Russia and Islam: State approaches, radicalisation and the ‘War on Terror’

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Abstract

Contesting the official rhetoric of inter-confessional harmony, some analysts now predict the inexorable spread of radical jihadism throughout Russia. This article challenges such bleak forecasts while providing a general overview of dynamics among Russia’s Muslim communities. While such pessimistic prognoses are exaggerated and ignore the varieties of Muslim expression in Russia, Putin’s policies of the securitisation of the Islamic threat in pursuit of the ‘war on terror’, his recentralisation of power, and the associated search for a new more assertive post-Soviet Russian identity, have all had potentially negative impacts on Russia’s Muslims. This is illustrated by three case-studies – Dagestan, Tatarstan and Moscow.

Is Russia facing an internal Islamist threat? This is the bleak assessment of a number of scholars. For example, Mikhail Delyagin (2005; see also Zhuravlev et. al. 2004) is one of a number of Russian analysts who fear that the combined impact of Muslim immigration, the demographic decline of ethnic Russians, and the ideological power of Islamic fundamentalism, means that Russia faces the prospect of an ‘Orange-Green’ revolution. Some Western analysts, most notably Gordon Hahn (2007; 2008; see also Kramer 2005, Dunlop and Menon 2006) argue similarly that the virus of Islamist radicalism, far from being expurgated in Chechnya as the Putin administration claims, is now spreading from Chechnya into the rest of the North Caucasus and increasingly other parts of Russia, extending as far as the Volga region and Moscow. As Hahn argues prophetically (2007: 1), ‘Russia is experiencing the beginning of an Islamist jihad’.

This article seeks to provide an more objective assessment of the multiple challenges facing Russia’s Muslim communities. Whereas most recent discussions of Russian radical Islam focus predominately on the North Caucasus, with little consideration of state policy outside counter-terrorism operations, we focus on the relatively understudied impact of state policies on Islamic radicalisation through three case-studies – Moscow, Tatarstan and Dagestan. Hahn (2007) is the partial exception, but he focusses exclusively on state centralisation (Putin’s ‘anti-federative counter-revolution’) and sees it as universally negative in impact. Our aim is to present a more nuanced and complex picture whicheschews both the complacency of the official discourse of societal harmony and the alarmist fears of an imminent Islamist jihad while providing a general overview of dynamics among Russia’s Muslim communities. We argue that Russia’s ‘Islamic threat’ is to date, a relatively localised, although growing phenomenon. We agree that federal centralisation is a strong driver of radicalisation, but also that schizophrenic state discourses, public attitudes, and the preferences of the local elites need to be considered. Moreover, state policies are not

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universally negative, but are contradictory: on one hand there is a marked effort at co-optation and inclusion of ‘official’ Islam. On the other hand Putin’s policies of the securitisation of the Islamic threat in pursuit of the ‘war on terror’, his recentralisation of power, and the associated search for a new more assertive post-Soviet Russian identity, have all had potentially negative impacts and radicalising effects on Russia’s Muslims. Such factors make the picture more diverse, at times helping provoke Islamist radicalisation, at times, although admittedly more rarely, restraining it.

The fundamental problem with the idea of an ‘Islamic threat’ (apart from possible cultural-religious prejudice) is that it is not possible to talk of Russian Muslims in the abstract or as one undifferentiated umma. Russia’s Muslim communities have differing historical legacies, geographical locations and generally differing relations to the Russian state. An article of this length cannot hope fully to encapsulate this complexity. However, we aim to analyse the main trends in Russia’s Muslim communities through three very different case-studies chosen to highlight very differing conditions and contexts. The first case is that of Moscow where Muslims are a sizeable minority, but the confluence of increasing immigration and rising state-sponsored nationalist sentiment potentially hinders prospects of stability and inter-confessional coexistence. The second case-study, Tatarstan, illustrates an area often taken, especially by the Russian authorities, as the exemplar of indigenous Russian Islamic moderation and tolerance. But, we examine how tensions, particularly in relation to Moscow’s drive for centralisation, have led to a struggle for the appropriate locus and interpretation of ‘official’ moderate Russian Islam, with competing ambitions for a Tatar-based ‘Euro-Islam’ and a more all-encompassing and centre-dominated ‘Russian Islam’. We also find evidence that growing Tatar disillusionment with the elite struggle to appropriate an ‘official’ Islam increases the attraction of more unofficial and radical Islams. The final case study is the republic of Dagestan, as an illustration of the wider problems of the North Caucasus, where it is not now Chechnya, but Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachai-Cherkessia that are the main threats to regional stability. Dagestan is particularly interesting because it possesses superficial similarities to Chechnya, but a divergent trajectory, avoiding secession and preserving internal stability. Nevertheless, the recent stabilisation of Chechnya appears to be contributing to growing destabilisation and radicalisation in Dagestan and across the North Caucasus.

Before considering our case-studies in greater detail, we first analyse the broader policy context for the increased emphasis on national security (the ‘securitisation’ of a number of spheres of domestic political life in Russia), showing how, combined with an ambivalent attitude to political Islam, securitisation has contributed to processes – such as widening repression of any perceived deviance or opposition, the centralisation of power and rising nationalism – which have in various ways contributed to a number of the key challenges facing Russia’s contemporary Muslim communities.
Putin’s Russia: National Security, Centralisation and Nationalism

At the most fundamental level, Russian perceptions and attitudes towards Islam reflect a barely disguised schizophrenia. On one hand, Islam is recognised as ‘an inseparable, fully-fledged, and active part of the multiethnic and multidenominational nation of Russia,’ having co-existed with Russian Orthodoxy over many centuries, most notably in the Volga region. Thus the Russian government consistently supports Russian Islam, and works with official Muslim institutions on the regional and federal levels. As the Russian orientalist Vitaly Naumkin notes (2006: 308), the ‘Russian umma is an integral part of the great Russian nation, one of the bulwarks of strengthening Russian statehood’. Former President Putin even confirmed in Malaysia in 2003 that Russia considered itself to be a ‘Muslim power’, which in recognition of this, joined the Organisation of Islamic Conference with observer status. Russian foreign policy has also been utilised to support this pro-Islamic orientation, particularly under Putin with the growing distancing from the West, Russian opposition to the war in Iraq, and the support to Iran and Hamas in Palestine.

On the other hand, considerably less flattering images of Islam as religion linked to extremism and terrorism are prevalent. While such images are clearly not unique to Russia, Russian fears of radical Islam have arguably deeper roots than those found in other European countries. The memories of the Western-supported Afghan mujaheddin against Soviet forces in the 1980s remain vivid and present a continuing narrative of islamic-inspired violence, from the civil war in Tajikistan in the early 1990s to the increasingly radicalised and islamised resistance in Chechnya in the late 1990s. Putin, as is well-known, only accentuated the role of the ‘Islamic terrorist threat’ in domestic discourse. However, he consistently sought to emphasise that the enemy of Russia was ‘foreign’ and ‘imported’ Islam (a ‘terrorist international’ in his own words) and not the moderate Islam as traditionally practised in Russia (e.g. Polyakov and Kizriev 2006). However, such distinctions are often lost in popular discourse. As Alexei Malashenko, one of Russia’s leading experts on political Islam notes (2006: 29), the ‘great majority of Russians judge Islam by the actions of religious extremists; by conflicts with the involvement of Muslims; by radical statements by Muslim politicians and spiritual leaders; and by an influx of immigrants’.

In the aftermath of 9/11, governmental tendencies towards increased emphasis on national security are far from unique to Russia. However, even before 9/11, Russian officials justified a ‘securitization’ of domestic policy, articulating an existential security threat that ‘succeeds in justifying the adoption of measures outside the formal norms and procedures of politics’ (e.g Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998; cf. Bacon, Renz and Cooper 2006). For Russians, the ‘war on terror’ was not a distant conflict but one fought directly on their territory, in the lawless North Caucasus and which had also spread across Russia, including Moscow, through increasingly bloody acts of terrorist revenge. In this context, an emphasis on anti-terrorist policies and the heightening of security threats was almost inevitable (Snetkov, 2007).

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2 Vladimir Putin, as quoted on website of Embassy of Russian Federation to Indonesia, [http://www.indonesia.mid.ru/aktiv/01_e.html](http://www.indonesia.mid.ru/aktiv/01_e.html), accessed 15 July 2008.
However, the process by which officials with a security background (the so-called siloviki) have grown in influence within the Putin regime highlights a darker side of securitization (cf. Bremmer and Charap 2006). With these statist-minded officials becoming more dominant, the definitions of friend and enemy, between moderate and ‘extremist’ or ‘terrorist’ have become increasingly less well-defined. In general, Russian legal definitions of ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’ are notoriously ambiguous and open to administrative abuse, but they have become increasingly more so as state security concerns have impacted on their definition. Notably, the definition of terrorism in Russian’s 2006 law against terrorism (unlike the UK Terrorism Act for example) excludes mention of acts conducted for a political or ideological goal and focuses on an ‘ideology of violence’. This is a vague and catch-all formulation which potentially blurs the distinction between protesters, extremists and terrorists, while granting government agencies extremely broad powers in fighting terror (Federaln’yi zakon 2006). The continually revised Russian laws on extremism have also tended to conflate the definitions ‘extremist’ and ‘terrorist’, and to define this extremism in very broad terms; for example extremist actions included in the revised 2006 anti-extremism law include ‘humiliating national dignity’ and ‘public approval of terrorism and other terrorist activity’, while whole organizations are liable to banning if their sub-components violate these provisions (articles 7/9). Whilst this law was moderated somewhat in its 2007 version, it still fails to define the general characteristics of extremism, but rather lists instances of extremism defined very broadly and changed often - for example, claims of religious supremacy (sentiments shared by many if not most religious believers) are seen as ‘extremist’.

Furthermore, how security threats have been publicly defined has been problematic. In line with the outburst by deputy head of the presidential administration Vladislav Surkov that Russia’s ‘pseudoliberals’ and ‘Nazis’ together represent a ‘fifth column’ of the so-called ‘terrorist international’, ‘extremists’ have de facto often been defined as all (allegedly foreign-sponsored) ‘traitors’ questioning the role of the regime rather than those with genuinely extremist views. While liberals are a much-favoured target of such depictions of foreign-supported treachery, ordinary Muslims who often are only expressing a higher degree of religiosity or who are perceived to be in opposition to local elites find themselves designated as ‘extremists’ and ‘Wahhabis’. There is a general Russian tendency to designate all variants of non-official Islam as ‘Wahhabism’, however theologically inaccurate in practice. In reality, there are many variants of ‘Wahhabism’ in the North Caucasus, though the common strands are the desire to return to a more pure Islam (the return to the time of the Prophet and the four righteously-guided Caliphs), the eradication of bid’u (innovations, particularly in religious practice), and a call for greater socio-political morality. As in other parts of the Muslim world, there are quietest and apolitical alongside radical and jihadist groups among salafist militants. State policy to eliminate ‘Wahhabism’ tends to ignore these differences, and to advocate repression of any non-official expression of Islam as ‘extremists’, often with counterproductive effects. This dynamic is particularly evident in Dagestan, as

4 Authors’ interview with Alexander Verkhovsky, head of Sova Center, Moscow, 14 April 2008.
5 Komsomol’skaya Pravda, 29 September 2004, p. 4.
discussed below. Another increasingly common illustration of this growing intolerance of any non-officially sanctioned Islamic expression is seen in the banning of Islamic literature. For example, anti-extremism legislation has not only led to the banning of the *Fundamentals of Tawhid*, by Abd Al-Wahhab, the founder of the state ideology of Saudi Arabia, but also the Russian translations of fourteen books by Sa’id Nursi, a Turkish philosopher and theologian. As Alexander Verkhovsky, a commentator on Russian extremism, notes, it appears odd, if not futile, to ban both an 18th century religious treatise, and books by a recognised moderate Muslim.  

The dynamic of securitization, as well as potentially increasing levels of intolerance, is also associated with increased state powers and prerogatives. Centralising measures have often been justified on an anti-terrorist or anti-extremist basis. In Russia, the most conspicuous instance was in the aftermath to the Beslan School atrocity in September 2004, when the danger presented to the state by the islamist ‘enemy at the gate’ was used as the justification for abolishing gubernatorial elections in all of Russia’s 89 regions and reforming the electoral system to remove its local constituency component (Lynch, 2005). This logic was unclear, but by reducing local corruption and increasing local responsiveness to the centre, the Kremlin’s purported intention was to increase central control of its anti-terrorist efforts. Nevertheless, as we will illustrate in all our case studies, any efficacy of centralisation in the ‘war on terrorism’ is counter-balanced by a sense of a loss of local power which, particularly for Muslim-dominated regions seeking autonomy from Moscow, provides potential fertile ground for societal and elite radicalisation. Administrative measures combined with a much reduced space for legitimate political contestation and dissent repress the manifestations of radicalisation but do not effectively address their root causes (and may even exacerbate them).

A further impetus towards authoritarian centralisation, which has been supported by the dynamic of securitization, has been the increase in state promotion of Russian nationalism. Russia’s dramatic economic turnaround since 2000 (average per capita income has grown four-fold) and increasing political stability has allowed Russia to engage more directly with the search for an agreed national identity to fill the vacuum left by Marxism-Leninism. This is, in one sense, probably a necessary stage of Russia’s struggle to evolve from a multinational empire in which Russians made up 51.4 percent of the total (1989 census) to a more ethnically Russian (but still multicultural) state in which Russians represent a majority of 79.8 percent (2002 census). However, as with any nationalist self-assertion based on an ethnic core, this can have potentially inflammatory consequences if mishandled. This is particularly so in the context of widespread nostalgia for the Soviet past, the demographic decline of ethnic Russians and the increasing migration of Muslims from Russia’s impoverished North Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Central Asia to Russia’s richer cities, principally Moscow and St Petersburg. The case study below on Moscow explores these dynamics and their consequences in fuller detail.

The methods by which Putin’s administration has directed and/or channelled nationalist sentiments are far from clear-cut, but in general it can be argued that there has been an attempt to ride the ‘nationalist tiger’, utilising it to support the key objective of the

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7 For detailed discussion see the volume *Russia Profile*, 4:7, August-September 2007.
strengthening of the state. But this involves both accepting that the more immediate manifestations of xenophobia might be unavoidable, and ensuring that freedom of nationalist expression does not cause longer-term damage to inter-ethnic or inter-confessional relations, while. For instance, Kremlin-loyalist political parties such as the Liberal Democratic Party and Just Russia (earlier Motherland) have made great play of their Russian ‘patriotism’ and proposed curbs on immigration. There has been an increase in jingoistic symbolism (for example the planting of the Russian flag on the Arctic seabed in 2007) and a relative lack of sensitivity towards ethnic minorities. Unlike Yeltsin, Putin has at times spoken not of ‘civic Russian (rossiiskii) patriotism’ but ‘ethnic Russian’ (russkii) patriotism. But, the officially sanctioned concept of ‘sovereign democracy’, as outlined by Surkov in 2006, is not explicitly nationalistic, claims to be multi-national and indeed says relatively little about inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations (Suverenitet 2006; Suverennaya demokratiya 2007; Pro suverennuyu demokratiyu 2007). The Putin administration has been keen to maintain the official line that Russia’s search for a new guiding national ideology preserves the Russian state’s traditional multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature and that its principal purpose is to consolidate the state against key threats, above all against ‘international terrorism’.

The problem, therefore, with the Russian state’s search for a new national ideology is not that it is explicitly ethnocentric or narrowly nationalistic, but that it seeks to encourage an ‘enlightened’ national self-assertion without supporting adequate safeguards against ‘non-enlightened’ self-assertion, such as a culture of tolerance or political liberalism. Simultaneously, it legitimates the Kremlin’s ‘discourse of danger’, with Russia as a ‘besieged fortress’ prone to external existential security threats (cf. Campbell, 1992). The by-products of such national(ist) reassertion are an increase in isolationist and chauvinistic sentiments in Russian society at large. Analysts have noticed a significant increase in support for the slogan ‘Russia for the Russians’, and an increase in Caucasophobia and Islamophobia, encouraged by stereotypical images of the Caucasus and radicalized Islam in the media and popular culture (e.g. Polikanov 2007; Gudkov 2006; Malashenko, 2006). Indeed ‘migrantophobia’ has become Russians’ biggest phobia: moreover, the migrant is usually conceived as a Caucasian. In the 1990s there was nothing intrinsically anti-Islamic in Russian nationalism. On the contrary, the Eurasianist form of Russian nationalism (propagated by such establishment figures as the publicist and TV commentator Aleksandr Dugin) saw Islam as an ally in the ‘clash of civilizations’ with the West (Malashenko 1998). Even more extreme forms of nationalism focused far more on Jews and the West as the main threat (Verkhovsky 2004). This has clearly begun to change: the ‘Movement against Illegal Immigration’ rose to national prominence by portraying a restaurant brawl between local gangs at Kondapoga in Karelia in September 2006 as an ethnic Russian-Chechen clash. In August 2007, an ostensibly authentic video showed Russian nationalists beheading two Caucasians in imitation of radical jihadists. Clearly, it is difficult to trace a direct link between state ‘official’ nationalism and its more gutter representations, particularly as state officials have repeatedly spoken against extreme manifestations of nationalism. However, analysts have repeatedly criticized Russia’s law-enforcement and judicial bodies for their tardiness and selectiveness in dealing with racially-motivated crimes, in particular their propensity to regard them as mere ‘hooliganism’, a criminal offence which is far easier to prove.  

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8 Authors’ interview with Emil’ Pain, director of the Center of Ethno-Political and Regional Research. Moscow, 15 April 2008.
Another major consequence of the debate over Russian identity is a reassertion of Russian Orthodox identity and potentially problematic consequences for Russian inter-confessional relationships. Although Russia’s 1997 religion law names Islam as one of four quasi-official religions, Orthodox Christianity is the undoubted ‘first among equals’ culturally and politically speaking: the 1997 law recognizes its ‘special role in the history of Russia and the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture’ (Federal’yi zakon 2005). Russia’s politicians have tended to reinforce this dominance. While legislation prohibits explicitly religious and regionally-based party organisations and therefore prevents the political mobilisation of both Islamic and Christian Democratic parties, politicians across the political spectrum have regularly appealed to Orthodoxy to demonstrate their patriotism to the ethnic Russian majority, most notably the communist leader Gennadii Zyuganov who has declared that ‘Jesus Christ was the first communist’. In the run-up to the 2007 election, Putin was merely echoing the 1997 law when he argued that:

‘Orthodoxy has always had a special role in shaping our statehood, our culture, our morals.‘

Despite this official favouritism towards Orthodoxy, it is not regarded as resulting in systematic discrimination against Russia’s other religions, although sporadic problems (e.g. with local elite opposition to building new mosques) have been noted (Krasikov 2004). However, while the Putin administration ostentatiously courted Russia’s Muslims, the Orthodox Church became emboldened by the prevailing nationalist discourse to concretize its role as ‘first among equals’ even against the wishes of the Kremlin (Knox 2005). For instance, the Church hierarchy has actively propagated the ‘Foundations of Orthodox Culture’ course as a compulsory weekly subject for all state school grades, and has succeeded in doing so in a number of Russian regions. However, this met firm opposition from intellectual circles and Russia’s Muslim hierarchy, some of whom opposed the alleged ‘Christianisation of our children’ and ‘clericalization’ of education and proposed a parallel ‘Foundations of Islamic culture’ course. This opposition played to the Kremlin’s near-paranoia about national unity and by 2007 the Kremlin had begun to oppose the Orthodox Church’s approach and to insist on a (yet to be adopted) ‘Foundations of World Religions’ course, although Russian nationalist indignation at this measure indicated that debate was far from over.

Clearly Russia’s striving to define a new identity in the context of heightened national security has complex and contradictory consequences. The Kremlin’s desires for securitisation, centralisation, and a reassertion of ethnic Russian identity conflict with its wish to promote a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state within which Muslims are both moderate(d) and integrated. Whilst Russia’s new president Dmitrii Medvedev projects a more ‘liberal’ image than Putin and indeed disapproves of concepts like ‘sovereign

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democracy’, it is an open question whether he will be willing or able to resolve the tensions that are visible throughout our case studies. It is to these that we turn next.

**Moscow: Muslims and the Limits of Multiculturalism**

Russia’s alleged ‘Islamic threat’ is not confined however just to the North Caucasus or even the Volga region. Malashenko identifies ‘Wahhabi’ activity ‘from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok and from Murmansk to Orenburg’, meaning this radicalisation has allegedly extended into all parts of Russia. However, the extent of this radicalisation is extremely difficult to judge, because of the paucity of reliable statistics. Moreover given analysts’ tendency to conflate all forms of non-official Islam with ‘Wahhabism’ caution is required. Nevertheless, there are still dynamics which are changing the face of a number of Russian cities. Moscow is one of the key examples.

Moscow has always had a Muslim population, with Tatars in particular being resident in the capital since the time of the Golden Horde in the middle ages. According to the 2002 Russian census, Tatars remain the second highest minority ethnic group (after Ukrainians) with 1.6 percent of the approximately 10 million population. This group is relatively stable according to official statistics: the proportion of Tatars fell slightly (from 1.8 percent in 1989), and only 10 percent of the Tatar population has migrated to Moscow since 1986. Nevertheless, unofficial estimates put them at 800,000 (8 percent) (Ashirov 2006). Indeed, since the collapse of the USSR, Moscow’s population has changed rapidly, caused above all by the demographic decline of ethnic Russians and the influx of migrants attracted by the relative affluence of the capital or using it as a transit route to Europe. Azeris have become the second biggest Muslim ethnic group in Moscow, with 0.9 percent of the population, a four-fold increase since 1989, and the number of ethnic Russians has fallen from 89.7 to 84.8 percent over the same period. There are no exact figures on the number of foreigners either in Russia or Moscow: a large number of immigrants are illegals, deterred by strict residency and exit visa requirements from registering their status (Yudina 2005). Although officials can talk of 10 million migrants nationally, a more accurate figure may be 4-5 million, of which over half may reside in the Moscow region (Ivakhniouk 2004). There are a large number of Muslims among migrants, especially from ex-Soviet countries (such as Tajikistan), the Caucasus (especially Azerbaijan and Chechnya), and among the many transit migrants from East Asia and Africa. Such an influx explains why, according to some estimates, the Muslim population of Moscow may reach 2 million in over 40 separate communities, making it continental Europe’s most Islamic city, although it is acknowledged that the number of truly ‘religious’ Muslims is likely to be far lower than the number of ‘ethnic’ (i.e non-practising) Muslims, perhaps numbering no more than 400,000 (Silant’ev, 2008).

Immigration, and Moscow’s reaction to it, has several implications. First, is the potential for ghettoisation. Traditionally, there have been no identifiably ‘Muslim’ areas in Moscow, and allegedly, town planners have explicitly sought to avoid troublesome ghettos of

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14 Ibid.
poorly-integrated immigrants like the banlieues of Paris. However, the influx of economic migrants has begun to change this: for instance Azeris have congregated in the north-east market district of Izmailovo. In late 2007 North and South Butovo became the first ‘Islamic quarters’ to open specifically Islamic shops (e.g for Halal meat) and to proposed Islamic healthcare and cultural centres (Kots 2007). Around 60,000 Muslims live in Butovo (one third of the region’s population) although the Butovo Islamic community (Milost’) which collects money for building a mosque has no more than 100 regular members. Muscovites’ reaction to this have tended towards the alarmist, expressing serious fears of Islamic ‘separatism’, ‘self-isolationism’ and indicating a significant intolerance of multiculturalism: Moscow comics undoubtedly tapped some popular fears when they joked that ‘southern Butovo had seceded from the Russian federation.’

Igor’ Beloborodov, director of the Institute of Demographic Studies, argues that when Muslim populations of a Moscow district constitute more than 10-12 percent, this gives rise to demographic fears and the rise in xenophobic feelings among the ethnic Russian population (Kots 2007). This comes perilously close to arguing that Muslims themselves are responsible for xenophobia – indeed he labels Butovo’s practices as ‘demagogy’.

The ‘official’ reaction might be judged from interviews published on the website of Project Russia (a nationalistic campaign associated with the pro-Putin United Russia party). It is strongly assimilationist. Andrei Tatarinov, a leader of United Russia’s youth wing ‘Young Guard’ declared: ‘If they [Muslims] don’t want to assimilate and live in our city like everyone does, then why are they here at all?’ The Izvestiya correspondent Dmitrii Sokolov-Mitrich expressed similar themes, seeing ghettos as the harbingers of the social problems of New York and Berlin. Speaking firmly in favour of a common culture, he indicated that Butovo could cause a domino effect whereby each cultural and religious group had its own enclave, a practice which if carried out by ethnic Russians would be judged ‘extremist’.

Furthermore, migration has had a noticeable socio-economic impact, fuelling popular concerns, especially regarding crime and job security. In this, the Moscow case parallels the securitisation of migration elsewhere, where migration, crime and terrorism are conflated as a security issue (Bigo 2002). Indeed, in 2001 the Russian security council declared that the scale of illegal immigration made it a pressing national security threat (Ivakhniouk 2004, p. 37). Yudina notes (2005, p. 594) that Moscow’s immigrant community is regarded as contributing to an increase in crime. However, given the illegal status of many immigrants and that problems with registration mean that they live in a semi-legal ‘grey’ zone, this is not surprising, whilst widely-reported prejudice against ‘blacks’ among Moscow’s militia may also contribute. Similarly, the influx of labour migrants into an emerging but still unstable Russian economy can (not altogether unjustifiably) be seen as having negative consequences: ‘illegal migrants disorganise a national labor market that is on the path to market economy; they increase illegal employment “niches” and, consequently, impede the transition process’ (Ivakhniouk, 2004, p. 41). Nevertheless, these negative consequences are offset by migrants’

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15 Malashenko, ‘The situation inside Russia.’
role in resolving labour shortages in a rapidly developing economy, particularly given Russia’s demographic decline.

Immigration has certainly made ‘migrantophobia’ a live political issue in Moscow and Russia more widely. Only 1.3 percent of Muscovites polled by Yudina (2005, p. 597) in 2005 were positively inclined towards migrants! In general, Russians ‘consider immigration more a threat than an opportunity’. The key reasons for such an overwhelmingly negative attitude include a fear of economic competition, especially as regards immigrants’ low wage demands, and a fear of cultural differences – immigrants bring their own rituals and conduct and take little account of Russians’ own. The Russian press has tended further to fuel widespread stereotypical views that migrants (especially from Central Asia) take over the service industries (e.g. taxis, fruit and vegetable markets), increase corruption and establish their own local mafias (Golubchikov and Mnatsakanian 2005, pp. 348-9). Views of immigrants as innately disposed to criminality have tended to be overblown also. For example, notwithstanding his support for assimilation noted above, Sokolov-Mitrich (2007) has written an extremely alarmist representation of crime situation in Russia, listing a succession of violent crimes committed by non-Russians. The book claims to highlight the ‘dark side of xenophobia’, but its key claim is insidious: the list of crimes presented makes it crystal clear to every reader that it is ethnic minorities who are really responsible for xenophobia – as their alleged criminality is provocative.

The Moscow city authorities have themselves taken increasingly strict measures against immigrants, from penalising landlords who harbour illegal immigrants to implementing the federal decision to forbid foreign traders (who are predominately from the Caucasus) from operating in markets or on the streets from 1 April 2007. Public opinion polls show that these measures are very popular. For instance, of 1600 people polled at the end of April 2007, 75 per cent believed that the reduction of foreigners on the markets was a positive thing, although these attitudes calmed somewhat when promised improvements in produce and services did not materialise.

Furthermore, migrantophobia has fuelled and in turn been fuelled by increasing Russian nationalism, that has used Moscow as its main national stage. In the Moscow legislative elections of 2005, the populist ‘Motherland’ bloc caused a scandal with its election broadcast showing stereotypical Caucasian immigrants alongside the slogan ‘Let’s cleanse Moscow of rubbish.’ In 2005, Moscow became the scene of an annual national anti-immigrant nationalist ‘Russian March’ on the National Unity Day holiday on 7 November organised by the Movement Against Illegal Immigration. There have been numerous violent assaults on Muslims at markets and in mosques, and by 2006 fully 90 percent of Muscovites believed that ethnic clashes were possible in the capital. Notably, the local government response has been as ambiguous in its effects as the national one. Although the ‘Motherland’ party was eventually removed from the December 2005 elections by a Moscow court on the

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grounds of inciting race hatred, this decision was selective and politically motivated, since it was instigated by, and did not affect the pro-Kremlin nationalist Liberal Democratic Party, which has used similarly inflammatory rhetoric on many occasions.

Moreover, whilst campaigns against ‘illegal’ immigrants have caused much distress to the Muslim community, it is arguably the lack of positive policies from the authorities that cause most long-term problems. On the face of it, Moscow is a model of interethnic and inter-confessional calm. Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov has a close relationship with the Russia’s chief Mufti Ravil’ Gainutdin, and in recent years he has made ostentatious attempts to court Muslims, for example by attending services to mark Eid al-Adha, the Muslim feast of sacrifice. Nevertheless, one reason for the emergence of ghettoisation is not abstract ‘immigration’ per se, but the lack of sufficient cultural, educational and religious representation for Muslims in the capital. Russian authorities have allegedly blocked efforts to open new Muslim institutions and as a result people move into areas (like Butovo) where these institutions/communities already exist (Kots 2007). Generally, the prevailing obstacle is the bureaucracy involved in opening and registering new Muslim religious/cultural organisations and building Mosques and other praying facilities. However, ethnic, religious or cultural discrimination apparently compounds bureaucratism as Moscow’s Islamic cultural and religious institutions seem to suffer disproportionately. According to co-chair of the Council of Muftis Nafigulla Ashirov (2006), although a good dialogue exists with Moscow’s high-ranking officials, the problems start lower down. For example, a small Muslim prayer room was opened in Moscow Domodedovo airport in 2002, but was soon closed and replaced by another administrative room, whereas the Orthodox room remained fully functional. By 2006 there were only four mosques with five under construction and sixteen projected, compared with seven synagogues and over 600 Orthodox churches. Moreover, there is only one school the whole of Moscow that teaches the Tatar language.

Despite undoubted increased interethnic tensions in Moscow, the impact of these social attitudes and policies is unclear. On one hand, ‘migrantophobia’, whilst directed at Muslims especially, is not identical to Islamophobia. Indeed, social stereotypes of the migrant threat relate mainly to economic criminality and cultural alien-ness rather than religiosity and terrorist potential. For example, whilst as the most visible and quickly growing migrant group, Azeris are the most disliked, they are rarely associated with Islam in the popular mind. Rather, popular concerns focus on alleged threats to the economy, law and order and even health (through the alleged poor quality goods that Azeris sell (Peshkova 2004). Moreover, the two million Muslims in Moscow can barely be construed as an ‘Islamic threat’, since this is hardly a homogenous community, but instead is divided both ethnically and by the madhhab professed. Moreover, the Tatars are socially well-off and well-integrated, with many speaking Russian as native language: those who have only migrated since 1986 report high levels of life satisfaction and have predominately specialist employment (Dobrynina 2006). Azeri migrants are far less integrated: as a whole they are less educated (only thirteen percent of post-1986 migrants have higher education) and more religious than the Tatars, many seek to preserve ‘their’ traditions and not to integrate into Moscow life (for instance by aspiring to return home and maintaining Azerbaijani citizenship), although some 45 percent of long-term residents consider that they must abide by Russian customs and traditions. This is evidence of Gorenburg’s view (2006, p. 339) that

there are tensions between urbanised Muslims and (predominately rural) Muslims who arrive in Moscow later - recent migrants are more keen to ‘maintain traditional cultural and religious values [and are] likely to turn to radical Islam’.

Two further factors militate against radicalisation; one is the ‘illegal’ status of many migrants, which dictates an imperative to maintain a low profile and not draw the state’s attention to themselves. More significantly, Moscow’s Muslims are keen to show that ‘our Islam is moderate, we are normal people, the same as everyone else’ and that they are not creating cultural or religious enclaves. They support the incumbent authorities through such movements as ‘Muslims in support of President Putin’ in order to further their initiatives and set up state-approved institutions such as the Moscow Islamic University, halal centres, medical centres and so on (Orlova 2007).

However, latent radicalisation potential must be acknowledged; widespread migrantophobia victimises Muslims disproportionately and makes no distinctions between radical and moderate Muslims. State inaction and/or discrimination towards Muslims increases their tendencies towards diversification and ghettoisation, as a growing need to establish, preserve and promote their own way of life is felt. The presence of radical Islamist jamaats in Moscow has long been acknowledged, although there is no indication that they are politically active, whilst several mosques are allegedly abuzz with radical rhetoric (Abdullaev 2001; Gritchin 2006). As yet, there is little evidence that mainstream Muslim groups in the capital are engaging in a radical critique of the authorities; but as we have seen above, nor is the authorities’ view of inter-ethnic harmony fully substantiated. Moreover, the spate of terrorist acts in the capital from September 1999 until 2005 (usually attributed by the authorities to North Caucasian ‘wahhabis’) indicate that the capital has been a prime arena for terrorist action, if not yet its source.

Tatarstan – the Battle for ‘Moderate’ Islam

The Republic of Tatarstan is regularly portrayed as the home of Muslim moderation and of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony. Since it is home to over 5 million Muslims it is also a healthy antidote to the tendency among many Western analysts to view Islam in Russia as coterminous with the conflicts in the North Caucasus and to posit an essentialist Russian Orthodox-Muslim confrontation. As such, it provides a good illustration of less negative Russian perceptions that see Islam as being a constitutive part of Russian history and the Russian state. This is not just an official discourse but has substance on the ground as well, as the long-term historical integration of Tatar Muslims with Russian society has resulted in there being considerably less ethnic Russian animosity towards Tatars as compared to most other Muslim groups. The rising feeling of Caucasusphobia and Islamophobia, evident in the Moscow case-study, has generally by-passed the Tatars, despite significant concentrations of Tatars in large Russian cities. As Malashenko notes (2006, p. 30): the ‘Russian man in the street apparently ignores the Tatar’s Muslim identity: they are just neighbours that everyone has come used to’. In addition, the Soviet ethno-national

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23 Marat Alimov, Chairman of Butovo’s community Milost’ – in Kots (2007).
24 For example, see the projects mentioned at http://www.butovomuslim.ru/projects/.
25 See also Malashenko, ‘The situation inside Russia’. 
delimitation left the Tatars with their own titular homeland, even if it provided only for a bare majoritv of Tatars within the republic and left the majority of Tatars living outside its borders. Nevertheless, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was at least a putative national homeland, Tatarstan, which could become the main site for a Tatar national renaissance and religious self-assertion.

The Republic of Tatarstan was also one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Yeltsin’s offer to ‘grab as much as sovereignty as possible’, though it did stop short of demanding secession as in Chechnya. Unlike Chechnya, Tatarstan successfully obtained a special Treaty with Moscow, which was signed in 1994, and which gave Tatarstan and President Shaimiev special privileges. These included rights to control taxes over the sale of alcohol, oil and gas; to retain a larger proportion of VAT revenues within the Republic; and to be able to form direct economic and trade links with countries abroad. This treaty was hailed in Kazan as an exemplification of the ‘Tatarstan Model’, which represents a certain continuity with the political aims of the jadidist movement to establish in Russia a looser asymmetrical federative structure. For the elites in Kazan, the commitment to a distinctive ‘Tatarstan model’ represented a particular model for post-Soviet Russian society, where relations between the various ethnic and confessional groups in the country would be configured in a looser and more modern (or post-modern) way.

Islam originally played a limited role in Tatar national self-assertion. However, the religious dimension did become increasingly important as personal religiosity increased amongst Tatar Muslims and the public institutional expressions of Islamic faith, such as mosques and religious schools, were re-built. Moreover, the Tatarstani government became increasingly drawn into and concerned about the internal conflicts which had emerged from within the Muslim establishment. This notably involved a growing discontent with the ‘official’ Soviet-inherited leader of Russian Islam, the head of the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM), Talgat Tadzhuddin, who was a Tatar but who insisted on remaining in Ufa, in neighbouring Bashkortostan, and who strongly resisted the politicisation of Islam. In Tatarstan itself, certain Muslim leaders seceded from Tadzhuddin’s jurisdiction, established their own independent Spiritual Board of Tatarstan (DUM RT) and elected a Mufti, Gabdulla Galliullin, who in turn became increasingly radicalised and critical of President Shaimiev and his government. In response to this situation, the Tatarstani government approved this secession from the federal Muslim structures and effectively nationalised Islam in the republic, helping the DUM RT to seek a monopoly over Muslim administration, overturning and ignoring in this regard the federal religious law of 1997 which sought to protect religious pluralism (Mukhametshin, 2005). At the same time, political pressure ensured that the troublesome Galiullin was ousted and a new Mufti, Gusman Ishakov, was elected who has been notably more supportive of the government.

The role that Islam plays in support of the ‘Tatarstan model’ has thus become increasingly important on an official level. This has also contributed significantly to the ambition of the republican leadership to define an officially approved definition of Islam. For the Tatarstani authorities, the constant mantra of the distinctive Tatar-Russian model of Islam is that of toleration and moderation (Nabiev, Ishakov and Kabudinov, 2002). Islamic civilisation in Tatarstan, it is argued, was always more universalist, tolerant and integrated with modernity than other parts of the Muslim world. Tatar Islam has always, in this version,
subscribed to the most liberal of the four traditional schools of law (the Hanafi *madhhab*) and this was an important factor behind Tatar support of reformist Islam, such as that promoted by the jadidists. To illustrate, Mufti Ishakov tells the story of the American journalist who came to Kazan’ to try and find Islamic extremism and, being so impressed by its evident absence, was determined to tell everyone how ‘Islam in Kazan’ is how Islam should be’ (quoted in Graney 2006). Implicit in this story is the historic mission of Tatar Muslims to demonstrate to the rest of the Muslim world how Islam should engage with the West and help avoid the ‘clash of civilisations’.

The most ambitious attempt to define the state-approved official has come from Rafael’ Khakimov, who was one of the leading Tatar national ideologists in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and who subsequently joined the Shaimiev administration as the chief national ideologist. Khakimov developed the idea of a ‘Euro-Islam’ which has conscious roots in the jadidist movement. The essence of his argument is that ‘Islam amongst us necessarily became European, a so-called Euro-Islam. The processes of modernization of Islam in Russian have to include both eastern and western factors. Euro-Islam reflects the culturological rather than the ritual aspect of Islam, leaving the latter to the individual. Islam is the culture which unifies the religious and the secular’ (quoted in Mukharyamov 2007, p. 55). In this regard, Khakimov suggests that Tatars have a unique and universal contribution to make to Islam, in their experience of long co-existence both with the West and Christendom, and in their adaptation of Islam to modernity and to liberal norms and practices. Indeed, Khakimov clearly suggests that Tatar civilisation is significantly more enlightened than the more backward Muslim societies in the Middle East (Khakimov 2003). He argues that Islam needs to move beyond the constraints of the traditional schools of law (the *maddhabs*) and use more freely the powers of interpretation (*ijtihad*) so as to adapt Islam to the challenges of contemporary life.

In the broader context of the defence and support of an autonomous and devolved Tatarstan, there are a number of perceived political advantages for the Shaimiev administration in promoting this liberal reformist conception of Islam. First, it provides reassurance to Moscow that Tatarstan is committed to co-existence, to struggling against Islamic radicalisation, and to ensuring that Tatar national identity does not assume a potentially alienating Islamic expression. The correlative implicit threat is that, without such devolved authority, the dangers of religio-nationalist radicalisation increase. Second, the promotion of Tatarstan as an island of moderation in the Muslim world, and as a unique fusion of Russian and Islamic culture, has proved to be a good marketing tool in developing direct relations with foreign countries and thus consolidating Tatarstan’s autonomous international identity. Third, and significantly more problematic, is the contention that the predominantly Tatar-driven conceptualisation of a moderate and tolerant Islam is a gift to all Muslims in Russia and thus the key distinctive feature of a more inclusive ‘Russian Islam’. The correlative of this is that Kazan’ should, as a consequence, be considered as the spiritual home of Islam for all Muslims residing in Russia and who have been influenced by Russian culture. This more expansive Tatar religio-nationalist ambition reflects a broader political desire to develop the ‘Tatarstan model’ as the post-Soviet exemplar of a new looser and federal constitutional order between the Russian centre and the periphery.
In practice, however, this ‘official’ version of Islam as promoted by the political leadership in Kazan’ has become increasingly contested, not least from the growing confidence and self-assertion of the centre under Putin’s rule. Like all regions in Russia, Tatarstan has lost much of its earlier autonomy. For republics like Tatarstan, which are economically advanced and rich in natural resources, this has been a painful and humiliating process. Although in 2007 the special Treaty between the centre and Tatarstan was renewed, it was generally recognised that this was a symbolic gesture and that real power had now shifted decisively to the centre.26

Tatarstan’s claims to be the ‘spiritual home’ of Russian Islam have also not been spared encroachments from the centre. The most significant of these has been the promotion of the idea of ‘Russian Islam’ which emanated in 2002-3 from a think-tank in Nizhnii Novgorod, the Centre for Strategic Research, which was directly supported by then head of the Volga Federal District and former prime minister, Sergei Kirienko. The concept of a ‘Russian Islam’ had much in common with Khakimov’s ‘Euro-Islam’, most notably its commitment to liberal modernism and its celebration of the fusion of Russian and Islamic culture. As the main author of the report, Sergei Gradirovskii, argued ‘Russian Islam belongs both to Islamic and Russian culture, including its political culture’. He also asserted that this experience of the inter-penetration of cultures is becoming increasingly critical in the ever-growing multicultural society which is transforming post-Soviet Russia, where immigration of Muslims is radically changing the social composition of the urban centres in Russia.27 Indeed, it is this multi-cultural reality which Gradirovskii saw justifying a more centralised and more ‘Russian’ rather than Tatar-led, definition and promotion of Islam. He argued that Russian was increasingly becoming the ‘language of communication’ between Russian Muslims, particularly in mosques in urban centres, as a consequence marginalising the role of the ‘languages of identity’, such as the Tatar language, in practical Muslim life. Thus, what was needed, he contended, is the promotion of a multicultural and universalist ‘Russian Islam’, which would become a distinctive contributor to the global Muslim community, and whose institutions would be properly financed. The implicit consequence was increased central leeway in managing Muslim affairs and, as in Soviet times, to providing an officially approved Russian version of what an ‘official’ Islam should look like. Tatarstan, if it were to play a role, was to be strictly subordinated to the exigencies of the centre’s own interest in controlling and containing Islam within Russia.

There is, therefore, a significant centre-periphery competition for the authentic voice and expression of Russian Islam, which has pitted the federalist pretensions of Tatarstan against the centralising ambitions of the Putin administration. At heart, this reflects more fundamental differences in views over what a multinational and multicultural Russia should look like and the role that religion should play therein. There is, however, an acute weakness in this explicitly political struggle to provide the state’s stamp of approval on a modernist liberal conception of Islam. This weakness arises from the resistance of those Muslims who might, for whatever reason, be disaffected with the political system and/or might be scandalised by the state authorities assuming control over their religious belief. For such individuals, the alternative ‘other’ of this official Islam – the salafist or so-called ‘Wahhabi’ Islamist approach – can inevitably appear attractive as a form of protest.

26 For evaluation, see Vremya Novostei, 28 June 2007.
Within Tatarstan itself, the nationalist opposition to the Shaimiev administration increasingly subscribes to a more radical Islamist agenda. For example, Fauziya Bairamova, the charismatic leader of the Tatar opposition party, Ittifak, has called for the Islamisation of individual, social and political life and for a return to the literal following of the Quran (Laruelle 2007). Particularly in the aftermath of the official repression of so-called ‘Wahhabites’ in response to the events in Dagestan in 1999 (see below), both Ittifak and the Pan-Tatar Public Centre viewed the attacks on ‘religious extremism’ as primarily politically rather than religiously driven. In response, both groups identified and supported a more rigorous and more fundamentalist vision of Islam. In the process, the representatives of official Islam in the Spiritual Board are denounced as too moderate and subservient to state power. In fact, these official representatives of official Islam find themselves caught between two understandings of Islam which they deeply contest: on the one hand, the liberal modernism of ‘Euro-Islam’ which undermines their own more traditionalist and apolitical conception of Islam and, on the other hand, the more universalist and radical variant of Salafist Islam, which derides any ‘national’ expression of Islam (Iakupov 2004).

Dagestan in the centre of the battle against radical Islam

The North Caucasus is the region where the challenge for Russia to meet the needs and aspirations of its Muslim communities is greatest and where the threat of radicalisation is most severe. A mosaic of small republics, inhabited by a patchwork of nationalities, often with historical grievances either with each other, with Moscow, or both, the North Caucasus was incorporated into Russia brutally and relatively late. This is the region where Russia’s Muslims (5 million in total) are also most compactly settled. The region’s historical links to the Middle East have influenced the tenor of its post-Soviet religious revival. Modernist Islam, such as the jadidist movement among the Tatars, remains largely absent from the religious map. Rather the battle of ideas over Islam has been between radical or Salafist Islam, popularly if inaccurately described as ‘Wahhabism’, and local Islams (often but not exclusively Sufism) traditional to the region.

A key question for observers has been whether the development of more internationalist and extremist Islamist trends will be obstructed by the region’s myriad ethnic, religious and elite differences, or rather will provide the ideology for overcoming them and transforming the North Caucasus into an incubator for international jihad. Dagestan is a critical test-case for this, particularly as the situation in Chechnya has been subdued. It has always been seen as the most likely region after Chechnya to be radicalised and engage in action against the federal centre. Alongside Chechnya, Dagestan is Russia’s most Islamic republic with Muslims comprising over 90 percent of its population and with the most number of Islamic institutions per head. It was the first region to be influenced by radical Islam (reportedly as early as the 1970s) and re-Islamation was an integral part of overcoming Soviet ethnic and cultural identity (e.g. Bobrovnikov and Yarlykapov 2003; Sagramoso 2007). Dagestan’s contact with the outside world in the 1990s occurred against the background of weak federal control and a dire socio-economic situation (the North Caucasus in general is bereft of many natural resources and heavily dependent on federal subsidy, but 1990s Dagestan was Russia’s most impoverished region, Chechnya excepted, with an unemployment rate of 80 percent in 1997). These factors encouraged the absorption of
foreign, radical ideas to fill the post-communist vacuum. Throughout the 1990s Dagestan experienced a significant ethno-religious revival, with pilgrimages, a burgeoning Islamic literature, mosque-building and the mushrooming of cultural and political movements, most notably local jamaats (Islamic communities) and madrasas (schools), alongside the formation of a political opposition that proposed strengthening the public role of Islam. Among the opposition movements was a burgeoning radical Islamist movement headed by Bagautdin Kebedov which challenged the ascendancy of the official (Tariqatist) Sufi orders and forged links with the neighbouring Chechen insurgency, with particular pockets of strength in the north and west border regions.

As a politico-military force Dagestani ‘Wahhabism’ peaked in August 1999 when 1500 Dagestani, Chechen and Arab fighters led by Bagautdin, Shamil’ Basaev and Ibn Al-Khattab invaded Dagestan, attempting to create the ‘independent Islamic state of Dagestan’ free from Russian influence. However, much to the invaders’ surprise, some 25,000 Dagestanis united to repulse the invasion, and the putative emirate collapsed within a month. Why was Dagestan the ‘Wahhabi’ dog that did not bark”? Even at their peak the supporters of radical Islam numbered at most some 5-10 percent of the population, and majority of both mass and elite eschewed political extremism and separatism in favour of the status quo (Makarov 2000). This was arguably a necessity in an impoverished republic utterly dependent on Moscow, still more so because Dagestan contains over 34 ethnic groups and professes traditions of ‘ethnic accommodation and political balance’ (Ware and Kisriev 2002). Against this background, extremism threatened total social cataclysm. Moreover, Tariqatist Sufism is enmeshed with a strong sense of tradition and national identity (be it Dagestani, Ingushetian or Chechen) which rejects ‘Wahhabism’ as foreign and alien. Finally, despite their disapproval of the methods and effects of the federal military operation, traditionally pro-Russian Dagestani elites did not consider Chechnya’s failed state an example for emulation, still less did they want to experience a similar federal crackdown.

In addition, the Dagestani elite made an anti-‘Wahhabi’ campaign its raison d’etre, in particular after 1999 when the Dagestani State Council banned ‘Wahhabism’ and religious extremism. This was a highly controversial step: many saw the legal measures as a necessary move, while others were more critical, noting the problematic issue of the definition of ‘Wahhabism’ and the potential anti-constitutional nature of the law (Ware et al. 2003). But the measures initially appeared so successful that by 2002 Dagestan’s ‘Wahhabi’ moment seemed to have passed with radical jihadist Islam discredited by its association with Chechnya and foreign extremists. This was but a temporary pause however; a trickle of violence after 1999 had by 2005 become an escalating torrent, so that by 2007 the Dagestani capital Makhachkala and its southern regions were repeatedly and regularly rocked by explosions, assassinations and gunfire directed against its regional elite and law enforcement personnel. Even this ‘unstable stability’ was seemingly maintained only by the huge number of federal troops and police in the region (Mukhin 2007; ICG 2008). The precise number of radicalized Islamists now in Dagestan is dispute: after 1999 the number of active jihadists remaining was said to be no more than 2000; nevertheless, the active members of the 12
Islamic jamaats had been between 20,000-100,000, meaning that the ‘mobilization potential’ of radical Islam remained significant.\(^{28}\)

Arguably the reasons for the upsurge in violence need to be sought in state and federal policies that address the symptoms but not the cause. In a 2005 report on the problems of the North Caucasus, Dmitrii Kozak (appointed in 2004-7 as presidential representative to Russian’s southern federal district) identified the unpopularity and corruption of elites and their transgressions on democratic practice as a perfect breeding ground for radicalism and extremism threatening Russian statehood (Khinstein 2005). However, it is rare for the authorities to suggest that politics rather than the socio-economic situation and international factors are the catalysts, and it is hard to identify which concrete political changes followed from Kozak’s revelation: the Kremlin appointed ‘clean’ leaders in some regions to be sure (Aliev in Dagestan, Mamsurov in North Ossetia) but bolstered corrupt ones (Kadyrov, Zyazikov in Ingushetia) in others (Dunlop and Menon, 2007). Most emphasis was put on increasing federal funding and troop numbers.

Indeed, the socio-economic causes of radicalisation have decreased somewhat even as violence has increased. By 2004, Dagestani unemployment had dropped to a ‘mere’ 24 percent, while Kozak’s appointment had brought a greater share of federal attention and finance, although little noticeable effect on corruption (Sagramoso 2007; ICG 2008). Indeed, it seems to be precisely politics that has driven local radicalisation. In Dagestan’s case, the demonisation of ‘Wahhabis’ serves the interests of the local elite: an ‘ethnocratic’ elite formed by merger of the atheistic Soviet-era nomenklatura, mafia and the co-opted Islamic establishment (the Muftiyat) was prone to using religious slogans instrumentally in self-defence (Makarov and Mukhametshin 2002). Radical anti-Sufi Islam challenged the position of religious and political elites alike: the former because it emphasised new scriptural interpretations and questioned the closed, hierarchical Sufi orders with their emphasis on subordination to the religious authorities, the latter because its emphasis on personal ascetism, equality and personal responsibility explicitly challenged the endemic corruption and self-interest of the local elite, many of whom had been in power since the Soviet era. Only in the late 1990s did the religious elite begin to oppose the political one, on the grounds of both its insufficient promotion of Islam and insufficiently rigorous opposition to ‘Wahhabism’. Nevertheless, the Tariqatist clerics supported the political elite’s post-1997 anti-‘Wahhabi’ campaign. The problem was that such a conflation of the interests of political elites and of the Muslim hierarchy only served to strengthen the appeal of radical Islam, particularly as its moral puritanism helps individuals and communities ‘to keep law and order and fight crime, elements of moral degradation, alcoholism and corruption’ (Naumkin 2005). ‘Wahhabism’ thus became an avenue for expressing dissatisfaction with personal alienation, political corruption and state insecurity.

Alongside this anti-‘Wahhabi’ campaign, Putin’s so-called ‘Chechenisation’ policies (the devolution of the anti-insurgency efforts to co-opted ethnic Chechens) had clear negative side-effects for Dagestan’s stability, despite their apparent achievements. The military campaign met significant success, with the assassination of resistance leaders Maskhadov, Basaev, Raduev and Abdul-Khalim Sadullaev leaving a rump 1500-2000 fighters under Doku

Umarov. The absence of large-scale terrorist atrocities in the heart of Russia after Beslan in 2004 appears to indicate weakening national resistance. As far as outsiders can tell, and while the situation is far from resolved, Chechnya itself is currently entering a new phase of political stability. Under the brutal but effective leadership of Ramzan Kadyrov (rising rapidly after his father’s death in 2004 to become Putin’s appointee as President in February 2007) Chechnya has received huge federal reconstruction funds, enabling the transformation of its war-torn capital Grozny and for Kadyrov even to propose initiating a tourist influx to the republic! (Dannreuther and March 2008). Kadyrov has emerged as one of Putin’s most loyal regional satraps, successfully securing 99 percent support on a 99 percent turnout for the pro-Putin ‘United Russia’ party in the December 2007 elections. So successful has Chechenisation been that Kadyrov has offered his peace-keeping services to neighbouring regions, and has begun to display aspirations for Chechnya to become a hegemonic power in the North Caucasus that have alarmed neighbouring Ingushetia in particular. 29

Of course, Chechenisation is extremely controversial. While its pacification of Chechnya is achieved at considerable cost, it also appears to have helped spread the conflict within the region: Dagestan joins other North Caucasian Muslim regions such as Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria in combating increasing low-level political violence, often blamed on terrorists from Chechnya displaced from the republic and emboldened by its heavy-handed pro-Moscow policies. This accusation need not be taken at face value; much of what passes as ‘Islamic terrorism’ is part of an entrenched criminalized and militarized elite conflict for power (Ware and Kisriev 2002).

Nevertheless, the promotion of military means to deal with political problems (heavy-handed ‘cleansing operations’, victimising ‘Wahhabi’ ‘extremists’ against a background of mass unemployment) has contributed to a ‘prison-camp’ atmosphere across much of the North Caucasus, driving young men into a new wave of salafist combat jamaats (including the Dagestani ‘Shariah’ jamaat) co-ordinated by Chechen resistance leaders Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev (in 2005) and Doku Umarov (from 2006) in the North Caucasus Front. The Islamist opposition has been largely expelled from Chechnya proper, and is split over its aims (for example in October 2007 five Chechen field commanders reputedly rejected Umarov’s declaration of a North Caucasus Emirate). 30 Nevertheless, this indicates that as in other parts of the world, Russian jihadism is transmuting into a more pervasive, rootless and potentially less controllable form not identified with a particular locality and increasingly divorced from the Chechen national cause: Dagestan, Ingushetia, and even traditionally pro-Russian areas without a strong history of Islamic extremism, like Kabardino-Balkaria, and neighbouring Russian republics such as Krasnodar, Stavropol and Rostov are becoming sites for jihadism.

Furthermore, the Kremlin’s increasing political centralization has most deleterious consequences in the North Caucasus, because, in parallel to increasing militarisation it removes local level ‘safety valves’ that limited disaffected populations defecting to the Islamic insurgency in the 1990s. For instance, Dagestan’s consociational governing system was replaced in February 2006 by an appointed presidency (Mukhu Aliev replacing Magomedali Magomedov). Whilst Aliev, in contrast to his predecessor, had a relatively clean reputation, top-down appointments may threaten Dagestan’s delicate elite and ethnic balance

in the longer term (ICG 2008). In parallel, the increasing emergence of local one-party systems dominated by the pro-regime United Russia party (UR) has further limited the scope for expressing intra-system political dissent. The Communist Party, which in the 1990s had played a relatively positive, integrative local role as a socially-oriented, internationalist organization with strong roots in civil society, has been almost entirely marginalised (Markedonov 2007). In the heavily manipulated December 2007 national parliamentary elections, local leaders engineered Soviet-level turnouts for United Russia across the North Caucasus with minimal subtlety. Typically, Dagestan returned a dramatically above-average vote for UR, which gained 89 percent on a 92 percent turnout. Such manipulation is potentially catastrophic where ‘Wahhabism’ provides an available alternative option for social solidarity.

The example of Dagestan illustrates the Kremlin’s general problem across the North Caucasus: its insistence on centralisation and a zero-sum attitude to opposition denies it room for manoeuvre and Moscow finds itself dependent on appointed leaders of various levels of effectiveness. When such local appointees deliver (as in Chechnya) the Kremlin becomes reliant on them as bastions of stability; when they do not (as elsewhere) it faces an unenviable choice between replacing them (and becoming a hostage to popular protest) and backing them (and risking discrediting federal policy in the region). Moreover, although Islamic radicalisation in the North Caucasus is increasingly international (or at least trans-regional) in its ideology and personnel, such radicalisation still appears to be firmly rooted in a reaction to local and regional issues: above all concerns about corruption, political representation and socio-economic destitution. The federal and regional approach, which explicitly addresses the latter concern whilst denying and even exacerbating the former ones and treating ‘Wahhabism’ as a unitary and inflexible ‘threat’ has some notable short-term successes, but the suspicion remains that rather than destroying the roots of radicalisation, the Kremlin’s efforts have spread its seeds far and wide.

Conclusion

This article has identified factors which might contribute to the radicalisation of the Muslim communities in Russia, while respecting the differentiated nature of these communities. However, this focus should not obscure the ways in which radicalisation has been contained. Generally, by the electoral period in 2007-8, there was evidence of greater national stability and a reduction of major internal threats to state security, linked to the improved economic situation and the generally popular support for Putin’s policies. The situation in Chechnya has also improved in terms of a reduction of hostilities and the elimination of the most powerful figures in the Chechen Islamist opposition. It should also not be forgotten that state discourses have made serious efforts in expressing support and sympathy towards Islam as a religion and giving a state stamp of approval on ‘moderate’ Islamic expression. Despite the formal primacy given to Orthodoxy, there is official recognition of Islam’s central role, and there is much support given to promoting a distinctive ‘Russian’ Islam, whether this is seen as a neo-jadidist project or ‘Euro-Islam’. These developments make it clear that views of Russia as facing a unified and all-pervasive national Islamic threat are very much exaggerated. Moreover, Putin’s claims of bringing stability to the country and resolving the Islamic threat cannot simply be dismissed out of hand,

particularly when compared with the controversial dynamics in the ‘war on terror’ in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, these seemingly more positive developments, much lauded in Russian official political discourse, are potentially less long-lasting than might immediately appear. Indeed, the central focus of this article is in identifying the ‘darker’ side of the processes of securitisation, with the associated dynamics of state centralisation, growing intolerance of any deviance of expression and increased nationalist sentiments. Our case-studies have sought to illustrate these dynamics and provide a more complex and nuanced picture of the potential dangers and opportunities for radicalisation in different parts of the Russian Muslim community. Thus, in Moscow and other large Russian cities, there is evidence that the growing sense of Russian nationalist self-assertion and its evident anti-migrant orientation, along with increasing authoritarianism and limits on other vehicles for expression of difference, is fostering increased disenchantment amongst indigenous and migrant Muslim communities that can potentially lead to radicalisation. In Tatarstan, long the exemplar of moderation and stability, the emasculation of local republican autonomy and independence has undermined indigenous pro-Russian expressions of Islamic self-identity, such as the ‘Euro-Islam’ concept, and now strengthens the potential appeal of more a radical universalist Islam. In the North Caucasus, the stabilisation in Chechnya, and the ambiguous processes of ‘Chechenization’ have occurred in parallel with increasing instability in neighbouring republics such as Dagestan. The intolerance of opposition by local elites, reflecting similar intolerance or perceived ‘extremism’ at the federal level, along with the weakening of local autonomy, has added to this increased sense of alienation. Therefore, what all these case studies indicate are grass-roots sentiments potentially rejecting any need for Islam to become modernised or officially approved by the Russian state and so potentially being attracted to a more fundamentalist Islam rejecting such restrictions. Were such potentials to be fulfilled, this might lead to a more widespread and more deeply rooted radical Islamist expression which would no longer be limited and diffused by the regional and ethnic differences of Russia’s 15 million-plus Muslim community.

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