

A REPORT OF THE CSIS RUSSIA
AND EURASIA PROGRAM

The Rise of Radical and Nonofficial Islamic Groups in Russia's Volga Region



January 2013

Author

Sergey Markedonov



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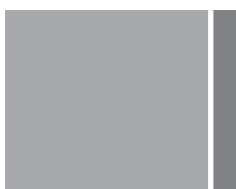
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ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	Anti-Ballistic Missile (Treaty)
ATPC	All-Tatar Public Center
DUMES	Spiritual Board of Muslims of European Russia and Siberia (Dukhovnoye upravleniye musul'man Evropeyskoy chasti SSSR i Sibiri)
CSBM	Central Spiritual Board of Muslims
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
FPS	Federal Penitentiary Service
FSB	Russian Federal Security Service (Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti)
IRP	Islamic Revival Party
NCFD	North Caucasian Federal District
RCM	Russian Council of Muftis
TSBM	Tatarstan Spiritual Board of Muslims
VFD	Volga Federal District



INTRODUCTION

In the two decades since the dissolution of the USSR, Russian and Western experts, human-rights activists, and journalists have become accustomed to the political violence of the North Caucasus. Terrorist bombings and acts of sabotage in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya are perceived as somehow intrinsic to the region. But a recent tragedy in the Volga region suggests that this sort of violence—and the Islamist terrorists who perpetrate it—may not be confined to the Caucasus. On the morning of July 19, 2012, simultaneous terrorist attacks wounded the Tatarstan chief mufti, Ildis Faizov, and killed Valiulla Yakupov, the former deputy chairman of the Tatarstan Spiritual Board of Muslims (TSBM), a well-known Islamic theologian and public figure and one of the most consistent opponents of what Russian politicians and media refer to as Wahhabism.¹ For the first time, official Islamic religious leaders from outside the North Caucasus became victims of Islamist terrorism. Three months later, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) announced it had prevented a large-scale terrorist attack in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, planned for the eve of the celebration of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha.² Two people killed in the counterterrorist operation had been suspected of the attacks on Faizov and Yakupov as well as other illegal activity.

With these attacks and counterattacks, the problem of inter-Islamic tensions in the Volga region suddenly became real, with some experts drawing attention to a historical parallel: religious and political violence in Dagestan, the largest republic of the North Caucasus, which began intensively with the murder of Mufti Sayyid Muhammad Hadji Abubakarov in 1998. Another parallel exists: reacting to the growing Islamist activity in the Caucasus in 1999, the People's Assembly of Dagestan enacted a law, "On the prohibition of Wahhabism and any other extremist activity," that recognized all Salafi organizations—which official Muslim clergymen in Dagestan call Wahhabi—as threats to the territorial integrity of the republic, and prohibited the activities of Salafi missions, including their production of audiovisual messages and communications. In 2012, deputies of the Tatarstan State Council reacted in a similar manner, adopting a series of amendments to regional freedom of conscience legislation that explicitly prohibit foreign citizens from establishing religious organizations within the republic. Since the passage of this legislation, only Russian citizens have been allowed to establish such organizations, and candidates for the Islamic clergy must have a diploma from a Russian or officially recognized foreign institution attesting to their religious

1. In Russian mass media and public opinion, and even among experts, the concept of Wahhabism is usually interpreted as a nontraditional trend for Russia's Muslims related to religious radicalism and to Saudi Arabia in particular and foreign influences in general. Among the critics of Wahhabism in the republics of the North Caucasus a special word arose: "Wahhabist," which they use interchangeably with "terrorist."

2. Eid al-Adha, also known as Kurban Bayram, is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide to honor the willingness of the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) to sacrifice his young first-born son Ismail as an act of submission to God's will, before God intervened to provide Abraham with a ram to sacrifice instead.

education.³ In both Dagestan and Tatarstan, restrictive mechanisms, fears, and phobias relating to foreign engagement have come to the forefront of policy, supplanting the influence of any other ideology or political bent. As such, the Kazan tragedy has raised a question: How likely is it that the North Caucasus scenario will be repeated in the Volga region, where the recent attacks took place?

Islam in the Volga region is a multidimensional phenomenon, and any attempts to make generalizations about it face methodological difficulties. These problems are compounded by ambiguities inherent in the terms “Islamism,” “militant Islam,” or “radical Muslims.” Each term, in its own way, refers to ideology and practice aimed at creating an environment in which all of the problems and contradictions of a Muslim community will be resolved exclusively with Islamic norms prescribed by shari’a, the system of regulations derived directly from the Qur’an and Sunnah. Unfortunately, those who consider themselves defenders of “real Islam” or “pure Islam” do not constitute a homogenous group, and each claims that its interpretation is the only correct religion.⁴

In contrast to the Northern Caucasus, however, Islam in the Volga region exhibits a different character. Although Salafis, who are frequently labeled “Wahhabis” by the Russian media and in political discourse, are active in the Volga region, the area is a remote periphery where several well-known international Islamist groups—such as the *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* (the Islamic Party of Liberation, which is almost unknown in the Caucasus), the *Tablighi Jamaat* (Society for Spreading Faith), and the *Fethullahcilar* movement (followers of Fethullah Gülen)—extend their influence, as do various sects of local origin that are unrelated to popular and well-known international Islamic organizations. Ordinarily, members of Hizb ut-Tahrir and supporters of Tablighi Jamaat do not share the Salafis’ approach, but in the Volga region plenty of situations exist where Islamists on the ground promote a mixed ideology that ignores contradictions between their organizational philosophies and those of the Salafis.⁵ Because of the secrecy surrounding the networks and activity of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tablighi Jamaat, and Fethullahcilar, it is hard to estimate the exact number of these Muslims in the region.⁶ The extent to which they are militant is also unclear. Observers and human rights activists claim that Islamist activists are sometimes victims of false allegations that they are connected to international terrorist networks.⁷ Nevertheless, these movements can be

3. Full texts of two those laws are available at <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/9315/> (Dagestan) and <http://www.rg.ru/2012/08/03/tatarstan-zakon-sovest-reg-dok.html> (Tatarstan).

4. Alexander Ignatenko, “Chistil’shchiki Islama” [The Islam cleaners], http://religion.ng.ru/problems/2010-11-17/1_islam.html.

5. Unlike followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Salafis reject political parties on the principle that Islam itself is more important than any parties; Salafis generally decry Hizb ut-Tahrir for engaging with the West and for peaceful rhetoric addressed to the peaceful methods.

6. Rais Suleimanov claimed about three thousand Tatar Wahhabis “are waiting in the wings”; see Ivan Kirichenko, “3000 Tatarskih wahhabitov zhdut svoego chasa” [Three thousand Tatar Wahhabis are waiting in the wings], August 7, 2012, <http://svpressa.ru/society/article/57617/>. Volga theologian Farid Salman says this number “is probably far too low”; see “Russia and Islam: The end of peaceful coexistence?” *The Economist*, September 1, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21561947>. Russian journalist Maxim Shevchenko doubted those figures, naming them mythical and “rather provocative”; see “Wahhabitsii myatezh v respublike Tatarstan: pro i contra” [The Wahhabi rebellion in the Republic of Tatarstan: for and against], August 9, 2012, <http://business-gazeta.ru/article/64349/>.

7. See the observation of “Memorial” human rights center, <http://www.hrights.ru/text/b23/Chapter1%202.htm>. It is important to note that human rights activists and journalists generally stress formal judicial mistakes, disproportionate use of force by law-enforcement structures, and violations of procedural norms. They recognize that religious radicalism and extremism exist, but they view human rights and procedural violations as provoking radicalization.

united under the term “nonofficial Muslims,” because they do not follow Russia’s officially recognized Muslim structures, are not registered as official religious groups, and are considered illegal, extremist organizations under Russian law.

This paper sheds light on the ideological sources and resources of radicalism in the Volga region, nonofficial Islamic movements’ support among the regional population, and opportunities for the potential growth of different forms of Islamist activities. It describes the origins of different nonofficial Islamic movements as well as their post-Soviet development, ideology, and relationship with the authorities and official Muslim clergy. The report also offers practical approaches both for Russian domestic policy and for the U.S.–Russian security cooperation agenda.

The Strategic Importance and Historical Legacy of the Volga Region

Before May 2000, the region now known as the Volga Federal District (VFD) was known as the Volga, Volga-Ural, or Volga region. The VFD comprises 14 of Russia’s 83 *subyekt federatsii* (Federal subjects), specifically the ones located directly on the Volga River or in adjacent areas in the Kama and Ural River basins that are closely associated with the Volga either historically or economically. Although the VFD comprises only 6.1 percent of all Russian territory, its population of more than 30 million people constitutes 21.3 percent of Russia’s total—a much higher percentage than the North Caucasian Federal District (NCFD). After the Central Federal District, which includes Moscow, the VFD is the second most populous of Russia’s eight federal districts.

Resources and Strategic Location

The VFD is rich in mineral resources, and its oil and gas reserves constitute 13 and 12 percent, respectively, of Russia’s total hydrocarbon resources. It is not by coincidence Tatarstan is often referred to as “the second Baku.” Additionally, the VFD contains 96 percent of the country’s known reserves of potassium salt, 60 percent of Russia’s phosphorus deposits, and 16 percent of its copper deposits. This region alone provides about 24 percent of Russia’s industrial production, the highest rate of any district in the country; in terms of investment, it provides 15.3 percent of the nationwide figure. The Druzhba Pipeline System, which starts near Almet’evsk, Tatarstan, and travels through Samara to Belorussia and then to the countries of the European Union, has a distinctly international impact on the region. The Surgut-Polotsk oil pipeline is among many that cross the VFD; five gas pipelines including Urengoy-Center and one export gas pipeline, Urengoy-Uzhgorod, do so as well.⁸

As a boundary region, the VFD comprises one-third of the Russian–Kazakhstan interstate border. Taking into account the porousness of this border as well as the fact that Kazakhstan borders on Central Asia, the VFD could be considered Russia’s gateway to Central Asia. This location is therefore both strategically and economically important and susceptible to migration problems involving new groups of Muslims.

8. “Informatsionnaya spravka: Polnomochnyy predstavitel’ Prezidenta RF v Privolzhskom federal’nom okruge” [Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Volga Federal District], on the website of the Privolzhskii Federalnyi Okrug [The Volga Federal District], <http://www.pfo.ru/?id=799>.

The value of the VFD is not limited solely to its economic contributions, however. The VFD is of crucial importance in the context of Russia–NATO and U.S.–Russian cooperation, in addition to its importance to issues of religious stability and security. According to a U.S. Department of State fact sheet,

The United States recognizes Russia’s contribution to building a better future for the Afghan people. Our two countries have developed excellent cooperation that supports Afghan efforts to make Afghanistan a peaceful, stable, and economically self-sustaining country, free of terrorism and illegal narcotics. We recognize that significant further international support will be needed to achieve this goal.⁹

As a result, more than 2,200 flights, 379,000 military personnel, and 45,000 containers of cargo have been transported through Russia in support of operations in Afghanistan. In June 2012 the Russian authorities gave permission for a transit route through the VFD for combined military supplies supporting the NATO operation. To help achieve this goal, the Alliance opened a special transit center in Ulyanovsk—despite the many U.S.-Russia disagreements on a wide spectrum of international policy issues, including Syria, Georgia, and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

The Legacy of Islam

The VFD includes six national republics—one third of Russia’s national republics—and is home to about 40 percent of Russia’s Muslim population. Within the VFD there are approximately 2,400 officially registered Islamic organizations, as well as the many nonofficial organizations mentioned earlier. Ethnically, Tatars constitute the largest Muslim ethnic group in Russia, with a total population of about 5.3 million; they are concentrated in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as in some areas of the Volga and the Southern Urals (the Ulyanovsk, Samara, and Orenburg *oblasts* [regions]). In total, there are about 4 million Tatars in the Volga region. Of the 1.6 million Bashkirs in Russia—the second largest Muslim group in the country—1.3 million reside in the VFD. Muslims constitute a majority in seven Russian constituencies, two of which are located in the VFD: Bashkortostan with 54.5 percent, and Tatarstan with 54 percent. Some other territories of the VFD are home to a significant percentage of Muslims, even if they don’t constitute a majority of the population. The Orenburg Oblast is approximately 16.7 percent Muslim,¹⁰ and the population of the Ulyanovsk Oblast is 13 percent Muslim.

When examining the religious and political challenges that the VFD faces, however, one cannot assume that challenges of one Russian region are applicable to another. Both the VFD and NCFD have diverse ethnic compositions and Islamic traditions as well as a relationship with other religions, primarily Orthodox Christianity. The respective histories of the two regions are very different, however. In both the Imperial and Soviet periods, the Volga region experienced higher levels of industrialization and urbanization than the North Caucasus. A large proportion of non-Muslim groups, mainly ethnic Russians, also settled in these industrialized, urban areas, leading the Volga region to become more secularized as well. Those factors decreased the role of Islam, especially in political sphere. Another key difference between the two regions is that, unlike the

9. U.S. State Department, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, “U.S.-Russia cooperation on Afghanistan: Fact Sheet,” June 18, 2012. <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/fs/193096.htm>.

10. It is also necessary to consider the huge influx of migrants entering Orenberg, whose numbers are difficult to assess with absolute accuracy.

North Caucasus, the Volga region has been an integral part of Russia for a much longer period of time, dating back to mid-sixteenth century Muscovy and the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by Ivan the Terrible.¹¹

This is not to say that Muslims in conquered territories were treated well. Repressive and discriminatory policies imposed upon the former Khanate subjects, including forced conversion to Christianity, prevailed from the sixteenth century through the first half of the eighteenth century. After that, however, Russian policy became more flexible and greatly expanded the rights of Muslims. Numerous wars against the Ottoman Empire, which claimed the role of the protector of Muslims and exploited the idea of religious solidarity, caused Russia to recognize the need to strengthen its own Muslim community's political loyalty. The Russian imperial government was also interested in decreasing the riots and rebellions that had been so numerous in the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth in the lands of the former Kazan Khanate. The Volga region, which at that time had the largest Muslim population in the Russian Empire, became a unique platform from which this goal could be realized. In June 1773 Empress Catherine issued the decree "On the tolerance of all faiths," which prohibited Orthodox clergy from intervening in the religious life of other confessions and formally recognized Islam as a "tolerable religion" in the empire. In November 1783, Tatar *morzalar* (Muslim noblemen) were integrated into the Russian Imperial Army and in February 1784 they were granted rights and privileges equal to those of the Russian nobility. They participated in all of Russia's military campaigns, including wars against the Ottomans.

Importantly, the first official Muslim organization in Russia arose in the Volga region. In September 1788 Russian Imperial authorities officially recognized the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly, with its center in Ufa (capital of today's Bashkortostan).¹² The assembly constituted a serious attempt, in the midst of the Russian–Ottoman War (1787–1791), to foster a constructive relationship between Russia's Muslim community and the Russian state, supporting and promoting the predominant role of the Orthodox Church while placing at the forefront such principles as political loyalty and religious autonomy. Volga Muslims, especially ethnic Tatars, played a significant role in the assembly's creation and development, and the competence of the assembly's clergy in matters of religion, education, and family law covered the entire Muslim population of the Volga region, promoting its comprehensive integration in the social structure of Russia.

These activities did not prevent some of Volga's Muslims from undertaking intensive searches for ethno-national or religious identity through the exploration of pan-Turkic ideas,¹³ participa-

11. Even before the conquest of the Kazan Khanate, Muscovy was generally successful integrating the Qasim Tatar Khanate. This khanate, which existed from 1452 until 1681 in the territory of contemporary Ryazan' Oblast with its capital in Kasimov, was a vassal of Muscovy. Qasim khans and their guard participated in all of Muscovy's raids into Kazan (1467–1469, 1487, 1552). Qasim khan Şahğali (1515–1567) was three times crowned as Kazan khan with the aid of Russia. In 1681 the Khanate was abolished and became governed by Moscow's appointees.

12. In 1796–1802, the assembly's center was in Orenburg and then was returned to Ufa. It was a collective body led by mufti and several *qadis* (judges). The first mufti was Mukhammed-zhan Khusainov (1756–1825). In its practice, the assembly synthesized Imperial legislation and Islamic Law.

13. Yusuf Akçura (1876–1935) made the first fundamental interpretation of Pan-Turkic political principles in his 1904 work "Üç Tarzı Siyaset" [Three policies]. Akçura was born in Simbirsk (now Ulyanovsk) to a Tatar family and lived there until he left for the Ottoman Empire.

tion in the late 19th century Jadid religious and intellectual movement,¹⁴ or engagement in federalism or sovereignty projects.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Orenburg assembly was able to develop a solid foundation of political loyalty among ethnic and religious elites as well as among the rank and file Muslims of the region. Indeed, although the assembly's structure transformed in the Soviet era, it survived the state policy of atheism that dominated in the USSR. The present-day Central Spiritual Board of Muslims (CSBM), also located in Ufa, considers itself to be the successor of the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly; in September 2013, it plans to celebrate the 225th anniversary of its establishment with the support of the Russian authorities.

The aforementioned facts help to explain why the Tatarstan terrorist attacks of July 2012 shocked and surprised numerous media outlets. For many years, experts and journalists discussing Russia's Islamic revival had drawn comparisons between the Volga and North Caucasus and, invariably, the "peaceful" nature of the first was juxtaposed with the "militancy" of the second.¹⁶ As the *Economist* noted,

Tatarstan was held up as a model of stability and tranquility as the Muslim-majority republics of the Russian north Caucasus became embroiled in a separatist conflict that spawned a still-continuing civil war along religious lines. More than half of Tatarstan's 4m people are Sunni Muslims who have long enjoyed friendly relations with the rest of Russia.¹⁷

Relations with the Kremlin

In fact, in the Volga region there still has not been any experience comparable to the creation of a de facto independent Chechen state (1991–1994 and 1996–1999) or of the permanent extensive terrorist network of the "Caucasus Emirate." Admittedly, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the situation in Tatarstan—as in many other autonomous republics within the former Soviet Union—was tense. Many autonomous republics that had existed alongside the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic tried to gain independence, just as former Soviet republics such as the Central Asian and Baltic states had done before them. In the case of Tatarstan, the people first tried to raise their political and legal status to that of a Soviet republic. Then they began to hold referenda showing support for sovereignty. In the March 21, 1992, referendum on the republic's sovereignty, 62 percent favored the status of a republic as a subject of international law. Ten days later, Tatarstan refused to sign a federal treaty with Moscow and in December 1993, it chose not to participate in Russia's first parliamentary elections or the referendum on the Russian Constitution.

14. Jadidism was an intellectual and religious movement especially popular among the Turkic people of the Russian Empire at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. This modernist trend maintained that Muslims in Russia had entered a period of decay that could only be rectified by the acquisition of a new kind of knowledge and comprehension of European-modeled political culture—that is, liberalism, or socialism. Jadids promoted discussion and reflections on Tatar ethno-national as well as pan-Turkic identity. In today's Tatarstan, Jadidist ideas are interpreted in the context of "Euro-Islam."

15. After the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 and then during the Civil War, Tatar nationalists attempted to establish an independent republic (the Idel-Ural State) but this project was not realized. The Tatarstan Constitution of 1992 defined Tatarstan as a sovereign state, but according to the constitutional amendments of 2002 (articles 1 and 3) Tatarstan is defined as a part of the Russian Federation.

16. Aleksei Malashenko, "Dva nepohozih Rennesa" [The two different Renaissances], *Otechestvennye zapiski* [The Domestic notes] 5, 2003.

17. "Russia and Islam: The end of peaceful coexistence?" *The Economist*, September 1, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21561947>.

Despite these tensions, Moscow and Kazan managed to avoid interethnic conflict. The Russians who lived in Tatarstan did not flee *en masse* and many of them were incorporated into the republic's elite. For years Tatarstan served as a political and managerial model for Russia's other regions. Beginning with Tatarstan in 1994, Moscow launched its "treaty federation" model, which was predicated on compromise and utilizing special agreements between the country's center and the regions; in the 1990s, Moscow signed 46 such treaties. During the two Chechen campaigns, journalists and experts often pointed to Tatarstan—a region with a complex ethnic composition that had found a way to avoid an armed confrontation with Moscow—as a counterexample to the outcome in Chechnya. The latest demarcation treaty between Moscow and Kazan, ratified on June 24, 2007, excluded such points as "the sovereignty of Tatarstan," although Kazan did retain the right to decide, jointly with Moscow, questions concerning the development of the republic's natural resources.

For the Kremlin, Bashkortostan's demands were also complicated puzzles. In the struggle to preserve particular preferences for the republic's elite, Bashkir leader Murtaza Rakhimov embraced a policy of "soft nationalism." Unlike the leadership in Tatarstan, he did not entertain the possibility of statehood outside Russia. Right from the start Bashkir "nationalism" was more grounded and orderly. In August 1994, Moscow and Ufa signed an agreement clarifying jurisdictional subjects and powers. This neat resolution of the ethnic factor and regional independence made Rakhimov successful until his resignation in 2010.

Indeed there were many cases in which religious community leaders—that is, senior officials of the national republics of the Volga region who identified themselves with Islam—persistently advocated for interreligious and interethnic dialogue and condemned extremism and terrorist practices. In this regard it is important to note the numerous statements from Mintimer Shaimiev, the first president of Tatarstan. In one statement he said: "Whether we want it or not, there is a confrontation between Christianity and Islam in today's world. However, in our republic we have a different experience."¹⁸ Talgat Tadzhuddin, an ethnic Tatar born in Kazan and chairman of the CSBM, always demonstrated his loyalty to Russia and tolerance toward Russian Orthodoxy. He, in particular, even suggested to his fellow believers that they celebrate Christmas, because it symbolizes the birth of Prophet Isa (Jesus), who is mentioned in the Qu'ran.¹⁹

Moreover, the Volga region produced such potentially attractive concepts as "Euro-Islam," which aimed to develop the religion in accordance with contemporary realities and interreligious dialogue. According to Rafael Khakimov, a former advisor to Shaimiev and an active promoter of this idea,

The Tatar version of Islam is very pragmatic, yet at the same time it is not superficial, since it is based on an advanced system of religious and secular education. It manages to organically unite Muslim values with the ideas of liberalism and democracy, and therefore it can be called "Euro-Islam." Tatars over a long period of proximity and engagement have been able to find many forms of coexistence with other ethnic groups, such as Catholics in Poland, Protestants in the Baltic countries, Orthodox Christians in Russia and traditional

18. Mintimer Shaimiev, "Ya vzyal otvetstvennost' na sebya" [I put responsibility on myself], *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, April 29, 2005.

19. Mihail Tul'skiy, "Wahhabity v Rossii pobezhdayut umerennyh musul'man?" [Do Wahhabis win the moderate Muslims in Russia?], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, June 19, 2001.

Islam in Central Asia. The whole way of life of the Tatars is a kind of dialogue with other civilizations, and this experience can be used to strengthen contacts between East and West, Russia and Asia.²⁰

Indeed, in the VFD there are tens of thousands of examples of tolerance and respect for ethnic and religious feelings in individuals' daily practice, more than would fill a multi-volume report. It is also true that the number of Islamic radicals in the district is relatively small; the number is estimated from some hundreds to three thousand. Overall, the VFD government and law enforcement agencies have been able to control the situation within their jurisdictions.

Islamism's Early Warning Signs

The challenge posed by political Islam in the post-Soviet Volga region has developed gradually. During the political liberalization of the late perestroika period and the early 1990s, Islamic issues did not play any significant role in regional processes or, at a minimum, their role was subordinated to the discourse of nationalism. Yet the first alarm bells of Volga Islamism rang long before 2012; the recent conclusion of the *Economist* that "traditional Muslims and Salafists lived harmoniously side-by-side in Tatarstan" is not quite correct.²¹ Both the Volga region and the North Caucasus, since perestroika and especially after the Soviet dissolution, have experienced an Islamic revival.

Political Islam in the Early Post-Soviet Years

In the early 1990s, the question of self-determination and choice of the future model of republican statehood was at the forefront of political discourse; Tatarstan and Bashkortostan were the most active in the alleged "parade of sovereignties." As historian Aidar Habutdinov noted, "Despite the fact that in 1989 there was mass celebration of the anniversary of the acceptance of Islam by the State of the Volga Bulgaria [the historic Islamic Bulgar state], it was considered more as a tribute to the ancestors and their statehood."²² The program documents of the Tatar movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s, largely tailored in accordance to Baltic standards, made practically no mention of religion. Official authorities did not use any religious rhetoric or arguments. The concept of a "special political path" for Tatarstan was related at that time to the proclamation of civil sovereignty, to the revival of ethno-national culture and language and, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, to the restoration of independence.²³

In fact, in the first platform of the nationalist All-Tatar Public Center (ATPC), as well as in the materials of the constituent congress of the 1991 Sovereignty Committee, the concept of Islam was simply absent. In the second ATPC program there was a special section entitled "Islam in the Tatar society," but at that point the role of the ethno-national factor was dominant in comparison with

20. "Rafael Khakimov o Evroislame" [Rafael Khakimov on Euro-Islam], http://www.islampeace.ru/?parent_id=784 (undated).

21. "Russia and Islam," *The Economist*.

22. Aidar Habutdinov, "Islam v Tatarstane v pervyie gody novogo tysyacheletiya" [Islam in Tatarstan in the early millennium years], May 20, 2008, <http://www.islamrf.ru/news/islam-world/culture/2940/>. Volga Bulgaria (Volga-Kama Bolghar) was a medieval state that existed between the seventh and thirteenth centuries around the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers, in what is now European Russia. The population was mostly Bulgars (an ethnically Turkic group) who had conquered the Finno-Ugrics and Turkic speakers of the region. They adopted Islam as their state religion in the early tenth century.

23. Ibid.

any religious issue. Incidentally, in the second ATPC program, Islamic fundamentalism was criticized and assessed as “unacceptable” for the future of Tatarstan as it was opposed to moderate and pro-European Jadidism.²⁴ At that time there were only loose attempts, if any, to establish Islamic political structures in the Volga region. According to sociological polls from the mid-1990s in the Republic of Tatarstan, 44.6 percent of the rural Tatars and 33.5 percent of the urban population perceived religion as both a connection with ethnic origins and as one factor of ethnic self-identification; 41 percent of the urban Tatars believed that Islamic holidays were traditional ethnic ones as well.²⁵

Still, the first manifestations of politicized Islam—initially timid—took place in the Volga region in the early 1990s. In 1990 Astrakhan hosted the first congress of the Islamic Revival Party (IRP), during which Akhmadkadi Akhtayev was elected leader.²⁶ This Salafi, a professional physician and ethnic Avar born in Kudali in Dagestan, was rather moderate in supporting dialogue between Salafi and Sufi Muslims as well as between Islam and Orthodox Christianity. The IRP as an organization, however, desired to consolidate all of the Muslims of the Soviet Union in pursuit of the right to live in accordance with the rules of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. As Rashid Khalikov, an IRP activist in Astrakhan, said: “We are labeled extremists. But this is not true; we simply support the purity of Islam and its precepts. We will have to revive our own religion throughout the whole world. We do not believe in the official mullahs because they are bureaucrats and far from our faith.”²⁷ Akhtayev himself believed that the alleged “new world order” targeted Islam as a victim.²⁸ Within the IRP at that time, popular democratic discourse was strongly criticized. The organizers of the forum appealed to Soviet Muslims, asking them to find their own way not associated either with the Communist Party, which was rapidly losing its power, or with the anti-Communist movement. Still, the IRP as a whole did not exist for a long time. The dissolution of the USSR placed too many different tasks in front of the Muslim communities of what had once been a common country.²⁹

24. The ATPC, also known as the Tatar Public Center, is an organization with a Tatar nationalist agenda founded in 1989. For more detailed observations, see http://tatar-centr.blogspot.com/2012/07/blog-post_14.html.

25. Rozalinda Musina, “Musulmanskays identichnost’ kak forma ‘religioznogo natsionalizma’ tatar v kontexte etnosotsial’nyh protsessov v etnopoliticheskoi situatsii v Tatarstane [The Muslim identity as a form of alleged Tatar “religious nationalism” in the context of ethno-social processes in the Tatarstan ethno-political situation], in *Islam v Evrazii* [Islam in Eurasia] (Moscow: Progress-Tradition Publishing House, 2001), p. 301.

26. Geographically, Astrakhan is in the lower Volga; although today the Astrakhan region is a part of the Southern Federal District, it is culturally and historically connected with regions of the VFD.

27. Cited in Victor Viktorin, *Islam v Astrakhanskoy regione* [Islam in the Astrakhan region] (Moscow: Logos Publishing House, 2008), p. 57. This book contains copies of original documents issued by the IRP Congress.

28. Mikhail Roshchin, *Sled Islamskogo fundamentalizma na Severnom Kavkaze* [The Islamic fundamentalist trace in the North Caucasus] (Moscow: Craft+ Publishing House, 2003), p. 5.

29. The IRP was actively engaged in the Tajikistan Civil War of 1992–1997. Dushanbe banned it in 1993, as it fought alongside the United Tajik Opposition against the governmental forces. During the Peace Agreement of 1997, IRP was legalized and then participated in the parliamentary elections. It boycotted the presidential elections of 2006.

Akhmadkadi Akhtayev in 1992 was elected as a deputy of the republican Parliament of Dagestan and on the eve of his death was going to participate in the elections of the Gunib district administration head. He criticized the concept of “armed jihad” in Dagestan and followed moderate line. In contrast, one of the IRP’s Astrakhan Congress organizers, Bagautdin Kebedov, became the leader of radical wing of the

The Post-Soviet Islamic Revival

At the same time, the end of the Soviet Union also brought with it the end of the official state policy of atheism; Islam, like Orthodox Christianity, Buddhism, and Judaism, gained legitimacy with the social and cultural space of Russia. Across the country thousands of mosques opened, overcoming the artificial isolation of the Soviet believers. Owing to newly opened borders, Russian Muslims were able not only to perform the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to the holy places of Mecca and Medina but also to study at foreign religious schools and access religious literature and periodicals.³⁰ Over twenty years, stable contacts with foreign co-religionists have been established and the space for communication with Russia's Muslims has been greatly expanded. However, all these achievements represent only one side of the coin.

With the resurgence of Muslim identity in Russia came the acquaintance of Russian Muslims with the theories and practices of radical Islamism. According to Zagir Arukhov, a distinguished Dagestani expert on Islam who was killed by terrorists in 2005, "It was expected that the totality of the Islamic system of regulation, the organic character of Islam as a socio-cultural system, and the flexible interaction with the state would give this religion important advantages in the socio-political transformation of society."³¹ But the transformation of Islam into a unifying and stabilizing force did not occur. Unlike Central Asia and the Caucasus, the Volga Muslim landscape had been more homogenous prior to the Soviet dissolution. The overwhelming majority of Muslims in the VFD were followers of the *Hanafi Madh'hab*, a juridical school of Sunni Islam in which the everyday life of adherents combined a mixture of Islamic religious norms and local ethnic traditions and customs. After 1991, however, religious liberalization resulted in the interference of external Islamic movements of different origins—Arabic, Turkish and South Asian—as well as domestic nontraditional groups.

Being a patchwork of various trends and groups, Islam could not play a consolidating role. Rather, many schisms that rocked the community of Russian Muslims, especially in the early 1990s, facilitated the emergence of various radical forces within Russia. Although most Russian Muslims are loyal citizens of their country, those influenced by radical Islam aimed to effect a full and complete victory of their ideological and political worldview. This consequence of the Islamic revival poses a potential threat to the unity of Russia and an increasingly significant risk for European security. It is fraught with interethnic conflicts as well as clashes not only between Christians and Muslims, but also between different groups of Muslims. As Roman Silantyev, a Russian expert on post-Soviet Islam, notes, the last two decades in the history of Russia's Islamic community have been filled with numerous confrontations—personal, business, and political—and radicals with their religious fervor and intolerance have played a significant role.³² The Russian state has been faced with an Islamist threat both inside the country in the North Caucasus and, to a lesser

North Caucasus Islamists. He is considered the spiritual father of Salafi Islam in Dagestan; now he is wanted by Russian law enforcement. Bagautdin's step-brother, Abbas Kebedov, has since 2010 been a member of a Dagestani commission for the social rehabilitation of former militants.

30. The USSR restored diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia in 1991; a year earlier, then-Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev decided to permit Soviet citizens to travel through third countries to perform the *hajj*.

31. Zagier Arukhov, "Poiski etnicheskoi i religioznoi identichnosti v Dagestane [In search of ethnic and religious identity in Dagestan], in *Religiya i identichnost' v Rossii* [Religion and identity in Russia], ed. M. T. Stepanyants (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2003), p. 185.

32. Roman Silantyev, *Noveishaya Istoriya Islamskogo soobshchestva v Rossii* [The contemporary history of the Islamic community in Russia] (Moscow: Ihtos Publishing House, 2005), p. 6.

extent, in the Volga region, and outside, as it was involved in the five-year civil war in Tajikistan (1992–1997). In many ways, the creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in May 2002 was a response to the growing destabilization in Central Asia, where Islamists boasted a greatly strengthened position barely ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union.³³ These same issues have also determined Russia's interest in closer cooperation with the United States and NATO on Afghanistan.

Early Islamism and Terrorism in the VFD

For more than two decades the dynamics of the North Caucasus overshadowed the religious situation in the VFD. Yet even in 1999, terrorism was beginning in the Volga region. Terrorists attacked the border of the Republic of Tatarstan and in the Kirov area in 1999, blowing up several branches of the Urengoy–Uzhgorod gas pipeline. The FSB arrested the organizers of this terrorist act, a group of alumni and students of the Yoldyz Madrassa in the city of Naberezhnye Chelny, Tatarstan. Ramazan Ishkildin, a native of the village Old Sibai in the Baimak district of Bashkortostan, who had been trained as an imam in the Vedenno district of Chechnya, led the group.³⁴ That year it was also reported that Islamist summer camps were being established in the Chusovoy district of the Perm area. In September 1999, Volgograd and Moscow became targets of terrorist bombings in which more than 200 people were killed. The main suspect of the Moscow attack was a native of Uzbekistan, Denis Saytakov, who had been trained at the Yoldyz Madrassa; the second suspect was Ruslan Ahmyarov, an ethnic Tatar born in Mordovia who had studied at the Al-Furqan Madrassa in Buguruslan, in the Orenburg Oblast. Some Salafis attempted to create a “Special Islamic Territory” in Tatarstan as well as Mordovia, following the example of a similar effort in Dagestan in 1998.³⁵ Among so-called Russian Talibs detained in 2002 in the U.S. prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, some were reportedly from Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The trial of the Islamic Jamaat, which will be described in detail later, also occurred in Tatarstan, and in 2001–2004 neighboring regions experienced a similar surge of religious fundamentalism.

For the last two years, the Volga region has increasingly been the site of law-enforcement and intelligence operations designed to counter the threat of Islamic terrorism. Probably the most impressive incidents took place in 2010 when special operations troops fought terrorists in the Arkhangelsk district of Bashkortostan and in the Nurlat district of Tatarstan, an area that has one of the largest oil reserves in the country. In both cases terrorists put up fierce resistance to the

33. On May 15, 1992, some members of the Commonwealth of Independent States signed the Treaty on Collective Security, an intergovernmental military-political alliance. The treaty was renamed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and signed by the presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan on October 7, 2002.

34. Vladislav Mal'tsev, “Bashkirskii Jihad” [The Bashkir jihad], http://www.vahhabizm.ru/stat/bashjihad_stat.html (undated).

35. Timur Kozayev, “Polzuchii terror” [The creeping terror], August 30, 2010, http://versia.ru/articles/2010/aug/30/islamskiy_radikalizm. Dagestanis proclaimed the creation of a “Special Islamic Territory” in August 1998. Official authorities and law-enforcement forces were withdrawn from three Dagestani villages and shari'a norms were introduced, replacing secular legislation. This territory was liquidated on September 12, 1999, during an operation of the Russian army and troops of the Ministry of Interior. A detailed observation of this topic can be found in S. Markedonov, *Ethno-natsionalnyi i religioznyi faktor v obschestvenno-politicheskikh protsessakh Kavkazskogo regiona* [The ethno-national and religious factor in the social-political processes of the Caucasus region] (Moscow: MAKSPress Publishing House, 2005), pp. 130–220.

law-enforcement agents. In March 2010, authorities arrested Bashir Pliyev, a native of Ingushetia known among Islamists as the Bashkir Emir and considered to be the spiritual leader and organizer of the Islamist underground in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. In the course of the investigation it was proved that an Islamist group he led had perpetrated a number of crimes that, to that point, had remained unsolved, including diverting the route of the gas pipeline in the Birsik district of Bashkortostan. In Nurlat, the special operation was aggravated by the fact that one of the three radicals killed in the operation was 34-year-old Ruslan Spiridonov, son of the former prosecutor for the city of Chistopol. This generational and ideological conflict is quite characteristic of the largest North Caucasus republic of Dagestan, not of the VFD. Similarly unusual, in March 2012 authorities uncovered an underground Salafi network in a jail of the VFD's Ulyanovsk Oblast.

Outside Influences on Volga Islamism

The Islamists of the North Caucasus have a particular interest in expanding their anti-Russian struggle to other parts of the country, including the VFD. Thus, in the spring of 2010, the leader of the "Caucasus Emirate," Doku Umarov, announced his readiness to "liberate" the Astrakhan and Volga territories from the "occupation of the Russian *kafirs* [infidels]."³⁶ His supporters occasionally publish pieces related to activities of the so-called *Vilayat Idel-Ural* (Islamic Emirate), and a website for the Vilayat Idel-Ural appeared in November 2010. The website's authors promised to support those Muslims who "lift up their voices in arms" and "commit themselves to liberate their lands from the rule of the worst of creatures and to establish just Islamic Law given us by Allah, the Lord of the worlds in order to govern on the Earth." Other materials on the site called for the Muslims of Tatarstan "not to be afraid of the infidels and their followers." The website defines the area of the Vilayat Idel-Ural as "all the territory of today's active removable Rusnya [a term used to identify Russia] that is not the Caucasus Emirate and its Vilayats but claims its right to be the territory of Muslims waging the Holy war for the liberation against the invaders and infidels."³⁷ In sum, the possibility of the North Caucasus Islamist experience being exported to the territory of the VFD has become extremely urgent.

No less important is the problem of the international relations of Volga's Islamists. Increasingly, their struggle is perceived in the context of "global jihad." Like the jihadists of the North Caucasus, Volga radicals cooperate with like-minded actors in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Middle East (mainly Saudi Arabia). In August 2008 in Bashkortostan the terrorist Pavel Dorokhov, an ethnic Russian who converted into Islam and changed his name to Abdul Mujib, was killed in a special operation. Mujib had previously trained in the Waziristan region of Pakistan with the Bulgar Jamaat—a group that, according to the statement of FSB director Alexander Bortnikov, was founded with the assistance of Al Qaeda.³⁸

36. Amir Dokku Abu Usman, quoted in "My osvobodim Krasnodarskii krai, Astrakhan and Povolzhskie Zemli" [We'll liberate Krasnodar area, Astrakhan and the Volga lands], March 8, 2010, <http://turpal-ali.livejournal.com/290.html>. The goal of the Caucasus Emirate was to establish an Islamic state based on shari'a norms on the territory of the North Caucasus as the first phase in the further Islamization of Russia and neighboring states. It was proclaimed on October 7, 2007, by the self-proclaimed president of the Chechen Republic-Ichkeria, Doku Umarov.

37. "Zayavlenie o granitsah Vilayata Idel-Ural" [Statement on the Idel-Ural Vilayat borders], <http://vilayatiu.co.cc/news/zayavlenie-o-granicax-vilayata-idel-ural/>, accessed November 14, 2012.

38. Mihail Cherniak, "Ubitiy boevik Al-Qaeda byl Russkim" [The killed Al Qaeda militant was Russian], August 29, 2008, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2008/08/29/518690.html>.

Eurasian countries—in particular, Georgia and Azerbaijan—have also showed interest in the dynamics of the Volga region, specifically to cooperate with nationalist movements, not with Islamist groups. In the spring of 2012, Rafis Kashapov, the head of the Naberezhnye Chelny branch of the ATPC, was invited to appear on the First Information Caucasus television channel in Georgia, which is specially oriented toward the Russian-speaking audience and the North Caucasus republics.³⁹ Because of decreased interest in VFD nationalism and separatism since the 1990s, however, nationalists and national separatists in the Volga today willingly and actively utilize the “Islamic factor” to draw attention to their activities. For example, Fauziya Bairamova, leader of the radical wing of the Party of Tatar National Independence Ittifaq, has tried to use Islamist rhetoric since the early 2000s to enhance the Ittifaq movement itself. She considers Islam a compulsory element of Tatar ethnic identity: “Don’t be deceived by the growing number of Mosques. They stand empty because only 1–2 percent of Tatars come to the religion; people *en masse* have not returned to our belief and have not started reading *Namaz* five times per day.” She especially criticizes the practice of mixed, or interethnic, marriages: “Nowadays about 50 percent of all Tatar maidens are married to *kafirs* (infidels) ... In the city of Naberezhnye Chelny, 70 percent of all drug addicts are children born through mixed marriages. All the cemeteries are filled by them.” In her opinion, the head of the Republic of Tatarstan needs to garner additional Islamic legitimacy.⁴⁰

All of these developments have raised serious concerns among the Russian authorities. During a meeting on the issue of extremism on August 8, 2011, Russia’s then–interior minister Rashid Nurgaliyev voiced concern about disturbing trends in the VFD. Noting that a neighborly atmosphere had characterized the Volga region for centuries, Nurgaliyev said instances of extremism based on religious and ethnic grounds had increased dramatically in recent years.⁴¹ In October 2011, officials from the Bashkortostan branches of the FSB and Ministry of Interior issued a statement on the challenge posed by the transformation of this republic into a “new haven for separatism” owing to the increased presence of terrorist and extremist groups. They made special note of the fact that the natives of Bashkortostan have engaged with the North Caucasus Islamist underground in terrorist activity and noted the desire of the radicals to exercise control over criminal groups. Although representatives of the Bashkortostan republican administration and the Republican Spiritual Board of Muslims were more careful and accurate in their estimates of the degree of radicalism in the region, they noted the “unordinary character” of the current situation and an increase in the difficulty that the official Muslim clergy face in their work as a result of their competition with the Islamists. Arthur Suleimanov, deputy head of the CSBM, said, “It’s very difficult for our imams to oppose the radical extremism of the youth.”⁴² Russian president Vladimir Putin, during his Tatarstan visit in August 2012, commented on Yakupov’s assassination, estimating his activity to have been a great contribution to the maintenance of ethnic and religious peace in the Volga region, and posthumously awarded the theologian the Order of Courage.⁴³

39. Rais Suleimanov, “Natsional-separatizm v Tatarstane v nachale 21 veka: ideologiya, organizatsii, zarubezhnoe vliyanie” [National separatism in Tatarstan in the early 21st century: ideology, organizations and foreign influence], April 4, 2012, <http://www.muslims-volga.ru/?id=3569>.

40. Fauziya Bairamova, quoted in “Tak kto zhe est’ kto v Tatarstane?” [So who is who in Tatarstan?], August 9, 2012, <http://www.islamrf.ru/news/analytics/politics/23381/>.

41. Rashid Nurgaliyev, quoted in “Privolzhie ishchet sposoby protivodeystviya extremism” [The Volga region looks for methods to oppose extremism], August 8, 2011, http://old.fedpress.ru/federal/polit/vlast/id_243225.html.

42. Arthur Suleimanov, quoted in Anna Chelak, “Bashkitiyu postavili v ruzhie” [Bashkiria was set in the gun], *Kommersant Daily*, October 19, 2011, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1798115>.

43. “President Rossii: Poezdka v Tatarstan” [The president of Russia: visiting Tatarstan], August 28, 2012, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/16311>.

Salafi Activity in the Volga Region

Wahhabi or Salafi?

Salafi Muslims became increasingly active in the Volga region after the fall of Communism. As noted earlier, the Russian media usually label these Muslims as Wahhabis, but a thorough examination of Islam in general, and Caucasian Islam in particular, reveals that as applied to Islam in the Volga region, the term “Wahhabism” is simply incorrect in both the academic and the applied sense of the term. Those who advocate Salafism have never defined themselves as Wahhabis, and they consider the term a pejorative nickname or a label imposed by the intelligence services.⁴⁴ The word “al-Wahhabiya” derives from Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of a conservative branch of Islam. His teachings later became the official ideology of the Saudi state. It is worth noting that even the followers of al-Wahhab never called themselves Wahhabis, because identifying with the name of a single person would fall under the sin of idol worship. Rather, his followers called themselves *muwahhidun* (“monotheists”) and adherents of the original, pure Islam, or *salafiyyeen* (“those who follow the way of the predecessors”)—that is, Salafis. Wahhabi was the term used by the group’s adversaries, even during the life of Abd al-Wahhab.⁴⁵ As ethnologist Ahmet Yarlykapov notes,

Not all radical fundamentalist ideas spread today in the Muslim world should be ascribed to classical Wahhabism. This term defines a wide range of radical-fundamentalist approaches to interpreting the teachings of Islam. These approaches receive their fullest and most systematic treatment in the works of Ibn Taymiyah and al-Wahhab himself.⁴⁶

In the opinion of the orientalist Galina Yemelianova, “Strictly speaking, the use of the term Wahhabism in relation to the Salafi movement in the Islamic regions of the former Soviet Union is incorrect because the latter is based on a wider doctrinal foundation than the teaching of Abd al-Wahhab.”⁴⁷

The most accurate definition would consider contemporary Volga Salafis a regional variant of Salafism that is not identified with official clergy. In the context of the Volga republics, Salafis demonstrate disrespect towards their elders, considering them “ignorant” and “backward” in matters related to the profession of Islam. From their point of view, the “virus” of national Islam has infected the older generations, who practice a faith associated with Tatar and Bashkir traditions. Salafis are sharply critical of mingling Islam with folk traditions, protesting against such popular holidays as Sabantuy, which they interpret as a manifestation of paganism.⁴⁸ More generally, Salafis are strongly critical of the traditional folk cultures of the Volga ethnic groups. They are also op-

44. Aleksei Malashenko, *Islamskie orientiry Severnogo Kavkaza* [The Islamic landmarks of the North Caucasus] (Moscow: Gendalf Publishing House, 2001).

45. Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) was an Arab Islamic theologian. His pact with Muhammad bin Saud helped to establish the first Saudi state.

46. Akhmet Yarlykapov, “Wahhabism na Severnom Kavkaze” [Wahhabism in the North Caucasus], in *Sotsial’no politicheskaya situatsiia na Kavkaze* [Social-political situation on the Caucasus] (Moscow: Institut Politicheskogo i Voennoogo Analiza, 2001), p. 156.

47. Galina M. Yemelianova, “The Rise of Islam in Muslim Eurasia: Internal Determinants and Potential Consequences,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2007): 79.

48. Sabantuy is a holiday celebrated by Tatars and other Turkic peoples living along the Volga River. In Bashkir, it is known as Habantuy; in Chuvash, as Akatuy. The holiday’s origin goes back to the pre-Islamic

posed to visiting Bolghar, a city located 130 kilometers from present-day Kazan that is supposed to have been the capital of the Volga Bulgaria and was the site of the “little hajj” during the Soviet era.⁴⁹

Salafis also do not recognize the *abystay* (female clergy) who are typical of the Tatar Islamic tradition.⁵⁰ They likewise deny the memorial commemorations on the third, seventh and fortieth day after the death of a Muslim. From their point of view, all the above-mentioned local traditions contradict “pure Islam” and must be eliminated as “wrong innovations.” They also brought to the Volga region the tradition of *takfir*, by which a Muslim may accuse another of infidelity when the second person does not follow at least one action indicated by the shari’a.⁵¹ As the rector of the Naberezhnye Chelny Mosque (Ak-Mosque) Madrassa, Rustam Shayhevaliev, noted: “In traditional Tatar society divorces never occurred because either the husband or wife were non-Muslims or infidels,”⁵² but Salafi views have sparked an increase in the number of the divorce cases.

Salafi Muslims also targeted the nationwide New Year celebration that is widely accepted in Russia; on the eve of both 2012 and 2013 in Kazan, numerous leaflets emerged calling for the celebration of New Year to be abandoned. In these materials, the New Year holiday was called “evil” and was characterized as a non-Muslim celebration. “To celebrate the New Year is to follow *shirk* [the sin of idolatry or polytheism or the worship of anyone or anything other than Allah]. Take care of yourself!” radicals stated.⁵³ Salafis, on their web forums, websites, and social networks, proposed the abandonment of other Russian holidays such as Victory Day, Women’s Day, the Day of the Defenders of the Motherland, and the Spring/Labor Day. In these materials, Santa Claus or “Father Frost” is depicted as *shaitan*, the Islamic equivalent of the devil, or as a pagan symbol that is incompatible with “pure Islam.”⁵⁴

Salafis Take Root

Although only a few years earlier the Volga region had looked from the outside like a region with entrenched secular traditions, by the mid-1990s Salafi Muslims had strengthened their position. In contrast to the Caucasus, the Volga region is much more urbanized (70.8 percent of the people living in the VFD live in the urban areas). And unlike the situation in European countries, cities and towns in the Volga region have not seen the creation of special “Islamic quarters” or any insular religious ghettos. Islamists initially had few chances to gain a foothold in the VFD, but for several reasons they did manage to take root to a significant degree.

period, when it was celebrated before the sowing season (its name means “plough’s feast”). In the post-Soviet era it is celebrated as a national holiday.

49. Under Soviet rule, Muslims from Tatarstan and other parts of the USSR who had no opportunity to make the pilgrimage to Mecca would instead travel to Bolghar for a “little hajj.”

50. Originally, *abystay* referred to the mullah’s wife, who taught girls basic religious rules. Later this term was applied to the women who teach the reading of the Qu’ran and the rules of Namaz.

51. Technically, the term *takfir* implies declaring someone an apostate. Among Salafis, it has taken on the meaning of considering anyone insufficiently observant to be a non-Muslim. Because in Islamic law apostasy is punishable by death, the *takfir* doctrine has become the basis for political assassinations.

52. Rustam Shayhevaliev, “Problema sem’i ostaetsya samoi aktual’noi v nashi dni” [The family issue is extremely topical these days], January, 20, 2012, http://islamio.ru/news/society/problema_semi_ostaetsya_samoy_aktualnoy_v_nashi_dni.

53. “V Tatarstane Wahhabity vystupayut protiv Novogo goda” [The Tatarstan Wahhabis oppose the New Year celebrations], December 28, 2012, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/federal/2012/12/28/1077286.html>.

54. Ibid.

The first reason they succeeded was the negative impact of divisions within the official Islamic institutions in Russia that actively cooperated with Moscow and adjusted their activities to local customs. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, splits arose within the Spiritual Board of Muslims of European Russia and Siberia, known as the DUMES, beginning with the desire of some imams to “be liberated from the Soviet legacy” and to create an independent spiritual board. Instead of one Spiritual Board that previously united the Volga region’s Muslims, two competitive structures arose. One of them, the CSBM, considers itself the successor to the DUMES and, before that, the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly. The second officially recognized structure was the Russian Council of Muftis (RCM), founded in 1996. Both of them have competed over the access to the authorities of different levels of social and religious influence.

An incident surrounding the opening of the Tauba Mosque in early 1990s in Naberezhnye Chelny triggered a scandal within the CSBM. In this conflict, Talgat Tadzuddin, the supreme mufti, and Idris Galyautdinov, *imam-khatib* (chief imam) of the mosque, discredited one another and the official Islamic clergy as a whole. Different regional and local administrations took sides in this quarrel, as they all tried to ensure their influence through linkages with loyal groups within the Muslim structures that were being revived at that time. As for the Russian authorities and special services, they were focused on more pressing topics, such as the crisis in Chechnya; ethno-political conflicts; incongruities between the presidential administration and the Supreme Soviet; and the question of how to divide the Soviet legacy, including the concentration of nuclear weaponry in Russia. Therefore they were not actively engaged in the religious quarrels in the Volga Region and failed to intervene properly. As the Russian scholar Roman Silantyev observed, “During the split, emissaries from foreign extremist centers used this situation to their advantage, as they were interested in the destruction of the main stronghold of traditional Islam associated with loyalty to the state.”⁵⁵

Some muftis involved in the religious conflict began accepting financial aid from a variety of religious foundations and centers, with little concern for the origins of that aid. In addition to targeted support for the construction and renovation of mosques, a number of educational programs began that were meant to teach young Russian Muslims, both abroad and within Russia. Activity at the grassroots level was equally vigorous. Salafi emissaries, both domestic and foreign, visited numerous communities, offering their imams and chairmen “disinterested” aid in exchange for the promotion of their missionary programs. Parallel to this, they founded their own communities, deliberately stoking conflicts between different generations of imams, pitting older pro-Soviet imams against younger ones. Their propaganda was most successful and effective in those cities where a majority of the population was Orthodox and in which Muslim communities were ethnically diverse and lacked ingrained Islamic traditions.

Second, the Salafis received a “head start” because the official Muslim clergy lacked a developed system of religious education and a dearth of personnel qualified to teach. According to Aislu Yunusova, a historian and political scientist from Bashkortostan,

The weakest link in today’s Russian Islam is the system of knowledge transfer. While there was a powerful impetus for the construction of Muslim education, press, and culture in general, from the early 20th century forward it did not develop further. In the 1920s and 1930s it was brutally suppressed by the policy of militant atheism. By the early 1990s

55. Silantyev, *Noveishaya Istoriya Islamskogo soobshchestva v Rossii*, p. 150.

knowledge about Islam had survived but was primarily kept by Russia's "ethnic" Muslims in the form of fragmented ideas prevailing at the level of family traditions. There was a complete absence of religious knowledge, literature, and the skills gained through Qu'ran study in Russian Islam before the current era of religious freedom and pluralism, which began with the proclamation of the law "On Freedom of Conscience" in 1991.⁵⁶

In this intellectual vacuum, the radicals, who benefitted from significant financial resources and utilized attractive slogans such as social justice, anti-corruption, criticism of ethnic nationalism, and calls to rally around the "true faith," were able to win a preeminent position for themselves.

Third, it is impossible to ignore domestic political factors. "Traditional Islam," which had been associated with loyalty to the state in the early 1990s, greatly discredited itself as a result of numerous intrigues, public quarrels, instances of corruption, and the redistribution of property. The Russian scholar Aleksei Malashenko noted, "Speaking about the Islamic revival, we should not overlook that this process was also realized through efforts of the post-Soviet intellectuals, politicians who cynically calculated and used Islam to improve their own images and popularity."⁵⁷ In many cases, former Communist Party officials and others who had engaged in atheist propaganda during the Soviet period altered their previous views and began to encourage Muslims to follow Russia's official Islamic clergy. All of these facts reduced the credibility of the official clergy and increased the impetus for the Russian Muslim community to search for alternatives.

Fourth, attempts by the authorities at various levels to oppose nationalism and religious radicalism through state-controlled political Islam were ineffective. One example was the creation of the all-Russian political movement *Nur* (Light), which extended its activities to 56 federal districts and was one of the first Muslim political organizations officially registered, in May 1995. Nur was considered the "religious internationalist" opposition to ethnic nationalist trends in Russia's republics, but in the parliamentary elections of 1995, figures such as the leader of the Tatar national movement, Aidar Halim, whose philosophy was far from "internationalist," were opportunistically included on the list of Nur candidates. But the movement's electoral results were very modest; it took 22nd place out of the 43 parties and blocks that participated in the elections. In Tatarstan the movement gained 5 percent and in Bashkortostan it gained 1.5 percent. Some other efforts to incorporate Muslim activists into Russian politics were similarly unsuccessful, such as the Union of Muslims of Russia, the Eurasian Party of Russia, and the *Refah* (Welfare) movement. According to sociologist Jean Toshchenko, "The last round of political activity in which the Muslim ethnocrats took part was the electoral cycle of 1998–2000."⁵⁸ In the parliamentary elections of 1999, acting in alliance with the Unity movement (consequently transformed to the United Russia party), five members of Refah became deputies of the state Duma, the lower chamber of the Russian parliament. But efforts to promote "civilized political Islam" parties that would be loyal to—and controlled by—the government fell by the wayside when Russia's legislation on elections was changed to prohibit the creation of parties on ethnic, regional, and religious lines. The Russian federal government, as well as the republican and regional administrations, focused their policy on the "Islamic direction," cooperating with the Spiritual Boards of Muslims that had been accepted as of-

56. Aislu Yunusova, "Radikal'nye ideologii i musul'manskaya molodezh' v Rossii" [Radical ideologies and Muslim youth in Russia], http://www.muslims-volga.ru/?id=376&query_id=6637.

57. Aleksei Malashenko, *Islam dlya Rossii* [Islam for Russia] (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publishing House, 2007), p. 14.

58. Jean Toshchenko, *Entokratiya: Istoriya i sovremennost'* [Ethnocracy: history and contemporary times] (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publishing House, 2003), p. 353.

ficial and legitimate structures. Thus, a huge segment of nonofficial Muslims who are not necessarily radicals or terrorists has remained outside of the governmental focus and has not experienced serious cooperation or engagement with the government.

Tatarstan and Salafi Propaganda

Since the 1990s Tatarstan has become the primary focus of Salafi propaganda. In 1993, Taiba, a Saudi Arabian charity organization, signed an agreement with the newly formed Yoldyz Madrasa at a mosque in Naberezhnye Chelny. In 1999, this madrasa became the focus of attention because one of its graduates was among the suspects in the terrorist attacks in Moscow. It was later proven that students from Yoldyz had also been associated with the North Caucasus Islamist underground. In October 1999, Airat Vakhitov, a graduate of Yoldyz who became imam-khatib of the central mosque in Naberezhnye Chelny, was arrested for being linked to illegal armed groups. After a special investigation provided by the Russian Council of Muftis in 1999–2000, this madrasa was closed and then reorganized as an institution for the religious education of women. To this day, however, Naberezhnye Chelny remains one of the focal points for the Salafis in Tatarstan.

In 1999 there were an estimated 200 other Salafi groups in Kukmor and approximately 50 in Neftekamsk, as well as approximately 150 individual Salafi groups in both Vyatka Glades (Vyatskie Polyany) and Almetyevsk. In the abandoned village of Ogryzskiy District, the Salafis attempted to create a “Special Islamic Territory” similar to ones that had been set up in the villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, and Kadar in the Buinaksk district of Dagestan in 1998. This attempt was quickly suppressed, but since that time, the areas in Tatarstan mentioned above have been frequently connected with Salafi activity. In March 2004, seven so-called Russian Talibs who had been seized in Afghanistan in 2002 and detained in the American prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, arrived in Russia. Among them there were three individuals from the VFD, specifically Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.⁵⁹ The trial against them ended with their acquittal. A year later, Timur Ishmuratov and Ravil Gumarov, two of the former “Russian Talibs” were arrested on charges of orchestrating a gas pipeline explosion in Bugulma, Tatarstan.

The trial of this so-called Islamic Jamaat acting in Tatarstan and the neighboring regions in 2001–2004 resonated within the republic in particular and throughout Russia as a whole. This conspiratorial structure was implicated in 30 separate criminal acts, including nine murders. Some members of the group were trained in terrorist camps in the North Caucasus and maintained ties with Islamist groups of that region, including the United Caucasus Mujahideen Shura and the Congress of Ichkeria and Dagestan Peoples. According to official accounts, Islamic Jamaat planned to destabilize the situation in Tatarstan on the eve of the 1000th anniversary of Kazan, with their plans including hostage taking, the murder of “infidels,” and attacks on public festival places. The investigation concluded that jamaat members were planning in 2007–2008 to organize series of explosions on some water intakes as well as against some industrial giants like KAMAZ in Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhnekamskneftekhim in Nizhnekamsk, and the helicopter plant in Kazan; in the future they intended to create an Islamic state in the Volga region with access to the borders of Central Asia and the North Caucasus.

59. The detainees included two persons from Kabardino-Balkaria, Ruslan Odizhev and Rasul Kudayev; one from Tatarstan, Ayrat Vakhitov; two from Bashkortostan, Ravil Gumarov and Shamil' Hajiyev; one from Chelyabinsk, Rustam Akhmyarov, and one from Tyumen', Timur Ishmuratov. Kudayev was arrested soon after a raid on a large group of militants in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, on October 13, 2005.

The first trial of the Islamic Jamaat took place in 2006 and the second in 2007; on January 6, 2009, the sentence was handed down. Some observers, who emphasized the disproportionate reaction of the FSB and law-enforcement structures, were skeptical of the ambitious goals and resources of this jamaat that the official investigation had claimed. Journalist Irina Borogan described the organization as more “garage and basement Islam” than politicized jihadism. Still, she does not deny that its members and leaders participate in illegal activities, including attending Caucasus training camps.⁶⁰

Indeed, the cooperation between Salafis and organized criminal groups bears scrutiny. The political aims and goals of these ties are not initially evident, but such ties do have a significant social impact. In January 2012, Asgat Safarov, then the minister of the interior for Tartarstan, said while speaking to his subordinates: “We are concerned about the degree of Islamization of organized criminal groups as well as the influence they have begun to wield. Government and law enforcement will have to take it into serious account.”⁶¹ These groups interpret even their criminal activities, such as the “protection racket” directed at local entrepreneurs, extortion, and the weaning of property from “infidels,” through the prism of shari’a norms. In early 2012, Salafi groups with links to organized crime were found to be active in Kazan, Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhnekamsk, Almeteyevsk, and Mendeleevsk.

The active “partnership” between Salafis and the criminal world emerged even in the context of the penal system, forcing the authorities to be more proactive. In 2011, the TSBM and the republican board of the Federal Penitentiary Service (FPS) signed a special treaty, as a result of which three full-time employees from the TSBM began cooperating with the FPS. Nevertheless, the problem remains unresolved; in March 2012, an underground network of Salafis was discovered in one of the prisons in the Ulyanovsk region.

In the early 2000s, Salafi ideology began to exert more influence on nationalist organizations, such as the ATPC. By this time, this nationalist movement, which had been popular in the early 1990s, had lost its former influence and, to a large degree, had become a marginal force. In 2001, ATPC representative Fanis Shaikhutdinov was arrested for distributing leaflets that contained a letter from a terrorist, Shamil Basayev, addressed to Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin calling on him to support anti-Russian jihad. In 2010 Fauziya Bairamova, “the Grandmother of Tatar national separatism,” who was a constant, radical supporter of national independence for Tatarstan, received a suspended sentence for the publication of a text calling for the republic’s secession from Russia. Recently, in her speeches and comments, the “Islamic issue” has begun to resonate much more clearly than before.

There are also some facts that indicate partial support for the radicals by officials on different levels, as well as evidence of some cases of crypto-Salafi activity in which Muslim clerics refuse to perform ceremonies corresponding to “traditional” or “Tatar Islam.” In 2010 in Nizhnekamsk, a

60. Borogan I. Jamaat v dva hoda [Jamaat in two moves], <http://www.agentura.ru/press/about/jointprojects/novgaz/jamaat2hoda/>. The term “garage and basement Islam” originated in France; Nicolas Sarkozy, when minister of interior, said, “What we should be afraid of is Islam gone astray, garage Islam, basement Islam, underground Islam.” See “France Creates Muslim Council,” BBC News, December 20, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2593623.stm>. This term has since been applied to spontaneous unofficial Islam having extremist expressions.

61. See “V Tatarstane budut primenyat’ zhestkie меры k banditsko-salafitskim gruppirovkam” [Strict measures will be applied to the bandit-Salafi groups in Tatarstan], Interfax News Agency, January, 25, 2012, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=43924>.

*muhtasib*⁶² refused to read the Quʾran on the third and seventh day after the death of a man, saying that it violated the “rules.”⁶³ In another instance, Rais Suleymanov, an expert on Islamic extremism, described a scandal in July 2012 involving Ramil Yunusov, the imam of the Kul Sharif Mosque in Kazan, who opened the mosque for the reading of prayers based on the Salafi canon.⁶⁴ Yunusov, a native of Nizhnekamsk, received support from the current mayor of Kazan, Ilsur Metshin, who had previously worked in Nizhnekamsk. Nevertheless Metshin publicly blamed Salafis, especially after the July terrorist attack.⁶⁵

Salafi Penetration Outside Tatarstan

Salafi activities have not been limited to Tatarstan; they were also recorded during the 1990s and 2000s in Bashkortostan, specifically the Agidel, Baymak, October, and Sibai districts and the capital Ufa; in Belozerye, Mordovia; Togliatti in the Samara region; as well as in the Orenburg, Penza, Perm, Ulyanovsk regions.

In 1994 Ayub (Anguta) Omarov, a Salafi preacher of Dagestani descent, founded his own group of Muslims in Astrakhan. The group’s composition was mixed and included ethnic Avars (the majority), Russians, Tatars, and children of mixed marriages. Omarov identified himself and his followers as *Muʾmins* (“real” believers who completely submitted to the will of Allah) and rhetorically tried to differentiate this identity from Saudi-originated Islam. His primary focus was on religious piety in everyday life—namely, no alcohol, smoking, or personal photos—and he tried to stay out of politics. After the second Chechen campaign, he took a cautious position and blamed the violence on all of the sides that had been engaged in the conflict. This approach placed him at odds with both radicals and the official Islamic structures, so in 2000 he left Astrakhan looking for a safe haven. The total membership of this group and one led by the Abdurazakov brothers, ethnic Avars in Astrakhan, amounted to about 300 people.

In 1997, an Astrakhan Salafi named Abuzar⁶⁶ began to preach in the village of Belozerye, in the Romodanovsk District of the Republic of Mordovia. He was able to attract the local rural youth as well as some others from the neighboring Tatar villages of Inyat and Aksenovo. A year later the village was the focus of attention due to growing tensions between radicals and “traditionalists.” In fact, in Mordovia there was an attempt to replicate the Dagestan scenario, obtaining Islamist control of a separate village.

Salafis also expanded into Belozerye. Ruslan Ahmyarov, a native of Belozerye and graduate of the Al-Furqan Madrassa, was wanted by the federal law-enforcement forces for his involvement in the bombing of two houses in Moscow in 1999. During the second Chechen campaign a group of Belozerye “Wahhabis” took part in the fighting on the side of the rebels and then returned

62. A *muhtasib* is a Muslim functionary keeping vigilant watch on the execution of the shariʿa norms.

63. Viktorin, *Islam v Astrakhanskoy regione*, p. 79.

64. Rais Suleimanov, “Islamsliyi terrorism v sovremennom Tatarstane: Wahhabizm na praktire” [Islamic terrorism in present-day Tatarstan: Wahhabism in practice], Agency for Political News, July 25, 2012, <http://www.apn.ru/publications/article26923.htm>.

65. Metshin recorded and posted a video on his website in which he said, “We will burn the all traces of Wahhabism with the hot iron.” I. Metshin: “S Luybymi proyavleniyami Wahhabizma nuzhno zhestko borot’sya” [I. Metshin: It’s necessary to fight hard against all forms of Wahhabism], July, 23, 2012 <http://www.metshin.ru/video/6858>.

66. Abuzar was an ethnic Russian who changed his name from Oleg Marushkin when he converted to Islam.

home with arms. Later, the activities of the Belozerye Jamaat declined substantially, but the village itself and its surroundings remained of special interest for the republican authorities and the law-enforcement and special services. In the summer of 2011, Belozerye native Fyarit Nevlyutov, nicknamed Abdullah-Tatar, was arrested after having been implicated in the bombing attempt on a passenger train that was traveling between Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Another native of the village, Rasim Bashirov, was arrested in Tajikistan while serving as a militant under the auspices of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.⁶⁷

In 2004, several students from the Al-Furqan Madrassa were involved in a terrorist attack on a school in Beslan, in North Ossetia. In September 2005, the madrassa was the object of an investigation during which both extremist literature and an arsenal of explosives were found. Following the 2005 investigation, the madrassa was closed. During the same period, authorities neutralized an organized criminal group in the Ulyanovsk region whose members used one of their private apartments as a “mosque” and often discussed various methods for fighting against the “infidels.” In 2010, the final member of this group was sentenced.⁶⁸

Salafi views have also penetrated the ranks of ethnic nationalists in republics outside of Tatarstan. As a result, ideas of ethnic superiority have become inextricably mixed with religious intolerance and radicalism. In December 2011 Fanzil Akhmetshin, deputy chairman of the International Union of Public Associations of the World Kurultay of Bashkirs, was accused of orchestrating activities that were aimed at inciting religious hatred. Speaking in the Baimak District of Bashkortostan, Akhmetshin promoted the superiority of Salafi ideas over the other branches of Islam and justified Salafi incitements to physical violence against opponents of the doctrine. In 2010, he contributed his ideas to the *Oran* newspaper, a publication of the Bashkir Youth Union. The Kirov district court of Ufa later declared these materials as extremist.⁶⁹

An Examination of Radical and Nonofficial Islamic Groups

Caliphate Ideas in the Volga Region: Hizb ut-Tahrir Activity

Founded in 1953 in East Jerusalem by a Palestinian judge, Taqi al-Din Nabhani (1909–1977), Hizb ut-Tahrir initially had the dual purpose of establishing an Islamic state and liberating Palestine. Its geographical expansion coincided with a broadening of the party’s focus from a primary concern with Palestine to the project of setting up an Islamic state. Hizb ut-Tahrir’s declared goal became

67. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is a militant Islamist group formed in 1991 that organized operations and raids around Central Asia and Afghanistan. Since 2001 its operating activity has been substantially decreased. For more details, see Rimma Akhmirova, “Derevnya Wahhabitov” [The Wahhabis village], September 9, 2011, <http://www.ves.lv/article/18516>.

68. See “V Ulyanovske osuzhden poslednii clen gruppy ekstremistov-wahhabitov” [The last member of the Wahhabi extremists’ group is convicted in Ulyanovsk], Interfax News Agency, August 30, 2010, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=37137>.

69. See “Glava molodezhnogo soveta kurultaya bashkirskoi molodezhi podozrevayetsya v ekstremizme” [The head of the Youth Bashkir Kurultay Council is suspected of promoting religious extremism], Interfax News Agency, December 16, 2011, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=43460>.

“to resume the Islamic way of life and to convey the Islamic call to the world.”⁷⁰ The pathos of Hizb ut-Tahrir is directed toward reestablishing the Islamic Caliphate and overcoming nation-states existing in the present-day Islamic world. According to Imran Waheed, spokesman for a British branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir, the party “believes that the nation-states in the Muslim world are artificial creations of Western powers to divide Muslims and exploit resources; we seek justice through the formation of a single Islamic state that serves the people rather than corrupt clients of foreign powers.”⁷¹ In Russia, as well as in a number of countries of Central Asia and the Middle East, the party is considered a terrorist organization and is banned, yet at the same time many European countries and the United States do not include it in their “terrorist lists.” In its public statements, Hizb ut-Tahrir usually rejects violence; this distinguishes the party from most Salafis, who in turn consider Hizb ut-Tahrir a “godless sect.” Seven days after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Hizb ut-Tahrir issued a statement in which it suggested that Muslims should not undertake terrorist actions. Yet the public activity of Hizb ut-Tahrir does include anti-Zionism, anti-capitalism, anti-democracy, and anti-Western approaches.⁷² As the party’s British spokesman noted, “The tears of the widows of Iraq are no different to the tears of widows in London. Western governments do not have a monopoly on anger, rage and suffering.”⁷³

In Russia, the first members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, mainly ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks, appeared in 1996 and initially these ethnic groups played the dominant role in the organization. In the early 2000s, Hizb ut-Tahrir’s presence became more visible and attracted the attention of the FSB. Faced with stiff opposition from the leadership of the Central Asian republics, and especially the authorities of Uzbekistan and President Islam Karimov personally, Hizb ut-Tahrir began to look for new areas in which to conduct their activities. Unlike the Salafis, Hizb ut-Tahrir had been concentrated outside the North Caucasus, its members choosing not to play an active role in that most turbulent Russian region, and instead focused on the Volga region, Central Russia, and Siberia. According to Andrei Soldatov, a Russian journalist and expert on extremism,

In our country Hizb ut-Tahrir has greatly changed its character. In the territory of the former Soviet Union it is perceived as a Central Asian movement with features characteristic to that region. So I think the main reason is probably the difference in mentality of the inhabitants of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Therefore this party is not popular in the North Caucasus. If we look at locations of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s followers, we find that they concentrate in the Lower Volga where, unlike the North Caucasus, there is fertile social and ethnic soil for this Central Asian movement.⁷⁴

70. David Commins, “Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani and the Islamic Liberation Party,” *The Muslim World* LXXXI, nos. 3–4 (1991): 194.

71. Manuela Paraipan, “Hizb ut Tahrir: An Interview With Imran Waheed,” September 12, 2005, <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/2146.cfm>.

72. According to the writings of Polish academic Wojciech Grabowski, a professor in the Department of International Relations at the University of Gdansk. See Wojciech Grabowski, “Hizb ut Tahrir—between violence and politics,” http://www.wojciechgrabowski.com.pl/download/Hizb_ut_tahrir.pdf.

73. Manuela Paraipan, “Hizb ut Tahrir.”

74. Andrei Soldatov, “Severnyi Kavkaz uzhe ne vkodit v chislo platzdarmov ‘mirovogo terrorizma’” [The North Caucasus has not yet been among the springboards of international terrorism], May 31, 2007, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/analyticstext/analytics/id/1188719.html>.

For example, in the early 2000s the North Caucasus Salafis Rasul Kudayev and Anzor Astemirov translated (from Arabic to Russian) and prepared to publish an anti-Hizb ut-Tahrir pamphlet. The full text of the pamphlet, “Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami,” is available on <http://musulmanin.com/biblioteka.html>. At the

In fact the “Russian direction” of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s activities has focused primarily on the mass replication of propagandist literature—leaflets and booklets including “Proclamation on the progress of the activity,” “Law enforcement bodies of the Russian Federation falsify the facts and falsely accused Hizb ut-Tahrir,” “Convergence with Ummah,” “How to behave in the case of contact with the intelligence agencies,” and “Training of the trainers”—translated into Russian.

In early 2003 at the urging of the general prosecutor, the Russian Supreme Court decided to recognize 15 well-known organizations including Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorist organizations. Yet this measure did not prevent the proliferation of Hizb ut-Tahrir cells in Russia more generally or in the VFD in particular. In December 2004, then–Minister of Interior Rashid Nurgaliyev said that 12 members of the organization had been detained and arrested following accusations of extremist activity in the Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Udmurtia, and Nizhny Novgorod regions. Among those detained, the majority were people in their twenties, and there were many representatives of Slavic ethnic groups, including Russian and Ukrainian. According to Roman Silantiev,

Alisher Usmanov, an ethnic Uzbek, was the most colorful personality among the detainees. He taught in the Kazan madrasa named “the Millennium Islam.” During the investigation, law-enforcement officers found on him fairly typical evidence, such as a grenade fuse, a TNT block, and brochures and leaflets with extremist content, including one entitled “The military training in the jihad against tyranny,” by Osama Bin Laden.⁷⁵

Usmanov was sentenced to nine months in a Russian prison for illegal possession of arms, but after his extradition to Uzbekistan he was sentenced to eight years. In August 2005, the Bashkortostan Supreme Court handed down a guilty verdict to the several party activists, and they were sentenced to prison terms from four to nine years.

Yet human rights activists and journalists alike have been critical in their evaluations of the campaigns against Hizb ut-Tahrir. According to Andrei Soldatov, the 2004 terrorist attack in Beslan triggered a repressive policy against this party on the part of the Russian law-enforcement agencies and the FSB: “It was chosen to be represented as the conductor of the global terrorism. I think that’s a mistake. There is no need to radicalize the movement, which, in principle, is peaceful. There are people with whom it is possible to talk.”⁷⁶ In the opinion of Irina Borogan, considering the mutual enmity between the Uzbek president and the Hizb ut-Tahrir, this campaign can be explained as an attempt by Russia to strengthen its influence in Uzbekistan and receive additional preferences there.⁷⁷ Memorial, the international human rights center founded in 1987, together with other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Institute on Human Rights and the Civilian Assistance Committee, paid special attention to the fact that people were detained not

same time, leaders of the North Caucasus Salafi *Kabardino-Balkaria Jamaat* prohibited spreading Hizb ut-Tahrir-oriented literature among their supporters. Alexander Zhukov, “Kabardino-Balkaria: na puti k katastrofe” [Kabardino-Balkaria: toward the catastrophe], October, 27, 2008, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/142989/?print=true>.

75. Silantiev, *Noveishaya Istoriya Islamskogo soobshchestva v Rossii*, p. 167.

76. Soldatov, “Severnyi Kavkaz uzhe ne vkodit v chislo platzdarmov ‘mirovogo terrorizma.’”

77. Irina Borogan, “FSB presentovala nam novuyu ugrozu iz Tsentral’noi Asii” [The Federal Security Service announced on the new challenge from Central Asia], *Ezhenedel’nyi zhurnal* [Weekly Journal], April 3, 2008, <http://ej.ru/?a=note&id=7954>.

only for extremist activities but also for the study of religious literature.⁷⁸

After a series of trials and the revelations of some Hizb ut-Tahrir members, a number of official Muslim structures and their representatives began to protect the party. Nafigullah Ashirov, chairman of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Asian part of Russia and cochairman of the RCM in 2005, prepared a brief about Hizb ut-Tahrir's ideological platform in which he tried to demonstrate the nonviolent nature of the ideology and practice of the Hizb ut-Tahrir and the absence of extremist activity in their actions. In March 2006, however, the Moscow Prosecutor's Office issued a warning to Ashirov not to be an apologist for Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Indeed, although in the West Hizb ut-Tahrir has espoused peaceful and non-violent activity, this has not always been the case within the VFD. In 2008 a Hizb ut-Tahrir cell in Togliatti, in the Samara region, was shut down and its leader convicted of possessing an explosive device. In 2009, 12 Hizb ut-Tahrir activists received four- to eight-year prison terms for their efforts to prepare for a violent seizure of power. In April 2010, Hizb ut-Tahrir cells were neutralized in Meleuz, Tuymazy, and Mrakovo in Bashkortostan. During the operation, extremist magazines and videos were confiscated.

According to the Interior Ministry of Tatarstan, a local Hizb ut-Tahrir structure had been illegally active in the city of Chistopol since 2005. In 2009 a student in the Agricultural College, Ilgiz Giziyaullin, who acted as a religious trainer there, was sentenced for his involvement with the organization. In June 2009 Rustam Safin, the imam of the Al-Ikhlas Mosque in Kazan, received a suspended sentence for his involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir. In March 2010, two students of the University of Kazan were convicted for involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir, which in 2004–2007 had distributed propaganda among the women of the Republic of Tatarstan.

In November 2010 a special operation in the Nurlat district of Tatarstan became a point of immense focus and scrutiny in the republic. The operation, which was directed against three militants, involved 500 police officers, armored vehicles, and a helicopter. It was led by then–Interior Minister Asgat Safarov. The scale of this counterterror effort involuntarily forced many observers to draw parallels with the situation in the North Caucasus. The investigation confirmed the involvement of three Hizb ut-Tahrir militants, 34-year-old Ruslan Spiridonov, 30-year-old Albert Khusnutdinov, and 26-year-old Diamond Davletshin.

When considering the principal differences between the way human rights activists evaluate Hizb ut-Tahrir activities and how the FSB sees them, it is necessary to note that it is extremely difficult to draw a clear distinction between the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Salafis on the ground. In theory their approaches are different, and sometimes the FSB does not take those differences into serious consideration. However as the well-known Kazan theologian Farid Salman observes,

In the Volga region Hizb ut-Tahrir often loses its connection to the ideological roots and comes under the influence of Salafis (“Wahhabis”). Thus, in practice, the “ideological jihad” is replaced by direct acts of violence (terrorism, subversive struggle, and actions against official authorities). The lack of general and religious education, youth and youthful maximalist approaches affect this replacement greatly. However, there are practical reasons as well. The followers of Salafi Islam try to “disguise” themselves as Hizb ut-Tahrir activists to

78. “Rossiya: Spetssluzhby protiv Islamskoi Partii Hizb ut-Tahrir” [Russia: Special Services against Islamic Party Hizb ut-Tahrir], February 15, 2005, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/70149/>.

divert suspicion. We can't ignore certain "excesses" from the government, where not just radical structures, but loyal groups associated with traditional Russian Islamic Heritage are banned... The lack of specialists leads to the situation where, for example, during the arrest of extremists relevant authorities are unable to expose Wahhabis, who cleverly hide behind the slogans of other ideological groups. Is it that important? Yes, it is very important! Such mistakes, lead to the formation of opposition to the governments, opposition which can then claim that the government is fighting against Islam.⁷⁹

Islam and the Turkic Legacy: The Nurcu Movement

The Islamic revival in the Volga region has also prompted reflections on the region's Turkic cultural legacy and identity, as well as on the interaction between the ethnic components of this Turkic legacy and Islam globally. Since the early 1990s the Volga region has witnessed the penetration of religious groups of Turkish origin, the first and largest of which was the Nurcu movement.

The original Nurcu movement was founded by Bediuzzaman Sa'id-i Kurdi (1878–1960), also known as Sa'id-i Nursi, after Turkey's war of independence. Sa'id-i Nursi voiced his support for a republic based on Islamic principles in an address to the new national parliament. However, because he opposed Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reform plan, which established a secular state, his ideas were not well received and he was repeatedly prosecuted. Nevertheless, he tried to integrate his interpretation of Islam with the principles of Turkish nationalism and statism. Since he considered Communism the greatest danger of that period, he supported the integration of the Turkish Republic into NATO, its engagement in the Korean War, and cooperation between Muslims and Christians in the struggle against atheism.⁸⁰ Sa'id-i Nursi is known worldwide for the *Risale-i Nur* (Light Tracts) collection, which includes a total of 14 books. After his death his followers organized separate groups and movements, but for all their differences, they still share the ultimate goal of gaining real influence in Turkic-speaking Muslim countries and regions.⁸¹

The most powerful of these offshoots is the neo-Nurcu *Fethullahcılar* (Fethullah Gülen's Followers) movement led by Fethullah Gülen, who was born in Erzurum in 1942. Gülen has had a complicated and controversial relationship with Turkish authorities. In 1971 the Turkish security service arrested him "for clandestine religious activities, such as running illegal summer camps to indoctrinate youths..."⁸² After that he was occasionally harassed, and in 1998 he left Turkey for the United States.⁸³ In 2000 Turkish authorities accused him of promoting insurrection in Turkey; the indictment against him emphasized "the silent and deep penetration" of his movement into the Turkish military, which was at that time the guarantor of the secular nature of the Turkish republic.

79. Farid Salman, "Rassuzhdeniya o razlichiyah mezhdy wahhabizmomi traditsionnym islamom" [Reasoning on the differences between Wahhabism and traditional Islam], Interfax News Agency, November 15, 2011. <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=analysis&div=168>.

80. Sukhran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2005).

81. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs denies the existence of an organization called the "Nurcu," stressing that different followers of Sa'id-i Nursi engage in different practices and activities. In accordance with Turkish legislation, official registration of religious sects is prohibited. Thus any structures affiliated with the "Nurcu" have no registration in Turkey's Interior Ministry.

82. Rachel Sharon-Krespin, "Fethullah Gülen's Grand Ambition. Turkey's Islamist Danger," *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2009): 55–66.

83. Ibid.

lican state. In 2006, however, all charges against him were dropped; the Supreme Court of Appeals subsequently confirmed the decision in 2008. Also in 2008, he was voted by readers of the journal *Foreign Policy* as “a leading intellectual of the world.”⁸⁴ As Rachel Sharon-Krespin noted, “many in the West applaud him as a reformist and advocate for tolerance, a catalyst of ‘moderate Islam’ for Turkey and beyond.”⁸⁵ In contrast to the Salafis, the Fethullahcilar movement suggests a focus on understanding Islam through education. According to one of Gülen’s statements,

The philosophy of our service is that we open a house somewhere and, with the patience of a spider, we lay our web to wait for people to get caught in the web; and we teach those who do. We don’t lay the web to eat or consume them but to show them the way to their resurrection, to blow life into their dead bodies and souls, to give them a life.⁸⁶

Gülen considers the primary task of the Fethullahcilar not to be in conflict with official policy but rather to form “the Islamic worldview”; additionally, the movement interprets armed jihad as a mistake and an extreme form of the struggle.⁸⁷ For these reasons, the Turkish journalist Emre Aköz called Fethullahcilar “the education jihad.”⁸⁸ Bayram Balci, a visiting fellow at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington, notes that these schools are secular “but striv[e] indirectly and moraliz[e] with the spreading of a moderated Islam and an Islam highly mixed with Turkish nationalism.”⁸⁹ He adds, “Fethullah’s aim is the Islamization of Turkish nationality and the Turcification [*sic*] of Islam in foreign countries.”⁹⁰

Though the linkages between the Fethullahcilar and the Turkish state are complicated and cannot be identified with official approaches, Ankara considers the activity of this neo-Nurcu movement useful for the promotion of Turkish national interests. The movement therefore benefits from the support of the Turkish embassies. Between the 1990s and the early 2000s Fethullahcilar opened 24 special schools, one university, one university department, and three language institutes in Russia. In March 1993 the Bashkortostan Ministry of Education signed an agreement with the Turkish company Serhat to facilitate the launch of a number of Bashkir–Turkish educational institutions—specifically, schools and charity lyceums. Four lyceums were opened in Ufa, Sterlitamak, Sibai, and Neftekamsk, where about 1,000 students have been taught. As a rule, the principals and teachers at these institutions have been members of Fethullahcilar. Numerous Turkish-originated

84. “Interview: Fethullah Gülen; Meet Foreign Policy’s Top Public Intellectual of 2008,” *Foreign Policy*, August 13, 2008. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2008/08/13/interview_fethullah_gulen.

85. Rachel Sharon-Krespin, “Fethullah Gülen’s Grand Ambition.”

86. “AKP’s Political Power Base,” *Inquiry and Analysis* no. 375, MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute), July 19, 2007.

87. See Magomed Gaziyeu, “Chaepitiya v istinnom svete” [The Tea-Parties under the real light], September 24, 2009, <http://i-r-p.ru/page/stream-document/index-25312.html>.

Just after the September 11, 2001, tragedy, Gülen stated: “We condemn in the strongest of terms the latest terrorist attack on the United States of America, and feel the pain of the American people at the bottom of our hearts. Islam abhors such acts of terror. . . . No terrorist can be a Muslim, and no true Muslim can be a terrorist.” See Halit Kara, “Importance of Gulen Movement in the Post 9/11 Era: Co-existence” <http://www.fethullah-gulen.org/op-ed/gulen-movement-9-11.html>

88. Emre Aköz, “Müslüman misyonerler” [Muslim missionaries], *Sabah* (Istanbul), December 30, 2004.

89. Bayram Balci, “Islam and globalization in post-Soviet Central Asia and Caucasus,” April 1, 2007, <http://www.reseau-asie.com/edito-en/reseau-asie-s-editorial/islam-and-globalization-in-post-soviet-central-asia-and-caucasus-by-bayram-balci-director-of-the-ins/>.

90. Bayram Balci, “Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam,” *Religion, State & Society* 31, no. 2 (2003): 156.

schools have also opened in Tatarstan—eight in total in Naberezhnye Chelny, Almet'yevsk and Kazan—as well as in Chuvashia and the Orenburg region. A Turkish cultural-educational center was founded in Nizhny Novgorod at the Linguistics University. Serhat provided financial support, as did the Tolerance Foundation, a Gülenist-dialogue organization founded in 1996.

However, since the late 1990s many disturbing signals concerning the educational content at these institutions have become the subject of discussion in the media. Various newspapers have reprinted the story of an ethnic Russian woman from Almet'yevsk talking about her son's education in the Tatar-Turkish lyceum:

Almet'yevsk is mostly a Tatar city. I gave my permission for him to be taught in this lyceum because of the quality of education and because some other schools were so expensive. Initially the changes in my son's behavior seemed harmless. He stayed at the lyceum overnight and visited the mosque. Then he started to ask me why my skirt is above the knee or my head is uncovered. Then he demanded to take away our Orthodox icons. There were scandals as a result. At last I took him away from this lyceum.⁹¹

Since the early 2000s, Russian law-enforcement agencies, educational officials, and the FSB have interfered in the activities of these Turkish educational institutions. In the summer of 2002 in Bashkortostan, the people educated at one such institution were detained as suspects in extremist activity. Subsequent special inspections found that many of the teachers at these lyceums and schools had no special qualifications or experience. They also uncovered that many of these teachers had violated the legislation concerning the stay of foreigners on Russian territory. In 2001 the principal of the Neftekamsk Bashkir-Turkish Lyceum, Omar Qavaqly, was deported from the country for such abuses. That same year, 20 members of Fethullahcilar were also forced to leave Russia. In 2002 the Bashkortostan Ministry of Education terminated its Agreement with Serhat. On December 15, 2002, then-FSB director Nikolai Patrushev, in a meeting with leading Russian media, made an official statement on Nurcu activity related to intelligence tasks.⁹²

In 2005 in Naberezhnye Chelny, some people supposedly connected with the neo-Nurcu movement were prosecuted under Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code for incitement of national, racial, or religious hatred. Finally, on May 21, 2007, Moscow's Koptevskiy court recognized some Russian translations of the *Risale-i Nur* materials as extremist. According to the court statement, these works contained "signs of extremism, in particular, incitement to religious hatred, propaganda of exclusivity, superiority and inferiority of citizens on the basis of their religion."⁹³ In 2008 the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, following a lawsuit prepared by the Office of the Prosecutor General and supported by the Ministry of Justice and the FSB, banned the activities of the Nurcu movement in Russia.

Still, neo-Nurcu activities continued. In April 2009, the prosecutor's office of the Lenin district

91. Konstantin Gusev, "Velikiy Turan v Nizhegorodskoi oblasti" [The Great Turan in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast], March 31, 2011, <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2011/03/m245340.htm>.

92. "FSB raskryla turetskuyu sektu, kotaraya zanimalas' shpionazhem" [FSB uncovered the Turkish sect, which was engaged in espionage], December 16, 2002, <http://www.orthomed.ru/news.php?id=3283>.

93. "Verkhovnyi Sud zapretil organizatsiyu Nurcular" [The Supreme Court prohibited Nurcu organization], April 11, 2008, http://ru-news.ru/art_desc.php?aid=906.

of Ufa found extremist literature (Nursi's works) in the library of the Russian Islamic University of the CSBM. In September 2011, the court in Ulyanovsk sentenced an Azerbaijani citizen, Rashid Abdulov, to one year of corrective labor for inciting religious hatred. According to the investigation, he founded the Nurcu cell in the region and managed to engage with the imam of the Ulyanovsk Mosque, Ilham Hisanutdinov. In October of the same year, the Leninsky District Court of Nizhniy Novgorod passed a guilty verdict against the six members of a Nurcu cell. Gülenists still operate several schools in Russia, but some prosecutors and judges have targeted them for extremist ties also. The problem lies in the fact that these groups are promoting nonofficial Islam, which the official structures dislike.

According to historian Aislu Yunusova,

It should be noted that with respect to the Nurcu there is no definitive evaluation of its religious leaders among scholars and officials. Many people tend to consider the teachings of Nursi as the teachings of a moderate theologian and reformer and, as a result, they miss the facts that his ideas contribute to the spread of religious extremism. Thus, in the Muslim community, rumors still persist that the police are pursuing not an extremist group but purely ordinary believers, as does the perception that all charges against Serhat are associated with the competition for high school students and nothing to do with the fight against extremism.⁹⁴

Tablighi Jamaat: Apolitical Fundamentalism?

Unlike the Salafis or the followers of the Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Nurcu movements, the activity of Tablighi Jamaat in the Volga region has been considerably less visible. This religious movement dates back to 1927. Founded by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi (1885–1944), Tablighi Jamaat emerged in British-controlled India. Expanding into Russia's Volga region has not been a priority of Tablighi Jamaat, despite gradual growth being typical for the movement since its inception. According to Alex Alexiev,

Despite its size, worldwide presence, and tremendous importance, Tablighi Jamaat remains largely unknown outside the Muslim community, even to many scholars of Islam. This is no coincidence. Tablighi Jamaat officials work to remain outside of both media and governmental notice. Tablighi Jamaat neither has a formal organizational structure nor does it publish details about the scope of its activities, its membership, or its finances. By eschewing open discussion of politics and portraying itself only as a pietistic movement, Tablighi Jamaat works to project a nonthreatening image. Because of the movement's secrecy, scholars often have no choice but to rely on explanations from Tablighi Jamaat acolytes. As a result, academics tend to describe the group as an apolitical devotional movement stressing individual faith, introspection, and spiritual development.⁹⁵

Indeed, historian Barbara Metcalf defines it as “a quietist, apolitical movement of spiritual guidance and renewal,” and well-known French orientalist Olivier Roy considers it “completely

94. Yunusova, “Radikal'nye ideologii I musul'manskaya molodezh' v Rossii.”

95. Alex Alexiev, “Tablighi Jamaat: Jihad's Stealthy Legions,” *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2005): 3.

apolitical and law abiding.”⁹⁶ The initial goal of Tablighi Jamaat was to return Indian Muslims and Hindus influenced by British culture, secularization, and Europeanization, to active and consistent faith. The importance of the geographical location decreased, but the focus on “return to faith” has remained. Itinerant preachers play the most important role in spreading “real faith”; there are no high-ranking positions within the organization. Rather, strangers unite in small groups and carry out their activities “from door to door.” In Rais Suleimanov’s opinion, these strategies make the activities of Tablighi Jamaat comparable to the missionary activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses.⁹⁷ In accordance with its stresses on nonparticipation in political affairs and strict adherence to religious piety, Tablighi Jamaat puts forward strict requirements. Women must wear the *hijab* (covering their faces and hands) and remain at home most of the time.⁹⁸ Unlike other religious movements, Tablighi Jamaat focuses its work not on non-Muslims but on the existing Islamic community of believers in order to “correct” their faith in accordance with the precepts of their movement.

Some scholars take seriously the allegations of terrorism by Tablighi Jamaat members. Alexiev notes there are many cases of “individual Tablighis committing acts of terrorism.”⁹⁹ Xavier Ternisien, a French specialist, considers Tablighi Jamaat the “antechamber of fundamentalism,” emphasizing that the movement’s participants are engaged in terrorist activity across the world.¹⁰⁰ Its followers’ desire to adhere to the “ideal faith” makes Tablighis closer to Salafis and some other extremist groups. As is the case with Hizb ut-Tahrir, radicals may disguise their activity through this organization, using the apolitical mask of Tablighi Jamaat as a cover.

The exact number of followers of this movement in the Volga region is unknown. Rais Suleimanov estimates that in Tatarstan there are about 350 people, primarily in Kazan, Yutazy, and Bavly. The movement emerged there in 1990s, originally under the leadership of Gabdelaziz Zagidullin. In the early 2000s one of the teachers in the Russian Islamic University was a Tablighi Jamaat follower.¹⁰¹ Today, their leader is Rafael Samigullin, who in 2003–2004 was trained in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Outside of the Republic of Tatarstan, Tablighis have been active in the Saratov region, where in 2009, Russian supporters of the movement held a congress. Unlike other unofficial groups, however, the Tablighis have definite constraints. Most important is their exotic appearance: they wear traditional Pakistani clothing, known as *shalwar-kameez*, and grow large beards. According to Valiulla Yakupov, the Tatar theologian who was killed in 2012, the appearance of the Tablighis often pushes young people away from the “strange Muslims.”¹⁰²

Tajikistan banned Tablighi Jamaat activities in 2006, and Russia followed suit in May 2009. The Supreme Court recognized the organization as extremist, a decision that prompted considerable disagreement. The Saratov mufti Mukaddas Bikbarsov, as well as Rustem Valiulin, an Islamic

96. Barbara Metcalf, “Islam and women the case of the Tablighi jama’at,” *Stanford Electronic Humanities Review* 5, issue 1 (February 27, 1996), <http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-1/text/metcalf.html>. See also Olivier Roy, “Search for a perfect world of Islam,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Paris), May 15, 2002.

97. Rais Suleimanov, “Tablighi Jamaat v Tatarstane: struktura, chislennost, ideologiya” [Tablighi Jamaat in Tatarstan: structure, quantity, ideology], December 25, 2011, <http://www.ru.journal-neo.com/node/11532>.

98. Metcalf, “Islam and women the case of the Tablighi jama’at.”

99. Alexiev, “Tablighi Jamaat: Jihad’s Stealthy Legions.”

100. Xavier Ternisien, “Rise of Suburban Salafists Worries Police and Muslims,” *Le Monde*, January 25, 2002 (in French).

101. Suleimanov, “Tablighi Jamaat v Tatarstane.”

102. Valiulla Yakupov, *K propocheskomu Islamu* [Toward the prophetic Islam] (Kazan, Tatarstan: Iman Publishing House, 2006), p. 387.

human rights activist from the Republic of Udmurtia, criticized the Supreme Court decision, stressing that Tablighi Jamaat is a nonpolitical structure and that it is not a security threat for Russia. They highlighted that, in fact, it focuses purely on the literal adherence to Islam, not on the creation of a caliphate (as does Hizb ut-Tahrir) or on armed jihad (as do Salafis). However the ideology, insularity, and secrecy of Tablighi Jamaat lead its members to be intolerant of other Muslims, not to mention the members of other religions. Thus, this environment could potentially lead to the rise of more proactive Islamists who would not limit their activities to only the “door to door” sermons.

Local Nonofficial Muslims: The Faizrahmanists

A final important group to consider when examining the spread of Islamic doctrines in the Volga region, is the locally rooted opposition Muslim community in the Torfyanoy settlement of Tatarstan, led by Faizrahman Sattarov; his approximately 70 followers are known as the Faizrahmanists. According to Galina Yemelianova, Sattarov—who was born in 1929—was one of the few Tatar imams of the Soviet period. He received professional theological training from 1955 to 1964 in the Bukhara Mir-i-Arab Madrassa and held the posts of imam-khatib in some of the USSR’s largest cities, including Leningrad, Rostov, and Oktiabr’sk. He was also a *qadi* (Islamic judge) in the DUMES from 1972 to 1976. Thereafter he began to oppose the official religious structures.¹⁰³ Sattarov outlined the basis of his vision of Islam in the book *Roots of Faith*, published in the Tatar language. Based on the Qu’ran and the Hadith, Sattarov discussed Islam as a tree having 73 roots, only one of which is the true faith. He claims that this root is his own teaching and interpretation of Islam, and that those who are not ready to recognize him as a Prophet will be punished.¹⁰⁴ Galina Yemelianova notes the eclectic nature of his religious views:

A fully tolerant attitude to wake rites is combined with non-acceptance of Sufism and some religious festivals, such as, for example, Mawlid (the prophet Muhammad’s birthday). Recognition of the importance of *ijtihad* (independent judgment in Islam) does not prevent the acceptance of some aspects of *taqlid* (Islamic tradition).¹⁰⁵

The Faizrahmanists do not conduct missionary activity; rather, they try to avoid extensive contacts with the outside world. Sattarov does not claim to wage a war against “infidels.” Among the closest associates of the Faizrahmanists’ leader are Gumer Ganiev, emir of the community, and Muhammad, the secretary. However, the totalitarian character of the sect and its isolation—for example, children are not allowed to contact others outside their community—create potential problems. Nevertheless, the Faizrahmanists are not alone. According to Rais Suleimanov, similar groups exist in Ufa and in Naberezhnye Chelny.¹⁰⁶

103. Yemelianova, “The Rise of Islam in Muslim Eurasia,” 78.

104. Rais Suleimanov, “Faizrahmanizty: sekta islamskogo proishozhdeniya v Tatarstane” [Faizrahmanists: the Islamic sect in Tatarstan], December 6, 2011, <http://www.gumilev-center.az/fajjzrahmanisty-sekta-islamskogo-proiskhozhdeniya-v-tatarstane-v-nachale-khkhi-veka/>.

105. Yemelianova, “The Rise of Islam in Muslim Eurasia,” 78.

106. Suleimanov, “Faizrahmanisty.”

Searching for an Adequate Reaction

The Islamic rise in the Volga region is a deeply complex phenomenon. It has been driven by the results of internal socio-political and religious dynamics, by religious globalization, and by the penetration of radicals into new territories. Islamism, as well as nonofficial Islam, is far from homogeneous; the degree of radicalism among the adherents of different groups varies widely. Each of these groups has a different set of motives and rationales for their dissatisfaction with the current government, and “traditional Islam” has existed for centuries in the Volga region alongside other faiths. As such, this problem cannot be considered as a narrow regional issue, especially when the strategic importance of the Volga region for Russia as a whole is taken into account.

Unlike the North Caucasus, the Volga region has not yet become a territory where suicide bombings, acts of sabotage, and military strikes are commonplace. Nevertheless, recent years have brought with them a number of very alarming signs. The Volga region today is markedly different from even a decade ago. How can the risks to the Volga region be minimized? Is it possible to prevent the “Dagestanization” of this crucially important area of Russia?

First, the Russian leadership needs to learn its lessons from the experience of instability in the North Caucasus. The Islamic rise in the Volga region cannot be controlled through military or police operations. Of course, radicals who overstep the bounds of the law must be held accountable. Still, any attempt to minimize the Islamist threat will be ineffective if it does not incorporate an understanding of social and ideological issues. The hard use of police power may help to bring down the temperature of the patient, so to speak, but it is insufficient to treat the underlying disease itself. There are many examples in which the FSB and other authorities have managed to minimize the activity of underground groups in the North Caucasus, but as long as the social preconditions for radicalism still exist, it will inevitably reappear.

Second, policymakers should support policies that would strengthen traditional Russian Islam, which is linked to the history and culture of the country as a whole and the Volga region in particular. However, Russia’s leadership should not conflate these policies with the straightforward support of loyal Muslim structures like spiritual boards at the republican and territorial levels, nor with the support of narrowly focused lobbyists. Following such an approach would be potentially dangerous, as the interests of a small number of groups could end up driving the religious policy of the state. Moscow has to recognize the growing role of religion in the political and social life of the country, but it also needs to counter the radicals that provoke militant insurgency and instability. Thus, the focus should be on large-scale public, cultural projects in which the state does not subcontract its responsibilities to anyone and in which it remains the initiator of all key decisions affecting not only the religious but also the secular sphere. This should include education, especially in the teaching of history and other humanities to emphasize cross-regional contacts not only within the VFD but also among different federal districts. It must also include active and consistent promotion of a pan-Russian, supra-ethnic political identity, a goal that all of Russia’s presidents have repeatedly proclaimed. Otherwise, any attempt to compete with those that promote purely sectarian loyalties would certainly fail.

Third, it will require colossal effort to differentiate between terrorists and those who would be amenable to pledge their political loyalty to the state. It would be wrong to label all nonofficial-Muslim groups as “Islamist” or “terrorist organizations”. Regional opposition groups do exist, primarily focused on some local interests; these could be integrated into activities already underway within Russia’s legal and political framework.

The important task for Russia is to engage in pragmatic cooperation with the West. Unlike the Caucasus, the Volga Federal District is to a much lesser extent involved in the international agenda. However, this status quo is likely to change quite soon, with the Volga region becoming increasingly important to a host of international actors. The opening of a NATO transit center in the region is already a reality. In 2013, more than 13,500 university athletes from 170 countries will visit Kazan for the 27th Summer Universiade, and in 2018 some cities in the region, such as Kazan, Samara, and Nizhny Novgorod, will host the games of the FIFA World Cup. These international sporting events will require a higher and much more professional level of security in a territory where Salafi radicals have the destabilization of the country as a whole as their goal. Indeed, these events will necessitate that Russia cooperate with its Western partners to ensure security. As such, the problem of confidence building will take on both global and regional dimensions. The United States, therefore, needs to embrace more realistic approaches to Russia's state-controlled and selectively supportive religious policy. As for Russia, it needs to identify means of voluntary international religious cooperation and not treat all foreign clergy as spies. The most important task for both countries is information exchange. Recent experience in the VFD, as well as in the North Caucasus, has demonstrated that radicals like the Russian Talibs often wage their fight against both the United States and Russia. Without information exchange and pragmatic communication, any cooperation between the two countries will be merely an exercise in rhetoric.

Finally, this initial investigation into the Islamic rise in the Volga region must be continued. Detailed field studies designed to understand the underlying motives of nonofficial and radical Muslims, as well as the reasons why they are unable to follow their religion within the framework of state-supported Islam, could fill in the gaps where scholars currently lack of adequate information. In-depth interviews with the regional experts, NGO representatives, and religious activists, including first and foremost those in nonofficial groups, will provide a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the current dynamics of Islam in the region.



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