that will -- how does it spill over if it does? What's the answer?

And is the problem, in terms of from Moscow's perspective, is this a situation where it's a lack of political will or a fear for any mid- to high-level official in Moscow to sort of own the problem in an area that has been nothing but problems. Or is it -- or does some of it stem from simply a lack of understanding of the region?

I sat down a couple weeks ago with Enver Kisriev, a serious expert on Dagestan at the Russian Academy of Sciences and had at least a two-hour conversation -- and still don't feel like I am grasping the source of the issue. And I'm thinking that experts like Professor Kisriev, yourselves, are far and few between. Is it the case that the policy-makers in Moscow simply don't understand the complicated fabric of society in Dagestan to ever be able to impose a solution?

I know I'm throwing out a lot of sort of comment with questions, and please feel free to take them and follow them where you will. But it also seems that one of the issues is the abandonment of the previous system of government in Dagestan, which to me is sort of vaguely reminiscent of Lebanon pre-civil war, where you had sort of an allocation. The Avars got so many positions in certain ministries, the Lezgis, the Laks, the Kumyks.

And that that -- although messy -- seemed to preserve the stability, and now where you have what looks to be sort of a federally imposed, sort of vertical structure that doesn't seem to be working.

Anyway, I have a whole bunch more and I hope folks in the audience do, but why don't we start with that and we'll -- would you like to --

MR. : Would you let me translate?

MR. PARKER: Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, please. Just one moment, the interpreter will translate.

MR. : (In Russian.)

MS. MILASHINA: Well, the thing is, I will try to cover the issue that has to do with the political will. The thing is that there was a document that was prepared by Dmitry Kozak who was the plenipotentiary representative of the Russian Federation in the southern federal district. The memo was prepared in 1995 and only parts of that memo -- 2005 -- and only parts of that memo was publicized.

Well, that report was showing that the Russian government fully understands the complexity of issues in Dagestan in particular. And it was clear the number-one priority for the Russian government in Dagestan was not Wahhabi Islam or separatism. Well, the separatism is not in the future for Dagestan primarily because it is populated by different ethnic groups that are in perpetual conflict with each other. So Russia plays a role of pacifier and the guarantor of stability in the region.

But number-one priority according to Kremlin was corruption and also the clan and the political feud as well as scales of so-called shadow economy. The shadow economy in Dagestan is very large. And prompted by Dmitry Kozak, Mukhu Aliyev, his man in Dagestan and who is the president of Dagestan, instituted this reform of the national council of Dagestan that was initially formed with proportional representation from each ethnic group and that was the primary tool in fighting in those clan structures.

Well, as they say, we hoped for the best, but you know the rest. You know, very often when the people or the leadership in Russia is moved by the best intentions the results are quite contrary. Well, and the main reason for the failure of the process is a single factor of laws not working -- not just in that particular part of Russia but on the entire territory. There are checks and balances, but these checks and balances are people, not laws or legal entities. And because of these people, the effect was quite different from what was intended.

And I would also have -- saying in Russian, it burns down to there the power vacuum is not going to be there for a long time. So if there is no rule of law, no accepted rules that people follow and play by; people invent their own rules, sometimes very violent and very harsh and they try to sort out their differences by using those other rules.

And I believe that this can lead not just to the actual separation of Dagestan from Russia, but it could bring separation of Dagestan from the region of Northern Caucasus.

(Note: The following sentence not via translator.) Not only Dagestan separated from Russia, but the whole North Caucasus will separated, if the things will go like that.

(Note: Continues via translator.)

MS. GANNUSHKINA: Well, I would probably follow on what Elena just said; I think that the disintegration of Russia is one of the possible scenarios, to my profound regret. Of course, forecasting could have taken more than just two hours; we could have been sitting here for months discussing possible forecasts and scenarios.

So why do your law enforcement agencies act in Dagestan and Northern Caucasus the way they do? Because they don't know any other way and because they are allowed to. And this boundless authority and arbitrariness and impunity is a trait and characteristic not just of the law enforcement in Northern Caucasus, but in the entire country of Russia. The system is corrupt through and through.

Of course, not everybody working in a law enforcement agency is a sadist, but if a sadist finds himself in a position of a law enforcement officer, he can fully realize himself. I would agree that the political leadership in Dagestan is not willing and considering separation from Russia as an option because such separation would cause extreme internal and interethnic strife within the province.

But this is what might be result of a nearsighted policy. And primarily I'm talking about the policy that was instituted by President Putin and now is fully implemented -- that the governors of provinces are not popularly elected but appointed. It certainly didn't help with better control over a situation and didn't help to stabilize the vertical integration of government. It created a situation when a chief executive in a particular area does not report or is not accountable to the people that live in that area. At the same time he reports to Kremlin and he usually tells Kremlin what Kremlin wants to hear, which is a typical situation. So nobody gives the true information.

And one other thing, while we're still on a forecasting mode: Is there a possibility for having an outward war in Dagestan similar to what happened in Chechnya? I think we can run a parallel but not with the war in Chechnya but with the conflict in Ossetia, in North Ossetia where there is some interethnic strife between Ossetians and Ingush. Under Stalinist deportation policy, Ingush were deported from that area of North Ossetia and now a lot of Ingush repatriated there and, in addition to that, Ingush Republic is now demanding to return this land to be a part of Ingush Province.

I recently visited the Kazbek region of Dagestan. I could see something similar to that. I briefly mentioned it in my initial statement. Repatriated Chechens claim this land as theirs. And they complain; they say, why can't we hold any government positions? Why can't we work in law enforcement? Why all of these key positions can be given only to the Avars.

Let's just -- they say, let's just follow the Islamic tradition. We came back to our native land so you have to go back to yours. And Avars respond to the fact that, well, we were brought here by force. We were taken from up high in the mountains and we can't go back; all of our settlements there are in ruins. We won't be able to survive there.

And I think that, based on our experience working in this other area, we can introduce the same concept in Dagestan. How can we reconcile two warring ethnic groups? Yes, we can hold a round table and workshops, talk about tolerance. But -- (in Russian). Yeah, but as one of the local leaders in Prigorodny district in Ossetia told me, the best way to solve this issue

is to employ people, give them work so they would have something to do eight hours a day, so they would have a 40-minute lunch break and during that lunch break they would talk about work and their pay would be a living wage so they could have decent livelihoods.

And I believe it's true. Then we can separate arguments about history and arguments about life. And in the center, we have the organization that deals with interethnic harmonization. What do we do there? We teach small business skills. We basically teach people who come there how to be self-employed, how to put some food on the table.

And, of course, in addition to that, there are certain events for children, a number of other entertainment projects. And we had six months of experience so far to see how people who were sitting as far apart from each other as they could now formed some joint business ventures. So how can we help them? We need to be there. So there's got to be some presence there so people wouldn't think that they were abandoned.

We need to bring textbooks to their schools because their schools are in terrible shape -- no textbooks at all. We need to assist and help these people to organize their livelihoods. This would certainly solve a lot of issues.

MR. PARKER: Perhaps we could take a few more questions all in a row and then turn it over to the panel. Sir? Thank you for your patience.

Q Alexei (ph) for American Russian Service. (In Russian.)

MR. PARKER: Could you ask the question in English and then the interpreter will translate?

Q Could you explain, in Russia media, a lot of references about foreign powers who has actual influence on this region as one of the sources of instability of Dagestan, for example. Can you explain your own opinion about who has any influence on Wahhabi underground or any other clans and tribes in this region? Saudi Arabia, United States, Israel, Iran. Thanks.

MR. PARKER: Thank you. Before we answer, a few other questions. Michael?

Q I was interested in getting your thoughts. With Russia's rising Muslim population, what implications or impacts --

MR. PARKER: Will you please identify yourself for the record.

Q Oh, it's Major Robert Horton (sp), United States Air Force. So implications of Russia's rising Muslim population from instability in the North Caucasus and potentially any of the repression against the Islam.

MR. PARKER: Others? Other questions? Please. Comments?

Q (Inaudible) -- from CSIS. My question pertains to what --

MR. PARKER: Can you please clarify for the transcribers your name again?

Q Matt Procapa (sp) from CSIS, Center for Strategic and International Studies. What international organizations do you think will be more effective to address the situation in North Caucasus and would the new leadership in the CSE and -- (inaudible), would this new leadership be able to tackle this issue? Thanks.

MR. PARKER: What new leadership in CSE?

Q The Kazakhstan leadership.

MR. PARKER: The Kazakhstan chairmanship.

Q Yes, would be able to change the situation or somehow deal with it. Thanks.

MR. PARKER: Did you understand? I think the question was, will the new -- Kazakhstan is set to chair an organization for security cooperation starting in January. The current chair is Greece. Kazakhstan will actually be the first chair from the post-Soviet states. And that will last for one year. Please, three questions.

Professor, would you like to start?

MR. MALASHENKO: Well, about impact from abroad to Dagestan. Alexander, look, of course, no comparisons between what we had in '90s. The penetration, I would say, or something else, it's a very, very weakened, not compatible with what we have some 10 years ago. But, at the same time, at the same time, what Saudian, for instance, or people from Kuwait, indeed, they help to reconstruct educational systems. And, of course, the institutions in Dagestan, their influence is felt, yes? I would say.

As to the assistance to Jamaat and to Azeri, I would say, some radical organizations, don't underrate it. In 2000, the armed -- the '90s. So the main roots, the main problems, it derives from local situation and not from abroad. And when I'm reading about a huge penetration of Arabs to Dagestan, it's not so.

So the situation is totally different. By the way, there are official ties between local elites, between governments, between presidents and their brother in faith, in Saudi, in Kuwait and so on. They are running to hajj every year. Really they have economic ties, maybe even a personal economic ties and economic interest. But, I repeat, as far as radical penetration, at the moment, it's not so dangerous.

Well, about Muslims. Maybe I didn't understand the question about maybe demography or what it was. So the population, the number of Muslims in Russia is unknown. It hesitates between 15.5 to 20. Well, I think it's some -- maybe around 19 or 19.5. Why? Because we have to take into consideration migration from Central Asia and from Azerbaijan.

Also it's extremely difficult to count how many people we have coming from Tajikistan, from Uzbekistan. Months ago, we had a conference in Bishkek about migration from Central Asia. Well, the figures, the information, was quite different. But if to summarize approximately, we have 2 millions of migration from Central Asia, mostly from Uzbekistan, from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. It's true.

And if we add about a million-and-a-half from Azerbaijan, it's possible. So we'll get this 19 or something around 20 millions. It doesn't mean that Russia will become a Muslim country in 10 years; that's impossible, of course. But the rate -- the percentage of the population, of Muslim population of course will raise. And that's no doubt.

And from that point of view, I cannot meet that in 2050, we'll have maybe 25, maybe something like that of persons of Muslim population. But one thing I want to add: There is an idea spread even by official muftis, official Muslim clergymen who are very loyal to Kremlin, to Moscow, they say sometimes that Russia is a Christian country temporarily. And in 100 years, Russia will become a Muslim country.

Nowadays, of course, it sounds like a propaganda, but this idea, I think it's very exciting. (In Russian.)

Just a minute, yes, yes. And I don't think that in Kremlin this factor is taken into consideration. I don't think. While there are different aspects, of course, which are very important, for instance, the presence of Muslim soldiers in Russian army, that creates some problems. It's not very, very difficult, but anyway, military men, sometimes they recognize that more and more it becomes an equation because young men in Muslim societies and Muslim communities, that's the biggest part. (Inaudible) -- but if the Soviet Union didn't collapse, approximately 32 or 33 percent of Russian military men were Muslims. So that's interesting.

MS. MILASHINA: Just one little thing I'd like to add to it is that it's very characteristic of the entire Northern Caucasus region is more than 50 percent of the population are younger than 30. And there is also an abundance of labor in the region. Usually there was labor migration during the Soviet Union. Traditionally, that's how this issue was resolved. But, unfortunately, because of the current policy in Kremlin and because in the aftermath, in the wake of two Chechen wars, the society becomes more and more xenophobic.

And there is a curious situation. There are a lot of migrant workers, guest workers, in Russian cities that are primarily immigrants from Central Asia. But those who come from the Northern Caucasus usually encounter hostility on behalf of the local population and much more so than those coming from the former Soviet republics. And it's much harder for someone who came from Northern Caucasus to get employment as a migrant worker.

And we see two migratory trends. The first one is when oil rig workers who were employed in Surgut or in Tumen in the northern regions of Siberia, they go back to Dagestan. At the same time, ethnic Russians are leaving Dagestan.

MS. GANNUSHKINA: (Note: The following sentence not via translator.) In Causasus, it's common for all Caucasian regions, these tendencies.

(Note: Continues via translator.) Well, it's an alarming sign because even though we don't have border delineation between Northern Caucasus and Russia, but we already have this separation of population between Russia proper and Northern Caucasus.

The people living across that nondelineated border feel more like strangers. So we came here to the U.S. and in D.C. we've been asking a lot of questions that are not very different from questions that Russians would have for us as experts on the region because a lot of Russians don't quite understand what's going on in the area.

I would just like to follow up with a comment that in Tumen, that was just mentioned by Elena, is the region where, just recently, they held a number of trials where defendants were accused of practicing radical Islam: the mosques are closed down, people are not allowed to worship.

And the charges are often fabricated, but Quran is often used as evidence against these defendants. Advocacy, human-rights advocacy organizations receive a lot of letters from penitentiaries and from armed forces that those who would like to worship are not allowed to. And, as a contrast, a Russian Orthodox priest would visit inmates in prison or a penitentiary while those who are of a different faith, Muslims, are inmates in the same prison, would be berated by both the priests and followers of Christian faith and by the administration of the penitentiary.

In Volgograd in a large government penitentiary during Friday prayer, the authorities would turn on the loud speaker and would be broadcasting lewd rhymes during the ceremony of Friday prayer by a Muslim imam. There were a few instances of hate crimes, murders committed in the Russian armed forces based on religious intolerance.

Well, you can only imagine what kind of sense of patriotism does this type of treatment instills in those of Muslim persuasion, actually return back to their homes. And these are closed systems because nobody would admit that it happens. And if it doesn't happen, how can you counter or fight it?

MR. PARKER: Thank you, Svetlana. We have a few more minutes, if there are any further questions or possible comments from the audience, please.

Q (Off mike.)

MR. PARKER: Yeah, sure, it helps the transcribers.

Q Hi, my name is Erica Omart (ph). I'm from the Jim Stein Foundation. I have two short questions. First, how popular is Putin in North Caucasus and in Dagestan in particular? And, second, are there any indigenous newspapers or TV channels in North Caucasus and in Dagestan or is it mostly covered by Moscow channels and newspapers. Thank you.

MR. PARKER: Any further questions. I would also add a couple of very specifics to Erica's questions. You asked about Putin; what about Ramzan Kadyrov? What is his image and influence in the broader region and, particularly, in Dagestan? Also, very quickly, what role, if any, is Azerbaijan and Georgia playing? Obviously the border there is very mountainous and remote; I suspect it's not much of a role.

And, lastly, of the numerous ethnic groups in Dagestan and in regions and the violence, the Avars, obviously a prominent group, the president the interior minister. Are there two or

three groups that one could cite or two or three regions for sort of the nexus of most of the violence or instability? And is the flatland region in northern Dagestan, is that really pretty entirely separate? I think that was appended to Dagestan in one of these Stalinist sort of re-drawing of the maps. Is that really a region we're not really talking about when we talk about all of this instability and violence?

MS. GANNUSHKINA: I would like to pick and choose, if you allow me, because I am the only one in this room, probably, who saw Mr. Putin displaying very strong Islamophobia. I am a member of an advisory council under the president of the Russian Federation and I was present at four meetings with the president.

There were two meetings when I remember Putin losing his temper, even though, overall, he's a very pleasant, good-meaning person. The first topic that causes some contention was Khodorkovsky. I can tell that he takes it seriously and he takes it personally, very personally. It was very unusual for a president.

And the second hot-button topic is Islam, about human-rights violations in Chechnya, about radical Islamization. He kept telling us, you don't understand. Yes, I understand human rights, et cetera, but there is a real threat or clear and present danger of Islamic caliphate.

You're saying that, yes, our law enforcement agencies and interior troops commit acts of violence against civilians, but see what did the civilians commit? Yesterday they killed a police officer. And here's a particular thing that I found very interesting. It was not our police officer; it was a Chechen police officer. And I couldn't help -- and I asked him, Vladimir Vladimirovich, even though he was a Chechen police officer, he was still ours.

Well, he brushed me away saying, they are all the same; they are all Islamists, separatists. Just recently they all were hiking up in the mountains with some machine gun. This is a good illustration to what Elena was just saying. The highest government authority doesn't view a Chechen police officer as "one of ours." This is unsubstantiated fear, a phobia of some abstract caliphate, as if it's hiding somewhere behind the -- and expressed by the president of a country.

Now a few words about Ramzan. I would say, for part of the young generation, Ramzan is certainly a role model. He is strong. He can do anything and he's allowed to do anything. Part of the population views him as inevitable evil or at least they stopped bombing us, they say. And, of course, intellectuals just can't stand him.

I would say that Chechnya has a fairly large stratum of intelligentsia, of intellectuals. And the organization conducts workshops for high school teachers. And I must say, when we conduct these seminars and workshops, the FSB keeps an eye on us. And usually, when we talk about Ramzan, this sentiment can be summarized as, I don't believe our nation has not deserved something better than that.

And there's only one type of relationship that's possible with Ramzan; it's total subordination and flattery. So people who have to take the offer, they can't refuse to become one of his inner circle or somebody in the government would become his subordinates and his lackeys. And they will have to report on everything they see. They become informants, what

happened to a former managing editor of Chechen Obshchestvo, a newspaper who is now one of the aides of Ramzan.

MR. PARKER: Well, we are just about out of time here. I'd like to thank everybody for coming. In particular, I'd like to thank our expert panel here for traveling all the way from Russia and also would just like to point out; I'm sure many of you have read the bios or know of our experts here, but it really is an honor for us to provide this forum. We know of the difficult circumstances that you work under in Russia. A number of your names are on these lists of enemies of the Russian people and these extremist lists. A number of your colleagues have been murdered for their work.

Elena comes to us from a newspaper that has lost four journalists in recent years: Mr. Domnikov, Mr. Shchekochikhin, Ms. Politkovskaya and, most recently, in January, Anastasia Baburova. None of these murders have been solved. I just wanted to underscore the sobering reality from where you're coming from and the great difficulty that you operate in.

It's certainly our pleasure and honor to host you here. Dagestan is a topic and the North Caucasus, in general, that we will continue to focus on. The commission hopes to visit the region. We have not been to the region in years. The U.S. government has very little penetration and presence, particularly due to the security concerns in the region. So, hopefully, possibly in the fall. And also an announcement to everybody: You can find our events and transcripts on the Web site. This event will be transcribed and, eventually, I think, there will be a webcast up on -- you know, if you want to review.

And next week, next Tuesday, the 23rd, we have a hearing on Russia's human rights record from 10:00 to noon in the Capitol Visitor's Center, SVC 202-203. And we'll be looking at issues of Russia's compliance with human rights commitments ahead of the summit in July, President Obama's first trip to Moscow. We will look at three areas: the area of religious freedom, press freedom and business freedom in Russia. And that's next week, for those who are interested. And it will be posted on the Web site.

And, for those of us who don't get our notices and reports, there's an opportunity to subscribe online: It is csce.gov. I'd like to thank you all for coming and the briefing is adjourned.

END.