

## RELIGION IN SOCIETY

**SPREAD OF JIHAD:  
THE ORIGINAL FACTORS AND  
THE SCOPE OF ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION  
IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS**

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Russia has been trying to put out the flame of resistance in the Northern Caucasus for 200 years now. Historians and political analysts came up with all sorts of explanations: the mountain peoples' predatory nature; British and Turkish influence; the mutinous leaders of Sheik Mansour, and imams such as Ghazi-Muhammad, Shamil, and Najmuddin Gotsinsky; the socio-economic crisis; and the subversive activities of foreign extremist organizations. In fact, resistance has been fed by the simple fact that the Caucasian Muslims cannot accept the rules, laws, and sociopolitical norms of the Russian state.

In his article "O znachenii nashikh poslednikh podvigov na Kavkaze" (The Meaning of Our Latest Exploits in the Caucasus), Nikolay Dobroliubov, a 19th-century public figure, identified the main reasons for the mountain peoples' violent resistance:

"From what we know about the history of the Caucasus we can conclude that the anti-Russian revolts of the locals were not brought about by chance people like Shamil or even by the very strict teaching of the Murids. The main reason was hatred of Russian domination."<sup>1</sup> Our contemporary Iakov Gordin says the same: "To harshly impose European ideas transformed into an 'over-regulated' variant typical of Russia on a fundamentally different system of world perception was a fatal mistake."<sup>2</sup>

Many of those who try to analyze the reasons for the region's mutinous nature fall into the same trap. They follow their own logic (far removed from the cast of mind of a Caucasian Muslim re-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: Ia.A. Gordin, *Kavkaz: zemlia i krov*, St. Petersburg, 2000, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

solved to fight the state) in an effort to explain why extremist and radical movements are gaining momentum. Even though such researchers do not go beyond the superficial and secondary causes of political-religious extremism, they claim a profound and exhaustive analysis of its roots and fur-

ther development. Here I would like to dwell on the deep-rooted factors which go back to the violently tectonic layers of the local nations' consciousness and their historical memory and are feeding the radical movements and resistance in the Northern Caucasus.

## 1. Inertia of Resistance

An objective analysis of history will say that resistance to the Russian statehood in the Caucasus, which started under Sheik Mansour, has been going on in ebbs and flows throughout the entire period the region has been part of the Russian state. Periods of active fighting alternated with periods of latent discontent among the mountain peoples, its main stages being: the movements of Mansour, Beybulat, the apogee of the Caucasian resistance movement under three imams of Daghestan and Chechnia; the smaller gazzavat of 1877; the Najmuddin Gotsinsky movement; the anti-Soviet riots and revolts of 1920-1940 and, finally, the two Chechen wars and the Shari'a coup in the Kadar zone of Daghestan. At different times, official power applied different names to this phenomenon—Muridism, plundering, rebels, banditry, separatism, terrorism, but the meaning and aims remained the same. This phenomenon can be described as Islamic resistance, which for more than two centuries now has been pursuing the same aim: independence from Russia and an Islamic state ruled by the Shari'a laws.

It would be extremely naive and even wrong to believe that during the 150 years of their existence as part of Russia's political and legal expanse, these nations have completely reconciled themselves to the state's imperatives. The Russian and the Soviet state created the phenomenon of an axiological and ideological gap. It separated those who accepted the new values and completely identified themselves with the new state (people in the valleys and towns, and the intelligentsia) from those who, generation after generation, remained implacable opponents of the Russian/Soviet state. They lived high in the mountains, belonged to secret religious communities, and remained loyal to Islam.<sup>3</sup> Today, these people are still convinced that jihad and armed resistance should be continued. In fact, the idea of an independent state within the current boundaries of Daghestan, Chechnia, and Ingushetia remains the most viable among the other ideas of Caucasian statehood. It has been nurtured by the traditions of the mountain dwellers and their sociopolitical culture, and has finally acquired a sacral nature.

All those who are now talking about the mounting ferocity of resistance and the transfer to political extremism and terrorism should look into the past. The imams of Daghestan and Chechnia and their naibs were even crueler: Imam Gamzat-bek liquidated the entire family of the Khunzakh khans (including the small crown princes). It was Shamil, a comrade-in-arms of imam Gamzat-bek, who threw the youngest of them into a precipice. His naib Kebed Muhammad personally slew 18 people, among whom were children who belonged to the clan of the Kazikumukh khans. Naib Labazan from Andi, who headed a Chechen detachment, surrendered his fellow villagers to Shamil with sword and fire.

<sup>3</sup> According to Bagautdin (who is an Avar) and belongs to the Naqshbandi tarekat headed by Shek Said-Afandi Atsaev (of Chirkey), in Soviet times too there were people in the remote villages of the Gergebil District of Daghestan who studied the Koran and the Shari'a in underground places for so long that they could no longer stand the daylight. Muhammad-rasul (Darghinian), imam of the mosque in the town of Izberbash town, who represented the village of Gubden, the people of which were known for their continued devotion to their religious duties (including the hijab), during cruel repressions said that the rural and district administrations had refrained from opposing the local ban on burying Communist party functionaries at the local cemetery. According to Zelimkhan, a Chechen, his uncle, the Minister of the Interior of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, secretly prayed five times a day in his office.

## 2. The “Anti-Constitutional” Nature of Islam

As distinct from other world religions, Islam offers its followers detailed social, economic, and political doctrines; and it can potentially mobilize its adepts to realize them. In other words, from the very beginning, it has been a politically biased religion, it has always called for social and political activity, and has always insisted on the Shari‘a in both political and social spheres. At all times, public and political involvement has been regarded as a form of religious worship.

At the same time, the Islamic political doctrine is anti-constitutional; it contradicts the basic legal principles of the Russian state and even rejects them. Islam recognizes no other authority and no other laws except the authority and the law of Allah. Power and law are two central issues in Islam; they test each Muslim and show him the right faith and the right road. All Muslims who submit to secular authorities and secular laws are considered to be unfaithful because they put secular rulers and secular laws above Allah. The Koran says: “...the command is for none but Allah. He has commanded that you worship none but Him, that is the right religion...” (Surah “Yusuf,” ayat 40); “Have you not turned your vision to those who declare that they believe in the revelations that have come to you and to those before you? Their (real) wish is to resort together for judgement to [the?] Satan, though they were ordered to reject him” (Surah “The Women,” ayat 60); “If any do fail to judge by ... what Allah has revealed, they are ... Unbelievers (Surah “The Table Spread,” ayat 44).

The key Islamic dogma speaks about the unique nature of Allah (*tauhid*), which means that power cannot be divided between Allah and man. Power, legislative initiative, and the right to enjoin belong to Allah. Anyone unwilling to accept this ceases to belong to Islam and becomes an unfaithful (*qafir*).

In this way, Islamic resistance to non-Islamic power is caused by the issue of the nature of power. The Muslims cannot be satisfied with the niche restricted to spiritual requirements which the state has reserved for Islam. Veneration is but part of the whole. At the very early stages of the anti-Russian jihad, the czarist authorities did nothing to encroach on this part of Islam, Islam of veneration. The imams of Daghestan and Chechnia fought against the claims of the Russian state to power.

In the first third of the 19th century, imam Gazi-Muhammad explained this in his “Ustanovlenie dokazatel’stv verootstupnichestva praviteley i sudey Daghestana, priznaiushchikh adat” (Proofs of Apostasy of Those Rulers and Judges of Daghestan who Accepted Adat).<sup>4</sup> Taqfir, accusing those Muslims of unfaithfulness who departed from the state-forming principles of Islam, was the main ideological instrument he used to justify a jihad against any non-Islamic system (be it the Russian state or the Daghestanian khanates ruled by adat).

The above shows that the idea of a war against the non-Islamic state and accusing those of unfaithfulness who refused to accept the idea of the power of Allah as unique and indivisible is not an imported novelty. The tradition of taqfir and an irreconcilable jihad appeared in the Caucasus two centuries ago and have remained essentially the same.

## 3. Islamic Renaissance and an Unprecedented Military and Political Revival of the Muslim World

Islam as a civilization and an alternative political, economic, cultural, and international model is not merely reviving. While remaining in a state of psychological, cultural, and economic depression, the

<sup>4</sup> See: G. Alkadari, *Asari Daghestan*, Makhachkala, 1929, p. 54.

Islamic world witnessed successive collapses of cultural, ethical, and sociopolitical systems. It lived through the rapid destruction of traditional social structures brought about by imposing alien standards, and accumulated a lot of destructive energy now being freed very much like nuclear fissure.

For the next 100 years, Russia will coordinate its Caucasian policy with the Islamic factor. It has come to the fore thanks to the mounting Islamic religious and political activity the world over, as well as because of Islam's huge integration potential boosted by the latest information and communication technologies, which will inevitably bring the scattered Muslim communities together. In fact, the Muslim demographic and ideological onslaught coupled with the Islamic countries' rapidly growing economic potential threatens to develop into another wave of Islamic expansion. Today, we are all witnessing an Islamic wave in the Caucasus.

It seems that further developments will prove unfavorable for Russia: the two centuries of resistance under the green Islamic banners in the Caucasus coincided with the general decline of Islam on a global scale. Today, however, the mounting Muslim resistance is synchronous with the Islamic onslaught all over the world.

#### **4. Response of the Caucasian Peoples to the Lawlessness, Crimes, and Anti-Islamic Policies of the Russian State and the Local Political Elites, as well as to Repressions against Muslim Activists**

In the past, the local people responded to the use of force and to the Russian troops in a violent or even suicidal way, following Shamil's defeat, the mountain people moved to Islamic countries in great numbers. As soon as Russia established its domination over the Northern Caucasus, a wave of what is known as the abrek movement engulfed the region. Pushkin, who visited the Caucasus at the very beginning of the Caucasian war, described the results of pacification: "The Circussians hate us. We drove them away from their vast pastures; the villages were plundered and whole tribes completely liquidated. They are moving higher up into the mountains to make their inroads from there. One cannot rely on friendship from the *peaceful* Circussians: they are always ready to help their mutinous relatives."<sup>5</sup>

Andrei Rozen (who took part in the Decembrist uprising in 1825) said that the "amazing and heroic deeds" of Russian military leaders, "the names of Zubov, Lazarev, Prince Tsitsianov, Kotliarevskiy, Yermolov, and Paskevich," as well as the permanently deployed Russian troops in the Caucasus (there are over "110,000 of them" together with the Cossacks), "which would have been enough to subjugate many states," "proved useless against the mountain peoples."<sup>6</sup> After analyzing the situation, Rozen concluded: "It seems that everything went wrong from the very beginning; we followed the patterns of the old times: like Pizarro and Cortez, everything we brought to the Caucasus was weapons and fear, which made our enemies even more wild and belligerent."<sup>7</sup>

During the Civil War, and later when Soviet power was being established in the Caucasus, and still later during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, the ties between certain social strata and between the mountain-dwelling and certain other peoples and the state snapped. Repressions and replacement of Islamic values, elements of religious rituals, and traditional world outlook and social patterns with the new Soviet ideology, official rituals, attributes, and "norms of Soviet lifestyle" caused indigna-

<sup>5</sup> A.S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, in ten volumes, Vol. VI, Moscow, Leningrad, 1949, p. 647.

<sup>6</sup> See: A.E. Rozen, *Zapiski dekabrista*, Irkutsk, 1984, pp. 389-390.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 390.

tion and fierce resistance. Certain categories of the mountain peoples became spiritually alienated from the regime.

The state resorted to the following measures to impose its integration and administrative doctrine: ruthless confiscation of agricultural products; forced collectivization; strong pressure on Islam and adat; and complete annihilation of the local elite—scholars of Arabic, alims, imams, and elders. This caused more revolts. It should be added that deportation and prolonged existence among alien people in exile strengthened the unity of the Vaynakh peoples (Chechens and Ingushes). They became even more dedicated to the national traditions and even more hostile toward the system, which they treated with animosity. Psychologically, they were prepared to put up fierce resistance.<sup>8</sup>

Today, many of those who belonged to moderate Salafi communities had to hide to avoid unjustified repressions; while others are fighting high up in the mountains together with mojaheddin. Those who come back to their republics bring radical ideas and military skills with them. Abdurashid Saidov, who saw how Salafi communities of Daghestan were destroyed, wrote: “The usual crude methods—repressions and persecution—the authorities used to fight religious ideology triggered a massive exodus of those who disagreed with this to Ichkeria... Persecutions and the exodus to rebel Ichkeria forced fundamentalists to close their ranks, they were inspired and more determined to win. They acquired better weapons and learned how to fight better.”<sup>9</sup>

The second Chechen war created even more intransigent and hostile Muslims who hated Russia. The analytical community has not yet realized the scope of rotation going on in the resistance ranks in Chechnia. The old leaders who grew up in the Soviet Union had many things in common with Russia: history, shared culture, and the shared Soviet mentality. They could feel a certain amount of guilt when attacking civilians. Many of them were criminals who had compromised themselves by cooperating with the Russian special services. In the first Chechen war, they disgraced themselves by actions described as criminal by the Russian and Shari'a laws. This made them easy prey for the federal propaganda machine.

This war is waged by a new generation of the Chechens—they are crueller and less reserved than the old one. In ten years of fighting, a new generation grew up in Chechnia which neither studied at school nor belonged to the Komsomol—it has nothing to do with Russia. Those who were 8 or 10 in 1994 are almost twenty now. They perceive everything Russian—language, culture, symbols, and laws—as absolutely hostile. They wish to pay back Russia in kind with blood, death, and fear.

Within a very short period, the second Chechen war developed from a national-liberation war of the Chechens into a Caucasian Islamic war. Resistance is no longer an ethnic Chechen phenomenon: it attracts more and more adepts of the protest ideas from the neighboring republics and territories. There is information that mobile semi-autonomous terrorist groups were formed in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Ingushetia, and even in the Stavropol Territory. According to the *Vlast* weekly, the majority of the terrorist acts in the Northern Caucasus and Russia in general were prepared outside Chechnia, in peaceful territories where the fighters feel free to store weapons and explosives and to attract people to their ranks.

Fighting in the town of Baksan (Kabardino-Balkaria), in which grenade launchers were used, the terrorist acts in the Stavropol Territory, fighters detected in the Tsuntinskies woods of Daghestan, the rapid development of fighting in Ingushetia, and the Beslan tragedy say that Russia's appeasement policy in Chechnia failed and that jihad is slowly but surely spreading in the Caucasus.

The last eighteen months in Daghestan were the most difficult period after the 1999 events. Local fighters delivered numerous attacks on the Russian military and the militia. According to official information, about one hundred members of the law enforcement bodies were killed, the head of the Administration for Fighting Extremism and Criminal Terrorism among them. Makhachkala has become the scene

<sup>8</sup> See, for example: A.S. Kulikov, S.A. Lembik, *Chechenskiy konflikt. Khronika vooruzhennogo konflikta 1994-1996*, Moscow, 2000, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> A. Saidov, *Tayna vtorzhenia* [www.chechpress.com].

of repeated street fighting, in which the federal side uses helicopters, special units, and heavy machinery. Leaflets calling for a jihad in the name of Rabbani Khalilov, amir of the Daghestanian mojaheddin, are fairly widespread.<sup>10</sup>

The building of the Federal Security Service of Ingushetia was blasted by Stavropol and Ingush Wahhabis (the act was carried out by a Nogai family from the Stavropol Territory). Any demonstrative act of retribution and intimidation may trigger at least a Daghestanian-Vaynakh uprising, even if the rest of the Caucasus remains outside it. This forecast is becoming more and more real: the rhetoric of jihad and the subversive and terrorist activities of the radical Muslims are finding an ever growing number of supporters among the local people.<sup>11</sup>

The Caucasus is living through another crisis. In its report published late in 2003, the International Institute of Strategic Research quoted figures of the Russian losses in Chechnia in 2002-2003 according to Reuters: 4,749, which is the maximum annual loss of life since the beginning of the current conflict. The institute's researchers were not amazed at the growing number of deaths: during the peacekeeping operation in Iraq, America is losing more men than at the initial stage of heavy fighting.

Islamic resistance in Chechnia is growing more organized and more coordinated. The remains of Maskhadov's, Basaev's and Khattab's forces scattered in the mountains by the large-scale federal operations are reuniting on a different basis. The fighters have abandoned the tactics of extensive operations using large detachments. It took them a year-and-a-half or two years to test and synchronize their new tactics. Today, they are operating in small, mobile and semi-autonomous groups able to change camps, maneuver and, if needed, to pool forces with other groups.

So far, the Russian law enforcement bodies have not been able to stem the "creeping radicalization" of the Caucasus. Vladimir Kravchenko, public prosecutor of Chechnia, has to admit: "Terrorism has become international. To deal with it we should treat the republics adjacent to Chechnia as border territories responsible for exercising strictly control over the movement of people and transport." It is hard to say whether this is possible at all: the sealed off borders will make coordination of the terrorist groups acting in every nook and cranny difficult, but will hardly prevent the spread of radical ideologies. This requires different methods.

Nobody knows how much blood must be shed for people to realize that the current methods employed against the guerrillas and terrorists in the Caucasus do not work. No matter how many heavy machines are used in the mountains of Chechnia and Daghestan, they cannot defeat ideology. Military measures are obviously not enough. We have already passed the point of no-return, when it was still possible to stem radical ideology and prevent its proliferation. Today, no state, no matter how strong, can dam up the flow of protest Islamic ideology: the people are only too willing to accept it despite the persecutions and probably even because of them.<sup>12</sup> Today the state should concentrate on preventing the radicalization of these ideas.<sup>13</sup>

It was clear from the very beginning that, under certain conditions, the most active branch of Caucasian Islam (Salafism) could be a moderate and peaceful movement. According to Vladimir Muratov,

<sup>10</sup> Significantly, in recent years the ranks of mojaheddin in Daghestan have been swelling with people from regions that were least Islamic under Soviet power: Lakhs, Lezghians, Nogais. Rabbani Khalilov and Idris Bakkunov, one of the leaders of a terrorist group which kills members of the law enforcement structures, are Lakhs. A large group of mojaheddin taken prisoner or killed during the fighting in June 2004 in Makhachkala were Lezghians. Nogais who took part in blasting the building of the Federal Security Service of Ingushetia were found and destroyed in Kizliar in the summer of 2004.

<sup>11</sup> During the fight between federal forces and the Gelaev group in the Tsuntin District of Daghestan, two Russian soldiers left to guard an armored carrier that had lagged behind the army column were killed by civilians who acted on their own. What is more, for over 18 months the law-enforcement structures have been unable to track several terrorist groups of Daghestanian mojaheddin who live in secret flats and move around Makhachkala in their cars. They are obviously supported by the local people—something that was impossible two or three years ago.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example: A. Larintseva, T. Samedov, O. Alenova, "Kol'tso kavkazskoy natsional'nosti," *Kommersant-Vlast*, 29 September-5 October, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> V.D. Krotov in his article "Geopolitika i bezopasnost' Iuga Rossii" has written: "The current crisis can be weakened, but not eliminated altogether. This is the main thing to be said about it." *Sovremennye problemy geopolitiki Kavkaza*, 2002.

who heads the Administration of the Federal Security Service of Daghestan, “not every Wahhabi is a criminal. Anyone has the right to his faith, as long as he does not injure others. We are concerned about those who violate law and order.”<sup>14</sup> At the height of the struggle against terrorism and religious extremism, this good principle was abandoned; the borderline between the radical and openly anti-state groups and absolutely loyal religious communities was ignored. This damaged beyond repair the cause of preventing radicalization of those Muslim communities which, from the very beginning, were keeping away from anti-state slogans and acts.

Rather than being concerned about an upsurge in Muslim social and political activity, the state should pay more attention to the fact that both the Salafi and the tariqat supporters are growing more radical and more destructive. Instead of completely squelching the social activity of all Muslims (which would inevitably invite unrest), the authorities should channel it in a positive direction. After all, Islamic revival obviously possesses powerful constructive potential.

Persecutions have not uprooted the radical protest Islamic movement in the Caucasus. In fact, history has shown us that the methods used against it could not defeat the modernist and reformist Islamic ideologies. In this case force is powerless. At all times, the radical ideas presented at the level of an alternative reformist goal under conditions of a grave socioeconomic and political crisis, the rising wave of religious awareness, and continued religious ignorance will remain attractive.

Power should enter into a dialog with the supporters of moderate Islam (primarily Salafi) and look for common issues. This should be done because their influence in the region is mounting. Spiritual structures and their heads (both Salafi and tariqat), as well as the heads of all sorts of groups inside the tarekats should distance themselves from official power. This corresponds to the constitutional provision of separating the church from the state to a much greater extent than state patronage of one branch and one religious trend.

We should distinguish between the radical and moderate Salafi trends; statesmen, the law enforcement bodies, and the common people should be taught this. In areas where moderate Salafism is still weak and is still developing, we should do our best to encourage it in order to oppose the ultra-radical and radical trends. This will make it possible to attract some of the radicals to the moderate side and invite them to hold a dialog with the authorities.

Moderate Salafism should be given the chance to become legal in order to shift the contradictions between Salafi and tariqat to the realm of theology. This will help remove the growing radicalization potential present in all Salafi movements and prevent their radicalization for the sake of survival, thus averting the possibility of organized Salafi forming underground ideological and political opposition to the tariqat and the authorities and creating an ultra-radical and militant branch.

In light of the growing legal skepticism of the secular state structures and the constitutional-legal norms, the republican authorities should devise ways and methods for bringing together the traditional and Islamic legal heritage and the Russian laws. This will help remove contradictions at the legal level of Daghestan’s political culture. The possibility of this merging has been theoretically substantiated in the conception of legal pluralism called upon to clarify the situation in which two or more legal systems have to coexist in one social context. If the problem continues to be ignored, large groups of Muslims will turn to the Islamic legal system as an alternative to the Russian laws. In the future, the legitimacy of state power and the Russian laws in Daghestan will be completely undermined. This will invite another crisis of power relations and a new round of disintegration.

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<sup>14</sup> “Kto budet vospityvat imamov?” *Novoe delo*, No. 45, 7 November, 2003.