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Radicalisation of the North Caucasus’ Muslims

The phenomenon of Islamic radicalism was also considered a problem by Soviet authorities: in the 1970s KGB struggled with “Wahhabi”, who appeared in mountain Dagestan among local Sufi leaders. Shortly before the USSR breakup Muslims created the Islamic Revival Party (IRP). Radicalisation processes among Muslims intensified with disintegration of the USSR and opening of borders.

Expansion of radicalism

The most radical regions are eastern and central parts of the North Caucasus: Dagestan, the Chechen Republic and Ingushetia, and also adjoining parts of Stavropol region with appreciable Muslim population. Though today in Chechnya radical elements are being pushed outside the borders of the republic they settle down in neighboring regions. That results in strengthening of Dagestani Islamic jamaats, so the republican law-enforcement bodies are compelled to hold regular operations against separatists. Radical views are considerably widespread in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachayevo-Cherkessia though the situation in general is less tense here that in Dagestan, the Chechen Republic and Ingushetia. We could witness the lowest level of radicalism in Adygeya and Krasnodar region; that partly owes the fact that ethnonationalism is not superseded by religious radicalism here. (While such nationalist organizations as "Circassian congress" and "Adyge-Khasa" remain mighty, Islamic radicalism will not have big prospects for wide circulation here).

1. Participants of radical movements and their activity

Radicalism in Russia is spread through different organizations, groupings, mosques and also some persons. The basic "cell" of radicalism in the North Caucasus is a Muslim community, jamaat. The most solid units are jamaats, which could be called youth ones by age of their participants; they were organized at the end of the 1980s - the beginning of the 1990s. Keen oppositional views of a significant part of the youth, which made their skeleton, promoted the process of organizing in the form of separate structures. On one hand they were oppositional to official Islamic structures - the Spiritual Boards of Muslims (DUM), and on the other hand, to so-
called "traditional Islam", professed basically by senior generation supporting observance of national traditions.

At first local jamaats were headed predominantly by self-educated persons. While their level of knowledge corresponded with the latter of other mullahs, they were not engaged in bitter controversy. The youth jamaats leaders used that period for strengthening their units and left questions of ideology to the following generation of leaders. They appeared in the early 1990s when young men who received higher education mainly in the Middle East started to come back home. They gradually became regional leaders, formed a kind of Islamic network comprising different youth jamaats and headed them. The best known and most organized network is Kabardino-Balkarian jamaat. Other known networks are the ones in Dagestan, Chechnya, Karachayevo-Cherkessia and Stavropol region.

In organization forms and activities youth jamaats copy the latter in the Middle East and use experience of other modern Muslim organizations of this region. Thus high degree of consolidation, cell-kind structure and providing wide-range charity support inside the jamaats are characteristic for them.

Significant part of youth jamaats served as a basis of separatist movement in the North Caucasus, which changed its objectives from ethnic ones (war for freedom of the Chechen Republic) to religious (declaring the North Caucasian emirate as the first step to the global Islamic state).

By the middle and late 1990s very different leaders gradually replaced the previous ones. Instead of the first hardly literate heads having received some education in the region at the most in late Soviet - first post-Soviet years, there came young imams having got thorough Islamic education abroad, mainly in the Middle East. A vivid example is represented by Musa Mukhozev, Anzor Astemirov (the jamaat of Kabardino-Balkaria), Kurman Ismailov (the jamaat of Mineralnye Vody resort), etc. Moreover, young intellectuals are joining the Islamist movements with greater frequency.

From the late 1990s Islamic underground network in the North Caucasus was being reconstructed. This restructuring includes the distribution of forces across a maximally wide territory and the creation of a network structure, in which the nodes are formally autonomous, but are able to communicate with each other to coordinate their actions using various agents and electronic means of communication. In setting up this network, the fighters are focusing on
disgruntled local residents, especially those who have been abused by the local law enforcement agencies.

**Written propaganda of radicalism and its influence**

Written propaganda of radicalism is very different. The most traditional forms are leaflets, brochures, texts of sermons. As a rule, sermons were video-recorded and served one of the main means of distributing radical ideas among local residents in the 1990s. However by the end of the 1990s – early 2000s the Internet started to supersede the old means and appears to be the main source distributing radicalism nowadays. In the early 1990s when the Internet was not a mass phenomenon yet, publications in newspapers and magazines of the radical wing played a great role in this process.

Among other important texts we should mention lectures given by radical ideologists at different institutions and in insurgent training camps, acting in the Caucasus during the 1990s. Some records of these lectures, that we obtain now, struck with the scale of brainwashing applied to students. The lectures formed radical views, developed corresponding outlook using citations from the Koran and Sunnahs, and also examples from history and contemporary political situation in the world.

Another way of radicalism propaganda lay in the usage of apparently harmless textbooks of the Arabic language. Baghauddin Muhammad, one of the main radical Caucasian ideologists, used Wahhabi doctrines in the Arabic language textbook, written by him.

Hereby I am going to give some examples from these texts. The fundamental belief of the Wahhabis is the demand for the implementation of the principle of *tawkheed* (monotheism). In the notebooks of a Wahhabi student we read: "the majority of Muslims frequently repeating "there is no god except for Allah", are not sincere or do that by tradition or habit. Their doings are mainly imitation and following an example, and they mostly base on the following words of Allah: "We have found our fathers professing this faith and we follow in their footsteps". In other words the Wahhabis consider the majority of Muslims being not sincere adherents, their Islam is mainly "hereditary", and they believe themselves to be Muslims by habit only.

In the Caucasus Wahhabis' ideology is based on recognition of the Koran and authentic Sunnah as the only a source of dogma. In the same notebooks we read: "Muslims should accept sincerely the doctrine of Islam, given in the Sacred Koran - the Word of the Allah and Sunnah - statements of Prophet Muhammad". Here is the source of Wahhabis' appeal to clean Islam of
"unlawful innovations" (*bid’a*), widespread in the North Caucasus. They sharply oppose many customs and ceremonies of local Muslims; and the most irreconcilable the Wahhabis are towards local Sufis and the cult of saints. Reverence of shaikhs, *zikr*, visiting tombs of saint shaikhs (*ziyarat*) and many other practices of local “tarikatists” are considered by the Wahhabis as an attribute of their voluntary fallacy (dalal), polytheism (*shirk*) and infidelity (*khufir*).

The ideology of Wahhabism gives high priority to jihad, understood as an armed battle for faith against the enemies of Islam. Thus in the same source we read: “Islam is the religion of jihad. Islam claims that each Muslim should spare neither his possessions nor forces for the sake of the victory of Islam”. In 1999, announcing "restoration of the Islamic state of Dagestan", the Islamic Shurah of Dagestan directly specified, that "jihad in Dagestan is *farz-ayn* (i.e. a personal religious duty - A.Ya.) for each Muslim". Thus they consider, that nowadays jihad necessarily takes the form of the armed struggle against the enemies of Islam. One of the main Wahhabi ideologists Baghautdin Kebedov communicated this idea consistently and methodically. In the Arabic language textbook for the first year, written by Baghautdin, one could find a lot of interesting things in texts given for translation into Arabic. For example: "We are at war with gyaurs, and they constantly fight against us. Today they have forces and various weapons at their service, still we have *iman* (faith - A.Ya.), and therefore we shall undoubtedly win. We have Allah with us, but they only have the Satan". Furthermore: "I have understood the lesson well. We should be the soldiers of Islam. We should study at schools, colleges, and universities. We should protect our religion and native land. We should protect our Muslim brothers. Long live our state - the state of Islam!". And, at last: "Big and small states should unite and create a great Islamic power".

*A radicalist "portrait"*

By the present moment qualitative structure of radical Muslims has changed significantly. It is not a poor and uneducated person, deprived of work and other social benefits any more. Today the source of radical views could mostly be found in the youth, organized in rallied communities; with the help of the latter they could solve different problems. Young intellectuals and the youth in general serve as important sources of radical views. The youth reacts keenly to the problems of

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3 Ibid. Pp.97, 161.
society, impregnated by corruption, clan system, economic problems and disorders; it starts its way into a greater life and is disappointed in the ways and means offered by the society. As a rule intellectuals are very keen to problems of society as they reflect a lot on the matter.

Various problems of inter-ethnic relations, absence of civil society and public discussion, growth of nationalism both of ethnic Russians and minority groups also nurture widespread of radicalism. In the North Caucasus, and also among natives of this region such feelings are supported by sensation of being a sort of a "second rate" in relation to non-Muslim majority.

As a rule we could picture a modern Muslim radical as a young man engaged in some business: it can be trade, transportation of goods, etc. It is an active, energetic and sociable person, which is important as an ability to come in contact with somebody and convince him makes half a success of propaganda. At the same time young people are the main object of propaganda. It is difficult to name any special group, the most susceptible to it as radical ideology is reckoned to everybody without exception.

Methods of violence

Violence inevitably follows from ideology of radicalism. In the Caucasus religiously specified violence could be divided into two kinds according to its object:

1. Violence against non-Muslims, including actions against the state and its structures;
2. Violence against Muslims.

1. Radicalists see the modern secular state as “godless” thus worthy destruction. It should be replaced by a state based on the God's laws which could build a corresponding society. That leads to their participation in separatist jamaats and fighting law-enforcement bodies: the army, special services, police, etc. Secondly, carrying out terrorist actions, which are called to spread panic among peaceful population and also implant anti-Russian moods. Terrorist attacks are also rather often directed against conductors of the Russian cultural influence: ethnic Russians, teachers, representatives of state bodies, etc.

2. Charges of infidelity and breakaway from the religion gives radicals ample opportunities to proclaim a wide circle of persons as having broken with Islam. As a result, there is extensive use of force against ethnic Muslims who serve the Russian power ministries.
Policemen in Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, and the eastern parts of Stavropol Krai are among the chief targets for the terrorists.

*Radicalisation of «traditional Muslims»*

We should also note the last years' tendency, namely radicalisation processes among traditional Caucasian Muslims, especially Sufis. On one hand that is accompanied with their opposition to Wahhabis. On the other hand, Sufi leaders become more and more intolerant to secular institutions and other forms of Islam, not connected with Wahhabis. They believe Sufism to be the purest form of Islam, and that only form is allowed to exist in the North Caucasus; that position acquires big popularity. We could observe recent campaigns attempting to forbid circulation of works of such moderate Muslim leaders, as one of Moscow's mosques imam Shamil Alyautdinov. Radicalisation of Sufis is the source of alarm given the level of their communities' integrity into the North Caucasian society.

*Conclusions*

Thus, rather a short history of Islamic radicalism phenomenon in Caucasus has shown that its occurrence was caused by a deep crisis in the region and its society. Competent use of ample opportunities by destructive forces namely organizing Muslim youth into network jamaats, has turned a significant part of them against interests of the secular state in general and Russian authorities in the region in particular. To neutralize the protest mood the federal authorities try to conduct a change of elites in the republics and also show decisiveness fighting corruption and ineffectiveness of the local economy. Replacing the leaders of Dagestan, Adygeya and Kabardino-Balkariy, demonstrative actions against corrupt officials, development of tourism and other economic projects are well received by the local population. Given the deep crisis the region is facing, cosmetic measures are clearly insufficient. In the North Caucasus it is necessary to conduct systematic reforms, something that the federal government is having a hard time deciding to do at present moment. No less important is the development of a civil form of identity: Muslim youth react very poorly to the growth in Russia of an anti-Caucasus mood. The integration of the Muslims of the North Caucasus into the broader civil society is not moving forward with enough decisiveness and speed that is fraught with serious consequences.