



Executive Memorandum

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MOSCOW HOSTAGE CRISIS DEMANDS GREATER U.S.—RUSSIA SECURITY COOPERATION

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With U.S. and Western interests worldwide threatened by terrorist attack, the October hostage crisis in Moscow perpetrated by Chechen Islamist extremists has raised concerns about the security of post-Soviet stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and nuclear reactors in Russia and Eurasia. U.S. investments in Russian and Caspian oil fields and supply routes are also threatened. Because some Chechen rebels have links to al-Qaeda, the likelihood of another terrorist attack with massive civilian casualties or the use of WMD in the Russian–Chechen conflict has grown significantly since the hostage crisis. To prevent that, the United States should expand anti-terrorism and security cooperation with Russia, bilaterally and through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)–Russia Council established in May, and with other Eurasian states.

Escalating Threats. Though the scale of the Moscow hostage crisis is reminiscent of similar attacks during the first Chechen war, this latest event indicates Chechen terrorists may be seeking more deadly outcomes. Chechen leaders have said that the next operation could target a nuclear reactor, similar to al-Qaeda threats against U.S. facilities.

The head of Russia's equivalent of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Yuri Vishnevsky, recently declared that unspecified amounts of nuclear materials have disappeared from Russian facilities despite efforts to secure and destroy WMD

under the U.S.–Russia Cooperative Threat Reduction (Nunn–Lugar) Program. According to the Russian media, cesium-137 and strontium-90, as well as the more common uranium-235 and plutonium, are missing. They may have made their way into the hands of Chechen or other terrorists. Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Energy for Non-Proliferation Rose Gottemoeller has said that Chechen extremists are more likely to deploy a dirty bomb than a regular nuclear warhead or “suitcase bomb.” Chechen Islamic militants also may be instrumental in transferring such devices or the materials needed to produce them to al-Qaeda. Russian experts note that the Chechens have used shoulder-launched missiles against Russian helicopters and might go after civilian aircraft, similar to the recent attack in Kenya attributed to al-Qaeda.

U.S. Interests at Risk. Al-Qaeda deputy chief Ayman al-Zawahiri stated recently that U.S. and Western economic enterprises are targets. Many interests in Persian Gulf states, including radical

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Islamist “charities” that fund Chechen separatists, disdain energy competition from and Western access to Caspian Sea oil. Exploding a dirty bomb in fields in Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan could put them out of commission for hundreds of years. But there are other ways to disrupt Western energy supplies, as al-Qaeda demonstrated on October 6 when a light boat carrying about 1,000 pounds of high explosives rammed a French super-tanker off the coast of Yemen. Concerns are growing about mega-terrorist attacks on the Chevron-operated Tenghiz–Novorossiysk oil pipeline; the Black Sea ports of Novorossiysk, Tuapse, and Supsa; the Baku–Novorossiysk pipeline; and the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline now under construction.

Chechen rebels have escalated their operations since the summer. President Vladimir Putin warned that they may cause casualties comparable to a WMD attack and implied that his government might respond in kind. A review of Russian military doctrine toward Chechnya is underway. Moscow resists a political settlement but is incapable of achieving a quick military solution. Questions continue about the efficiency of its security services, including the secret police (FSB), which failed to prevent the 40 to 50 Chechen fighters from entering the Moscow theater with over 100 kilograms of high explosives. Russia has stepped up rhetoric advocating the extraterritorial use of force against terrorists and their supporters, but U.S. Department of State officials are concerned that a sweeping operation in, for example, the Pankisi Gorge or elsewhere in Georgia could undermine state sovereignty.

The Chechen Outcome. The chances for a political settlement have dimmed since the Moscow crisis. Chechnya has become a haven for organized criminals and Islamic militants, despite Shari’a law, after the 1996 Russian troop withdrawal. President Aslan Maskhadov failed to prevent over \$100 million from radical Islamist networks from reaching the rebels. He is hardly a proper partner to negotiate peace with the Russians. Leaders in Russia, Dagestan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are also concerned about calls to create a Chechen-led caliphate stretching from the Black Sea to the Caspian, given the possibility that a radical Islamist state could institute an education system that brainwashes

youths to kill “infidels.” A radical and impoverished Islamist state in Europe, on the doorsteps of Russia and weak South Caucasus states, would be destabilizing.

U.S. Policy. Because of the security threats to U.S. interests in Eurasia, including the threat from terrorists using WMD, the United States should:

- **Expand anti-terrorism and security cooperation with Russia and countries in Eurasia, and conduct a joint security audit of major terrorism targets bilaterally and under the auspices of the NATO–Russia Council.** The U.S. Departments of Defense and Energy, using Nunn–Lugar funding, should work with their counterparts to provide higher levels of protection for WMD storage sites and energy facilities in the region. Joint training, including anti-terrorism exercises and hostage rescue operations, should be conducted between the FBI and Russia’s FSB, and between the U.S. Delta Force and Russia’s Alpha and Vityaz forces.
- **Develop intelligence cooperation between the CIA and U.S. Treasury Department and Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) to intercept Chechen terrorist funding and operational support from outside Russia.** The Administration should cooperate with Russia to facilitate the extradition of Chechen terrorist leaders from Persian Gulf havens.
- **Recommend negotiations between Chechen insurgents and Moscow to seek a solution that preserves Russia’s territorial integrity.** Separatists should break all ties to global terrorist Islamic networks such as the Islamist wing of the Chechen rebels led by Shamil Basaev, which should be excluded from the negotiations. Those who maintain such ties should be put on the State Department’s terrorism watch list.

Conclusion. Security in Russia and the Southern Caucasus is increasingly at risk. Innocent civilians as well as U.S. and Western economic interests in the area are threatened. Greater U.S. security cooperation with Russia and Eurasian states is needed to thwart future terrorist attacks in the region.

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