

Terrorism in Russia at national, regional and international level

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Abstract

Terrorism in Russia should be analysed not only as a threat to national security, but also as a political tool used by the Kremlin at the national, regional and international level. The evolution of threats in the Russian Federation, from the North Caucasus and the Caucasus Emirate, through the growing significance of the so-called Islamic State, to the activities of the Islamic State – Khorasan Province and the attack at the Crocus City Hall, illustrates the many challenges facing the security services. The author analyses Russian anti-terrorist legislation and selected regulations concerning extremism, which, in practice, are used by the Russian state as part of a broader system of control and threat assessment. The article also discusses cooperation in the fight against terrorism in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. The author demonstrates that Moscow uses the narrative of the fight against terrorism to justify military action, strengthen social control and build influence beyond the country's borders, including in Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The Russian anti-terrorist model is based less and less on prevention and more and more on political definition of opponents, which leads to incorrect management of threat perception and, as a result, to further terrorist attacks.

Keywords

Russia, terrorism, extremism, ISIS, Asia, CSTO, anti-terrorism, the Kremlin

Introduction

Terrorism is a term that is widely used but is difficult to define unambiguously. The phenomenon of terrorism is, in fact, dynamic, dependent on the legal and political context, as well as on the entities that define it: the state, international organisation or researcher. There are hundreds of different perspectives in the literature, ranging from accounts that emphasise violence against civilians and the psychological impact, to approaches that treat terrorism as a method of struggle aimed at bringing about political or ideological change. Alex P. Schmid describes terrorism as a method involving repeated acts of violence carried out by partly covert individual, groups or state actors, motivated by political, criminal or idiosyncratic reasons. In his view, the direct victims of violence are not the main addressee of the action, but they serve as a tool for conveying a message to a selected group, authorities or society¹. Bruce Hoffman defines terrorism as a deliberated instilling fear through violence or the threat of violence and exploiting it in the pursuit of political change. He emphasises that terrorism is intended to have psychological effects extending beyond the direct victims of the attack, as its real target is the wider public: society, government, public opinion or particular political, ethnic or religious group².

From a Polish perspective, Krzysztof Liedel and Paulina Piasecka define terrorism as an unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property in order to intimidate or coerce the government or the civilian population. The main aim of such activities is to achieve political or social goals³.

The Global Terrorism Index does not present the author's definition of terrorism, but based on the 2026 report, it can be assumed that it is (...) *a threat or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to achieve a political, economic, religious or social objective through intimidation, coercion*

¹ A.P. Schmid, *Defining Terrorism*, https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-03/Schmidt%20-%20Defining%20Terrorism_1.pdf [accessed: 20 III 2026]; See also: A.P. Schmid, A.J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature*, Amsterdam 1988.

² *Database Scope*, RAND National Security Research Division, <https://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents/about/definitions.html> [accessed: 20 III 2026].

³ K. Liedel, P. Piasecka, *Jak przetrwać w dobie zagrożeń terrorystycznych. Elementy edukacji antyterrorystycznej* (Eng. How to survive in an age of terrorist threats. Elements of counter-terrorism education), Warszawa 2008, pp. 46–47.

or *instilling*⁴. In addition, the source distinguishes between the concepts of ‘terror’ and ‘terrorism’, and also questions the distinction between terrorism and resistance or guerrilla warfare, because what is an attack for some is, for others, a narrative in the struggle for freedom⁵.

It should be emphasised that, in this article, the term ‘extremism’ is not treated as a synonym for terrorism. Extremism refers to a broader ideological, organisational and political category associated with extreme views, radicalisation, propaganda or the activities of groups regarded as a threat. It may lead to violence or terrorist activity, but it is not necessarily the same thing. Terrorism refers, however, primarily to the use of violence or the threat of violence for political, ideological, religious or social purposes. In the Russian legal system, extremism and terrorism are treated as related but distinct legal categories. This is evident in Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which concerns extremist organisations but explicitly excludes organisations designated as terrorist under Russian law. Terrorist organisations are covered by separate regulations, in particular Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code of the RF concerning the organisation of and participation in the activities of a terrorist organisation. At the same time, in the practice of the Russian security apparatus, the concepts of extremism and terrorism are sometimes used in parallel as instruments of social control and for the political definition of threats. Therefore, in the text, the term ‘terrorism’ refers primarily to acts of violence, attacks and the activities of terrorist organisations, while ‘extremism’ appears where the Russian legal regulations, radicalisation, propaganda and broader mechanisms of politically defining opponents are discussed.

For the Moscow authorities, achieving the goals is crucial, so they use their own, context-dependent definition of terrorism⁶. On the one hand, as Russian politicians point out, no country is resistant to terrorist attacks⁷.

⁴ *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf>, pp. 6–7 [accessed: 13 IV 2026].

⁵ A.P. Schmid, *Defining Terrorism...*; L. Weinberg, A. Pedahzur, S. Hirsch-Hoefler, *The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism*, “Terrorism and Political Violence” 2004, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 777–794. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095465590899768>.

⁶ The Russian legislation defines a terrorist act as the commission of an explosion, arson or other acts designed to instil fear among the population and to pose a threat to life, causing significant material damage or other serious consequences, undertaken with the aim of destabilising the activities of public authorities or international organisations. More in the sub-section: *Russian legislation on terrorism and extremism*.

⁷ G. Faulconbridge, *Russian security failure? Kremlin says no country is immune to terrorism*,

On the other hand, from a Russian perspective, terrorism is linked to state policy, not just to a threat to security. This means that Russia can use a broad definition of terrorism to characterise the actions of opponents, including external actors (organisations, states and groups), as terrorist in nature as part of protecting its interests, including abroad. Russian understanding of terrorism differs from the concepts adopted in Western countries, including in Poland, both at the legal and political levels⁸.

In the article, the author presented terrorist threats that the RF has been struggling with for years. He described also the most important terrorist groups and the activities they carry out within the Russian territory, primarily in North Caucasus. Furthermore, he emphasised the role of Moscow's international cooperation and its foreign operations, with particular emphasis on combating terrorism. He discussed counter-terrorist activities, the strategy of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (hereinafter: CSTO)⁹ in the fight against terrorism, and the national legislation relating to terrorism and selected regulations concerning extremism.

The scope of this article and the research objective set do not allow for a detailed discussion of all the aspects of the Russian internal politics. It does not take into account politically motivated prison sentences, nor does it provide a comprehensive analysis of the institutions involved in both the anti-terrorist activities and the functioning of the apparatus of repression. These issues require a separate study.

Since the start of the RF's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, terrorism in Russia has ceased to be merely one of the threats to security and has become an element of domestic and international policy, a tool used to support political and military actions. Subsequent attacks in Russia after 2022 revealed significant gaps in the operation of the security apparatus and a lack of effective response. This did not change the paradigm of Moscow's

Reuters, 25 III 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-security-failure-kremlin-says-no-country-is-immune-terrorism-2024-03-25/> [accessed: 20 III 2026].

⁸ A. Olech, *Terroryzm – określenie definicji zjawiska w polskich i zagranicznych badaniach* (Eng. Terrorism – defining the phenomenon in Polish and foreign research), “Studia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego” 2020, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 121–138. <https://doi.org/10.37055/sbn/145302>.

⁹ The Collective Security Treaty Organisation consists of: The Russian Federation, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, although Armenia remains a formal member of the organisation, it has not been involved in its work since February 2024.

policy towards terrorist threats. On the contrary – the narrative attributing responsibility for the attacks against the RF primarily to Ukraine and Western countries is being reinforced¹⁰. As a result, the Russian anti-terrorist model relies increasingly on managing public perception and politically defining opponents, rather than on prevention. Therefore, the country becomes vulnerable to further attacks from different groups¹¹.

Russia's current strategy in Europe is based on the systemic use of criminal networks as a tool of hybrid war. Russian services recruit people with a criminal record, who are often in difficult economic situation and come from Russian-speaking communities, to carry out acts of sabotage, such as damage to infrastructure and acts of vandalism¹². This mechanism allows Russia to operate below the threshold of open conflict, limit the risk of being unequivocally held responsible, and reduce operating costs.

Russian legislation on terrorism and extremism

Russian legislation, including Article 205 of the Criminal Code of the RF, defines a terrorist act as the causing of an explosion, arson or other acts designed to instil fear in the population and pose a threat to life, causing significant property damage or other grave consequences, undertaken with the aim of destabilising the activities of the public authorities or international organisations or influencing their decisions. The provision also covers the mere threat of carrying out such actions. In the case of offenses committed by an organised group or resulting in serious consequences, enhanced penalties are provided. Actions involving the use of nuclear materials, chemical or biological substances, or actions leading to the death of a person may, however, result in a sentence of life imprisonment. At the same time, the regulations allow for exemption

¹⁰ K. Hird et al., *Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, March 25, 2024*, Critical Threats, 25 III 2024, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-25-2024> [accessed: 20 III 2026].

¹¹ E. Ferris, *How Russia's War in Ukraine is Creating Domestic Security Gaps*, Royal United Services Institute, 23 IX 2025, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/insights-papers/how-russias-war-ukraine-creating-domestic-security-gaps> [accessed: 21 III 2026].

¹² K. Rekawek, J. Lanchès, M. Zotova, *Russia's Crime-Terror Nexus: Criminality as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare in Europe*, https://icct.nl/sites/default/files/2025-09/Russia%20Crime%20Terror%20Nexus_Criminality%20as%20a%20Tool.pdf [accessed: 16 VI 2026].

from criminal liability for individuals who have contributed to preventing the commission of the attack¹³.

Russian legislation, in particular the Federal Law ‘On Countering Terrorism’, defines terrorism as an ideology of violence and the practice of influencing the decisions of government authorities or international organisations by intimidating the population or other forms of unlawful actions involving the use of violence¹⁴. At the same time, the Act introduces broad understanding of terrorist activity, including carrying out attacks, planning them, financing them, inciting them, creating illegal armed structures, recruiting and training perpetrators, as well as information activities and propaganda. The scope of terrorist activity can be very broad, taking into account activities of an informational and political nature as well. Regulations related to counterterrorism encompass not only the prevention, detection, and suppression of threats, but also the mitigation of their consequences, the conduct of counterterrorism operations, and the protection of facilities and sites of particular importance¹⁵. The broadening of the definition of ‘public space’ gives the state considerable leeway in classifying certain activities as terrorist acts¹⁶.

The National Antiterrorism Committee serves as the central body coordinating the RF’s counterterrorism efforts, integrating the activities

¹³ Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации от 13.06.1996 No 63-ФЗ. Статья 205. Террористический акт (Ugolovnyy kodeks Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 13.06.1996 No 63-FZ. Stat’ya 205. Terroristicheskiy akt), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_10699/43942021d9206af7a0c78b6f65ba3665db940264/ [accessed: 20 III 2026].

¹⁴ Федеральный закон Российской Федерации от 06.03.2006 No 35-ФЗ „О противодействии терроризму”. Статья 3. Основные понятия (Federal’nyy zakon Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 06.03.2006 No 35-FZ „O protivodeystvii terrorizmu”. Stat’ya 3. Osnovnyye ponyatiya), https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_58840/4fdc493704d123d418c32ed33872ca5b3fb16936/ [accessed: 20 III 2026].

¹⁵ Counterterrorism operation – a set of special, operational-combat, military and other actions involving the use of combat equipment, weapons and special means, aimed at stopping a terrorist act, neutralising terrorists, ensuring the safety of individuals, organisation, and institutions, and minimising consequences of a terrorist act. Russian legislation distinguishes between broadly understood counterterrorism activities (systemic measures) and a counterterrorism operation (a specific use of force), with both concepts being formulated in a manner that allows for their flexible – including political – application. Counterterrorism activities are defined as activities carried out by state authorities, public authorities of federal territories, local self-government bodies and private individuals. Quoted after: Федеральный закон Российской Федерации от 06.03.2006 No 35-ФЗ...

¹⁶ Ibid.

of federal, regional, and local structures under the leadership of the Federal Security Service (FSB). It is responsible for planning counterterrorism operations, shaping state policy in this area and managing communications related to threats¹⁷. This demonstrates the centralisation of Russia's security system and the significant role of the Kremlin in defining threats and combating terrorism.

Russia defines the phenomenon of international terrorism in very broad terms and in a way that is directly linked to its own interests. Article 361 of the Criminal Code includes not only traditional acts of violence, such as terrorist attacks or arson, but also any activities considered to be directed against the interests of the RF or to interfere with the 'peaceful coexistence of states'. In practice, this means that the category of terrorism can be applied much more broadly than simply to domestic security threats. Importantly, individuals who finance, recruit, or train the perpetrators of such attacks may also be subject to a sentence of life imprisonment. The regulations provide for the harshest penalties in the event of fatal attacks¹⁸. All of this is part of a general trend within the Russian state apparatus towards maximising criminal liability, while leaving room for interpretation.

Russian regulations concerning extremist and terrorist activities indicate that the state treats this category very broadly and, above all, as a tool of control. Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code provides for severe penalties (up to 10–12 years of imprisonment in cases involving the abuse of an official position), both for organising structures and for mere participation or recruitment. This means that the line between a real threat and activity arbitrarily defined as extremist is blurred. Importantly, this provision concerns organisations recognised as extremist¹⁹, excluding organisations which, under the legislation of the RF, have been recognised

¹⁷ *National Antiterrorism Committee: goals and objectives*, National Antiterrorism Committee, <https://en.nac.gov.ru/home> [accessed: 21 III 2026].

¹⁸ *Уголовный кодекс Российской Федерации от 13.06.1996 № 63-ФЗ. Статья 361. Акт международного терроризма (Ugolovnyy kodeks Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 13.06.1996 № 63-FZ. Stat'ya 361. Akt mezhdunarodnogo terrorizma)*, https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_10699/0994b72ccab34fae773ced2c837691518a3e3dca/ [accessed: 20 III 2026].

¹⁹ *List of organisations designated as extremist under the legislation of the Russian Federation*, see: *Перечень организаций, признанных в соответствии с законодательством Российской Федерации экстремистскими (Pierieezen' organizacyj, priznannykh w sootwietstwiu s zakonodatelstwom Rossijskoj Fiedieracyi ekstriemists)*, <https://minjust.gov.ru/ru/documents/7822/> [accessed: 20 IV 2026].

as terrorist²⁰. In practice, this shows that extremism and terrorism function in Russian law as related but not identical categories. At the same time, it is possible to avoid liability by voluntarily ceasing activities, but in practice the final decision rests with the security services, which determine whether a person has in fact ceased their activities and whether they should face the consequences.

Terrorist threats to the Russian Federation

Among the member states of the CSTO, Russia is the main source of terrorist threats in the post-Soviet space, and is also a country accused of terrorist activities both domestically and abroad. The Kremlin, in order to achieve its own objectives, demonstratively resorts to measures in domestic policy that fall within the definition of terrorism. At the same time, the RF is developing anti-terrorist strategy which it uses to subjugate regions and communities and to justify its military actions. For decades, Russia has demonstrated that it very effectively uses the 'terrorism threat' to achieve its goals. This is the case in relation to the Caucasus region, activities on the African continent, and with regard to Ukraine²¹. At the same time,

²⁰ Unified federal list of organisations (including foreign and international organisations) designated as terrorist under the legislation of the Russian Federation, see: *Единый федеральный список организаций, в том числе иностранных и международных организаций, признанных в соответствии с законодательством Российской Федерации террористическими (на 4 апреля 2026 г.)*, Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации (*Yedyny federal'nyy spisok organizatsiy, v tom chisle inostrannykh i mezhdunarodnykh organizatsiy, priznannykh v sootvet-stvii s zakonodatel'stvom Rossiyskoy Federatsii terroristicheskimi (na 4 aprelya 2026 g.)*), Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii), <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm> [accessed: 20 IV 2026].

²¹ A. Wilk, W. Konończuk, *Ukrainian-Russian war under the banner of anti-terrorist operation*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 6 VIII 2014, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-08-06/ukrainian-russian-war-under-banner-anti-terrorist-operation> [accessed: 19 I 2026].

the RF repeatedly suffers the consequences of its anti-terrorist activities²², as it becomes a target of terrorist groups²³.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the highest concentration of terrorist attacks on the RF territory was recorded in the North Caucasus, especially in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia. These areas have long been major centres of activity for Islamist and separatist groups. Although North Ossetia was the site of one of the most tragic terrorist attacks in Russia's history, its significance in contemporary attack statistics is smaller than that of other Caucasian republics²⁴. As recently as 2012, before the series of attacks in Western Europe, including in France, Great Britain, Belgium and Germany, the terrorist conflict in the North Caucasus was regarded as the most brutal of its kind in Europe. During this period, around 700–800 people were killed each year in clashes between the RF forces and militants described by the Russian authorities as terrorists²⁵. Furthermore, between 1992 and 2011, 1415 terrorist attacks linked to groups operating in the North Caucasus were recorded in Russia. The highest number of incidents occurred in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia, which confirms that terrorist threat is concentrated in that region. Some of the attacks were also carried out in Moscow and Saint Petersburg, among other places.

²² J. Flanagan, *Bloodshed and retreat from Mozambique for Putin's private army the Wagner Group*, The Times, 25 XI 2019, <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/bloodshed-and-retreat-from-mozambique-for-putin-s-private-army-the-wagner-group-696tnpzqh> [accessed: 19 I 2026].

²³ *The Deadliest Attacks In Russia*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-timeline-terror-attacks/28410225.html> [accessed: 19 I 2026].

²⁴ *IntelBrief: Radicalization and Extremism in Russia's North Caucasus Region*, The Soufan Center, 12 IV 2024, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2024-april-12/> [accessed: 26 X 2025]; M. Bartosiewicz, *Increasing radicalisation: terrorist attacks in Dagestan*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 25 VI 2024, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2024-06-25/increasing-radicalisation-terrorist-attacks-dagestan> [accessed: 26 X 2025]; T. Grabowski, *Terroryzm północnokaukaski: przejawy zjawiska* (Eng. Terrorism in the North Caucasus: manifestations of the phenomenon), "Res Politicae" 2014, vol. VI, pp. 59–78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.16926/rp.2014.06.04>; M. Johns, *Terrorism and the North Caucasus: An Overview*, "START Background Report", National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), University of Maryland, April 2013, pp. 1–5, https://www.academia.edu/8490735/Terrorism_and_the_North_Caucasus_An_Overview [accessed: 16 VI 2026].

²⁵ T.W. Grabowski, *Terroryzm północnokaukaski. Źródła, przejawy i przeciwdziałanie zjawisku* (Eng. Terrorism in the North Caucasus. Sources, manifestations and counter-terrorism measures), Kraków 2017, p. 7.

The RF's experience of Islamist terrorism is long-standing and systemic. Since the war in Afghanistan (1979–1989), through the Chechen conflicts, right up to its involvement in Syria, Moscow has remained one of the main opponents of jihadist groups. As a result, Russia has been the target of numerous attacks, culminating in incidents carried out at the theatre in Dubrovka (2002), at the school in Beslan (2004), as well as at the Crocus City Hall (2024). At the same time, it should be emphasised that, despite being aware of the threat, the Russian security apparatus has limited capacity to neutralise it effectively²⁶, particularly while stretched by the war against Ukraine.

Since the 1990s, Russian 'war on terrorism' in Chechnya has not been merely an internal affair, but part of its foreign policy strategy. Following the attacks on 11 September 2001, the RF sought to frame its actions in the Caucasus within the global narrative of the fight against terrorism, capitalising on a temporary convergence of interests with the United States, particularly in the context of the operations in Afghanistan and the US military presence in Central Asia²⁷. Russia's relations with Europe remained strained due to criticism of human rights abuses in Chechnya, refusals to extradite suspects and accusations of interference in the countries of the former Soviet Union, which gradually reduced the scope for cooperation. Russia instrumentalised the anti-terrorist narrative, subordinating it to political interests. It opposed the growth of the US influence in many regions of the world. At the same time, it pointed to the discrepancy between the need to consistently combat terrorism declared by Washington and the diverse approach of the US to individual countries and organisations, including in the context of Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas. In Russian narrative, this was intended to support the argument that the US applied double standards, whereby whether a particular entity was classified as a terrorist organisation or as a political partner depended not only on its methods but also on the current interests of the US and its allies. This allowed Moscow to undermine the credibility of the US and weaken the real dimension of cooperation

²⁶ J. de Gliniasty, *Moscow Attack: Russia Confronts Islamist Terrorism*, Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, 26 III 2024, <https://www.iris-france.org/en/184928-moscow-attack-russia-confronts-islamist-terrorism/> [accessed: 21 III 2026].

²⁷ M. McFaul, *U.S. Russia Relations After September 11, 2001*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 24 X 2001, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2001/10/us-russia-relations-after-september-11-2001?lang=en> [accessed: 21 III 2026].

with the West in the fight against terrorism. Between 2001 and 2022, Russia consistently combined criticism of Western 'double standards' in the fight against terrorism with attempts to legitimise its own security policy, including activities carrying out in the North Caucasus, Syria and in other regions recognised by Moscow as important to its interests²⁸. It is currently continuing to balance political efforts in the field of counterterrorism policy with military involvement in counterterrorism operations in Russia and worldwide.

For many years, Chechen separatists were portrayed by the Russian authorities as the most serious terrorist threat for the RF. In some of the English-language literature they were referred to, among other things, as Chechen Rebels or Chechen Separatist Movement²⁹. Between 1999 and 2013, structures originating from this movement were responsible for most terrorist attacks carried out on the RF's territory, however, their activity gradually decreased considerably over time. A new phase of North Caucasian terrorism began with the establishment, on 31 October 2007, of another terrorist organisation founded by Doku Umarov, one of the leaders of the North Caucasian insurgency. He renounced his position as the President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, and proclaimed the creation of the Caucasus Emirate³⁰ – an Islamist, self-proclaimed organisational structure that for many years served as the principal terrorist base in the North Caucasus region.

The process of forming armed terrorist structures in the North Caucasus began as early as 1999. The local jamaats operating at that time in Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and North Ossetia became in the following years the organisational and personnel

²⁸ I. Oldberg, *The War on Terrorism in Russian Foreign Policy*, FOI – Swedish Defence Research Agency, Defence Analysis, Stockholm 2006.

²⁹ P. Bhattacharji, *Chechen Terrorism (Russia, Chechnya, Separatist)*, Council on Foreign Relations, 8 IV 2010, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chechen-terrorism-russia-chechnya-separatist> [accessed: 20 III 2026]; T. Grabowski, *Terroryzm północnokaukaski: przejawy zjawiska...*

³⁰ *The North Caucasus: The Challenges of Integration (II), Islam, the Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, Europe Report N°221, 19 X 2012; *Caucasus Emirate*, START – National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, January 2015, <https://www.start.umd.edu/baad/narratives/caucasus-emirate.html> [accessed: 19 I 2026]; B. Roggio, *Doku Umarov declares Islamic Caucasus Emirate*, Long War Journal, 26 XI 2007, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/11/doku_umarov_declares.php [accessed: 19 I 2026].

base for the Caucasus Emirate, formally announced in 2007³¹. In December 2009, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation banned the Caucasus Emirate's activity, considering it to be a terrorist organisation. From that moment on, the Caucasus Emirate became one of the main sources of terrorist threat related to North Caucasus and one of the significant challenges for Russian anti-terrorist system³².

The growing influence of the so-called Islamic State (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS) has had a direct impact on the security situation in Russian North Caucasus. In this context, ISIS should be regarded first and foremost as a terrorist organisation, even though its activities were based on an extremist ideology, radical propaganda and international recruitment networks. Hundreds of militants left the region to join the armed conflict in Syria and Iraq, and among the foreign fighters serving in the ranks of ISIS and other jihadist organisations, a significant proportion were citizens of the RF, many of whom originated from the North Caucasus. This process weakened the Caucasus Emirate and limited its recruiting opportunities. This led to the fragmentation of this organisation, as some commanders and militants pledged allegiance to ISIS, while others continued their activities in the region under its banner³³. As a result, in the North Caucasus, the remnants of the Caucasus Emirate and new groups linked to Islamic State began to coexist – often in a competitive environment – which meant that the nature of the threat shifted from a local, Caucasian perspective to a transnational one.

After 2014, the structures of the Caucasus Emirate began to break down. This was a consequence of both the intensified activities of Russian security services and deep internal divisions within the community of the Caucasian jihadist groups. An important factor weakening the group's position was

³¹ T.W. Grabowski, *Terroryzm północnokaukaski. Źródła, przejawy i przeciwdziałanie zjawisku...*, p. 159.

³² J. Sinai, *The Terrorist Threats Against Russia and its Counterterrorism Response Measures*, "Connections: The Quarterly Journal" 2015, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 95–101, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11610/Connections.14.4.08>; M. Falkowski, *The Islamic State in the Caucasus – who benefits?*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 14 I 2015, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-01-14/islamic-state-caucasus-who-benefits> [accessed: 12 III 2026]; M. Youngman, C. Moore, *Guide: The Caucasus Emirate*, Radicalisation Research, 9 XI 2017, <https://radicalisationresearch.org/research/youngman-guide-caucasus-emirate/> [accessed: 12 III 2026].

³³ M. Ter, *The Caucasus Emirate, the Other Russian Front*, https://www.cidob.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/NOTES%20129_TER_ANG.pdf [accessed: 16 VI 2026].

the disloyalty of some of its commanders and militants, who pledged allegiance to ISIS between 2014 and 2015. This led to the subordination of some Caucasian structures to the Islamic State. ISIS gradually assumed the role of the dominant ideological and organisational centre for radical circles originating from the North Caucasus³⁴. As a result, the Caucasus Emirate lost its ability to independently set the direction of its activities and coordinate operations on a large scale in Russia and the autonomous republics. It gave way to a stronger organisation linked to ISIS.

The Islamic State Caucasus Province (Wilayat al-Qawqaz), established in June 2015, emerged as a significant actor in Russia's terrorist threat landscape in the subsequent years, drawing on part of the former Caucasus Emirate's cadre base and organisational infrastructure. This was a consequence of the mass oaths of allegiance to the Islamic State by the leaders of local jamaats. This process led to the absorption by the structures of ISIS of a significant number of the existing supporters of the Caucasus Emirate, and at the same time to the internal fragmentation of the armed environment in the North Caucasus. The result was a temporary decline in the operational activity of jihadist groups and a fall in the number of attacks between 2014 and 2015 in republics such as Dagestan and Ingushetia. It is estimated that during the Syrian conflict, around 2800 fighters from the countries of the former Soviet Union joined the fighting in the ranks of ISIS³⁵, including people from the North Caucasus region and Central Asian countries. This led to the gradual disintegration of the Caucasus Emirate and the takeover of its personnel and infrastructure by the structures of ISIS, primarily the Islamic State Caucasus Province³⁶, which has become a main hub of jihadist activity in the North Caucasus since 2015.

Thus, the activity of ISIS has been one of the greatest challenges for the Russian security apparatus, primarily due to the vulnerability of some

³⁴ *The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad?*, International Crisis Group, 16 III 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/russia-internal-syria/238-north-caucasus-insurgency-and-syria-exported-jihad> [accessed: 19 I 2026].

³⁵ F. Hanoush, *Fighters from the Caucasus Join ISIS to Fight Russia*, Atlantic Council, 14 IX 2016, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/fighters-from-the-caucasus-join-isis-to-fight-russia/> [accessed: 21 III 2026].

³⁶ M. Vatchagaev, *Caucasus Emirate and Islamic State Split Slows Militant Activities in North Caucasus*, Jamestown, 14 II 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/caucasus-emirate-and-islamic-state-split-slows-militant-activities-in-north-caucasus-2/> [accessed: 20 I 2026].

regions of the North Caucasus to the development of terrorism. The ideas of global jihad and the establishment of a caliphate found supporters there even before the formal emergence of ISIS structures. The turning point came in 2015, when the organisation openly declared jihad against the RF. This decision was directly linked to the involvement of Russian military forces in Syria on the side of Bashar al-Assad's regime, which led to Russia being designated as a priority target of ISIS. This was accompanied by numerous propaganda, recruitment and terrorist activities.

The Kremlin responded by strengthening the capacities of the security apparatus, which on the one hand increased state control, but on the other could exacerbate social and political tensions³⁷.

In 2015, the threat of terrorism in Russia increased significantly, not only from militants of Chechen, Dagestani and, more broadly, North Caucasian origin fighting for independence, but also from other terrorist organisations. When, in September 2015, Russia launched a military offensive against rebel groups in Syria, a splinter faction of Al-Qaeda – al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) organisation responded³⁸. The leader of terrorist group, Abu Muhammad al-Julani, subsequently called for retaliatory attacks against Russian citizens in Syria. The reaction from the terrorist organisation's supporters was almost immediate – on 13 October 2015, two missiles struck the Russian embassy in Damascus³⁹. Thus, the terrorist groups in Africa and the Middle East have intensified their activities against the RF⁴⁰.

It is worth noting that, according to estimates from December 2015, Russian citizens accounted for approx. 8% of all foreign fighters who,

³⁷ A.M. Dyner, *Terrorists Kill at least 137 at Moscow Concert Hall*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 25 III 2024, <https://pism.pl/publications/terrorists-kill-at-least-137-at-moscow-concert-hall> [accessed: 19 I 2026].

³⁸ J. Beslin, M. Ignjatijevic, *Balkan foreign fighters: from Syria to Ukraine*, "Brief" 2017, no. 20, pp. 1–4.

³⁹ *Al-Qaeda in Syria calls for revenge attacks on Russia*, The Washington Post, 13 X 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/al-qaeda-in-syria-calls-for-revenge-attacks-on-russia/2015/10/13/b7f7dfdf-a0a4-451d-bd2e-180f2f4882f5_story.html [accessed: 16 V 2026]; *Syria crisis: Rockets hit Russian embassy compound in Damascus, reports say*, ABC News, 13 X 2015, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-13/rockets-hit-russian-embassy-compound-in-damascus-reports/6851968> [accessed: 16 V 2026].

⁴⁰ A.K. Olech, *Ataki terrorystyczne w Federacji Rosyjskiej w XXI wieku* (Eng. Terrorist attacks in the Russian Federation in the 21st century), "Nowa Polityka Wschodnia" 2019, no. 4, pp. 110–115. <https://doi.org/10.15804/NPW20192306>.

during the Syrian conflict, travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS and other jihadist organisations. The number of Russian volunteers was estimated at around 2400 individuals (as of September 2015), while overall scale of the phenomenon was assessed at 27 000–31 000 departures from at least 86 countries⁴¹. This confirms the significant presence of Russian nationals among foreign fighters.

Another example of the escalation of terrorist activity directed against the RF after the start of its military intervention in Syria was the bombing of a Russian passenger aircraft flying from Sharm el-Sheikh to Saint Petersburg. On 31 October 2015, an explosive device detonated on board an aircraft operated by airline Metrojet, killing a total of 224 people (217 passengers and 7 crew members). The majority of the victims were Russians, except for three Ukrainian passengers and one from Belarus. ISIS structures claimed responsibility for the attack, describing it as a direct retaliation for the Russian military intervention in Syria⁴². This demonstrates that Russia's involvement in the Middle East led to an intensification of the terrorist threat beyond the North Caucasus region, with Russian citizens also being targeted outside the country.

The Islamic State Caucasus Province claimed responsibility for an attack on Russian military facility in southern Dagestan carried out on 2 September 2015. However, this information was not independently confirmed. In a recording published by a Russian-language ISIS media outlet, the leader of the Dagestani structures of the Caucasus Province, Furat Media Abu Mukhammad Kadarsky (Rustam Asilderov), called on the organization's supporters to carry out the fight in the Caucasus instead of traveling to Syria⁴³. He argued that taking action in the region would be more effective than travelling to the Middle East to support ISIS structures in Iraq and Syria. This was an example of propaganda aimed at mobilising

⁴¹ *Foreign Fighters. An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, December 2015, https://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_format-for-print-120915-REBRAND-031317.pdf [accessed: 21 I 2026].

⁴² Z. Gold, *Wilayat Sinai Risks Backlash After Metrojet Bombing*, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CTCSentinel-Vol8Iss118.pdf>, pp. 19–22 [accessed: 19 I 2026]; D. Costa-Roberts, *Questions swirl over Russian plane crash in Egypt that killed 224*, PBS News, 1 XI 2015, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/details-emerge-case-downed-russian-jet> [accessed: 20 I 2026].

⁴³ J. Paraszczuk, *IS's North Caucasus Affiliate Calls for Recruits to Join It in Daghestan*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 3 X 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/islamic-state-north-caucasus-affiliate-call-for-recruits-daghestan/27285024.html> [accessed: 16 V 2026].

supporters to take action in their country of residence, without having to travel to areas of armed conflict.

Another group operating against the RF was the Imam Shamil Battalion (Katibat Imam Shamil), affiliated with Al-Qaeda, which referred to itself as the 'Knights of Islam'. The group claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing carried out on 3 April 2017, in the Saint Petersburg metro, between the Sennaya Ploshchad and Tekhnologicheskoy Institut stations. As a result of the attack, 15 people were killed and several dozen were injured. A second explosive device was discovered and defused at another metro station. In connection with the attack, Russian authorities detained 11 individuals originating from Central Asia⁴⁴. These events demonstrate the importance of transnational jihadist networks and their capacity to conduct and inspire terrorist actions within the territory of the RF.

Between 2015 and 2022, Russia faced the threat of terrorist attacks concentrated in the North Caucasus. These were mainly carried out by jihadist groups linked to the Islamic State Caucasus Province, which had taken over part of the personnel and structures of the former Caucasus Emirate. The attacks most often took the form of targeted strikes and, importantly, were directed against security service officers, local government representatives and religious institutions⁴⁵.

The Russian language has become the third most popular language of ISIS propaganda (after Arabic and English), and the Russian intervention in Syria was a factor that may have further strengthened the influence of radical groups in Russia – both ISIS itself and other radical and jihadist circles⁴⁶. It can be concluded from this that, due to the increased activity of terrorist organisations and radical circles within Russia and in neighbouring countries, the Russian language has begun to play a significant role in transnational propaganda and recruitment communications amongst jihadist circles.

⁴⁴ A.K. Olech, *Ataki terrorystyczne...*, pp. 109–129.

⁴⁵ M.S. Stempień, *The evolution of terrorism in Russia in the years 2015–2022. Quantitative analysis of the phenomenon*, "Przegląd Wschodnioeuropejski" 2023, no.14, pp. 185–199. <https://doi.org/10.31648/pw.9711>.

⁴⁶ A. Borshchevskaya, *Russian Officials Inadvertently Aid Radical Islamists in Russia*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 31 XII 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/russian-officials-inadvertently-aid-radical-islamists-russia> [accessed: 22 I 2026].

Since 2020, the activities of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) – a regional ISIS structure operating primarily in Afghanistan and Central Asia – have been gaining increasing prominence in Russia. The organisation gradually took the lead in planning and instigating attacks aimed at Russia. This group operates differently from previous North Caucasian groups. This applies both to its modus operandi and to its recruitment, which relies heavily on economic migrants from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, functioning on the margins of Russian society. It was precisely these circles that became a recruitment base for the organisation. They are susceptible to radicalisation in situations of discrimination, repression and disinformation in Russia. There are also international structures, and even global terrorist organisations, operating in the RF⁴⁷. From this perspective, it is not possible to neutralise the threat solely through the use of brutal methods or the deployment of specialised counter-terrorism units – that is, the procedures employed to date by the Kremlin.

It should be noted that, across the wider region of Central Asia and Afghanistan, activities of ISIS-K have been gradually increasing since 2020, culminating in the attack in Russia on 22 March 2024, in which 144 people were killed and 551 were injured. It was not only one of the largest demonstrations of ISIS-K's capabilities in Russia⁴⁸, but also one of the largest terrorist attacks on a global scale. ISIS-K carried out the attack at the Crocus City Hall in the Krasnogorsk area in the Moscow Oblast. Just one day after the attack, the National Antiterrorism Committee announced that 11 suspects had been arrested⁴⁹. Among the key motives behind the perpetrators' actions, it should be noted that activities of ISIS-K were a response to Russia's closer cooperation with the Taliban⁵⁰, as well as to military operations in Syria and the Sahel against the Islamic State⁵¹.

⁴⁷ IntelBrief: *Radicalization and Extremism in Russia's...*

⁴⁸ K. Strachota, *Islamic State-Khorasan: global jihad's new front*, 29 III 2024, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-03-29/islamic-state-khorasan-global-jihads-new-front> [accessed: 20 I 2026].

⁴⁹ *Global Terrorism Index 2025*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf> [accessed: 22 I 2026]; A.M. Dynér, *Terrorists Kill...*

⁵⁰ M.N. Katz, *No, Putin, the ISIS-K attack in Moscow wasn't about Ukraine*, Atlantic Council, 29 III 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/isis-k-putin-moscow-al-qaeda/> [accessed: 20 I 2026].

⁵¹ A. Olech, *The Wagner Group in Africa. The sham battle of Russian mercenaries against terrorism*,

In the context of the attack at the Crocus City Hall, Russia was to have received information about planned attacks on concert halls in Moscow from the security services of other countries, friendly countries (Iran) and hostile countries (the US⁵²). The limited response from the Russian authorities may suggest that they either did not have sufficient knowledge of the threat or did not attach sufficient importance to the warning signs. Russian security services may therefore not have completely ruled out the possibility of a threat, but rather misjudged its likelihood, scale or urgency. It is also possible that their attention was focused on other priorities at the time, including operations being carried out abroad.

The Royal United Service Institute indicates that the state apparatus, led by the FSB, prioritised political and social challenges relating to the Russian operation against Ukraine. Terrorism was not a priority. Even immediately after the attack itself, it was assumed that Western intelligence services (led by American and British ones) and Ukraine were responsible for it. Another important aspect is radicalisation in Russia itself, also among migrants from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In 2024, there were five attacks in Russia, neither of which was previously detected⁵³. For a country that has been grappling with terrorism for decades, such serious shortcomings point to a lack of capacity to respond, a shortage of resources (including specialist officers), a failure to treat terrorism as a priority, and a significant focus on the war with Ukraine.

Also in 2024, a terrorist attack took place in Dagestan on Russian territory, where armed assailants carried out coordinated attacks on Orthodox churches, synagogues and police stations in the cities of Derbent and Makhachkala⁵⁴. As a result of these attacks, which the authorities have described as terrorist attacks, at least 20 people were killed, including officers of security services and clergy, and more than 40 were injured. Russian services did not confirm the identities of the perpetrators. Some information indicates that they cooperated with organisations associated with ISIS, including with the Islamic State Caucasus Province, but also ISIS-K

“Terrorism – Studies, Analyses, Prevention” 2024, no. 5, pp. 273–309. <https://doi.org/10.4467/27204383TER.24.010.19398>.

⁵² *On the Terrorist Attack at the Crocus City Hall in Moscow*, U.S. Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 11 IV 2024, <https://osce.usmission.gov/on-the-terrorist-attack-at-the-crocus-city-hall-in-moscow/> [accessed: 20 III 2026].

⁵³ E. Ferris, *How Russia’s War in Ukraine...*

⁵⁴ M. Bartosiewicz, *Postępująca radykalizacja. Ataki terrorystyczne w Dagestanie...*

provided media support. Importantly, Russian authorities constructed a narrative alleging that Western or Ukrainian organisations were involved in instigating and supporting terrorist attacks.

The FSB is currently publishing 'Unified federal list of organizations, including foreign and international organizations, recognized as terrorist in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation'. It covers 70 entities, including foreign and international organisations, as well as local and regional structures⁵⁵ operating within the RF.

Although the Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia, one of the nationwide Russian organisations representing Muslim communities in the RF, repeatedly and publicly condemned terrorism and extremist ideologies as actions contrary to the principles of Islam, acts of violence were nevertheless carried out within the territory of the Russian Federation by individuals claiming affiliation with this religion. In response to the 2010 Moscow Metro bombings, Russia's Supreme Mufti, Talgat Tadzhuddin, emphasised that Muslim communities in Russia unequivocally condemned the perpetrators of terrorist attacks. He stated that such acts have no religious justification and are contrary to the teachings of Islam⁵⁶. In the following years, official Muslim institutions in the RF continued to maintain a critical stance toward religiously motivated terrorism and violence, emphasising that terrorist acts should not be equated with Muslim communities⁵⁷.

Due to the international involvement of the RF, terrorist threats in Africa should also be taken into account. Russia declares that its counterterrorism efforts are focused primarily on the Sahel states, particularly in Mali, where the fight against terrorism serves as one of the main justifications for the presence of Russian military forces and mercenaries. In practice, however, this activity also serves broader political, economic and military objectives, including the maintenance of influence and access to natural resources.

⁵⁵ *Единый федеральный список организаций...*

⁵⁶ *Peaceful Muslims have no relation to extremists – supreme mufti of Russia*, Pravmir, 30 XII 2013, <https://www.pravmir.com/peaceful-muslims-have-no-relation-to-extremists-supreme-mufti-of-russia/> [accessed: 21 I 2026].

⁵⁷ B. Vitkine, *Russia faces wave of Islamophobia after Moscow attacks*, Le Monde, 30 III 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/03/30/russia-faces-wave-of-islamophobia-after-moscow-attacks_6666864_4.html [accessed: 20 I 2026].

Russia's antiterrorist policy in Africa is presented as a response to the activities of many jihadist groups operating on the continent. These include, among others: the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, JNIM), the Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel, ISSP), the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), as well as Islamic State structures in Mozambique, also referred to as Ansar al-Sunna/Ahl al-Sunna. In the context of Central Africa, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and Islamic State structures in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (ISIS-DRC), related to the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) should also be mentioned. In the Russian narrative on security, they are portrayed as a threat that justifies Moscow's continued military and political presence in certain African countries⁵⁸.

It is therefore important to analyse with particular care the actions taken by terrorists against Russia, especially in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mozambique, Libya or the Central African Republic. If Russia were to decide to build its bases in any of these countries, continue expanding the presence of the Wagner Group⁵⁹ or the African Corps⁶⁰, attempt to maintain infrastructure in Syria, and begin constructing additional bases, it would certainly have to commit additional troops and resources to counterterrorism efforts both in Russia and the Caucasus, as well as in Africa and the Middle East. This will require additional, unforeseen and significant investments, along with a reallocation of resources, including funds currently allocated to the war in Ukraine.

The Kremlin will have to decide how important it is to establish new military bases on the African continent in the context of further fighting against terrorists and the difficulties associated with conducting

⁵⁸ A. Olech, *The Wagner Group in Africa...*

⁵⁹ A. Olech, *Rosyjscy najemnicy – raport z działalności w Afryce* (Eng. Russian mercenaries – report on activities in Africa), Defence24, 8 IV 2024, <https://defence24.pl/geopolityka/rosyjscy-najemnicy-raport-z-dzialalnosci-w-afryce> [accessed: 22 I 2026].

⁶⁰ After the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin in 2023, Russian paramilitary presence of mercenaries in Africa was gradually reorganised and brought under the control of state-run structures, primarily the Africa Corps, which is linked to the Russian Ministry of Defence. In practice, this meant the partial takeover or replacement of the functions previously carried out by the Wagner Group in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Libya and the Central African Republic. See: F. Bryjka, J. Czerep, *Africa Corps – a New Iteration of Russia's Old Military Presence in Africa*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 29 V 2024, <https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/africa-corps-a-new-iteration-of-russias-old-military-presence-in-africa> [accessed: 22 I 2026].

operations and training. So far, Russian mercenaries in Africa – who are, after all, most often regular soldiers of the Russian army – have been losing this confrontation with terrorists and have proven unable to effectively oppose them. This scenario occurred in Mozambique, the Central African Republic, and now in Mali and Burkina Faso. Due to the difficulties involved in combating terrorist groups, Russia cannot afford to build military bases, as they would automatically become targets for terrorist groups, including jihadist organisations. Therefore, it must select locations for new investments with great caution and in close cooperation with the governments of African countries.

The Russian Federation, in the context of current security challenges, carried out attacks and the influence of terrorism on the functioning of the state, remains among the countries particularly exposed to terrorist threats. In the Global Terrorism Index 2025 report, Russia was ranked 17th in the world (moving up 20 places compared with the 2024 report), and in the Global Terrorism Index 2026 report – 16th. The rise in the country's ranking in 2025 and staying in the top twenty in 2026 are a consequence of increased terrorist activity within the country, including successful attacks with a significant impact on society. Russia, conducting a full-scale military operation against Ukraine and engaging militarily in Africa under the slogan of combating terrorism, is simultaneously increasing its vulnerability to such threats and becoming a target of retaliatory actions by terrorist groups⁶¹.

The data presented in Table 1 shows that the high level of terrorist impact in the years 2020–2025 in countries, such as Somalia, Syria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mozambique, Libya, the Central African Republic and Sudan, persists despite the presence or involvement of the RF. At the same time, in countries cooperating with Moscow at political and military level, such as Egypt, Algeria, Serbia and Eritrea, there is no clear improvement in the security situation. In practice, this means that Russian activity – both in the Sahel countries and in Libya, the Central African Republic, Mozambique and Sudan – does not lead to the elimination of terrorism, but rather fits into a mechanism maintaining an environment of instability, that enables governments or juntas to become dependent on external support⁶². As a result, Russia functions as a beneficiary of prolonged

⁶¹ *Global Terrorism Index 2025...; Global Terrorism Index 2026...*

⁶² See: A. Arieff et al., *Russia's Security Operations in Africa*, Congressional Research Service,

chaos, in which terrorism remains an element of cooperation enabling and justifying its continued presence, rather than a problem that Moscow will resolve at systemic level.

Table 1. The ranking of the selected countries between 2021 and 2025 in terms of the impact of terrorist threats on their functioning according to the Global Terrorism Index (1 – the greatest impact, 100 – the least impact).

Country	Place in the world				
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Egypt	15	16	20	29	32
Eritrea	93*	93*	89*	100*	100*
Mozambique	13	12	15	17	15
Central African Republic	93*	55	59	71	76
Somalia	3	3	7	7	7
Sudan	86	93*	89*	100* (engulfed in war)	100* (engulfed in war)
Syria	5	5	5	3	6
Mali	7	4	3	4	5
Burkina Faso	4	2	1	1	2
Niger	8	10	10	5	3
Libya	26	32	39	53	59
Algeria	39	37	44	42	47
Serbia	93	93	89	82	66

* Last place in the report

Source: own elaboration based on: *Global Terrorism Index 2022*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf>, pp. 8–9 [accessed: 22 I 2026]; *Global Terrorism Index 2023*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GTI-2023-web-170423.pdf>, pp. 8–9 [accessed: 22 I 2026]; *Global Terrorism Index 2024*, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>, pp. 6–7 [accessed: 22 I 2026]; *Global Terrorism Index 2025*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf>, pp. 6–7 [accessed: 22 I 2026]; *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/GTI-2026-web-04112026.pdf>, pp. 8–9 [accessed: 22 I 2026].

8 IV 2026, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12389> [accessed: 12 IV 2026].

www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf, pp. 6–7 [accessed: 13 IV 2026].

Terrorist threats to the Member States of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation

There is a risk that terrorist organisations from the Caucasus will attempt to carry out terrorist attacks not only in Russia, but also in the CSTO member states. Operations of terrorist organisations also have a criminal character, as they continuously cooperate with criminal groups. In order to obtain funds to sustain their activities, these organisations are involved in, among others, international drug trafficking, kidnappings or arms sales. Consequently, the use of the territories of the CSTO member states to carry out illegal activities, such as by establishing a Europe–Asia trade route, poses a huge threat to security in the region. Furthermore, the ongoing operations in Syria, and the unstable situation in the southern part of the country, mean that the RF must monitor conflict regions while also ensuring that border security in the CSTO member states is not neglected.

Attention should be paid to the threat posed by Afghanistan. Tajikistan, the CSTO Member State bordering it, reported threats related to terrorism from its southern border. This was due to the unstable situation in Afghanistan, and the lack of security at border crossings. It should be added that, after 2022, the Central Asian countries significantly changed their policy towards Kabul. On the one hand, the risks are recognised, but on the other, the main factor influencing the development of Afghanistan's relations with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is precisely Russia. In addition to the above, Moscow seeks to oversee cooperation and projects carried out by Central Asia countries, preventing them from strengthening their independence, and at the same time presents itself as a guarantor of security⁶³, even though it faces its greatest challenges in the fight against terrorism (Table 2).

⁶³ D. Zielińska, *Pragmatism beyond divides: Central Asia's engagement with Afghanistan*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 7 XI 2025, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-11-07/pragmatism-beyond-divides-central-asias-engagement-afghanistan> [accessed: 12 I 2026].

Table 2. The ranking of the selected CSTO countries and Afghanistan between 2021 and 2025 in terms of the impact of terrorist threats on their functioning according to the Global Terrorism Index (1 – the greatest impact, 100 – the least impact).

Country	Place in the world				
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Armenia	93*	93*	76	79	81
Belarus	93*	93*	89*	90	94
Kazakhstan	93*	93*	89*	100*	100*
Kyrgyzstan	93*	93*	89*	100*	100*
Russia	44	45	35	16	17
Tajikistan	47	50	69	70	41
Afghanistan	1	1	6	9	11

* Last place in the report

Source: own elaboration based on: *Global Terrorism Index 2022*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GTI-2022-web-04112022.pdf>, pp. 8–9 [accessed: 22 I 2026]; *Global Terrorism Index 2023*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GTI-2023-web-170423.pdf>, pp. 8–9 [accessed: 22 I 2026]; *Global Terrorism Index 2024*, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf>, pp. 6–7 [accessed: 22 I 2026]; *Global Terrorism Index 2025*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf>, pp. 6–7 [accessed: 22 I 2026]; *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2026-Report.pdf>, pp. 6–7 [accessed: 13 IV 2026].

The potential threat posed by lone actors or individuals who declare their affiliation with or loyalty to terrorist organisations⁶⁴ may currently constitute one of the most serious challenges to Russian government and CSTO countries. This is linked to the mass exodus of Russian citizens to the Middle East, their indoctrination, and subsequently their return to Russia and their engagement in terrorist activities. The exact number of such individuals is unknown, but the threat posed by returning fighters and those becoming radicalised on their own has been repeatedly highlighted as one of the problems facing Russian security system.

⁶⁴ B.M. Jenkins, *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies. Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States Since 9/11*, RAND, 31 VIII 2011, https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP343.html [accessed: 22 IV 2026].

The most important thing in this regard is to determine how (means, tools) and where an attack can be carried out. One of the main ways in which terrorists communicate and discuss specific targets is through social media and gaming platforms. They contain training materials, as well as resources designed to encourage and motivate people to attacks. This ensures that indoctrinated terrorists remain in constant contact with their superiors in Africa or in the Middle East. For this reason, verifying all the evidence and sources requires the ongoing involvement of Russian services. The Russian government takes into account similar threats arising from the ongoing migration and development of cyberterrorism.

For years, Russian security services have been carrying out preventative measures in the country's largest cities, aimed primarily at safeguarding public transport, areas with heavy traffic and mass events. This involves deploying police officers and soldiers to patrol the streets, as well as establishing zones of heightened checks, which will help to maintain security in critical areas of cities. Border controls and international cooperation are also important elements. Previous experiences of terrorist attacks on Russia's territory and repeated threats from terrorists are the basis for stepping up security measures. This is mainly due to the fact that terrorist organisations, e.g. Al-Qaeda and ISIS, continue to call, in their statements, for attacks to be carried out on the Russia's territory, and urge people to individual attacks⁶⁵. In view of the above, international engagement of the CSTO member states is essential to ensure that each member state implements similar methods and measures to combat terrorism. Common military initiatives and response to threats should consist of carrying out simultaneous actions and adopting a similar strategy in the implementation of counter-terrorism measures.

⁶⁵ A. Aji, B. Mroue, *Russian Embassy shelled in Syria as insurgents hit back*, Associated Press, 13 X 2015, <https://apnews.com/article/991656eab57d4aa79fbd5458af62b60e> [accessed: 21 III 2026]; T. Joscelyn, *Head of al Qaeda's Syrian branch threatens Russia in audio message*, Long War Journal, 13 X 2015, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/head-of-al-qaedas-syrian-branch-threatens-russia-in-audio-message.php> [accessed: 21 III 2026]; *ISIS video threatens attacks in Russia, Moscow*, Ahram Online, 12 XI 2015, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/165409.aspx> [accessed: 21 III 2026]; *Why is ISIS targeting Russia?*, Vision of Humanity, 25 III 2024, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/why-is-isis-targeting-russia/> [accessed: 21 III 2026].

Working Group on the Fight against Terrorism and Extremism under the CSTO

A special organisational structure has been established within the CSTO – the Working Group on the Fight against Terrorism and Extremism (Russian: *Рабочая группа экспертов по вопросам борьбы с терроризмом и экстремизмом*), operating under the auspices of the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils of the CSTO. Its main tasks include coordinating Member States' efforts to combat terrorism and extremism, identifying and analysing current and potential security threats, and formulating recommendations for joint preventive and operational measures. The Group performs an expert and advisory role, supporting the development of a common CSTO security policy, including by initiating the harmonisation of legal frameworks and institutional cooperation between member states in the field of countering terrorist and extremist threats⁶⁶.

As early as 2015, the CSTO countries were pointing to an increase in security threats linked to activities of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, particularly in the context of the unstable situation in Afghanistan⁶⁷. Particular importance was attached to the protection of the southern borders of the member states, above all the Tajik-Afghan border, which is regarded as one of the most vulnerable sections in terms of security terrorist, extremist and drug-related threats. The cooperation of the CSTO countries in this area was intended to strengthen border security, coordinate actions and develop the capabilities of the collective security system⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ *Меры по противодействию международному терроризму и экстремизму рассмотрены на заседании Комитета секретарей советов безопасности стран ОДКБ*, Национальный правовой Интернет-портал Республики Беларусь (*Mery po protivodeystviyu mezhdunarodnomuterrorizmu i ekstremizmu rassmotreny na zasedanii Komiteta sekretarey sovetov bezopasnosti stran ODKB*, Natsional'nyy pravovoy Internet-portal Respubliki Belarus'), 24 V 2018, <https://pravo.by/novosti/obshchestvenno-politicheskie-i-v-oblasti-prava/2018/may/28997/> [accessed: 22 I 2026].

⁶⁷ *Заявление глав государств-членов Организации Договора о Коллективной Безопасности о противодействии международному терроризму, 21 декабря 2015 года, г. Москва*, Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности (*Zayavleniye glav gosudarstv-chlenov Organizatsii Dogovora o Kollektivnoy Bezopasnosti o protivodeystvii mezhdunarodnomu terrorizmu, 21 dekabrya 2015 goda, g. Moskva*, Organizatsiya Dogovora o kolektivnoy bezopasnosti), 21 XII 2015, https://odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/zayavlenie_glav_gosudarstv_chlenov_organizatsii_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti_o_protivodeystv/?sphrase_id=66457 [accessed: 10 III 2026].

⁶⁸ *В Астане состоялась сессия СКБ ОДКБ*, Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности (*V Astane sostoyalas' sessiya SKB ODKB*, Organizatsiya Dogovora okollektivnoy

According to representatives of the CSTO, it is precisely terrorism that significantly increases the likelihood of conflicts breaking out in various regions of the world, hinders the development of military activities – including those on the borders of CSTO's area of responsibility – and therefore requires a comprehensive and in-depth analysis, as well as joint efforts to counteract threats. The consolidation of efforts to promote global and regional security, including the exchange of information, joint exercises and shared priorities in the field of security, is one of the priorities of the CSTO⁶⁹.

During regular meetings, the Working Group on the Fight against Terrorism and Extremism draws up proposals to improve cooperation in organising joint operations to combat terrorism and extremism. It regularly updates the list of organisations recognised as terrorist and extremist in the CSTO member states. It also carries out activities aimed at improving the operational and combat training of the special forces units of the CSTO.

Between 2024 and 2025, under the CSTO, the existing priorities of the Working Group were maintained and developed, and adapted to the changing security environment. Particular emphasis was placed on countering terrorist and extremist activities involving the exploitation of disinformation and new technologies, including propaganda and recruitment carried out in cyberspace, combating transnational terrorist groups linked to cells in Afghanistan, and strengthening the protection of Member States' external borders (particularly along the Tajik-Afghan border), stepping up joint exercises and deepening of IT and legal cooperation between the CSTO states. At the same time, the importance of preventive measures – including educational programmes and efforts to counter radicalisation – was emphasised as an integral element of regionally strengthening collective security⁷⁰.

bezopasnosti), 28 XI 2024, https://odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/v-astane-sostoyalas-sessiya-skb-odkb/ [accessed: 22 I 2026].

⁶⁹ Генеральный секретарь ОДКБ Станислав Зась 4 сентября выступил на совместном заседании министров обороны СНГ, ШОС и ОДКБ, Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности (*General'nyy sekretar' ODKB Stanislav Zas' 4 sentyabryavystupil na sovmestnom zasedanii ministrov oborony SNG, SHOS IODKB, Organizatsiya Dogovora o kollektivnoy bezopasnosti*), https://odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/generalnyy-sekretar-odkb-stani-slav-zas-4-sentyabrya-vystupil-na-sovmestnom-zasedanii-ministrov-oboro/?sphrase_id=66458 [accessed: 11 III 2026].

⁷⁰ О. Keskin, *Лидеры стран ОДКБ выразили глубокую озабоченность эскалацией в зоне израильско-палестинского конфликта* (*Lidery stran ODKB vyrazili glubokuyu ozabochennost'eskalatsiyey v zone izrail'sko-palestinskogo konflik*), Anadolu Agency,

Russia's role remains a key issue in the fight against terrorism within the CSTO. Its counter-terrorism strategy is based on building cooperation both with the organisation's member states and with selected external partners. The Russian Federation was supported in its counter-terrorism efforts by, among others, the UN and China⁷¹. This means that Moscow will seek to develop counter-terrorism cooperation both within the CSTO and outside it. It may also turn out that, once the war in Ukraine is over, the narrative of the fight against terrorism will become one of the tools enabling Russia to make a partial return to the international stage.

At the same time, measures to protect the interests of the RF, which will be undertaken by the Kremlin as counter-terrorism measures, remain a priority, including within a broader jurisdiction, i.e. on the territory of all states belonging to the CSTO. This gives Russia the opportunity to maintain influence over CSTO Member States through cooperation between security services, the exchange of information, training and joint operations carried out under the banner of counter-terrorism. The fight against terrorism as

28 XI 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/ru/мир/лидеры-стран-одкб-выразили-глубокую-озабоченность-эскалацией-в-зоне-израильско-палестинского-конфликта/3407532> [accessed: 22 I 2026]; МИД стран-членов ОДКБ сделали заявление о положении в Афганистане (*MID stran-chlenov ODKB sdelali zayavleniye o polozhenii v Afganistane*), KazTAG, 28 XI 2024, <https://kaztag.kz/ru/news/mid-stran-chlenov-odkb-sdelali-zayavlenie-o-polozhenii-v-afganistane> [accessed: 22 I 2026]; Касым-Жомарт Токаев принял участие в сессии Совета коллективной безопасности ОДКБ в узком составе, Официальный сайт Президента Республики Казахстан (*Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev prinyal uchastiye v sessii Sovetakov kolektivnoy bezopasnosti ODKB v uzkom sostave*, Ofitsial'nyy sayt Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan), 28 XI 2024, <https://www.akorda.kz/ru/kasym-zhomart-tokayev-prinyal-uchastie-v-sessii-soveta-kollektivnoy-bezopasnosti-odkb-v-uzkom-sostave-2810955> [accessed: 22 I 2026]; Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности (ОДКБ), Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации (*Organizatsiya Dogovora o kolektivnoy bezopasnosti (ODKB)*, Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii), https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/integracionnye-struktury-prostranstva-sng/odkb/ [accessed: 22 I 2026].

⁷¹ В Москве прошла Международная конференция «О роли и характере взаимодействия международных и региональных организаций в борьбе с международным терроризмом», организованная Секретариатом ОДКБ при участии ОБСЕ, Организация Договора о коллективной безопасности (*V Moskve proshla Mezhdunarodnaya konferentsiya «O roli i kharaktere vzaimodeystviya mezhdunarodnykh iregional'nykh organizatsiy v bor'be s mezhdunarodnym terrorizmom», organizovannaya Sekretariatom ODKB pri uchastii OBSE, Organizatsiya Dogovora o kolektivnoy bezopasnosti*), 30 X 2019, https://odkb-csto.org/news/news_odkb/v-moskve-proshla-mezhdunarodnaya-konferentsiya-o-rol-i-kharaktere-vzaimodeystviya-mezhdunarodnykh-i/?sphrase_id=66458 [accessed: 16 I 2026].

understood by the Kremlin – a point echoed in numerous statements⁷² – has a completely different dimension than it does from the perspective of the West.

There are many areas of cooperation between the CSTO and the UN regarding international fight against terrorism. The basis for joint activities is the agreements concluded between the CSTO Secretary General and selected UN organisational units, and, above all, the memorandum of understanding with the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) of the UN Security Council and the cooperation agreement between the CSTO Secretary General and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). Cooperation with partners – the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – is also significant. It should be noted that, since the UNOCT was established in 2017, the Office has been led by the representatives of the RF⁷³, which from a political and institutional perspective, may have helped to maintain active relations between the UN and the CSTO in the field of combating terrorism.

Russia's war against Ukraine exposed the weakness of the CSTO as collective security mechanism. In other words, instead of consolidation and cooperation, there has been a distancing, and most members – apart from Belarus – are avoiding openly supporting Moscow. This combines two conflicting approaches from Russia's perspective. Most members do not want to legitimise aggression or risk losing profits in their relationships with the West. At the same time, the Kremlin continues to seek to develop its regional policy by drawing on the narrative of the ongoing need to combat terrorism and to maintain the special operation in Ukraine, which is intended to justify decisive action in the region and to build influence in forums such as the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The problem is that, without Russia's ability to intervene and impose resolutions on conflicts (e.g. Armenia – Azerbaijan or Kyrgyzstan – Tajikistan), the CSTO as an organisation becomes powerless, and the countries in the region are increasingly seeking alternative

⁷² *Putin Accuses Ukraine of Wanting Ceasefire to Rearm and Prepare 'Terrorist Attacks'*, The Moscow Times, 4 VI 2025, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/06/04/putin-saysukraine-wants-ceasefire-to-rearm-and-prepare-terrorist-attacks-a89340> [accessed: 22 I 2026].

⁷³ *Leadership*, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/en/leadership> [accessed: 14 III 2026].

cooperation projects with, among others, China and Turkey, as well as seeking cooperation with the European Union⁷⁴.

Summary

The authorities in Moscow portray Russia as a key actor in the international fight against terrorism, emphasising the need to avoid double standards and to build a broad coalition against terrorism and extremism. They treat counterterrorism as a tool of state policy. They promote a narrative that prioritises eliminating existing threats (rather than prevention). They completely control the information space and marginalise the importance of human rights. All this is intended to legitimise repressive methods within the country and increase influence abroad⁷⁵. At the same time, establishing cooperation with the Taliban government or using ‘counterterrorism’ operations instrumentally to support activities in Syria, the Sahel and Ukraine undermines the credibility of this narrative. This shows that the aim is to intensify rivalry with Western countries, not so much in terms of the fight against terrorism itself, but rather in the way threats are defined, security narratives are constructed, and their own actions are legitimised under the banner of counter-terrorism. Russia uses this category as a political instrument, presents its own approach as an alternative to the Western model and as a justification for actions taken both within the country and abroad.

The Russian Federation has been putting forward the view for years that the fight against terrorism should be conducted without double standards, and it often uses this issue to highlight the shortcomings of the West⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ P. Filkowska, *Pierwsze reakcje państw członkowskich Organizacji Układu o Bezpieczeństwie Zbiorowym na inwazję Federacji Rosyjskiej na Ukrainę* (Eng. First reactions of the member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation on the Russian Federation invasion in Ukraine), “Wschód Europy” 2024, vol. 10, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.17951/we.2024.10.1.113-128>; A.M. Dyer, *CSTO Ambiguous on War in Ukraine and Faces Regional Challenges*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 27 III 2023, <https://pism.pl/publications/csto-ambiguous-on-war-in-ukraine-and-faces-regional-challenges> [accessed: 12 I 2026].

⁷⁵ See wider: J. Hedenskog, *Russia and International Cooperation on Counter-Terrorism. From the Chechen Wars to the Syria Campaign*, FOI, March 2020, <https://foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--4916--SE> [accessed: 12 I 2026].

⁷⁶ *Russia accuses West of double standards regarding Daesh*, Middle East Monitor, 29 VIII 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190829-russia-accuses-west-of-double-standards-regarding-daesh/> [accessed: 12 I 2026].

The authorities in Moscow accuse Western countries of adopting a selective approach to ISIS (including in the context of Afghanistan), suggesting that some states treat terrorist organisations instrumentally – as tools for pursuing their own political objectives – rather than combating them consistently. Furthermore, it can thus blame other actors for the attacks⁷⁷.

At the same time, experiences from the North Caucasus and the participation of the RF citizens in foreign conflicts show that the terrorist threat is long-term in nature and will continue to develop. It is estimated that at the peak of ISIS's activities, around 2300 Russian citizens and around 4700 fighters from the former Soviet republics took part in the fighting in Syria and Iraq. Some of them may have returned to Russia or neighbouring countries, strengthening local radical and terrorist networks⁷⁸. Returning terrorists possess combat experience, contacts and funding, which facilitates the recruitment of further people and the execution of operations, leading to a growing level of terrorist threat. Given Russian counterterrorism system, based mainly on special services and military operations, conditions conducive to further radicalisation and violence are emerging.

The 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine exposed serious weaknesses in Russian special services, which for years had built an image of an effective security apparatus⁷⁹. Analytical units not only failed to correct the Kremlin's political assumptions, but may also have reinforced them by adapting their assessments to the expectations of decision-makers clustered around Vladimir Putin. As a result, Russian services, including the FSB, instead of performing functions that would ensure security, became part of a system confirming false assumptions, which had direct consequences for operational activities in Ukraine. A similar pattern

⁷⁷ A. Kozioł, *Russia Shifts Counter Terrorism into War Propaganda*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 18 X 2024, <https://www.pism.pl/publications/russia-shifts-counter-terrorism-into-war-propaganda> [accessed: 19 III 2026].

⁷⁸ D. Nicolson, *Foreign Terrorist Fighters from the North Caucasus: Understanding Islamic State Influence in the Region*, "Connections: The Quarterly Journal" 2017, vol. 16, no. 4. <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.16.4.04>.

⁷⁹ J.M. Raubo, *Ukraina 2022. Historyczna rysa na propagandowym obrazie rosyjskich służb specjalnych* (Eng. Ukraine 2022. Historic crack in the propaganda image of the Russian special services), InfoSecurity24, 12 III 2022, <https://infosecurity24.pl/sluzby-specjalne/ukraina-2022-historyczna-rysa-na-propagandowym-obrazie-rosyjskich-sluzb-specjalnych> [accessed: 19 I 2026].

of behaviour by the services also applies to the fight against terrorism in the RF.

The Russian security apparatus's focus on the war against Ukraine and its rivalry with the West has limited the state's ability to effectively detect and neutralise some terrorist threats. The events of 2024, including the attack in the Crocus City Hall or attacks in Dagestan, showed not only the scale of challenges in the domain of terrorism, but also gaps in the response system, despite earlier warnings from other states. At the same time, the Kremlin's response focused largely on controlling the narrative, crackdowns, expanding the powers of the security services, and attributing responsibility to selected terrorist groups and opponents, in particular Ukraine and Western countries⁸⁰. All of this is consistent with the premise of using terrorism as an element of domestic policy and a tool for mobilising public support in order to maintain control, although attacks continue to occur in Russia and the region.

It should be emphasised that it was the attack on the Crocus City Hall which demonstrated that, despite years of pacification efforts, Russia had not eliminated the sources of the terrorist threat, and that the root of the problem still lies in the North Caucasus. Although the scale of attacks within the country has been small in recent years, radicalisation in republics such as Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia remains a persistent phenomenon, particularly among the younger generation. Jihadist structures – both those linked to the Islamic State and to the re-emerging Caucasus Emirate – focus on operations against security services and state institutions⁸¹. An increasingly important aspect is international dimension in which attacks may be carried out by individuals from Russia as well as from across the wider Caucasus region.

The conditions and threats discussed do not indicate an increase in the scale of terrorism in the RF, but they do indicate the existence of persistent factors that cannot be fully eliminated, even by the authoritarian Russian apparatus. The neglect of early signs of radicalisation, as well as the ongoing and escalating terror and the privileged position of Russian security services at both the local and regional levels, led to

⁸⁰ A. Koziol, *Walka z terroryzmem jako element propagandy wojennej Rosji...*; P. Sonne, E. Schmitt, M. Schwartz, *Why Russia's Vast Security Services Fell Short on Deadly Attack*, The New York Times, 28 III 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/28/world/europe/russia-concert-attack-security-failures.html> [accessed: 21 III 2026].

⁸¹ *IntelBrief: Radicalization and Extremism in Russia's...*

incorrect threat assessments and a delayed state response. The experience related to the underestimation of earlier attacks in Russia, including the influence of Chechen elements, the activities of Al-Qaeda and ISIS⁸², indicate that Russia is not capable, and will never be able, to fully eliminate terrorist threat, both domestically and abroad.

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⁸² L. Aron, *The Expansion of Russia's Radical Islamism Outside the North Caucasus*, American Enterprise Institute, 30 IX 2015, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/testimony/the-expansion-of-russias-radical-islamism-outside-the-north-caucasus/> [accessed: 22 I 2026].

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