

Chechen and Federal Authorities Declare Sulim Yamadaev a Fugitive

The ongoing conflict between the pro-Moscow government and the Vostok battalion of the Russian Defense Ministry's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) intensified on August 6 when the Chechen authorities announced that the battalion's commander, Sulim Yamadaev, has been put on the federal wanted list for various crimes, including an alleged murder. On August 7, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office confirmed that Yamadaev had been put on the federal wanted list for the 1998 murder of a Chechen businessman, Itar-Tass reported.



The Chechen authorities' announcement that Sulim Yamadaev has been put on the federal wanted list came during a meeting between Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov and Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Alkhanov on August 6. Alkhanov declared that information received the previous day from the investigations department of the Investigative Committee of the federal Prosecutor General's Office's directorate for Chechnya "testifies to the fact" that Sulim Yamadaev is now wanted by the federal authorities. According to Interfax, Alkhanov cited material "that is evidence of his participation in the kidnapping of people and other grave crimes."

Kadyrov, for his part, said that Yamadaev "should be detained and prosecuted," adding: "He is a criminal, and a criminal must incur a sentence [for his crimes]. It doesn't matter what position or last name a person has, what services he has rendered or how many medals he has. The long and short of it is that he violated the law and was involved in grave crimes, as shown by irrefutable evidence." Kadyrov also said that he has never called for the disbandment of the Vostok and Zapad battalions (the latter is also a Chechen-manned battalion operating under the command of Russia's Defense Ministry), but that the members of those units should not suffer for the actions of "certain personalities." In general, Kadyrov said, "the staff of the battalions is conscientiously fulfilling its military duty and the criminal actions of the [Vostok] battalion commander and a group of servicemen of the battalion have put a black mark on the entire Russian Defense Ministry."

Kadyrov said that attention should also be given to Sulim Yamadaev's brothers, who, he said, "may be to one degree or another closely linked to the criminal actions of their brother." It should be noted Badrudi Yamadaev, who is Sulim Yamadaev's younger brother and a Vostok battalion member, was placed on the federal wanted list earlier this year for alleged involvement in the disappearance of the brothers of Abubakar Arsamakov, owner of the Samson-K meat-processing plant in St. Petersburg and president of Moscow Industrial Bank. The brothers, who were kidnapped more than a year ago and have not been seen since, are believed to have been murdered (Chechnya Weekly, May 1).

Kommersant on August 7 quoted a source in the federal Investigative Committee's investigation department for Chechnya as saying that the Gudermes inter-regional investigative department on May 4 of this year launched a criminal case against Sulim Yamadaev and a group of people whose identities have not yet been determined, in connection with the February 1998 kidnapping and subsequent murder Usman Batsaev, a 32-year-old inhabitant of the Gudermes district village of Dzhalka.

The newspaper quoted Usman Batsaev's brothers, Ali and Umar, as saying that they had returned to Chechnya from Moscow in 1998 and decided to open a bakery, but that they had quickly attracted the attention of "bandits," including rebel field commanders, who tried to extort protection payments from them. However, they were protected by a relative—Aidamir Abalaev, who was then Interior Minister of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the separatist government that was at the time in power in Grozny. Despite that apparent protection, on February 23, 1998, Usman Batsaev and a neighbor were abducted in their home village of Dzhalka by armed people traveling in three automobiles. The brothers said gunshots emanated from the car into which Usman was forced. The brothers also said they knew from the start that he had been kidnapped by Sulim Yamadaev and his brothers, who were at that time considered the de facto rulers of Chechnya's Gudermes district. The Batsaev brothers and Aidamir Abalaev subsequently went to Sulim Yamadaev to win Usman's release, and Yamadaev freed the other man who had been abducted and promised to release Usman the following day. But when the following day arrived, Yamadaev claimed that Usman had escaped, and Usman's brothers were subsequently approached by middlemen promising to return Usman for \$10,000. Another intermediary, however, told Usman's brothers that he had been murdered.

According to Kommersant, representatives of the Yamadaevs and Batsaevs had another sit-down in April 2000, after the start of the second military campaign in Chechnya, with Viktor Kazantsev, the then commander of the Unified Group of Forces in the North Caucasus, playing the role of intermediary. Sulim Yamadaev reportedly brought one of his subordinates, Ilyas Takuev, to that meeting, telling the Batsaevs that Takuev had shot and killed Usman, that Takuev would show them where Usman was buried and that if they wanted revenge, they could take revenge on Takuev. Usman Batsaev's decomposed body was indeed found near the Russian military base at Khankala outside Grozny, but Takuev, while admitting he had participated in abducting Usman Batsaev, claimed it was Sulim Yamadaev who murdered him.

The brothers said they could not take revenge on Yamadaev because "he has a whole unit of spetsnaz and a powerful structure like the GRU standing behind him, but we don't even have weapons." However, after the conflict between the Vostok battalion and Kadyrov and his forces erupted this past April, the brothers appealed to Chechen law-enforcement structures.

According to Kommersant, republican investigators were able to question practically everyone connected to Usman Batsaev's murder (including Ilyas Takuev) except for Abalaev, who was killed by security forces in 2002, and Sulim Yamadaev—who, as the newspaper noted, was temporarily removed as Vostok battalion commander after its conflict with Kadyrov started in April and is currently living in Moscow. Kommersant quoted investigators as saying they have testimony from witnesses and other evidence that Sulim Yamadaev murdered Usman Batsaev, but that the case must be investigated by military investigators, not civilian investigators. However, according to the newspaper, military investigators have refused to get involved in the case on the grounds that in 1998, when the crime took place, Sulim Yamadaev was a rebel field commander, not a Russian army officer. Still, Kommersant reported that other criminal cases in which Sulim Yamadaev figured have already been transferred to military investigators. The Russian military, however, has not declared Yamadaev a fugitive from justice.

Kommersant quoted "acquaintances" of Sulim Yamadaev in the Russian Defense Ministry as saying that the new steps against him may be connected to the resignation of Aleksei Maslov as commander of Russia's ground forces. According to the newspaper, Maslov, who may be named Russia's chief military representative to NATO, personally oversaw the Vostok battalion. Maslov has been replaced by the former commander of the North Caucasus Military District, Vladimir Boldyrev, who also knows Yamadaev personally but, according to Kommersant, has apparently not had enough time to get up to speed on the situation in Chechnya. In any case, the newspaper reported, the Defense Ministry has had no reaction to the announcement that Sulim Yamadaev is now the object of a federal manhunt.

For his part, Ruslan Yamadaev, Sulim Yamadaev's brother and a former State Duma deputy, told Kommersant: "He [Sulim] lives in Moscow, and the investigators know how to find him, and I don't even want to comment on all this nonsense with the accusations."

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<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374359>

Ex-Chechen Rebel Official Goes to Europe to Convince Exiles to Return Home

Magomed Khambiev, the former defense minister of the separatist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) who is now a deputy in Chechnya's pro-Moscow parliament, traveled to Western Europe on August 3 for meetings with top separatists living abroad aimed at convincing them to return to Chechnya, the Moscow Times reported on August 6. Khambiev, who surrendered to the pro-Moscow Chechen authorities in 2004 after some 40 of his relatives were abducted by forces loyal to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, said in an interview published in Gazeta on August 5 that he thought his brother, Umar Khambiev, a former health minister in the separatist government and envoy to Western Europe for late separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov who currently lives in Paris, would return to Chechnya with him.



Magomed
Khambiev

According to the Moscow Times, Magomed Khambiev said he would talk to other senior separatists that emigrated from Chechnya to Europe. "I don't want to name them now," he told Gazeta. "I will say only that these are not run-of-the-mill guys." Timur Aliev, an adviser to Kadyrov, told the Moscow Times by telephone on August 5 that Khambiev's initiative was not officially endorsed by the Chechen government but conceded that he could not have undertaken the tour without tacit approval from the republic's political leadership.

In late May, Khambiev called on his former comrades living abroad to return to the republic and disband the rebel armed groups. "Our president is a Chechen, the representatives of all branches of power are Chechens, members of the law-enforcement organs are also Chechens," Kavkazky Uzel quoted him as saying. "We don't realize it, but it is possibly today that we have received the very independence that was fought for all those years. And when those who have not yet returned [to Chechnya] understand this, realize that it is the embodiment of their ideals, they will return home and become brothers-in-arms of the president" (North Caucasus Weekly, May 29).

Kavkaz-Center, the Islamist website that is supportive of the idea of a Caucasian Emirate and hostile to ChRI Prime Minister Zakaev and other ChRI officials and loyalists, posted a report on August 5 about Khambiev's trip to Europe. The website claimed that following his televised appeal in late May, Khambiev announced that he was ready to negotiate with Zakaev. The website also claimed that the renowned surgeon Khassan Baiev—whom Kavkaz-Center claimed is a representative of Zakaev—had met with Dikal Muzakaev, the Chechen Republic's minister of culture. In May, around the time of Khambiev television appeal to Chechen separatists living abroad to return home, various media attributed comments to Zakaev that some observers interpreted as an overture to Ramzan Kadyrov and his government. These included statements that Chechnya's "decolonization" was a "fait accompli," that rebel forces were targeting the Russian military and not Chechen government forces, and that the ChRI government was preparing "several serious documents aimed at averting clashes between the Chechen partisans and the Chechen police."

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported on May 23 that Zakaev had made his comments about Kadyrov in an interview with RFE/RL in November 2007 and repeated some of them at a conference in London on May 14 organized by the Royal United Services Institute. Yet, according to RFE/RL, Zakaev gave an interview to RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service on May 20 in which he "implicitly" branded Kadyrov a "criminal" and said the Russian leadership "will kill him treacherously at the first opportunity." RFE/RL reported that Zakaev made a similar prediction at the May 14 conference in London, saying he is convinced "a magnificent funeral" is being prepared for Kadyrov and that Beslan Gantamirov, the former Chechen Deputy Prime Minister and Grozny mayor, would succeed Kadyrov. RFE/RL also reported that in his May 20 interview, Zakaev categorically denied speculation that there is a draft written agreement between him and the pro-Moscow Chechen government, and also denied that a visit to Grozny by Khassan Baiev was undertaken at his behest (North Caucasus Weekly, May 22 and 29).

<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2374360>

Chechen Kidnapping Victim Kidnapped Again

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on August 6 that MokhmadSalakh Masaev, a 42-year-old resident of Chechnya who made public his secret detention and torture by Chechen security agents, was abducted again. Citing Masaev's relatives and the Memorial human rights group, Human Rights Watch reported that he was seized in Grozny on August 3 by unknown individuals in camouflage uniforms and that the incident was witnessed by passers-by and street vendors. According to HRW, Masaev's family has no information as to his fate or whereabouts, and a local police station refused to register a report on the abduction filed by Masaev's brother Oleg. Moreover, Oleg Masaev's conversation with the policemen led him to believe MokhmadSalakh had been abducted by Chechen law-enforcement agencies acting on informal instructions of the republic's leadership, HRW reported.



Earlier this year, Masaev told HRW that he had been abducted from a mosque in Gudermes in September 2006 and held in an illegal detention facility until January 21, 2007, and that while in detention he was beaten on several occasions, accused of being a Wahhabi and a collaborator with insurgents, held in inhumane conditions and subjected to death threats. Two of his acquaintances were abducted and held with him but freed earlier through the intervention of their well-connected relatives. Following Masaev's persistent demands, the prosecutor's office in early 2008 launched a criminal investigation into the kidnapping of Masaev and his two friends. On July 10, Novaya Gazeta, published an interview with Masaev, in which he said he "had been held hostage for four months by [Chechen President] Ramzan Kadyrov" in a secret detention facility located in Kadyrov's native village, Tsenteroi.

"We are deeply alarmed about Masaev's abduction and fear his life is in danger," said Tanya Lokshina, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Russia office. "Masaev is one of the few people who dared to speak publicly about how he was tortured in illegal detention by Chechen officials, and we are afraid he's paying a very high price for his courage ... If President Dmitry Medvedev is truly committed to entrenching the rule of law across Russia, he needs to foster an environment in which victims of human rights abuses can speak up without fear, including in Chechnya."

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Ingushetiya.ru Editor Flees Abroad

Roza Malsagova, the editor of the opposition Ingushetiya.ru website, has left Russia and plans to ask for political asylum abroad. Ekho Moskv radio on August 6 quoted her lawyer, Kaloï Akhilgov, as saying that Malsagova left Russia with her three children around two weeks ago after she was charged with a “massive” number of criminal and administrative violations. The lawyer did not say where she was located or in which country she would appeal for asylum, but the Moscow Times on August 7 quoted him as saying she had traveled to Germany.



In June, Moscow's Kuntsevsky District Court ordered that Ingushetiya.ru—which has repeatedly accused the administration of Ingushetia's president, Murat Zyazikov, of corruption and accused security forces in the republic of murder and kidnapping—be shut down for publishing extremist statements. According to the Moscow Times, authorities in Ingushetia last month also opened a criminal case against the website on charges of inciting ethnic hatred.

According to the Moscow Times, Malsagova, a former actress and the top director at the Ingush Dramatic Theater, claimed in an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty last April that men dressed in camouflage had threatened her and her children at her home in Nazran. The newspaper quoted Akhilgov, her lawyer, as saying that Malsagova moved to Moscow last November after large-scale protests in the republic led to an intimidation campaign against opposition leaders by local law enforcers. It also quoted Tatyana Lokshina, deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Russia office, as saying that Malsagova had told her in June that the crackdown on the website could result in the persecution of her relatives in Ingushetia but that Malsagova “obviously didn't plan to leave the country then.”

On August 4, Ingushetia's opposition submitted 80,000 signatures to President Dmitry Medvedev asking him to dismiss Zyazikov and appoint former Ingush President Ruslan Aushev in his place (North Caucasus Weekly, July 10). Lokshina told the Moscow Times that Ingushetiya.ru was a major organizer in the signature campaign and that its employees fear retribution from Zyazikov's administration.

News that the editor of the opposition website fled Russia came against the backdrop of a deteriorating security situation in Ingushetia, with a sharp rise in the number of insurgent attacks on police and security forces in the republic (see Andrei Smirnov's article below).

Meanwhile, Ruslan Aushev said in an interview published in the August 4 edition of the Gazeta newspaper that he cannot ignore the opinion of the 80,000 Ingush who signed the petition asking for his return as Ingushetia's president. “I understand that my countrymen, in signing [the petition], gave their passport numbers [and thereby] displayed bravery. Therefore I cannot say: ‘You people, get out of here’. When I left office in 2002, I said: ‘All the same, I remain with you’. I am also saying that now.”

Aushev said that the situation in the republic has worsened, noting that 70 policemen have been murdered in Ingushetia during the past six months. He also said that young people in the republic have become increasingly radicalized and no longer believe in the republic's political authorities or the religious establishment, while the idea of living according to Sharia law is heard with increasing frequency. At the same time, the former Ingush president said it may indeed be time to introduce elements of Islamic law in the Muslim regions of Russia. “That would reduce the high degree of dissatisfaction,” he said, adding that corrupt officials “long ago stopped fearing secular laws.”

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Briefs

Newspaper Closed in Dagestan

The federal Prosecutor General's Office announced in August 6 that the Chernovik newspaper in Dagestan had been closed down for spreading extremist views. Reuters quoted the office as saying in a statement that Chernovik had had glorified rebels and insulted Russian federal forces in an article headlined "Number One Terrorists." "They lionize terrorists and prompt the reader to conclude that Russia's constitutional order must be overthrown," said the statement, published on the office's website. "The text of the article distorts the religious situation, calling for 'heads to be cut off infidels' and banning the reading of religious texts in Russian." Chernovik's editor, Nadir Isaev, told Reuters his newspaper was not promoting militant Islam and was just following an independent editorial agenda. "One of the pillars of democracy is an independent media which can criticize the authorities," he said. The newspaper's closure took place against the backdrop of ongoing violence in Dagestan. On August 7, four offices in the building of the city prosecutor's office in Kizlyar were set on fire by several people wearing masks. According to Itar-Tass, the attackers overpowered guards and threw Molotov cocktails into windows of the building's ground floor.

Karachaevo-Cherkessia Gets a New President

On August 5, a special session of Karachaevo-Cherkessia's parliament confirmed Boris Ebzeyev as the republic's new president, Itar-Tass reported. Ebzeyev, who served as a Russian Constitutional Court judge for the last seventeen years, was nominated by President Dmitry Medvedev to replace Mustafa Batdyev as Karachaevo-Cherkessia's president. The Moscow Times reported on August 1 that in 1995, Ebzeyev was the only Constitutional Court judge to criticize decrees issued by then-President Boris Yeltsin ordering federal troops to crush separatists into Chechnya. Ebzeyev said the decrees violated Russia's constitution. Ebzeyev is an ethnic Karachai, the republic's largest indigenous group.

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Rebels Move Closer to Seizing Control of Ingushetia

By Andrei Smirnov

Last week, Russia's Foreign Ministry expressed the Russian government's concern about the situation in Georgia's breakaway republic of South Ossetia. The Ministry said on August 3 that the threat of an all-out war there was becoming "increasingly real," and late on August 6 a Russian Foreign Ministry envoy rushed to the Georgian capital Tbilisi to discuss the prospects for peace talks between the Georgian government and the South Ossetian separatists. At the same time, there is a region within the borders of the Russian Federation where the situation could be described as even more tense and alarming than in South Ossetia. Yet no official in Moscow has publicly expressed any concern about what is going on there. That region is the North Caucasian republic of Ingushetia.

Since early this year the insurgents in Ingushetia have been continuously increasing their attacks against the republic's law-enforcement personnel. Last week, however, guerrilla activity on the part of the republic's rebels reached an unprecedented level. According to news reports coming from the republic, at least one policeman or Federal Security Service (FSB) officer was killed or wounded every day there over the past week. Late at night on August 4, rebel squads entered Ingushetia's largest city, Nazran, and attacked mobile police posts. According to the Ingushetiya.ru website, the main targets of the rebels were private houses belonging to Kharun Dzeitov, the republican prime minister, and Khizir Tsoloev, the imam of Nazran. Their houses were attacked with assault rifles and grenade launchers. The militants also fired on police positions in order to prevent possible attempts by police to thwart rebel plans to destroy the houses of the officials. According to the website and official reports (Ingushetiya.ru, Interfax, August 5), police checkpoints came under fire that night near the Dynamo Sports Arena, Tsentr-Kamaz (the elite residential area where houses of high-ranking republican officials are located, including those of the prime minister and of the city's Imam) and Mutsalieva Street (also in the Nazran downtown).

According to reports by Ingushetiya.ru on the night of the rebel raid on Nazran (August 4-5), Russian troops that had moved to the center of the city to assist Ingush police units fired at an apartment building on Mutsalieva Street. They probably thought that the rebels who fired at the policemen were hiding there. It is noteworthy that the troops did not try to surround the area where they assumed the rebel positions to be, but just fired on the suspected rebel positions. The Russian military and police troops simply blocked all entrances to the Tsentr-Kamaz district of Nazran to defend the houses of Ingush officials. However, the rebel squads had left the area by that time but remained in other parts of the city, including Mutsalieva Street. As it later turned out, the rebels controlled the street until the middle of the next day (August 5).

Early on the morning of August 5, Bekhan Burzutanov, a police officer with Ingushetia's anti-organized crime department, made a grave mistake: he drove to work via Mutsalieva Street, thinking that the insurgents had already left. Burzutanov's car was attacked by automatic weapons and grenade launchers and he was killed.

Following that attack, a real rebel bacchanalia started in Ingushetia. Rebel groups moved freely throughout the republic, shooting at any policeman they encountered. During the day on August 5 two police officers from the Central Directorate of the Russian Interior Ministry for the Southern Federal District were attacked on the Kavkaz highway. One of them was killed and another was wounded. A police car in which several policemen were riding came under fire in the village of Ordzhonikidzevskaya, a police station was attacked in the village of Troitskaya and an officer from the republic's anti-organized crime department was killed in his private home in the village of Yandiri during the funeral ceremony for his brother, also a policeman, who had been killed several days earlier.

Top Russian security officials, including former FSB chief Nikolai Patrushev (who is now Secretary of the Kremlin's Security Council) and Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliev, visited Ingushetia many times this past winter. Several sessions of the regional Anti-Terrorist Commission have been held this year and the Russian presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District visited Ingushetia several times to meet with its president, Murat Zyazikov. During these meetings, many nice words were spoken about the development of the regional economy, about improving coordination between different security agencies and about effective methods of anti-insurgency propaganda. The "effectiveness" of these talks can now be seen in Ingushetia's hospitals, which are filled with wounded policemen and military servicemen.

It should be noted that starting in early July—according to official reports—the police responded to rebel attacks by activating the Krepost (Russian for “fortress”) special plan more often than the Perekhvat (“intercept”) or Vulcan (“volcano”) special plans. The difference between the Krepost plan and the Perekhvat or Vulcan plans is that the former is defensive while the latter are offensive. Plan Krepost means that the police and military forces stay inside their buildings, ready to repulse a rebel attack, while Plan Perekhvat or Plan Vulcan means that the security forces take measures to find and destroy a rebel group. The fact that security officials in Ingushetia today prefer to declare the defensive Krepost plan rather than the other plans means that the situation in the republic has reached a phase in guerrilla warfare known as the “guerrilla offensive period.” According to guerrilla warfare theory, war has several stages. The first stage is when government forces try to destroy rebel squads in remote areas of a country, such as mountains or forests. Failing that, the war enters a second stage, in which the guerrillas initiate regular sabotage operations, coming closer to the main centers of the country (large settlements). If the rebels are successful and the security forces cannot disrupt them, the guerrillas begin offensive operations near or inside major populated areas. At the same time, the police and the army lock themselves inside their garrisons. The next stage—the collapse of the government— usually quickly follows.

One can see the way that guerrilla warfare followed this pattern during the American campaign in Vietnam, the Soviet war in Afghanistan and the first Russian military campaign in Chechnya. It appears that the same scenario is now unfolding in Ingushetia. The Ingush police and Russian armed forces in the republic now care more about their own safety than about the general security situation in the republic. Zyazikov and his government are located in the capital Magas, a fortress city heavily guarded by Russian military units. Kidnappings, a problem in Ingushetia that human rights activists like to talk about, have almost stopped now, a fact allowing one to reach the paradoxical conclusion that the more police officers get killed by the rebels, the fewer civilians are detained or kidnapped in the republic.

If we do not soon see any radical changes in Russian policy towards Ingushetia, the republic may in the near future become the first real province of the insurgents’ Caucasian Emirate.

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Russia Chagrined by U.S. Attempts to Court Russian Muslim Clerics

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

The U.S. Department of State has found itself in an awkward position. The invitation to visit the United States that it extended to Russia's muftis under the auspices of "Islam in the USA" program was unanimously declined by all the invitees, who expressed views that were severely critical of the U.S. policies toward Muslim countries. Intriguingly, the official explanation offered by Russia's Muslim religious leaders was that they did not wish to become embroiled in political issues. Yet their response itself was politicized to the point of making their claimed motives look nothing short of laughable (http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2008/08/01_a_2799148.shtml).

The exact headcount of Russia's mufti corps is difficult to estimate due to its ongoing divisions and changes of affiliation between the two rival Muslim leadership centers of the Russian Federation. The first of them, known as Russia's Council of Muftis and headed by Ravil Gainutdin, reportedly comprises a number of religious offices located chiefly in the European part of Russia and the regions adjacent to the Volga River; the core member of this group is the Muftiyat of Tatarstan (<http://religion.sova-center.ru/discussions/1BDDDB2D/B1BE75A>). The other one, known as the Central Department of Religious Affairs of the Russian Federation's Muslims, operates under the leadership of Talgat Tadjautdin and includes approximately 26 clerics who serve several regions of Russia, the European part of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic Republics (<http://www.religio.ru/dosje/22/66.html>). A third organization, the Coordination Center of North Caucasus Muslims' Religious Organizations headed by Ismail Berdiyev is not affiliated with either of the two and is one of the most powerful religious organizations in today's Russia (<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=24577>).

In truth, the programs run by the U.S. State Department are merely educational tours; similar ones exist for press secretaries of regional leaders, attorneys, journalists, etcetera. Under a typical itinerary, the visitors are shuttled across several states for three weeks of mostly pro forma meetings and program participants—fatigued by extensive travel—rarely have a good word to say about their hosts at the end of their stay. So why does the State Department continue with the program? And does it take into account the organizational affiliations of its visitors, and the predictable reaction of their rival groups, which always try to secure their own government's support?

All of the Russian muftis, following time-honored rules from the era of Communist party rule, condemned U.S. policies and in protest declined the invitation to visit a country that remains a mystery to most of them. This indicates that the Russian government has started to tighten its grip over all matters involving Muslim clerics. The muftis would not gain any reputation points with their flocks because their actions, once again, revealed their utter subservience to the Kremlin. Moreover, that sort of behavior results in condemnation from the public, which views the mufti corps as yet another arm of the government established for the benefit of the government, not the people. This is why the muftis' reputation with the public has always been and remains very low (http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2008/08/01_a_2799148.shtml).

The public's utter lack of regard for the muftis is becoming a problem for the clerics, who have lately been targeted by armed attackers. For instance, the former chairman of the Coordination Center of North Caucasus' Religious Organizations, Magomed Albogachiyev, (who concurrently served as the mufti of Ingushetia) was forced to step down before the end of his term under pressure from armed opposition due to attacks and threats (see the newspaper *Angusht*, no. 59, July 2004, for Albogachiyev's published statement attributing his early retirement to the social and political situation in the republic).

Several weeks ago Deputy Mufti of Ingushetia Kambulat Zyazikov was wounded and taken to the hospital in serious condition after an assassination attempt. Although one should not discount another plausible explanation for the attack—namely, the close family ties between the victim and Ingush President Murat Zyazikov (<http://www.lenta.ru/news/2008/07/24/shoot/>).

Another North Caucasus mufti, Anas Pshikhachev of Kabardino-Balkaria, has been roundly criticized for ignoring the interests of the public. Pshikhachev also happens to be one of the three former participants of the State Department program that visited the United States last year under the program's auspices (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd->

south/chechnya/991435.html).

In Chechnya, the Muslim clerics have traditionally limited their activities to providing guidance to the public in the realm of procedural issues. Today, however, this is no longer enough for the pro-Moscow Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who has called upon the muftis to step up their efforts to combat Salafist ideology, the growing drug abuse problem, and the increasing disintegration of the essential Chechen traditions under pressure from both Salafism and Europe's unbridled influence. The Mufti of Chechnya, Sultan Mirzoyev, also has to deal with the challenge of ensuring the return of the former rebel fighters—yet another task assigned to religious leaders delivering sermons in mosques across Chechnya.

In Dagestan, the efforts of Mufti Ahmad-Hajji Abdullayev are focused on defusing internal tensions within the Muslim populace fueled by the dislike of Sheikh Said of Chirkey, who is viewed as a government puppet (<http://kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1219377.html>). In some villages, residents began to shun Friday prayers. The same sentiment is driving shifting public loyalties toward religious figures that are closer to the public interests rather than those sheikhs and muftis who chose to align themselves with the government and became government officials.

In Adygeya and Krasnodar Krai, Mufti Nurbi Emizh has reason to be calm, not least because his region has no armed opposition. However, Emizh has to cope with problems of a different kind. His troubles come from those repatriating ethnic Adygs who, upon returning to their homeland, have found their mufti to be nothing but a government official and have consequently become critical of him. In response, the mufti of Adygeya opined that ethnic Adygs returning from Middle Eastern countries should not be allowed to meddle in the matters of religion. According to Emizh, the returnees have a different mentality, while all Adygs would do well to remember that they live in a country where laws must be respected above all. The mufti gets rid of his newly repatriated opponents by arranging their deportation for “violation of passport regulations,” as was the case with Ramadan Tsei, a religiously degreed man who became an enemy of Mufti Emizh (<http://www.adygi.ru/index.php?link=news&action=show&id=4>). Emizh is not happy about the influx of returning Adygs, who are creating a number of issues, including the challenges of providing them with religious guidance.

Therefore, all of the muftis invited by the U.S. State Department with the goal of promoting the operations of America's Islamic organizations have intimately close ties to the Kremlin's ideologues and would never dare make any independent moves without permission from the policymakers in the Kremlin and the Russian Foreign Ministry. The State Department might as well send the invitations to the muftis straight to the Kremlin and the Foreign Ministry and await a response from the government, not from the invited clerics.

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