

REGIONAL SECURITY

**RUSSIA'S INFORMATION SECURITY
IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS:
PROBLEMS AND
HOW TO SETTLE THEM**

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Introduction

The Northern Caucasus, home to numerous ethnicities, is a challenge to the political administration and national security of the Russian Federation; many problems of state order and ethnic relationships, caused by rivalry among political and ethnic elites for power and influence, have reached a critical level. There are ethnic and clan contradictions and territorial disagreements.¹

Today, the information security of the Northern Caucasus should be discussed at two levels—domestic and global. The former is related

to the region's status and role in Russia's domestic policy and development and the latter to its place in Russia's foreign policy and the interest of foreign states and international organizations in the macro region.

In one of his books, Andrey Zdravomyslov wrote that the Northern Caucasus owed its international weight to the fact that it was situated at the crossing of geopolitical "power" lines, "the crossroads of geopolitical aims."² On 12 November, 2009, in his address to the Federal Assembly, President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev pointed out

¹ See: V.E. Mishin, *Bezopasnost Severnogo Kavkaza v usloviakh globalizatsii*, Ph.D. thesis, Pyatigorsk, 2005, p. 85.

² A.G. Zdravomyslov, *Mezhnatsionalnye konflikty v postsovetskom prostranstve*, Moscow, 1996, p. 87.

that “our most serious, domestic political problem [is] the situation in the North Caucasus.”³

³ [<http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/297#sel=162>: 1,162:5].

Information security in the Northern Caucasus is directly related to real and potential threats and challenges. In the last few years, their level and scope have increased many times over to become extremely dangerous.

Sources of Information Threats

As one of Russia’s macro regions, the Northern Caucasus is open to globalization impacts, is affected by global information and communication technologies, and is, therefore, open to information threats.⁴ The rapid increase in number of Internet users, electronic media, and data bases is changing the lifestyle in the North Caucasian republics.

The media, the only source of information about what is going on in the world, can affect public opinion by planting all sorts of ideas about events and developments in the public’s mind; very often, however, what they say has nothing to do with reality.

The media invariably stir up a lot of interest; on the other hand, the reading and viewing public should be aware of the considerable changes underway in the information sphere.

At the turn of the century, the fundamental changes in the “balance of power” in the sphere of information and functional purposes of the media created an absolutely new context in which the press, radio, and even TV (recently the most popular information source) were pushed aside. The last decade has seen new communicative and information vehicles: blogs, social networks, and Internet news. In the Northern Caucasus, these trends have not yet become all-important, however they have already transformed the information space and created new actors.

Politically active groups of young or even older people have become active Internet users; they rely on the Internet for communication and the latest information supplied by social networks, blogs, interactive sites, text messages, etc. An analysis has revealed that the terrorist act which took place in Stavropol on 26 May, 2010 was fully and promptly covered on the Internet: some of the websites moved faster than the traditional media to publish the names of those injured and killed; the VKontakte social network brimmed with information and commentaries.⁵

The younger generation has obviously moved away from the traditional media, previously the only source of information and social communication, to the social networks, making the blogosphere the main information source and a platform of discussion.

The science of conflict resolution admits that the mobilization of ethnicity is a purpose-oriented process; this calls for close attention to manipulation technologies. It should be said, however, that certain authors have quite rightly warned that the factor of manipulation should not be absolutized; it should be analyzed within the relevant context of objective and subjective factors (ranging from social-economic to social-psychological) fraught with ethnic confrontation. Ethnicity “can easily be manipulated by political leaders seeking to mobilize a population, especially when a society is undergoing major socio-economic change.”⁶

⁴ See: *Ibidem*.

⁵ See: “Rol SMI v blokovykh konfliktakh,” in: V.A. Avksentyev, S.N. Zinev, D.A. Lavrinenko, *et al.*, *Etnopoliticheskie protsessy na yuge Rossii: ot lokalnykh k blokovym konfliktam*, Rostov on Don, 2011.

⁶ D. Smith, *Trends and Causes of Armed Conflict*, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2004, p. 11.

The use or, rather, abuse of ethnicity for political purposes threatens the territorial integrity of states; this means that the mechanisms employed in the North Caucasian republics should be carefully studied. According to V. Avksentiev, G. Gritsenko, and A. Dmitriev, “there is a political dominant—a systemic ethnopolitical crisis”⁷ in the Northern Caucasus.

Manipulation of public opinion and human minds (sacralization of traditional elements that are sometimes deliberately presented as archaic) are an important vehicle of politicization of ethnicity and Islam.

Destructive forces in the Northern Caucasus are not alien to using the media for misinformation. In 2009, the *Karachaevo-Balkarsky mir* newspaper ran a series of articles designed to discriminate Christianity and the Cossacks and revive certain conflicts of the past. One of the articles dealing with the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 said in particular: “The Caucasian aborigines in the areas occupied by Germans might have thought: is there any difference between Russians and Germans? After all, radish might turn out to be sweeter than horse-radish.”⁸

Traditionalism and Islamism are interconnected (yet not identical), which explains why they might compete with each other, even though the way they are planted in the mind is very similar. Both actively use information technologies; on the other hand, in the Northern Caucasus traditionalism is encouraged by the regional ruling elites who look at radical Islamism as an alien phenomenon.

While Salafism is popularized in illegal publications, the thesis of the exclusive nature of any of the ethnic cultures is openly promoted in academic publications, courseware, and the press. The North Caucasian ethnic elites who pay lip-service to the federal center use the slogans of ethnocultural specifics to their own advantage; they rely on those elements of traditional culture which sacralize power and skillfully keep the people away from political decision-making.

The Russian media are fond of writing about certain elements of Caucasian traditional culture (abduction of brides, abreks, etc.) as something very romantic. President of Ingushetia Yunus-bek Yevkurov spares no effort to reconcile neighbors divided by blood feuds⁹ (another of the North Caucasian traditions), however the media have so far failed to double his efforts with adequate information support, even though this traditional institution is responsible, to a great extent, for the growing number of those who join bands of militants in the Northern Caucasus. We should be aware that the revival of traditionalist attitudes in the minds of the local people constitutes an information threat to Russia as a whole.

Separatism is one of the manifestations of ethnopolitical conflict and the most radical type of nationalism. Based on the misinterpreted principle of national self-identification, it demonstrates a certain level of organization. We should not dupe ourselves: demands for sovereignty and independence in an ethnically distinctive territory are nothing but a mechanism of manipulation used by certain groups to promote their own interests.

Administration of Information Flows

Separatism in the Chechen Republic is mainly latent; “cultural separatism” based on traditionalism encouraged in the Northern Caucasus, however, might undermine the political and legal pillars

⁷ V.A. Avksentiev, G.D. Gritsenko, A.V. Dmitriev, *Regionalnaia konfliktologiya: kontsepty i rossiiskaia praktika*, Moscow, 2008, p. 14; *Yug Rossii v zerkale konfliktologicheskoy ekspertizy*, ed. by G.G. Matishov, N.I. Golubeva, V.A. Avksentiev, Rostov on Don, 2011, pp. 44-48.

⁸ *Iug Rossii v zerkale konfliktologicheskoy ekspertizy*, p. 261.

⁹ See: M. Tangiev, “Mirotvorcheskie initsiativy prezidenta Ingushetii,” *Bulletin seti etnologicheskogo monitoringa* (Moscow), No. 85, May-June 2009, p. 80.

of Russia. In the context of the rising ethnic tension, regressive traditionalism connected with the revived custom of blood feud is coming to the fore; “cultural separatism” is partly evident in the relations between the information elites of Chechnia and the federal center: part of the region’s ethnopolitical elite is engaged in nationalist activities, while some of the media shatter the convictions of the masses in and outside the republic.

The above is best illustrated by the media coverage of the July 2010 events at a Don summer camp for children in the Krasnodar Territory. The Chechen media presented the conflict between local young men and groups of young people from other areas as a “pogrom and assault on Chechen children”; the media of the Krasnodar Territory, rather than concentrating on the shocking fact that the young men who arrived from Chechnia tore down the state flag of the Russian Federation, wrote about a “conflict over girls.” The media savored the minutest details of what had happened, but passed over in silence the court sentence and the ethnic affiliations of those who were punished.

This suggests the following: in order to create a negative attitude toward this type of conflict, the media should be guided by the interests of the state and rely on verified information.

Here is another pertinent example.¹⁰ On 26 May, 2010, an explosion at the Palace of Culture and Sport in Stavropol raised a high information wave: all the TV and radio companies across the country deemed it necessary to cover the event. The local people were frightened: it was rumored that the explosion was a prelude to events similar to what had happened in May-June 2007 when several murders (some of them still unsolved) caused panic—in May 2010 people expected mass riots and numerous casualties.

The terrorist act of 26 May, 2010, unprecedented in scope and number of casualties, pushed the city to the brink of another crisis; very much as before it was rumored that ethnic relations had been triggered the events and that the explosion was but the first in a series of terrorist acts staged by goodness knows who as revenge for goodness knows what.

Despite the gloomy expectations nothing bad happened and life returned to normal, which suggests that the administration acted fast and did the right things.

In the majority of cases, negative or even provocative information about events allegedly revealing, directly or indirectly, an ethnic component appears either because there is no objective and complete information, or because the authorities insist that what happened was an act of hooliganism with no ethnic overtones.

Spokesmen of all sorts of bodies of power tend to give everyday rather than ethnic reasons for conflicts, sometimes disregarding an obvious ethnic component. These are wrong tactics that produce no positive results: the public has already acquired its own ideas about what is going on; since people have learned to mistrust official information, the authorities are limited in their choice of settlement methods and instruments.

Media coverage of the Stavropol events in Russia and abroad helped normalize the situation: the public adequately responded to the terrorist act, while the city authorities acquired public support and ensured law and order in the city.

In fact, aggravations caused by ethnically tinged crimes that echoed far and wide in the Stavropol Territory, especially in the Caucasian Mineral Waters area, could not be excluded, however nothing of this sort happened.

The situation worsened on 27 May, 2010 when the people of Stavropol were disturbed by rumors about an explosion in a bus in the city’s center. Contradictory rumors rapidly spread across the

¹⁰ For more detail, see: D.A. Lavrinenko, E.T. Mayboroda, “Informatsionny menedzhment etnokonfliktного protsessa (Stavropol, mai 2010 g.),” in: *Politicheskaya bezopasnost Yuga Rossii: materialy Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii i kruglogo stola*, Krasnodar, 2010, pp. 83-87.

city; by noon it was on the verge of panic: adults avoided public places and kept children away from schools and sport clubs.

The head of city administration for emergencies and crisis situations made a statement published by Novosti Information Agency; it took the city authorities several hours to return the situation to normal and convince people to trust official information rather than unfounded rumors.

This was another example of the block conflict scenario: real or imagined events were interpreted in the general information context to add an ethnic dimension to what was really happening or was presented as real.

In May 2010, the law-enforcers, acting together with the state and municipal structures which supplied enough adequate information, cut short the unfolding conflict. The fact of an "information breakthrough," however, shows that the authorities are still lagging behind the demands of the time.

Mechanisms of Translation of Information Threats

In the post-Soviet period, dissemination of contradictory or even destructive political information made solidarity of the social, ethnic, and economic communities and subcultures doubly important. A system of information security based on the communicative-synergetic paradigm was urgently needed.

With this aim in view, a group of lecturers from the Department of Political Science and Political Management of Kuban State University (the basic department of the Southern Scientific Center, Russian Academy of Sciences [RAS]) undertook a vast research project called Information Security in a Polyethnic Society (on information from the Southern Federal District) within a program titled Development of Scientific Potential of the Higher School (2009-2010) implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science of the RF and the Federal Agency for Education.

A sociological poll conducted in 2010, under the project, in the Southern and North Caucasian Federal districts to identify which information sources carried nationalist information produced the results shown in Table 1.

Three hundred and twenty-one young men were polled: 92 of them in Adigey; 134 in Ingushetia; and 95 in Daghestan. The results suggested that the greatest amount of nationalist information appears on the Internet: one out of two polled in Adigey and Ingushetia and one out of three polled in Daghestan agreed with this. It should be said that as distinct from the other regions, people in Daghestan more frequently mentioned the regional and national press (about 27% and 22%, respectively).

About a third of the polled in Adigey and Ingushetia and about a quarter of the polled in Daghestan believe that Russian films spread nationalist ideas; 30% in Adigey blames foreign films.

The respondents in the three republics agree that the federal TV channels are guilty of nationalist overtones (29%, 24%, and 22% in Ingushetia, Adigey, and Daghestan, respectively).¹¹

The respondents did not agree about the national and regional press: respondents in Daghestan and Ingushetia blamed the national press (22.1% and 19.4%, respectively), while in Adigey the share was 5%; together with about 5% of the respondents in Daghestan and 8% in Ingushetia most of the respondents in Adigey believe that the federal press and fiction are less guilty of nationalist statements and sentiments than other information sources.¹²

¹¹ See: V.M. Iurchenko, I.A. Gherasimov, "Politicheskie ustanovki molodezhi v kontekste obesbecheniia bezopasnosti na Iuge Rossii," in: *Sotsialnoe samochuvstvie naseleniia v sovremennoy Rossii: tezisy dokladov Vserossiiskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. by G.D. Gritsenko, Rostov on Don, 2010, p. 253.

¹² See: *Ibid.*, p. 254.

Table 1

**Frequency of
Nationalist Information
in Different Information Sources
(% of the polled, by region)**

Information Sources	Region		
	Adigey	Daghestan	Ingushetia
Internet	50.0	36.8	52.2
Federal TV Channels	23.9	22.1	29.1
Regional TV Channels	9.8	7.4	14.9
National press	5.4	22.1	19.4
Regional press	12.0	27.4	11.9
Russian films	31.5	24.2	36.6
Foreign films	30.4	13.7	13.4
Fiction	8.7	5.3	8.2

Source: V.M. Iurchenko, I.A. Gherasimov, "Politicheskie ustanovki molodezhi v kontekste obesbecheniia bezopasnosti na luge Rossii," in: *Sotsialnoe samochuvstvie naseleniia v sovremennoy Rossii: tezisy dokladov Vserossiiskoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii*, ed. by G.D. Gritsenko, Rostov on Don, 2010, pp. 251-254.

In Daghestan, 27.4% blames the regional press.

The above can be used to set up rules and formulate recommendations for the federal and regional structures and other political actors: the media and education technologies should be used to teach tolerance; religious organizations, national centers and groups, and formal and non-formal politically active youth structures should receive more attention together with the regional media that address young audiences, while public structures and organizations of young people and branches of political parties, etc. should be encouraged.

To sum up: information security in the North Caucasian region realized through the media calls for more active and consistent efforts.

The "Network" Threat to Information Security

The information struggle, which is growing much more complicated and much more subtle, calls for persistent analytical efforts.

New political entities (all sorts of blocs and parties) are coming to the fore to upset the balance of power, change the course of political discussions, and aggravate social problems.

Information policy can be described as efficient when the methods of conflict settlement realized through it dominate the political discourse as the most influential ideologue. This “political formula” confirms the legitimacy of the ruling elite, which wants to preserve the institutional structure and the mechanism of statehood reproduction.

The symbol-creating elites should build up an ideology of harmony and patriotism. To remain a political entity, their members should consistently and deliberately oppose all attempts to destroy the homogeneity of Russian super-ethnicity on which the security of the state and its polyethnic society hinges.

It was the tragedy in Budennovsk in 1995 and a series of blasts in trolleybuses in Moscow (2005) that brought information terrorism to Russia.

Back in the 1990s in Chechnia, extremists demonstrated that they knew how to use information to manipulate the public. The information component of North Caucasian security should receive adequate attention to prevent having a negative information impact on political decisions and undermining public confidence in the bodies of power and law-enforcers.

A systemic crisis in the Soviet Union crippled the regime and social relations and added vigor to ethnopolitical conflicts. The crisis, which assumed religious dimensions, stirred up ethnic extremism of different hues, ranging from national separatism and national chauvinism to terrorism.¹³

For over 20 years now, terrorism has been and remains the main extremist trend in several of the North Caucasian republics; the largest number of terrorist acts takes place in the Northern Caucasus.

According to A. Dobaev, “since the 1990s terrorism has switched to the network principle to become ‘new terrorism;’ more often than not hierarchical structures cannot adequately oppose it for a number of objective reasons. Network actors can reach the people on top, there are centralization and intensity of contacts; terrorist groups can upgrade their management, they can act autonomously with a lot of flexibility and dynamism and preserve sustainable contacts inside the network for better cooperation and lightning operations.”¹⁴

The same author has pointed out that “the network principle of organization of terrorist groups proved to be extremely effective and asymmetrical when dealing with all types of opponents and creating important advantages: compatibility with transnational terrorist groups; prompt information supply and exchange; unified information structure; prompt decisions; decentralization; secrecy and mobility; and they can act autonomously and efficiently under orders coming from outside the region.”¹⁵

The terrorist network in the Northern Caucasus should be carefully studied because what is called “new terrorism” differs greatly from the previous forms of terrorism¹⁶: it is a response to the “network warfare” concept.

At the present stage, terrorist groups, parties, and other structures are absolutely autonomous; there are cells of 3 to 5 militants who know only their leaders; the leaders, in turn, communicate only with their direct supervisors. Many of the terrorist structures are fairly complicated with different branches in different spheres: politics, finance, and “direct action” (groups involved in terrorist activities).¹⁷

¹³ See: R.G. Abdulatipov, “Sostoianie russkoy natsii—sostoianie gosudarstva,” *Sobytia i kommentarii*, No. 058, 31 March, 2004, available at [www.trud.ru].

¹⁴ A.I. Dobaev, *Vliianie ugroz terroristicheskoy deiatelnosti na formirovanie sistemy ekonomicheskoy bezopasnosti v usloviakh globalizatsii. Abstract of Ph.D. Thesis*, Rostov on Don, 2008, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁶ See: *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁷ See: *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Terrorists have mastered elaborate means and methods of target selection and terror, hostage-taking being one of them. They know how to use the latest media technologies to inform the world about their aims. The terrorist acts in Dubrovka (Moscow 2002) and Beslan (2004) received wide coverage all over the world.

Doku Umarov, one of the separatist leaders, used the Internet with much more skill than any of the North Caucasian separatists to communicate, instruct, conscript, and disseminate his ideas, as well as raise funds to go on with terrorist acts against the leaders of the North Caucasian republics.

The Russian special services, on the other hand, are not equally skillful in Internet warfare. For many years now they have been fighting the Kavkaz-Tsentr website without much success: this propaganda resource of the Chechen extremists is still alive, while the opponents of the Russian leaders acquired a chance to blame the Russian special services for hacker attacks. This happened, for example, in the spring of 2007 after a scandalous series of hacker attacks on the Estonian state websites.¹⁸

Chechen extremists use the Internet for fundraising: they inform their supporters about how to transfer donations and where.

The situation in the North Caucasian information space cannot but cause concern; extremist audio records can be easily bought in Kabardino-Balkaria, Chechnia, Ingushetia, and Daghestan. Young people, who are responsible for the future of our country, do not hesitate to visit extremist Internet sites. So far, blocking has proven impossible. On 14 April, 2009, when speaking at a meeting with representatives of the republic's muftiat,¹⁹ President of Chechnia Ramzan Kadyrov said that the growing interest of young people in the Internet might draw the most susceptible of them with pretty vague ideological convictions and ideas about the world into all sorts of structures, thus subjecting them to brainwashing and making them religious extremists.

Continued terrorist acts and the steady replenishment of terrorist ranks with educated young people who have good jobs mean that Russia is once more losing the information war in the Northern Caucasus

Responsibility in the Information Space

The electronic media have become the main instrument of ethnic mobilization; here I am not referring to TV and radio; I have in mind the Internet and cell phones, potential instruments of information warfare that can reach each and everyone.

The Internet is rapidly gaining popularity in Russia where the younger generation is much more interested in this source of information and communication than other generation groups. As a media instrument, the Internet can be both constructive and destructive and produce quite an unexpected impact on people's minds for the simple reason that it is independent from the state.

Laws and repressions are useless when it comes to the destructive impact of information technologies. The government bodies at all levels tend to rely on traditional mechanisms of information impact—the press, TV, and radio—which no longer produce the desired results.

Information security criteria are hinged on obsolete approaches: secrecy and the notorious Soviet idea of counter-propaganda; strange as it may seem the public relations instrument and the Internet remain neglected.

¹⁸ See: A.I. Smirnov, *Informatsionnaia globalizatsiia i Rossiia: vyzovy i vozmozhnosti*, Moscow, 2005, pp. 278-279.

¹⁹ [grozntsenty.ru/forum/lofiversion/index.php/t47.html].

Uncontrolled media coverage of extreme situations causes a response that defies propaganda of anti-terrorism.

When talking about the information aspect of counterterrorist efforts, we should pay attention to NGOs and their activities. Today, some of the commercial media tend to replace anti-extremist propaganda and warnings about dangerous social repercussions of extremist ideology with sharp criticism of the faults and shortcomings of the government bodies and law-enforcers,²⁰ which means that public opinion is warped to acquire a shape of “ideological support of terrorism.”

Distorted information causes a lot of pain for members of different groups (the relatives of hostages, people who hate the government and are prepared to oppose it, psychopaths and psychologically unbalanced people who know next to nothing about real life).²¹ Some human rights activists insist that “the state should employ kid-glove methods when dealing with terrorists.”²²

The right to spread legally acquired information as citizens’ inalienable right is confirmed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other regulatory and legal acts. Art 19.2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights²³ says: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”

The next point of the same article specifies: “The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

- (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
- (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals.”

We all know that terrorists invariably succeed in achieving their main aim: to scare people and drive them to panic.

People lose confidence in state power; they become skeptical of everything being done to fight terrorism; fear makes people indifferent to crimes and transforms them into narrow-minded nationalists and xenophobes.

Media coverage of acts of terror is greatly responsible for the above. A sociological poll dealing with the problems of counterterrorist struggle and security measures revealed that only 18.7% believed that what was done was adequate; 62.6% described the security measures as inadequate, while 14.3% was convinced that “nothing important has been done.”²⁴

According to the returns of the poll conducted by the Obschestvennoe mnenie Fund, one out of five respondents had no negative feelings about belligerent nationalists and blame their victims (migrants); 9% tend to justify skinheads because “they merely do what the militia should have done; they

²⁰ See: A. Tazhudinova, “Protivodeystvie ekstremizmu kak natsionalnaia idea,” available at [<http://www.dagpravda.ru/?com=materials&task=view&page=material&id=3945>].

²¹ See: Ibidem.

²² D.A. Koretskiy, “Ideologicheskoe obespechenie bor’by s terrorizmom,” available at [http://sartracc.ru/print.php?print_file=Pub/kolreckiy%2825-05-07%29.htm].

²³ Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December, 1966; entry into force 23 March, 1976, in accordance with Art 49, available at [<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>].

²⁴ Analytical document on the results of sociological poll conducted by the Saratov Center for the Study of Organized Crime and Corruption to identify what the public thought about terrorism in Russian in 2008, available at [www.sartracc.sgap.ru].

restore order and deal with migrant scum.” Only 2% are convinced that “Russia is a place for all nationalities.”²⁵

Journalists should learn to be responsible for the content and general mood of what they write. This is very important. People and the media do have the right to disseminate information, including information related to terrorist acts; it should be borne in mind, however, that destructive elements might use it in their interests and that this will interfere with counterterrorist operations and endanger the lives and health of civilians and members of special forces.

It should be said that the media create certain problems for those engaged in antiterrorist operations: there were no control mechanisms and, therefore, no responsibility for breaking the rules established by the community; there are no productive contacts between the state structures responsible for antiterrorist operations and the media, which results in disinformation, unnecessary complications, did nothing good for the image of the government and the law-enforcers, and makes the media vulnerable to criticism of their audiences.²⁶

The commonly accepted opinion that “in a counterterrorist operation journalists and the special services pursue different aims”²⁷ disorganizes both, breeds mistrust between them, and makes coordinated efforts impossible.

This explains incorrect media coverage, which may trigger destructive processes and transform them into an information terrorist threat; “the absolute majority of authors describe journalists as spokesmen, or an instrument of terrorists, or even their instigators to arrive at the absurd conclusion that without TV there would have been neither Beslan nor 9/11.”²⁸

Those who stage “protracted” terrorist acts (hostage-taking) as a rule tend to use TV as an instrument of objective online coverage. It creates a sense of being directly involved in the event, incorporates large masses of TV viewers, and produces a simultaneous impact on the multi-million audience. Journalists, who are fond of saying that they are “duty bound to supply the audience with a complete and unedited picture of what has happened or is going on,”²⁹ allow terrorists to stage their actions with a view to global coverage. Terrorist acts, on the other hand, are not a propaganda ploy terrorists use to promote their ideas or seek approval of their actions: violence is a tool used to succumb the state and society to their demands.

It seems that the Russian state and society should arrive at a common strategy of information opposition to ethnic and religious extremism and start working together. The information mechanisms available today are extremely important for shaping a positive civil identity of Russia’s population.

No matter how important, information technologies are not enough; civil society should be consolidated; its members should be encouraged, while the state and people should work together to address the most painful ethnopolitical, social, economic, and cultural problems.

Conclusion

Today, information is used as a political and economic weapon; it has changed our lifestyle and our perception of reality. People are living in a symbolic media-created space in which “society” is

²⁵ S.M. Kochoi, “Ekstremizm: problemy protivodeystviia,” available at [www.sartraccc.sgap.ru].

²⁶ See: G.A. Shaginyan, *Antiterroristicheskaia informatsionnaia politika rossiiskogo gosudarstva*, Abstract of Ph.D. Thesis, Krasnodar, 2006.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁸ O. Prikhodko, “Lingvisticheskiy arsenal antiterroristicheskoi bor’by,” *Zerkalo nedeli*, No. 38, 25 September, 2004, available at [http://zn.ua/CULTURE/lingvisticheskiy_arsenal_antiterroristicheskoy_borby-41199.html].

²⁹ L.P. Martirosova, *Osobennosti osveshchenia terrorizma v SMI*, Abstract of Ph.D. Thesis, Pyatigorsk, 2009, p. 21.

frequently defined as an “information society,” while information is seen as the main and the most important resource of social development.

Democratic institutions, which have spread far and wide, have made politics public, while public opinion and the media as manipulation instruments have become a weapon of the power struggle.

Opposition to the spread of unwelcome information has been going on in peace and war with the help of new, more efficient, and affordable information vehicles that can affect decision-making. This started the process of elaboration and realization of the ideas of psychological wars based on information and waged for strategic and political advantages by warping the enemy’s individual, group, and mass conscience. The technologically advanced countries acquired a considerable leeway, which they used particularly auspiciously in the Cold War.

An adequate assessment of the security problems presupposes that we should recognize the systemic nature of this phenomenon, which calls, correspondingly, for a systemic analysis. This implies careful study of the interaction between the inner components of the security problem and its external elements that produce a direct or even strong social impact on certain social segments.

The contemporary law-governed state needs efficient information security management; the state should devise a flexible information policy that can be easily adjusted to the rapidly changing geopolitical situation to ensure competitiveness in the global media market. We should bear in mind that information has become a strategic reserve and a political instrument.

Academics and politicians have pointed out that information society requires different treatment and different strategies at home and abroad, as well as different approaches to national and regional security. In fact, the information sphere and the way it uses foreign intellectual potential, spreads its own spiritual values and ideology, culture and language, and affects the development and moral and spiritual expansion of other countries is ultimately determining the country’s political potential.

An efficient information policy is an important instrument of information security; it is a phenomenon of the information space as a special type of space with specific forms of activities very different from those of the previous development stage.

A strategically correct information policy is an instrument of control of information flows in a way that leads to social development based on values shared by all. In this case, information affects the target groups to achieve the expected consolidating effect; the state shapes the information space and its relations with society according to the accepted aims and tasks in the information sphere.

Security-wise, the Northern Caucasus is Russia’s most unstable region; this means that the federal center should treat the problem of information security there as one of its priorities.

The government of Russia should pay more attention to the struggle in the information space; we need mechanisms of state information policy in the Northern Caucasus and control over its implementation.

Information security calls for comprehensive and multilayer investigation since the media are coming to the fore in the national security system. The RF Information Security Doctrine should be revised and actively implemented with due account of regional specifics: in the Northern Caucasus terrorists actively use information flows.

Regrettably, the state and regional bodies of power in Russia are not paying adequate attention to the much more prominent threats to information security in the south of Russia; they have not yet completely grasped the role the media play in politics; the information factor is consistently underestimated when it comes to planning political actions.

Protection of the information space should be moved to the center of modernization efforts in the Northern Caucasus; it predetermines, to a great extent, the content and dynamics of the political processes, the specifics of self-identification, and the role of the community in Russia and the globalized world.

We should exclude narrow departmental approaches to protection of the North Caucasian information space; it should be treated as a national task to be addressed by all the structures and all the subjects of the Russian Federation.

To achieve information security in the Northern Caucasus, all the government bodies of power and administration structures, public associations, and people should receive timely and complete information.

The continued instability in the Northern Caucasus is an outcrop of the political transformations; the conflict nature of the republics' political development, the unsettled conflicts, the separatist trends, and the expansion of religious extremism and terrorism. Russia's geopolitical rivals are trying to capitalize on the above, which makes the Northern Caucasus an arena of transborder political competition.

The current situation in the Northern Caucasus calls for a more active and better substantiated policy and systemic measures designed to pull the region out of the crisis and ensure its security. After all, the macro region's strategic importance for Russia's national interests cannot be overestimated.
