

THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS: SPREAD OF JIHAD

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The “post-perestroika” separatist-minded elites that came to power in Chechnia in the early 1990s and aspired to achieve ideological consolidation of the Chechens made an attempt to revive some of the elements of the old traditional social system based on blood kinship. At the grass-roots level there were clans of close blood relatives (from the bottom up: *d’ozal*, *var*, *varis*) and larger social structures (*taips* and *tukhums*) that together formed the Chechen nation—*nokhchi k’am*. The great number of *taips* and *tukhums* and the fact that the Vainakhs lacked any statehood experience buried the idea. The Chechen leaders had to place their stakes on the ideology of traditional “local Islam” of the Sufi virds *Kunta-hajji* and *Vis-hajji* that belonged to the *Qadir-iyya Tariqah* (known in Chechnia as *Zikrizm*).

This did not create the desired ideological cohesion for the simple fact that the Chechens are scattered throughout several dozen Sufi structures (*Vird* brotherhoods). This moved “integration Islam,” which rejected everything that might divide the Muslims—races, ethnic groups, *taips*, and other local ethnic and confessional groups—to the frontline. In the Northern Caucasus it is known as *Wahhabism* (*Salafism*).

Today, with part of the road toward restored normalcy in Chechnia successfully covered, the situation still leaves much to be desired. The defeat of the separatists in Chechnia and the spread of the Salafi ideology across the Northern Caucasus transformed “resistance” partly into “guerrilla warfare” and partly into mobile and loosely connected terrorist groups.

The “Youth Jamaats”: Institutionalized Terror

Today the extremist religious-political organizations are functioning in the Northern Caucasus as network structures with no obligations to their soldiers and no compunction about aims and means. In the broader sense the networks are self-organizing polycentric structures oriented toward specific aims and tasks and consisting of completely autonomous or even temporary groups with absolutely transparent legitimization of power, decentralized responsibility, and horizontal (as well as vertical) contacts and communications. They are open groups of loosely connected, equal and independent members, which means that they can spread by admitting new groups (which use similar communication codes, that is, address the same tasks and/or share similar values).

They are much more mobile and much less vulnerable than the centralized organizations; they are perfectly adjusted to infiltration into power and administrative structures, corruption practices, etc., are much more resistant and regenerate easily.¹

Today, and for some time in the past, the terrorist communities have been developing a network organizational form much better suited to their needs; they have moved away from the hierarchically arranged lineal forms toward network structures.

The network model ensures more secrecy and efficiency as well as financial self-sufficiency in the globalized world. The developing information technologies allow terrorist structures to promptly coordinate their actions irrespective of their scales.

This means that the centralized terrorist organizations of the past are being replaced with transnational network structures composed of numerous autonomous cells tied together by ideology which can organize terrorist acts in any corner of the world. The most dangerous (and the most widespread) is a segmented, polycentric, and ideologically integrated international terrorist network that can use organized crime and the shadow business. In short, the range of potential members is unlimited.

The conglomerate of networks, which is growing bigger by admitting all sorts of networks—terrorist, financial, and criminal (narcotics, slave trade, illegal arms trade, etc.)—is acquiring new qualities and becoming absolutely autonomous, looser than before and, therefore, less vulnerable.²

Their efficiency, as well as the efficiency of the fighter groups that belong to them, is determined by better coordination, wider organizational possibilities, and more active information exchange (online and otherwise). This makes the networks nearly perfectly suited to the so-called “swarm” wars waged according to the principle of “fighting pack.”³ After delivering a blow at a previously coordinated place and time the fighters and supporting units (which arrive from different regions, republics, or even countries) disappear: they fall apart into smaller groups, immediately leave the scene of the crime, or blend with the local people.

These tactics used in low-intensity conflicts have been and remain highly efficient even when used against well-protected targets and military facilities. They are equally effective in megapolises when targeted at poorly protected civilian facilities and the ordinary people.

In the last three or four years the terrorist movement in the Northern Caucasus has been moving in this direction: by that time the first echelon of field commanders and active fighters of the illegal armed units (IAU) that stood opposed to the federal center were exterminated. The new generation of the North Caucasian radicals could no longer follow in their footsteps. It promptly organized itself into a clandestine urban network of terrorist structures found in nearly all the North Caucasian republics.

The so-called jamaats largely based on the ethnic principle and operating in the corresponding republics are the typical organizational form of the North Caucasian radicals. The elder generation of fighters was gradually replaced by young men whose jamaats came to be known in academic and journalist writings as youth jamaats.⁴

Today terrorist networks of youth jamaats are operating in nearly all the constituencies of the Southern Federal Okrug. In the late 1990s-early 2000s they communicated at the higher command

¹ See: E.G. Soloviev, *Transformatsiia terroristicheskikh organizatsii v usloviakh globalizatsii*, Moscow, 2006, p. 16.

² See: *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

³ I.P. Dobaev, A.G. Dugin, “Rol i mesto ‘tsvetnykh revoliutsii’ v geopoliticheskikh transformatsiakh v Kaspiisko-Chernomorskom regione,” in: *Evraziiskii proekt: kavkazskii vector. Yuzhnorossiiskoe obozrenie*, Issue 30, Rostov-on-Don, 2005, p. 76.

⁴ The term “youth jamaats” was introduced into academic and journalistic circulation by Russian expert in Islamic and Caucasian studies A. Iarlykapov.

and even the grass-roots level; today the independent network structures communicate indirectly, mainly at the ideological level.

Organizationally young terrorists copy similar Mid-Eastern structures: the commander's undivided authority, close ranks, lavish charity, and mutual assistance inside the organization (in this respect they emulate the Islamic Resistance Movement—HAMAS).

An analysis of what has been written about the youth jamaats suggests that the network structures are highly viable, autonomous, and self-reproductive. Today the Wahhabi fighters are kept together by the latest ideological examples created abroad and “enriched” with local ideas.

Terrorism was, is, and will remain the main political weapon of those who preach religious-political extremism; radical ideologies justify terrorism and subversive activities.

In an effort to improve their tactics the youth jamaats abandoned the practice of frontal attacks; they have armed themselves with subversive and terrorist “swarm” tactics. They change bases, maneuver, and unite with similar groups if the need arises. The communication that groups and bases maintain allows them to coordinate their actions. In other words, the neo-Wahhabi groups have developed into a modern Islamist terrorist movement based on the “spider web” principle. The guerillas of the past have moved down from the mountain forests to the cities; they enlist young men without a criminal record and even students of secondary schools and higher educational establishments.

Spread of Terror: the Consequences

The spread of terror in the Northern Caucasus earlier predicted by only a few has become a reality. The situation in the Northeastern Caucasus (Daghestan and Ingushetia) arouses special concern; it has already greatly affected the processes underway in other republics, Kabardino-Balkaria in particular.

In other words, “peace” in Chechnia did nothing to reduce the guerilla activities—the fighters merely moved to the other North Caucasian constituencies and plunged into terrorist activities.⁵ Experts have already ascertained that the fighters are still well-coordinated and well-trained, acting secretly and synchronously; not infrequently they organized terrorist acts in several republics simultaneously. From time to time searches at terrorist bases produce detailed lists of militia and FSB officers, registration numbers of their cars and instructions for making bombs. According to the media, the fighters are as dedicated as before and usually have to be destroyed along with their bases.⁶

The meeting of Arab-dominated Majlis-ul-shura held in July 2005 was an important milestone in the history of the terrorist movement: Shamil Basaev was the only Chechen of its 12 members, the others were Arabs. The shura passed far-reaching decisions related to invigoration of Islamist clandestine activities in the Northern Caucasus. Amir Seifulla (Anzor Astemirov), one of the leaders of religious-political extremism in Kabardino-Balkaria (who earned notoriety in connection with the Nalchik events of 13-14 October, 2005), wrote: “In the summer of 2005 I attended a military majlis in Nalchik where amirs Abu Idris Abdullah Basaev, Khanif Iless Gorchkhanov, and Abu Muhammad Musa Mukozhev were discussing the possibility of joining the jamaats of Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria to the Caucasian Front.”⁷ It was then that the Kabarda and Karachai jamaats were instructed

⁵ See: *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 14 May, 2007.

⁶ See: *Ibidem*.

⁷ [www.kavkazcenter.com].

to heat up the situation in Adygeia and the Caucasian Mineral Waters, respectively. Soon after that, in October 2005, fighters of the Kabardino-Balkarian jamaat attacked several facilities in Nalchik, the republic's capital.

It is common knowledge that for many years now the clandestine fighter groups have been acting under slogans of radical Islamism; the trend began under President Maskhadov of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Its next president, Abdul-Khakim Sadulaev, said in so many words that the Maskhadov-Akhmadov plan ("democratic" or "Paris" plan), according to which Chechnia should have become a secular democratic state independent of Russia, had failed.⁸ He insisted that the jihad in the Northern Caucasus was aimed at setting up an Islamic state that would incorporate all local Muslims. President Sadulaev, however, did not remain in office long enough to realize his pet idea. He set up an intermediary structure (the so-called Caucasian Front), divided it into sectors that coincided with the North Caucasian republics, and set about readjusting ideology and the resistance strategy with the emphasis on a network of armed jamaats across the Northern Caucasus.⁹

In October 2007, the new president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Doku Umarov (who came after Sadulaev), declared himself "the amir of all the fighters of the Caucasus and the leader of jihad" and "the only legitimate power wherever there are mujaheddin" in an address he placed on the Internet sites of the separatists. He refused to recognize the laws of the official authorities in the Caucasus and the world over: "I reject and outlaw everything that separates the Muslims. I outlaw all ethnic and territorial-colonial zones known as the North Caucasian republics, etc.... Russia is not our only enemy; America, Britain, and Israel, all countries at war with Islam and the Muslims, are also our enemies."¹⁰ In this way the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria was transformed into an administrative-territorial unit (vilayet) of the North Caucasian Emirate.

This split the ranks of the Chechen separatists; Ahmed Zakaev, emissary of the Chechen separatists based in London who headed a new Ichkerian government, was even more displeased than many: "The split was caused by Russia's special services."¹¹

Some experts believe that Umarov, who inherited a ready-made structure (the Caucasian Front) from Sadulaev, merely called it a state (the North Caucasian Emirate). Why the stormy response from the Chechen emigration in the West? The answer is simple: "The North Caucasian Emirate is one of the priority candidates for the list of terrorist organizations while the emigrants who settled in Europe do not want to be regarded as emissaries of a terrorist organization. The most far-sighted of them have already warded off the danger of criminal persecution."¹²

An analysis has revealed that the fighters of the numerous terrorist jamaats of the Northern Caucasus aim mainly at law enforcers, top officials, and official Muslim clergy. This is especially clear in the case of the following terrorist groups: Sharia and Jennet (Daghestan); Iarmuk (Kabardino-Balkaria), Caliphate (Ingushetia), etc. Since 2002 these categories of people have been consistently exterminated.

This is confirmed, for example, by the numerous terrorist acts and attempts on the lives of officials of state structures in the Chechen Republic. Recently the law enforcers have registered that the armed clandestine organizations have become much more active: in 2008 groups of several dozen fighters captured settlements on two occasions, attacked army officers and law enforcers, and were engaged in armed encounters with federal armed units and local law-enforcement structures.¹³

⁸ See: M. Iakhimchik, "Dve Chechni—utopiia ili fakt?" *Zavtra*, 18 November, 2003.

⁹ See: *IA Caucasus Times*, 22 November, 2007.

¹⁰ "Doku Umarov raspustil Ichkeriiu," *Nastoiashchee vremia*, 2 November, 2007.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *IA Caucasus Times*, 22 November, 2007.

¹³ See: *Kommersant*, 1 September, 2008.

Terrorist activity in Daghestan reached its peak in 2005: law enforcers were attacked 108 times (explosive devices were used in 44 attempts); 39 terrorist acts and 44 attempts on the lives of law enforcers were exposed; 123 were detained; 50 were killed while resisting arrest; and 13 planned subversive and terrorist acts were prevented.

In June 2007, speaking at a conference in Makhachkala, Minister of the Interior of the Russian Federation Rashid Nurgaliev described the situation in Daghestan as disturbing. "In the last two and a half years," said the minister, "nearly 270 terrorist acts have been committed. They killed scores of militiamen, including top officers of the republic's Ministry of the Interior, Deputy Minister of the Interior Magomed Omarov being one of them... Eighty officers of the Ministry of the Interior were killed and 47 wounded."¹⁴

The situation in the Republic of Ingushetia is more or less similar. In 2004 it suffered a violent eruption of terrorist acts: in June terrorists carried out several well-coordinated attacks on some republican targets; in September there was the tragedy in Beslan devised, planned, and executed by the so-called Ingush jamaat. Later, terrorist activity in Ingushetia gained momentum both qualitatively and quantitatively, which made it the region's "weak link."

Kabardino-Balkaria, where there is a lot of talk about the "missionaries" who come to promote the ideas of jihad among the local youth, is another hot spot. The experts list the following closed Islamic structures that preach religious extremism and stand opposed to the Spiritual Administration of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria as extremist organizations: the Republican Shura and the so-called Jamaat Iarmuk.

The Shura is a well-organized structure of "Wahhabi jamaats" with a Shari'a-based vertical arrangement. It has a so-called Sharia court and the Kabardino-Balkarian Institute of Islamic Studies not registered with the republic's Ministry of Justice. The Republican Shura described its aim as gaining power through a gradual stage-by-stage process.

The Jamaat Iarmuk is another extremist organization with an inevitably negative impact on the situation in the republic; in the past its members belonged to the Gelaev band, which has an extensive criminal terrorist record in Kabardino-Balkaria (on 13-14 October, 2005 it attacked several of the defense and security structures in Nalchik).

In February 2006 the republic's Ministry of the Interior held a round table on the problem of terrorism and extremism. It presented a socio-psychological portrait of those involved in the terrorist acts in Nalchik on 13-14 October, 2005 compiled by the law enforcers and based on information related to 166 terrorists involved: 87 percent of them were young people between the ages of 20 and 30; 13 percent were older men over 30; 20 percent of the fighters had higher education; 15 percent had secondary specialized, and 1.2 percent had incomplete secondary education. Over half of them were married; 56 fighters had figured as suspects in criminal cases (7 cases of drug trafficking and 8 involving illegal arms trade).

In 2006 and 2007 the law enforcement bodies of Kabardino-Balkaria liquidated the larger part of the Jamaat Iarmuk during the course of several special operations. The survivors are on the "Wanted" list but the leaders of the radical Islamists have not abandoned their active terrorist and propaganda efforts on Internet sites such as Kavkaz-Center, Gamagat, and others, which regularly display the so-called addresses to the Muslims that shame those who refuse "to take up arms," call for terrorist and subversive activities, and threaten to carry out more terrorist acts in the republic.

Even though the wave of terrorist activities has somewhat subsided compared to 2005 the situation in the North Caucasian region remains fairly complicated. On 4 July, 2008 the director of the FSB of Russia said at the sitting of the National Antiterrorist Committee in Rostov-on-Don that

¹⁴ *Vesti Severny Kavkaz*, 6 June, 2007.

since the beginning of 2008 seven terrorist acts had been prevented and the activities of 80 heads and prominent members of terrorist structures had been stopped; over 30 terrorist-related acts had been prevented; and 130 homemade explosive devices, about 900 kilograms of explosives, and 600 units of firearms had been confiscated. The director had to admit that the Southern Federal Okrug was and remains the epicenter of terrorist activities: it was the scene of 80 percent of terrorist acts. "Attacks on law enforcers in Chechnia, Ingushetia, and Daghestan are going on and claim civilian lives. The bandits are trying to build up tension, slow down the peace efforts and demonstrate their relevance to their foreign sponsors," said the director. He also admitted that not all the North Caucasian regions had achieved efficiency in crime prevention; the terrorists were enlisting new members mainly from among the youth, who are more susceptible to well-targeted ideological brainwashing.¹⁵

In August 2008 at the next session of the National Antiterrorist Committee in Nizhnii Novgorod the FSB director repeated that in the Northern Caucasus attacks on officials, law enforcers, servicemen and civilians were continuing. He said that in Daghestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Chechnia planned terrorist acts had been prevented in the course of targeted operations. He also pointed out that according to information that reached the Committee the average age of the fighters was much younger than before: young people were being drawn into terrorist and extremist activities through purposeful propaganda of religious extremist ideas.¹⁶

Terrorism and Geopolitics in the Northern Caucasus

The already far from simple situation became much worse on the eve of, during, and after the August 2008 Russian-Georgian crisis. Media reports on terrorist acts in Daghestan, Chechnia, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria have become more frequent, which means that the tension in the Northern Caucasus did not climb up on its own but under geopolitical pressure. This was directly connected with the tension in the Caucasus and was caused by the forces well-known for the skill with which they fan conflicts and local wars all over the world.

Today information about financial support of separatists from other countries appears more frequently than before. On 13 July, 2008 the Caucasus Times Information Agency informed that in 2008 no less than \$13 million had already arrived in Kabardino-Balkaria "to encourage the non-formal organizations." The situation in Ingushetia is even worse: law enforcers, officials, and Muslim clergy are attacked almost every day.

In September 2008 M. Khazbiev, head of the opposition Ingush organization The People's Parliament of Ingushetia, announced that the parliament had voted for separation from Russia and was already collecting signatures. Law enforcers are not safe in other republics—Daghestan, Chechnia, and Kabardino-Balkaria. Some political analysts believe that the fighters (who were being instructed and paid from abroad) seized the opportunity offered by the slackened attention of the local authorities and the law-enforcement structures, which were concentrating on South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia.¹⁷

¹⁵ See: *Rossiiskaia gazeta—Iug Rossii*, 4 July, 2008.

¹⁶ See: *Rossiiskaia gazeta—Iug Rossii*, 25 August, 2008.

¹⁷ See: M. Mankiev, "Mir posle Tskhinvala: tochka nevozvrata," *Fond strategicheskoi kul'tury*, available at [fondsk.ru/article.php?id=1658].

The Strategy of Intensified Repulsion to Terror

In the last few years the law-enforcement structures have become much more efficient; they have mastered the situation to a certain extent when it comes to combating terrorism and religious-political extremism. Several special operations brought excellent results: in Daghestan the clandestine terrorist groups were dealt crippling blows. This happened in Makhachkala, Kaspiisk, and the Khasaviurt and Buinaksk zones. The groups of Khalilov, Makasharipov, Dibirov, Nauzov, Imurzaev, Taimaskhanov, Akhmedov, Khasbulatov, Shaikhaev, Mutashev, Melikov, and others were liquidated. World experience, however, showed that successful “hunting” of leaders of criminal or terrorist networks does not bring “victory” over network terrorism.¹⁸

This means that the use of force is no answer. The experience of other countries has shown that repression of ethno-religious extremism is useful when it comes to fighting armed units. The use of force against the radical Islamic organizations and bearers of radical ideas who offer projects of state and legal organization alternative to the Russian Federation and who shun the use of force merely extends the social basis of ethno-religious extremism.¹⁹

This is confirmed by the widespread practice of combating the radical Islamic movements: repressive measures alone will never wipe out extremism—they merely encourage it. The experience of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, which tried to suppress ethno-religious extremism in the Northern Caucasus, shows that bans on and the use of force against anti-governmental activities rooted in ethnic religiosity have done nothing to smooth out social deviations—they merely conserved them.

This means that the state should resort to other methods: information, propaganda, and explanatory efforts as well as more concerted efforts to stem money flows to terrorists.

At the same time, it would be wrong to associate the stepped-up terrorist activities with increased money flows (from inside the country and from abroad): not infrequently certain officials tend to reduce the “resistance movement” to the banal money issue in order to expose it as mercenary, unprincipled and, therefore, doomed. These people pursue at least two aims: to undermine the fighters’ popularity among the local people, particularly among the youth. This is partly justified: those who make murdering people their business and who do not spare each other in money squabbles can be nothing but repulsive.

More than that: some people tend to write off their own blunders in the struggle against the terrorist underground to lavish funding; they prefer to explain the rising wave of extremism and reproduction of the “resistance movement” among the fighters in Chechnia and in the other North Caucasian republics by the notorious economic factor and push aside all other causes.²⁰

It is obviously important to stem the money flow, however this cannot resolve the problem of the continued existence and development of religious-political extremism; this is also true of the autonomous terrorist groups that use ideological-political doctrines as their driving force and of the mobile units that can survive on random and scant funding. In fact the terrorist underground can easily estab-

¹⁸ See: M. Kenney, “From Pablo to Osama: Counter-Terrorism Lessons from the War on Drugs,” *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 3, Autumn, 2003, pp. 187-206.

¹⁹ See: I.P. Dobaev, V.I. Nemchina, *Novyi terrorizm v mire i na Iuge Rossii*, Rostov-on-Don, 2005, p. 281.

²⁰ See: Kh.T. Kurbanov, *Religiozno-politicheskie ekstremizm na Severo-Vostochnom Kavkaze*, Rostov-on-Don, 2006, p. 117.

lish control over commercial enterprises through threats and blackmailing, levers that are especially effective in the totally corrupt environment in which embezzlement of public funds and clientele clan relations are seen as the norm. In his time Shamil Basaev insisted that he and his fighters received a lot of money from the local administration heads of the Republic of Chechnia. The situation seems to be very much the same.

The ramified terrorist network in the North Caucasian regions means that the counterterrorist operation in the Northern Caucasus has not yet been completed. Those who say differently are indulging in wishful thinking. The time has come to readjust the strategy by shifting the stress from the use of force and administrative methods to political, economic, social, cultural, educational, and other levers. Islam in Russia should modernize itself mainly by improving the quality of Islamic education in the Russian Federation.
