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Ilyas Kashmiri strategy behind Dagestan blasts

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ISLAMABAD - Twin blasts in Russia's volatile North Caucasus region of Dagestan on Wednesday, following the double explosions in the Moscow Metro on Monday, mark a refinement of guerrilla warfare first seen in Afghanistan after 2006.

At that time, al-Qaeda gathered the best guerrilla fighters of local and foreign origin under the umbrella of Lashkar al-Zil (Shadow Army) and carried out a string of operations that included the Serena Hotel attack in Kabul in 2008 and the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai, India.

The Dagestan blasts, like the Moscow suicide attacks on Monday, were carried out by the Chechen resistance movement, but the careful selection of a particular target, and through that an attempt to kill other and bigger targets, carries the hallmark of al-Qaeda's Lashkar al-Zil. (A third explosion took place in the Khasavurtzky region of western Dagestan overnight on Thursday, killing two people when their car, suspected to have been packed with explosives, blew up, Russian news agencies said.)

Wednesday's double suicide bombing in Kizlyar, Dagestan, killed at least 12 people and wounded 23, mostly members of Russia's [security](#) forces. The first blast occurred when an explosives-laden vehicle did not stop at a police check post. The vehicle exploded when a police car chased and came close to it. The area, predictably, was cordoned off and dozens of security men flooded the site. At that point, a man in a [police uniform](#) came up and exploded, killing a much higher number of police men than the earlier blast.

The Lashkar al-Zil was reorganized after the arrival of Ilyas Kashmiri's 313 Brigade in [the Afghan](#) War theater in 2005-06, resulting in similar attacks in [Afghanistan](#), Pakistan (on [the](#)

General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, October 2009; at the Parade Lane Mosque, also Rawalpindi, in December, 2009; and on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore, in March, 2009) and India.

The strategy, in which an action is carried out on one target while aiming for another, bigger target, was developed by Ilyas Kashmir. The combined presence of the international Jihadi brigade in Razmak, North Wazirsitan , including Chechens, Uzbeks, Turks and others, along with Arab militants and 313 Brigade, meant finally that it could be expanded to the North Caucasus and to Moscow .

The strategy first surfaced in Aknor cantonment in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, where it was used against the Indian armed forces following the massacre of Muslims in the Indian city of Gujarat in 2002. In attacks involving 313 Brigade, which had divided into two groups, Indian generals, brigadiers and other senior officials were lured to the scene of the first attack. Two generals were injured and several brigadiers and colonels were killed. This was one of the most telling setbacks for India in the long-running Kashmiri insurgency. The Pakistan army could not injure a single Indian general in three wars.

A repeat was seen in the Serena Hotel attack in Kabul in January 2008 (which was carried out by the Haqqani network but masterminded by Lashkar al-Zil), in the incidents mentioned above, and in the December 2009 attack that killed seven CIA operatives at Khost, in eastern Afghanistan.

Ilyas Kashmiri, as commander of 313 Brigade, stayed a few years in Razmak, north Waziristan, with other Central Asian and Arab militant commanders, exchanging notes on the latest guerrilla strategy and orchestrating joint operations under the Lashkar al-Zil.

These are all signals that the attacks in Chechnya this week are the beginning of new insurgency in the region. The Lashkar al-Zil command understands how to perpetuate the insurgency and generate necessary resources. Such insurgencies do not need financial help from state or other donors, instead securing cash by robbing banks or other financial institutions or other such methods. The insurgents then bribe the security apparatus to clear the way for their operations, buy inside facilitators, and so make their targets easy to reach.

Russian Prime Minister and former president Vladimir Putin and Russian security forces were able to crush the Chechen-led resistance in the North Caucasus and had prevented any big operation for the past six years. However, a new battlefield has now opened up in Central Asia, influenced and masterminded by al-Qaeda, and not limited to Russia.

The preparations are comprehensive, with careful segregation of different elements so that a crackdown on one group does not harm another. This is not bad news for Russia alone, but also for America and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies operating in Afghanistan. About 15% of their supplies come through Russia and the Central Asian republics, just where the new battlefield is forming