FIRST PROJECT REPORT

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‘Radicalisation’ and Violence: the Russian Dimension

Principal Investigator Roland Dannreuther
Co-Investigators: Luke March and Matteo Fumagalli
Research Assistant: Ekaterina Braginskaia

1. Research Progress

The research progress made over the last 12 months include:

Fieldwork.

- RD and LM made a preparatory visit to Moscow in early September 2007 so as to make initial contacts with our proposed institutional collaborators – the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Political Technologies. Professor Vitaly Naumkin of the Oriental Institute agreed to this institutional affiliation; after some consideration, the Institute of Political Technologies, declined as they felt that this topic was not one where they had sufficient specialist expertise. As a consequence, we approached Dr Alexander Verkhovsky, Director of the SOVA Centre (a well-respected centre specialising in issues of political extremism and nationalism) and he agreed to an institutional collaboration. The Oriental institute selected two of the international fellows visiting Edinburgh and sent a representative to the Edinburgh seminar; the SOVA Centre sent a delegation, including Dr Verkhovsky, to Edinburgh in June for the seminar. We are intending to hold workshops with these institutional partners in Moscow in 2009.

- RD and LM made a second visit to Moscow in April where a series of interviews were conducted with academics and analysts of religion, Islam, nationalism and extremism.

- Plans are underway for a more extensive and extended fieldtrip in October and November which will include visit to Tatarstan, Nizhny Novgorod, Dagestan and Moscow. This trip will involve RD, LM, MF and EB, though not everyone going to the same place. MF will also make a fieldwork visit to Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to gauge Central Asian migrant experiences in Russia.

Working Papers and Publications

- Article published in latest volume of Survival (vol. 50, no. 4, August-September 2008) by RD and LM entitled ‘Moscow: Has Moscow Won?’. This paper argues that Putin’s policies towards Chechnya have finally brought a degree of stability to the troubled
republic, assesses the reasons for this, but cautions that the current situation remains unstable.

- **Working Paper** (and paper presented to BISA 2007 conference) entitled ‘Russia and Islam: Domestic Debates, Radicalisation and the ‘War on Terror’. This paper provided an initial exploratory overview of the key issues to be addressed in the project and included an analysis of Muslim communities in the three case-studies: Moscow, Tatarstan and Dagestan.

- **Papers for the seminar on ‘Russia and Islam’ in June (see below) to which members of the Edinburgh research team contributed the following:**
  - RD – Russian Discourses and Approaches to Political Islam and Radicalisation
  - LM – Moscow and Islam
  - MF – Impact of Central Asian Migration
  - EB – Russia, France and UK – Comparative Analysis of State-Muslim Relations

- **Proposal has been sent to the Routledge-BASEES series for publication of revised seminar papers for an edited book. Awaiting response but initial feelers have been positive.**

**Seminars and Conferences**

- **Paper given by RD and LM to BISA 2007 Conference**

- **Set up and managed seminar in Edinburgh on 19-20 June entitled ‘Russia and Islam: Institutions, Regions and Foreign Policy’:**
  - 20 participants in total. 13 papers, - 5 from participants from Russian Federation, 7 from UK participants
  - Paper-givers included the international fellows and representatives from the institutional collaborators, the Oriental Institute and the SOVA Centre.
  - Papers being revised and worked for an edited book publication.

- **Panels on project planned for BISA 2008 and ISA 2009**

- **Plans for workshops in Moscow in 2009 at Oriental Institute and/or SOVA Centre.**

- **Plans for user engagement through seminars at Chatham House, London and/or the International Institute for Strategic Studies.**

**International Fellows and Institutional Collaboration**

- **Three international fellows visited the School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh, for the month of June. These included:**
  - Professor Elaheh Koolae from the University of Teheran. She contributed a paper on ‘Russia and Iran’ for the Edinburgh seminar.
  - Dr Akhmet Yarlykapov, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences. He contributed a paper on ‘Types of Radicalisation of Muslims in the North Caucasus’.
  - Dr Azat Khurmatullin, Russian Islamic University, Kazan. He contributed a paper on ‘Islam and Political Evolutions in Tatarstan’.

- **In addition, representatives from our institutional collaborators – Dr Aleksandr Verkhovksy and Dr Galina Kozhevnikova from the SOVA Centre and Professor Dina Malysehva from the Oriental Institute – visited for one week during the period of the seminar**
• All of these international fellows and visitors used this time in Edinburgh and the UK to develop networks and to use material found in the university library.

Web-site

• Website for project currently being developed with aim to have it launched in early September.

2. Key Findings

The research project has had two main dimensions. The first deals with the analytical and theoretical frameworks within which the Russian state and Russian academics and analysts conceptualise the concepts of extremism, radicalism, moderation and the dynamics and meaning of radicalisation. The second part assesses the practical impact of state policies on Russian Muslim communities, focusing on the three case-studies of Moscow, Tatarstan and Dagestan and the extent to which radicalisation is evident, as well as contrary dynamics of de-radicalisation.

Discourses and Approaches

The main findings include:

• In terms of general approaches to political extremism, it is notable how the concerns of the 1990s on the threat of extreme nationalism and neo-fascism have declined in relative significance. This is in part driven by the Kremlin’s increasing instrumentalisation of Russian nationalism for purposes of state consolidation as is evident in the state-approved ideology of ‘sovereign democracy’. Although this concept includes formally a strong commitment to inter-ethnic harmony, it also supports the sense of Russia as a ‘unique civilisation’ and a distinctive sense of Russia’s national self-identity. Political extremism now is considered more broadly to cover all those groups which challenge this state-approved ideology, including for instance liberal opposition groups as well as nationalist and religious extremists.

• The legal framework which seeks to counter extremism and terrorism remains imprecise and set in general terms. The result is that law enforcement agencies have considerable latitude to interpret these statutes in an illiberal manner. This affects Russian Muslims who adopt perceived heterodox religious stances, even if these are non-violent and generally recognised to be moderate in a broader Muslim context.

• The concept of ‘radicalisation’ is not used to the same degree as in the UK. In relation to its Muslim communities, the meanings of it shift (as it does in the UK to an extent) between a narrow focus on those seeking to use religion as a justification for violence to those who adopt a form of Islam which involves a greater degree of religiosity and adopts a non-traditional salafist form.

• In terms of approaches to Islam, there is a deeply embedded construction of a dichotomy between a foreign, alien extremist Islam, which seeks to undermine the Russian state, and a moderate traditional and loyalist Russian Islam. This distinction has its roots in the Soviet period but has become more strongly embedded with the experience of the 1990s and the rise of Islamist political violence. This is most clearly evident in the highly problematic use of the term ‘Wahhabism’ to denote all Muslim groups who are deemed to be challenging the approved traditional Russian Islam.
• The state is increasingly relying on the state-approved Muslim faith leaders to determine what is orthodox and what is heterodox, which informs local and federal policies.

• The Russian Muslims are divided about the nature and content of the emerging Russian national identity. Some view the state in terms of adopting a Eurasianist and anti-Western identity, where Orthodoxy and Islam are given equal respect as co-founders of the Russian state; others are more sceptical and seek to provide a greater degree of autonomy for Russia’s Muslim communities from a state which is perceived to privilege the Christian roots of Russian national identity and where Muslims are treated as a potentially threatening presence.

Dynamics of Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation

From our study so far, we have identified the main sources of radicalisation among Russia’s Muslim communities in the following factors:

• The fragmentation of the Russian state in the 1990s which also led to the fragmentation of the principal Muslim institutions. This contributed to radical voices being articulated in the inter-Muslim and intra-Russian struggle for political, social and religious authority. The emergence of ethno-national conflicts, such as in Chechnya, exacerbated these radicalising trends.

• The activities of foreign Muslim organisations which supported salafist groups, particularly during the 1990s. In addition, the experience of many Russian Muslim while studying or travelling in the broader Muslim world.

• Corruption and poor economic conditions. This is particularly the case in the North Caucasus with official religious structures seen as supporting existing neopatrimonial structures of economic and political power.

• Inter-generational conflict. The younger generation often question their elders’ knowledge and understanding of Islam and argue that the traditional practices of Russian Islam as syncretistic and impure. For example, youth jamaats in the North Caucasus, which conform to salafist tenets, explicitly excludes the participation of older people.

• Repression and arbitrariness of law enforcement officials. As noted above, the tendency to treat all those failing to conform to the ‘official’ Islam as ‘Wahhabis’ increases alienation and the sense of injustice.

• The lack of resonance of modernist interpretations of Islam, building upon the Tatar Jadidist tradition. Failure of state-approved concepts of ‘Euro-Islam’ or of the ‘Russia Islam’ project.

• With the consolidation and centralisation of the state during the Putin administrations, the relative increased importance of religious as against ethno-national identities. This is seen most explicitly in Chechnya and the North Caucasus but is generalisable elsewhere as well.

• That the more the state promotes islamisation, instrumentalises religion, and provides support for national religious institutions, the more this radicalises Muslims and promotes a counter-dynamic of a search for more universalist conceptions of Islam.

• Alienation of Muslim migrant communities due to rising ethnic Russian migrantophobia. But, it is important to note that the experience of Central Asian migrants, which is one of our case-studies, varies considerably from region to region in Russia and alienation is felt greatest in the large cosmopolitan urban centres, like Moscow.
From our study so far, we have identified the main sources of de-radicalisation among Russia’s Muslim communities in the following factors:

- Improved economic situation which has given the state greater capacities for patronage and for dealing with some of the underlying roots of economic-driven frustrations.
- Ending of *laisser faire* approach of the Yeltsin period to greater state financial and other support for Muslim institutions, for Muslim religious education, for support of moderate Muslim groups. State policies of excluding foreign Muslim organisation from operating on Russian territory and stemming financial support from abroad.
- Relative success in stabilising Chechnya through the process of Chechenisation. Success in stemming terrorist campaigns throughout Russia of period from 2001-5. Replacement of some of the most corrupt leaders from republics in the North Caucasus.
- Consolidation of Russian national identity and sense of pride. This is certainly detectable among ethnic Russians but is also evident among Russian Muslim communities as well, particularly as this national reassertion adopts an anti-Western orientation and an activist Russian foreign policy towards the Muslim world.
- Consolidation and centralisation of the state leading to complementary process of internal perception of need for consolidation and greater cohesion of Russia’s Muslim communities. The more repressive political environment raises the costs for disunity and radical opposition to state-approved Muslim expression.

These findings, it should be noted, are generalisations drawn from our research to date. They need to be qualified in two ways in particular:

- It is not always easy to separate dynamics of radicalisation and de-radicalisation as they are sometimes co-constituted. For example, greater state financial support for approved religious institutions contributes to greater capacity-building and consolidation of Russia’s Muslim communities, but also potentially to alienation among Russian Muslims who are suspicious of state intentions. Also, it potentially increases fears of both orthodox and secularists that Muslims are being accorded special privileges.
- There is no one Russian Federation. There remain many differences between the different regions of Russia which is captured in our three case studies – the dynamics of radicalisation and deradicalisation differ significantly between Moscow, Tatarstan and Dagestan.

3. Recommendations/ Implications for the UK

There is clearly a very important need at the present time when bilateral relations between the UK and the Russian Federation are not at their warmest for the UK government, and broader British society, to understand the social and political dynamics within Russia; the factors being the deterioration of Russia’s relations with the UK and the West more generally; and to understand how this influences and is influenced by Russia’s sizeable Muslim minority.

Our research so far (and we are still developing and seeking to consolidate and test our findings) in relation specifically to Russia’s Muslim communities is that:

- These Russian Muslim communities are at a critical cross-roads. The dynamics of fragmentation, disunity, resort to political violence and radicalisation have been partially stemmed through a mix more effective state intervention and societal exhaustion. Mutual
suspicions have, as a consequence, declined but far from evaporated. Currently there is a greater awareness, both by the state and within the Muslim communities, of the internal weaknesses within the Muslim community, which is a legacy of the Soviet period and the influence of more dogmatic salafist doctrines. The key question is whether these weaknesses will be addressed from below, from within these Muslim communities, or will be imposed by the state from above through its choice of privileged intermediaries.

- There is a particular felt need among Russian Muslims for more capable Russian Muslim intellectuals who have a better understanding of Islamic law and theology and can articulate the religious interests of Russia’s Muslim communities. The UK government, through support of UK religio-educational bodies, can contribute to this through educational exchanges, developing networks of scholars working on Islamic issues, and providing access to western scholarship. This should be aimed to strengthen those scholars and representatives of Russia’s Muslim communities who can promote a more pluralistic understanding of Islam, which both challenges state attempts to control religious expression and those seeking to use Islam for violent political purposes.

In terms of understanding radicalisation, and how to design more effective counter-radicalisation policies, our research suggests that there are more similarities and parallels between the UK and Russia than would generally be expected. This challenges the assumption that Russia is somehow ‘unique’ either through its increasing divergence from liberal-democratic norms or its own sense of a ‘special destiny’.

- Areas of similarity in terms for dynamics of radicalisation include the inter-generational conflicts. In the UK this is primarily driven by alienation between 1st and 2nd/3rd generation Muslim migrants. This also applies in Russia with Muslim migrant communities, for example from Central Asia, particularly as younger generations feel estranged both from their indigenous cultures (through acculturation with the Russian language and culture) and from broader Russian society with its increased resentment of migrants and Muslim more generally. But this also applies to indigenous Muslims, such as Tatars who have always resided in Russia, as tensions arise between the poor knowledge of Islam of the older generation and the sense among the younger generation that this Muslim expression is archaic, syncretistic and too compliant to state interests.

- In terms of counter-radicalisation, there are similarities in the Russian and UK attempts to
  - Promote and strengthen state-Muslim intermediary institutions.
  - Support educational establishments which promote moderate Islam
  - Tread the fine line between state support which permits pluralism and freedom of religious expression but without imposing state-approved Islamic expression, which undermines rather than indirectly supporting more radical expressions, and which also assuages the concerns of the non-Muslim majority. There is a potential here for UK-Russian dialogue and exchange of views on the common challenges that this presents for both countries, while respecting their differing conditions. Broader intra-European comparisons (i.e. with France and Germany) can also usefully be incorporated here.

- In terms of counter-insurgency strategy, there is a need to recognise that Putin’s strategy towards Chechnya has had its successes, not least in bringing a degree of stability and a genuine process of reconstruction. Unfortunately, this strategy has also been founded upon an increasing sense of anti-Westernism, where the perceived UK support for the Chechen resistance and Akhmed Zakayev in particular, has undermined bilateral relations.
In relation to Chechnya, Russia has followed fairly classical counter-insurgency strategy which is not dissimilar to that pursued in Iraq and Afghanistan. That is in bolstering local actors to support Russian strategy, most notably through empowering the Kadyrov clan which has been part of the resistance; finding avenues for rebels/terrorist to relinquish the struggle and be incorporated back into society; engaging in a ‘hearts and minds’ campaign through provisions of substantial funds for reconstruction.

There are potential lessons to be learnt for the UK if bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation were to be re-instituted. For the UK, a sense of whether the Chechnya model is transportable to the rest of the North Caucasus, which remains deeply unstable and open to radicalising trends, would also help frame policymaking towards Russia.

Other possible recommendations and lessons:

- Understanding how the concept of ‘sovereign democracy’ fits into Russia’s state consolidation. The issue of the role played by the Muslim communities reflects the degree to which this concept is exclusionary (i.e. supporting an ethnic Russian and xenophobic nationalism) or is inclusionary (making Muslims co-equal but potentially on an anti-Western Eurasianist basis).
- Understanding the divisions and distinctions between Russia’s Muslim communities. Need to tailor policy towards the different regions.
- Anti-extremist and anti-terrorist laws. To develop some cooperation about such legal frameworks and their strengths and weaknesses.
- Understanding how Russia’s internal policy towards its Muslim is influencing Russian policies in the Middle East and the Muslim world.