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Chechnya Is More Violent Than Reported

By Paul Goble

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Staunton ◙ Ivan Sydoruk, the deputy prosecutor general of the North Caucasus Federal District, recently told federal senators that "a large portion of weapons are obtained by militants from the stores of military units," meaning Russian units.

Sydoruk also said that during the last 18 months, the attacks on the militia and officials have been committed with the use of contemporary weapons and explosives, and the number of these attacks has increased dramatically.

Those were just some of many statements by Sydoruk during an Oct. 25 hearing of the Federation Council's Committee on Legal and Judicial Questions that called into question the optimistic assessments of many Russian and Western officials and experts.

About The Columnist

Paul Goble is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious issues in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. Earlier he

served as vice dean for the social sciences and humanities at Audentes University in Tallinn and was a senior research associate at the EuroCollege of the University of Tartu in Estonia.

Prior to that, he served in various capacities in the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the International Broadcasting Bureau, as well as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He can be contacted at paul.goble@gmail.com

What's more, the government forces aren't degrading the ranks of the militants, as Moscow has claimed. Rather, the militants have become more sophisticated, carefully preparing their attacks and ploys and even taking steps to ensure that when they use suicide bombers, as they increasingly do, the latter self-destruct in such a way that their remains cannot be identified.

Sydoruk said that in 2010, the number of extremist crimes had increased by more than four times, and that 254 percent of these 352 acts, or about 70 percent, had taken place in Chechnya. That belies the upbeat claims of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and others.

Government forces have had some successes, Sydoruk noted, pointing to the killing of 400 militants over the last nine months, the prevention of more than 50 terrorist acts and the seizure of 240 kilograms of explosives, 500 units of fire arms and more than 100 grenades.

But as impressive as these numbers are, Sydoruk suggested, they highlight the extent of the problem, especially since the militants seem capable of recruiting replacements, finding money and arms and enjoying support from local populations. Those factors taken together are reflected in the number of losses that Russian forces continue to experience.

In that regard, historian Vladimir Popov told Nezavisimaya that Sydoruk's figures showed that the militants in the North Caucasus were killing 19 militia members and soldiers per week last year and that now, this figure has risen to 23 per week. "For peace time," he said, "these are very large losses, which can be compared with the losses of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan."

Sydoruk made even more sweeping conclusions. He said Russia is losing "the information and especially the ideological" struggle and that to regain the initiative, the Russian side must work in close relationship with the Muslim religious leaders in the North Caucasus.

Sydoruk also pointed to the region's disastrous economic situation. As of July 1, he said, there were 449,000 unemployed people in the North Caucasus Federal District, which is some 40 percent of the population. That situation is a breeding ground for militants and extremists, he said. He added, "Give one of them $100, and he will do whatever you want."

The deputy prosecutor general was equally critical of the militia and its activities. "In the majority of subjects of the district, the issues of protecting educational institutions and other socially important targets haven't been resolved," he said. Moreover, militia units often fail to take even obvious steps to prevent attacks and shore up security.

Sydoruk said the situation was so bad in Interior Ministry units in the North Caucasus that

there needs to be a complete "re-attestation" of all its employees to "free [the police] from cowards and traitors because we are in possession of facts and criminal cases that confirm the direct betrayal by some employees."

At another level, the prosecutor continued, "one of the chief tasks" Russia must address is "intercepting the militants' money flows." They are getting money from domestic sources, engaging in "open rackets," and by a tightly controlled system of financing from abroad.

Sydoruk's comments are so much at variance from those of Putin, Kadyrov and other senior Russian officials that it will be worth watching what happens now, either to his career or to Moscow's policies in a region that remains far more unstable and violent than is generally believed.

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