

## **Opening Statement for Ranking Member Brian Higgins (D-NY)**

### **Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

#### **Hearing: "Assessing Terrorism in the Caucasus and the Threat to the Homeland"**

**April 3, 2014**

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I look forward to hearing today's testimony as we continue to expand our knowledge of the threats, groups, and counterterrorism efforts within the Caucasus region. Several inter-ethnic conflicts that developed at the end of the Soviet Union remain unresolved and continue to fuel tensions within the Caucasus region.

Specifically, a historical exclusionary political system and competition over land and resources has fueled conflicts in the multi-ethnic Russian republics of the North Caucasus. While several extremists groups have emerged and then later disappeared as a result of these conflicts, one group, the Caucasus Emirate, remains active today. The Caucasus Emirate has admitted to planning and executing numerous terror attacks in the Caucasus region and in Moscow since its founding in 2007. Two of the most deadly attacks claimed by the Caucasus Emirate have occurred in Moscow.

On March 29, 2010, two suicide bombers killed 40 people and wounded more than 100 people after attacking two metro stations. On January 24, 2011 a suicide attack at Moscow's busiest international airport killed 35 people and wounded as many as 180 people. While all of the attacks executed by the Caucasus Emirates deserve our attention, I am especially concerned by these two attacks on high impact transportation targets.

As the Representative of the Buffalo-Niagara region, I have a keen awareness and concern for high impact transit targets. Buffalo is home to the Peace Bridge, one of the busiest crossings at the Northern Border. Over 30 billion dollars of annual commerce travels through the Peace Bridge in Buffalo, Niagara region. An attack, similar to those carried out by the Caucasus Emirate in this area could be catastrophic.

For this reason and many more, I remain disturbed that the Buffalo-Niagara Region is not considered "high risk" enough for state and locals in this area to receive funding under The Department of Homeland Security's Urban Area Security Initiative "UASI" program.

Without UASI funding, the local law enforcement and emergency personnel do not have the ability to sustain the advancements they have made since 9/11. How can the Buffalo-Niagara region be expected to protect and respond to attacks and threats without the same basic funding provided to other, less utilized transit targets?

I want to emphasize that many experts assert that based on known threats and capabilities an attack on the United States from the Caucasus Emirate or other Caucasian groups is unlikely as these groups are generally not preoccupied with the United States. However, the Caucasus Emirate has stated that it has no conflict with the US and it will not harm any civilians, including Russians, yet this has not always been the case. Therefore, I believe it is fair to both consider and discuss this group and others in a global context, their roles within the larger global jihadi network.