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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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After the recent assassination attempt against the president of Ingushetia, Yunus-bek Yevkurov, the question of whether Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of the Chechen republic, will be granted control over the neighboring Ingushetia has become a hot topic of debate. Yevkurov is now lying unconscious in the hospital and Kadyrov is proclaiming that President Dmitry Medvedev of Russia has given him a mandate to lead counter-insurgency operations in Ingushetia.

Some local residents, panicked at the notion, are calling for Ruslan Aushev-Ingushetia's beloved president during the stormy 1990s, who still remains immensely popular-to take control. Aushev, reluctant to surrender his homeland to Kadyrov, is ready to assume power. His chances, however, are slim - the Kremlin doesn't like independent politicians. Regardless, the central question today is: how broad are the powers that the Kremlin has granted to Kadyrov and how might his new mandate influence the situation in Ingushetia?

Ingushetia is a tiny republic in Russia's North Caucasus. It was once peaceful, particularly compared with Chechnya. It was not long ago that the border between Ingushetia and Chechnya marked a division between peace and war. Crossing over from Chechnya to Ingushetia, one would unwittingly exhale: "Now everything will be okay; it's safe here." Poverty, mud, and corruption were overwhelming; but here they didn't kill people, here they didn't shoot, here there were no abductions...

But Ingushetia has become Russia's hot spot over the past few years. When did things change? A range of problems that had previously been localized "across the border" in Chechnya slowly started seeping into Ingushetia. In 2002, abduction-style detentions began; at first, the abductions affected only people displaced from Chechnya. Later, however, abductions, torture and disappearances began to affect the Ingush population as well.

Before June 2004, these occurrences were infrequent. But then things changed. During the night of June 22 (one cannot help but think about the symbolism as it was on June 22, 68 years earlier, that World War II came to Russia), the war in the Caucasus came to Ingushetia. A group of insurgents headed by Shamil Basayev seized the towns of Nazran and Karabulak, killing more than 100 local law enforcement personnel. People in Ingushetia spent the night in a state of terror. The next day, when burials for the previous night's casualties began, the republic was overcome with shock.

At that time, most people in Ingushetia were willing to support any action taken by the government to prevent more attacks; they welcomed counter-insurgency operations. But, as it turned out, the counter-insurgency operations followed the "Chechen model." Villages were "swept:" young men were abducted, tortured and forced to admit involvement in the attack on Nazran, or to ties to the insurgency and to name accomplices. The authorities then sought out those people, who also may or may not have been involved, tortured them and demanded more names.

After three years of this people in Ingushetia began to perceive the authorities-particularly law enforcement and security officials-as enemies, possibly even worse than the insurgents. At the same time, insurgents' attacks were by no means subsiding on account of the government's counter-terrorism operations. In fact, the insurgency was becoming more and more active, reaching unprecedented levels by mid-summer 2007. Insurgents regularly attacked policemen, military personnel and officials-all the way up to the highest levels. In response, law enforcement staff conducted aggressive special operations. They killed young men suspected of insurgent activity in the middle of public streets, in broad daylight, and in some cases in front of their relatives in their own houses.

It's difficult to say how many young men actually fled to join the rebels in the mountains, but the arbitrary use of force and humiliation, combined with ineffective governance, naturally had an effect on the attitudes of young people. Support for the insurgency gradually grew, as did hatred for law enforcement. Since the end of 2007, the republic has been overcome by waves of public protest. Authorities brutally crushed political opposition movements, but their actions were futile in stifling the Ingush people's demands - the public wanted Murat Zyazikov, then Ingushetia's president, to resign, law enforcement leadership to be replaced, and lawless special operations to stop. Meanwhile, insurgent activity continued.

In the fall of 2008, the Kremlin realized that the situation in Ingushetia was reaching crisis levels and was no longer able to ignore it. Zyazikov was finally forced to resign - which the public in Ingushetia viewed as a triumph. He was replaced with Yunus-bek Yevkurov, who had made his career first as an airborne troops officer and then in the military's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) system. The Kremlin made it clear that his job was to suppress the insurgency.

Yevkurov approached this task with a thorough understanding of Ingush society. He immediately initiated a series of "peacekeeping" operations bringing the opposition to his side and creating under his office a Council for Human Rights, to which he assigned respected public figures. He insisted on the importance of fighting the insurgency fiercely and relentlessly, but sought to bring counterinsurgency back into a legal framework by ending abductions and other unlawful practices. Yevkurov understood very well that lawless counterterrorism measures would only distance the Ingush people from their government and might even push young people to join the opposition.

Yevkurov's critics now say that in his eight months as president, until the suicide bombing that severely wounded him on June 22 (that date again!), he failed to achieve any significant or visible results either in suppressing the insurgency, or in restraining arbitrary law enforcement. However, Yevkurov faced a very difficult legacy, and it is unrealistic to have expected him to solve problems in just months that had accumulated over several years. Yevkurov consistently worked, with some success, to close the growing gap between the Ingush people and the authorities, and tried to make local residents believe that government structures sought to protect their interests.

Today, judging by the news that we have been receiving from Ingushetia, people are closely following news bulletins of the president's condition and very much want him to return. Their expectations for the future appear connected to him and to the hope that Moscow will come to understand that Ingushetia needs to follow Yevkurov's path, not Kadyrov's. The latter will not bring stability to Ingushetia.

Moscow considers Kadyrov's efforts effective, and for now is willing to use him beyond Chechnya. This much was made clear in mid-May, when "Kadyrovtsy" (the Chechen forces under his de facto control) and Ingush police forces undertook joint special operations in the Sunzhen district of Ingushetia. Previously, counterterrorism efforts in Ingushetia had been the prerogative of the Federal Security Services (FSB), who didn't want any interference from Kadyrov. However, given the ever-growing Ingush insurgency, the Kremlin allowed Kadyrov into Ingushetia. During the Sunzhen operation, Kadyrov worked with Yevkurov, who was at least able to provide the Ingush people with a guarantee that Kadyrov's forces wouldn't lose control. Now, with Yevkurov out of the picture (and we can only hope that this is temporary), Kadyrov's authority is growing. He is known to be ambitious and is unlikely to forgo the opportunity to expand his influence in the region.

The Kadyrovtsy, predominantly consisting of former rebel fighters, know the insurgency from the inside. They brutally persecute relatives of suspected insurgents and take hostages. The insurgency has been fairly inactive in Chechnya in the past few years. The short-term problem has been solved, but at what price for Russia, and how might these tactics backfire in the future?

Chechnya is formally a republic of the Russian Federation. In reality, however, it's like an enclave under Ramzan Kadyrov's rules, cut off from the Russian legal system. Stating that his forces will investigate the attack on Yevkurov "through our own traditional means, and [with] vengeance [that] will be severe," Kadyrov is underscoring that Russian law has little relevance for him. The Kremlin should give this some serious thought before handing the President of Chechnya carte blanche in Ingushetia or anywhere else.

Moreover, Ingushetia differs from Chechnya. Though Ingushetia has also experienced unlawful abductions and killings, the Ingush population has not been plunged into the kind of terror that has reigned in Chechnya. Also, Ingush society is more traditional, with clans playing a more significant role in societal relations. Finally, the potential for public protests is unquestionably greater in Ingushetia than in Chechnya, where people are worn out by over a decade of warfare.

Kadyrov's counter-terrorism operations in Ingushetia may wreak havoc on Ingush society. The path chosen by Yevkurov is not simple and does not yield immediate results, but in the long run it is significantly more effective than the path of the Chechen leadership. The "direct and severe answer" to the insurgency Medvedev is seeking shouldn't come at the cost of his vision for a rule of law in Russia.

Possession of Extremist Material in Kyrgyzstan

Police Torture and Abductions in Turkey