

ABSTRACT

Islamic Factors in the Socio-Political Life of Post-Soviet Russia

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For Russia, religion is one factor that fostered its formation and assisted in the development of all facets of its culture. A current analysis of the relations between the Russian state and Islam is, therefore, the foundation of this study. The changes that took place in the religious and cultural life of Muslims over recent decades and ways in which the content of Islamic education can be changed were also analyzed in this study. The study further examined the relations between religion and state in Russia and how Islam, through novel parties and movements, has participated in the politics of the country. Three politics-related problems associated with Islam were identified: political Islamism, extremism and terrorism.

The main objective of this research was to analyze the influence of the Islamic factor on the development of the socio-political situation in Russia, and to identify certain peculiarities of the Islamic revival within the Russian Federation. To facilitate this aim, the research analyzed the relations between Islam and the Russian state; examined the socio-political prerequisites that brought about the Russian Islam; studied the sources, both internal and external, influencing the Muslim community in Russia; and analyzed

the interconnection between the three politics-related problems associated with Islam. The research seeks to provide a conceptual and ideological analysis of the present situation: based on a concrete-historical and functional analysis of the role of Islam in Russian, past and present. This approach will retrace the actual temporal sequence of past events and changes in the political and social lives of the vast majority of Muslims in Russia.

This study also identified the main reasons Islamist activism became more pronounced as availability in the country of a multi-million Muslim community; awareness of their specific interests; conflicts in Muslim regions and in Islamic-Christian socio cultural borders; and influences of the various foreign countries. An analysis of the socio-political situation and study of the main tendencies of influence of the Islamic factors in Russia show that Islam is a foundation for self-identification and a means of self-preservation for a certain part of the nation.

Islamic Factors in the Socio-Political Life of Post-Soviet Russia

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Russia is currently going through one of the most complex periods of its history. Transformations that started in the 1990s introduced significant changes into all areas of life in both civil society and the state. One of the manifestations of the changes that started in the state is a religious revival, which is characterized by an increase in the number of believers; a growth in the positive public opinion of religious organizations acting within the state; conversion to religious culture; and, formation of parties and movements on the basis of a religious ideology.

Islam is a traditional religion of more than thirty indigenous ethnic groups within Russia, and also of a large number of migrants arriving in Russia for permanent and temporary residence. Religion played a significant role in the formation of these nations and in the development of all sides of their culture.

With the beginning of democratic transformations in Russia, the religious life of Muslims has become noticeably more active. Numerous existing communities, which previously were not recognized by the authorities, were legalized. A large number of new mosques were built, eventually exceeding five thousand in number. There are over 50 higher and secondary specialized Muslim religious educational establishments, and practically all mosques have primary religious schools. There are more than 20 Muslim published newspapers across the country. A copious amount of religious literature (mainly translated texts) is also published. Every year, several thousand Muslims travel

to the holy places of their religion: Mecca and Medina. All this indicates that within the current social landscape of Russia, Muslim organizations have utilized previously unseen opportunities to influence historic Muslim population.

A scientific analysis of the current state of Islam in Russia, its connection with the past, and a search of possible methods of development in the future, is of consequential benefit to the Russian government. Especially noteworthy is a study of potential opportunities of renewal of Islamist teaching, taking into account Russia's multi-national and multi-confessional character, and the need for a successful adaptation of modern Muslims to the conditions of vital activities of the society, which have embarked on a gradual road of democratic transformations and progressively open market relations.

Studying the process of religious revival enables it to be understood in the context of the ability to define a correct vector of further development within the Russian state. This has both scientific and also socio-political significance. It is necessary to speak not so much about the revival of Islam as about the revival of Islamism—a political movement among aggressively political Muslim intellectuals—as Islam itself (as a world religion) never disappeared and does not need to be revived. The actual revival (or, more precisely, activation) applies to some elements associated with Islamism. This is an uneasy social phenomenon that is directly related to the changes that occur in the economic, political and religious life of Russia's Muslim populations. If we want to understand what is happening with Islam currently, we should describe not only its position today, but also the attitudes toward it in the past. Only this whole picture can help us correctly identify changes that occurred with Islam and became a fact of life for the Russian society.

Islamist revival is a turning to a nostalgic rendering of the past, to the experience of current problems. At present time, however, this process is moving in several different directions at the same time. A large number of existing movements within Russian Islam allow us to say that some of them are really focused on imagined and constructed past and aspire to revive the so-called “pure Islam” and return to its origins. These viewpoints are held by the fundamentalist movements, particularly Wahhabism (Salafism) which has quickly penetrated into the territory of Russia and the CIS countries.

Thus, while assessing Russia’s Islamic religious situation, it is necessary to take into account Russia’s different religions, confessions, religious movements, and their proportion, their relations among themselves, their historical blending within Russian society, and their relations with Muslims within Russia.

According to various estimates, there are 15-30 million Muslims who live in Russia. A growing number of the followers of Islam in the country may have the potential to become a socio-political force. Under certain conditions Russia’s Muslims can potentially become involved in confrontations with the Russian state, the Russian Orthodox Church and the wide strata of the Russian population, to which some external forces may try to foster a spirit of xenophobia and Islamophobia. It is necessary to take into account that Islam is a religion that is regionally capable of asserting its own political aims. Russia’s Muslim intellectuals are beginning to actively advance the project of Islamism in order to achieve some political goals in the country.

The majority of Muslims in Russia, however, belong to historically peaceful madhabs (Hanafi and Shafi’i legal schools) of the Sunni movement in Islam. However,

recently representatives of radical movements in Islam began appearing. These so-called extremists became more active in the country and the whole world.

Islamic extremism is an aspiration to rid Islamic orthodoxy of all distortions and extraneous features, both in the religious and socio-political areas. There is an opinion that this is a political rather than a religious movement, as its representatives do not voice ideas of reformation of the actual religion as a system of dogmas and customs. They demand to change the role of the religion in the life of the society; rejecting the authority of the ruling national ideology. Moreover, recently this term acquired a negative connotation, as it is now constantly identified with the extreme forms of the extremism. Islamist extremism is used in different ways and by different Islamist groups who aspire to seize political power.

The terminology of Islamist doctrines and movements is characterized by discordance, which is caused by tense inter-Islamic and inter-confessional disagreements and conflicts. Today the scholarly literature and political discourse widely refuses using such terms as “Islamic fundamentalism,” while describing these movements as forms of “Wahhabism,” “Salafism,” “revivalism,” “Muslim radicalism,” “political Islam,” “recisianism,” “Islamism” and many others. It is also characteristic that some of these concepts are used by other analysts outside the Islamic conceptual system. Definitions of these concepts are characterized by ideologizing and political bias in an attempt to show Islam as an ontologically aggressive religion. While Muslim theologians do not use such terms as “Islamic fundamentalism,” “Islamism” and certain other terms for characterizing Islam, the author of the dissertation will use the term Islamism due to its widespread use in the scholarly literature and press.

Recently Islamist extremism has become topical subjects within Russia. This requires a reconsideration of the socio-political changes in the political image of Russia. This is particularly necessary in order to evaluate the degree of influence of the “Islamic factor,” and the danger of those tendencies on the development of the religious life that Russians face today.

At the turn of the twenty-first century the interest of the scientific society in the Islamic question have increased. Researchers more often analyze the question of how central religion is in the formation of a person as an individual and the formation of their religious culture, viewpoints and socio-cultural characteristics in the current conditions, which were preceded by many years of state-supported atheism.

A scientific analysis of today’s relations between the Russian state and religion, Islam in particular, is undoubtedly topical. A search for the ways of Islam’s development has become a political necessity. Taking into account a host of international, political realities and using an analysis of the situation within Russia as guidance, it is prescient to understand in which socio-political direction Islam may develop in the future. It is necessary to create conditions for Muslims’ successful adaptation to the rapidly changing situation in Russia (and their successful life and activity) into an understanding of the conditions of the multi-confessional society. This requires a critical analysis of the changes that took place in the religious life of Muslims over the last years and a search for ways of changing the content of Islamic education. This underlines a critical need of both science and society for new, modern knowledge about the influence of the Islamic factor on Russia’s state and social development.

Besides having a purely scientific significance, social and political analysis of the problems of the dissertation have an applied character. It could help in formulating recommendations with regard to creation of Russia's long-term (domestic and foreign) political strategy in relation to Islamic communities within the twenty-first century while taking into account Russia's larger national-state interests.

The degree of scientific elaboration on the problem of the Islamic factor's influence on Russia's state and social development can be assessed differently. On the one hand, over the last years the number of publications covering this subject has increased, which is a positive development. On the other hand, there is an obvious over-politicized and biased character to the researches, whose authors are influenced by a host of subjective factors, such as their nationality, religion and proximity to various political institutions. Therefore, a number of fundamental aspects remains underexplored; concealed, or presented rather one-dimensionally and in a biased manner.

There are publicists and politicians within Russia who seriously speak about the general "threat" of Islam. Such views, which are widely disseminated by local and foreign media, have a significant influence on the whole society, creating in people's minds a fragmentary and one-sided picture of the trend. The complexity of the subject is mainly determined by the fact that, in recent years, a fair amount of politics has been brought into what should be a purely religious process. In order to achieve their group goals, political circles of Russia, Central Asia, and other foreign countries have started more actively using the threat of political Islam as a kind of scapegoat.

In order to study the influence of the "Islam factor" in Russia and develop our own analysis, it is necessary to consult research that is either directly related to the

problems of interest or to consider these problems indirectly. All publications that are of interest for this research can be divided into several groups.

The first group consists of the research, the analysis of which allows the formulation of conclusions about the degree of development of scientific knowledge on the topic of this study and to specify main principles of my own research.¹ The works of experts on Russian Islam and political scientists (such as R. Landa, L. Sukiyainen, U. Kobishchanov, M. Stepanyans, K. Gadzhieva, and others)² contain a rich factual and methodological material. At the same, it is necessary to note that a number of narrow questions are considered in their work only indirectly.

The history³ and the current position of Islam in Russia, including its processes of revival, became the topic of a number of recent academic monographs. Fortunes of Islam

¹ Rafik Muhametshin, *Islam v Sovremennom Rossiiskom Obchestve* [Islam in Contemporary Russian Society] (Moscow: Logos, 2001); R. Muhametshin, *Tatary i Islam* [Tatars and Islam] (Kazan: Izd-vo "Fen", 2003); Alexandr Ignatenko, *Islam i Musulmane v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam and Muslims in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow, 1999); A. Ignatenko, *Islam i Politika* [Islam and Politics] (Moscow: Institute Religii i Politiki, 2004); Oleg Kucher, *Islam* (Xarkov: Feniks, 2004); S. Melkov, *Putj Voinov Allaxa: Islam i Politika Rossii* [The way of Warriors of God: Islam and Politics in Russia] (Moscow: Veche, 2004).

² Urii Kobishchanov, *Musulmane Rossii, Korennye Rossiiskie Musulmane i Russkie Musulmane* [Muslims in Russia, indigenous Muslims of Russia and Russian-Muslim] (Moscow: Izd-vo ROSSPEN, 2002); Robert Landa, *Rossia i Mir Islama: obchee i osobennoe* [Russia and the world of Islam: the general and special] (Moscow: RAN, 2002); R. Landa, *Islam v Istorii Rossii* (Islam in the Russian History] (Moscow: Izd-vo "Vostochnaya lit-ra", 1995); Leonid Sukiyainen, *Musulmansko Pravovaya Kultura i Rossiiskoe Zakonodatilstvo* [The Muslim Legal Culture and the Russian Legislation] (Moscow: Izd-vo Nauka, 1998); L. Sukiyainen, *Islam protiv Islama: Ob Islamskoi Alternative Ekstremizmu i Terrorizmu* [Islam vs. Islam: On Islamic Alternatives to Extremism and Terrorism] (Moscow, 2002); Marietta Stepanyans, *Musulmanskie Konceptii v Filosofii i Politike: XIX-XX* [Muslim concept of philosophy and politics: XIX-XX] (Moscow: Nauka, 1982); K. Gadzhiev, *Geopolitika Kavkaza* [Caucasus' geopolitics] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, 2003).

³ Ravil Bukharaev, *Islam in Russia: The Four Seasons* (New York: Curzon Press, 2000); Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Alexandre Bennigsen, *Islam in the Soviet Union* (F. Praeger, 1967); Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); D. Arapov, *Islam v Rossiiskoi Imperii: Zakonodatelnye Akty, opisaniya, statistika* [Islam in the Russian Empire. Legislation, descriptions, statistics] (Moscow: Akademkniga, 2001).

in current Russia and prospects of its development are studied by A. Malashenko, L. Bashirov, R. Abdulatipov, R. Nabiev, U. Mizun, and S. Hunter.⁴ These studies, analyzing the existence of Islamic communities in Russia in general; while paying particular attention to the Islamist factor, the use of Islam in politics, and its possible influence on social processes. A study of such works allowed for the continual correlation of the degree to which Islam's influence on all processes in the state has been studied and the viewpoints, methodology and orientations of analysis of the questions that are of interest for us.

The second group of scholars that have a particular significance for this research considers more narrow issues, such as relations between religion and state in Russia⁵ and the participation of Islam in the political life of the country through newly-created parties and movements.⁶ The works of the authors of this group allow us to more objectively

⁴ Aleksey Malashenko, *Islamskoe Vozrozhdenie v Sovremennoi Rossii* [The Islamic Renaissance in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998); Leva Bashirov, *Islam i Etnopoliticheskie Processy v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam and the ethno-political processes in modern Russia] (Moscow, 2000); Urii Mizun, *Islam v Rossii* [Islam in Russia] (Moscow: Veche, 2004); Ramazan Abdulatipov, *Sydney Islama v Rossii: Istoriya i Perspektivy* [The fate of Islam in Russia: History and Prospects] (Moscow: Mysl, 2002); R. Nabiev, *Islam i Gosudarstvo: Kulturno istoricheskaya Evoluciya Musul'manskoy Religii na Evropeiskom Vostoke* [Islam and the State: Cultural and historical evolution of Islam in the European East] (Kazan: Kazanskii Universitet, 2002); Shireen Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2004).

⁵ Alexander Verhovskiy, "Muslims, Society and Authorities in Contemporary Russia," in *Will Russia Become a Muslim Society?* ed. Hans-Georg Heinrich, Ludmila Lobova, and Alexey Malashenko (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011); Giovanni Codevilla, "Relations between Church and State in Russia Today," *Religion, State and Society* 36, no. 2 (2008); James W. Warhola, "Religion and Politics Under the Putin Administration: Accommodation and Confrontation within 'Managed Pluralism,'" *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 1 (2007); Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Islam and Orthodox Russia: From Eurasianism to Islamism," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41 (2008); Irina Papkova, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Political Party Platforms," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 1 (2007); Sergey Gradirovskiy, Proekt "Russkii Islam" [The project "Russian Islam"] *Obraz*, August 2004, <http://rus-obraz.net/magazine/4/4> (accessed June 12, 2011).

⁶ F. Asadulin, *Musul'manskie Duxovnye Organizacii i Obyedineniya v Rossiiskoi Federacii* [Muslim spiritual organizations and associations in the Russian Federation] (Moscow: Logos, 1999); Roman Silantiev, *Noveishaya Istoriya Islama v Rossii* [Recent History of Islam in Russia] (Moscow: Algoritm, 2007).

assess such a complex phenomenon as the socio-political influence of the Islamic factors and to consider in detail the relationship between Islam and the authorities, parties and society. At the same time, while recognizing the undoubted theoretical and methodological significance of these studies, it is constructive to note that often they either lack a detailed theoretical conception of the Islamic factor in Russia, or the theoretical scheme voiced by one or another author is insufficiently reasoned and politically biased.

The third group of politics-related studies covers a large and topical international range of problems: such as Islamist extremism and terrorism. As early as the time of *Perestroika*, foreign experts on the Soviet Union paid special attention to the phenomenon of “Islamist extremism.” However, in general their works simply described this phenomenon. Today this is a very topical subject, as terrorism and extremism are gaining strength, and not a single state can feel absolutely secure. There are many scholarly books and articles that have been published in Russia with *diametrically opposing* viewpoints. This interest in Islamist “extremes” is greatly stirred up by some Russian politicians and media, who use the idea of the “green belt” stretching from Caucasus and Central Asia to the Volga River to draw an assumed parallel between terrorism and Islam. Scholarly publishing, however, claims to be objective and to restore justice, putting forward arguments for a viewpoint that the so-called Islamist extremism and horrible terroristic acts generally have non-Islamic sources and do not follow the aims of Orthodox, normative Islam. These authors make efforts to separate terroristic acts from the more general term “Islamic.” Using a vast amount of factual material, these scholars consider theoretical and practical issues of the connection between terrorism and

the political views of Orthodox Islam.⁷ The works of certain researchers allow us to see the current problems, which are, as it turns out, connected not only to Islam, but also to the geopolitics of many countries, and to perceive the scale of the urgent questions.

Mass media pays quite a bit of attention to analysis of the tendencies of revival of Islam and coverage of various manifestations of Islamic fundamentalism. For this reason the author of this dissertation has extensively relied upon materials from the popular Russian press.⁸ Various advocates of different views also too often distort the thousand-year history of Islamic communities within Russia, which is both contested and multivalent. As a result, modern newspaper accounts often hold spirited debates about the fortunes of contemporary Islam and Muslim communities in Russia.

⁷ A. Baibakov and E. Borovikov, *Vaxxabizm i Islamskii Ekstremizm v Rossii* [Wahhabism and Islamic Extremism in Russia] (Moscow: Tsentr Politicheskoi Informatsii, 2005); Galina Yemelianova, ed., *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Valerii Tishkov, ed., *Severny Kavkaz v Nacionalnoy Strategii Rossii* [The North Caucasus in the National Strategy of Russia] (Moscow: RAN, 2008); G. Jemal, *Osvobozhdenie Islama* [Liberation of Islam] (Moscow: Umma, 2004); Shale Horowitz, "Islam and Ethnic Conflict: Hypotheses and Post-Communist Illustrations," *National Papers* 35, no. 5 (2007); Michael Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism: A Longitudinal Perspective on Islam and Conflict in the North Caucasus," *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2005); Paul Marphy, *The Wolves of Islam: Russia and the Faces of Chechen Terror* (Washington D.C: Potomac Books, 2004); Yossef Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* (New York: Harper, 2008); Robert W. Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad* (New York: Praeger, 2010).

⁸ "Musulman Nauchat Rodinu Lubit," *Izvestiya*, March 24, 2005; L. Sukiyanen, "Islam protiv Islamskogo ekstremizma," [Islam against Islamic extremism] *Asia and Africa Today*, February (2003); A. Urixanyan, "Ostorozhno, dveri zakryvautsya" [Attention, the Doors Are Closing], *Political Journal* 37, no. 34 (2004); X. Fraga, "Islam i Terrorism – ne odno i tozhe," [Islam and terrorism are not the same] *Novye Izvestiya*, April 12, 2004; R. Khmirova, "Pochemu my boimsya Musulman," [Why are We Afraid of Muslims?] *Komskomolskaya Pravda*, March 16, 2004; F. Safiullin, "Stanet li Rossia Polusom Dobra?" [Would Russia become the pole of good?] *Tatarstan*, no. 9, 2004; Peter Worthington, "Russia's War with Islam," *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/peter-worthington/russias-war-with-islam_b_1000429.html#s396816 (accessed October 7, 2011); Michael Schwartz, "Russian Anger Grows Over Chechnya Subsidies," *The New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/09/world/europe/chechnyas-costs-stir-anger-as-russia-approaches-elections.html?_r=2 (accessed October 8, 2011); Tom Parfitt, "The Islamic Republic of Chechnya" *Foreign Policy*, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/15/the_islamic_republic_of_chechnya?page=0,1 (accessed March 15, 2011); Sophia Kishkovsky, "Chechnya Coerces Women on Dress, Activists Say," *New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/28/world/europe/28iht-chechnya.html?_r=3&partner=rss&emc=rss (accessed September 27, 2010).

Individual aspects of the problem of Islam's existence in the political space of current Russia, and its influence on the state and society, have been considered by a number of researchers. There are both conceptual formulations and publications, which introduce a vast trove of factual material into any scientific analysis. These works, however, often do not give a clear idea with regard to the wide range of complex problems that are of interest for this study. The object of the research is to summarize Islam as a religion and as a cultural expression that is currently undergoing rapid changes, and its subjects, acting in Russia and abroad. The subject of this research are the peculiarities of the influence of Islam on the society and state in Russia, factors of the Islamist revival, and the development of various, distinct Russian Islamic communities at the turn of the twenty-first century, contradictions in the development of religious life in the present conditions, and also the constituent parts of Islamist extremism and the prospects of terrorism in contemporary Russia.

Taking into account these objectives, the topicality of the problem under consideration, and the degree of scientific elaboration on the problem, the objective of the dissertation is an analysis of the influence of the Islamic factors on the development of the socio-political situation in Russia and identification of prerequisites and peculiarities of the Islamic revival in the Russian Federation. Based on the objective view and in order to ensure its successful realization, it was necessary to complete a number of particular research tasks:

- to analyze on a general theoretical level the relationship of the Russian state and society with Islam, while taking into account the dynamics of current world-wide political phenomena;

- to consider from a historical point of view the socio-political conditions and prerequisites of formation of Russian Islam as a vital factor of ethno-confessional self-identification of nations;
- to study internal and external sources influencing the Muslim community in Russia; and
- to pay attention to the analysis of the interconnection of Islamist radicalism and extremism under Islamic slogans in the territory of current Russia and their influence on the processes in the country.

The methodology of the research is determined by the specific characteristics of political factors, and it is closely connected to analytical methods and ways of conceptual and ideological approaches. In order to correctly perform the analytical tasks of this dissertation, the author has applied methods of concrete-historical and functional analysis on the role of Islamic communities in Russia in both past and the present.

Based on the descriptive-historical character of the research, the historical development of Islam in Russia and the relationship of this religion with other institutions has also been studied. A historicist method allows the researcher to retrace the chronology of events and the gradual changes of Islam within the political and social life of Russia over the course of its long history. While performing this research, the author has faced a certain methodological difficulty in the correct use of terms and concepts, as they are commonly distorted, especially in the mass media, and differently interpreted, including their interpretation in the scientific arena.

Performance of the tasks of the dissertation and the methodology of the research required not only the use of the above-listed literature, but also the use of a certain set of

sources. First, certain national and legal documents are cited among the main sources of the dissertation: *the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Russian Federation National Security Concept, Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, Federal Law On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations*, and other legislative acts. These regulatory documents provide a certain orientation for this analytical work and allows this researcher to construct an analysis based on the legal basis of the functioning of religious organizations in Russia, measures which are taken by the state for the security of the country, and national interests.

Second, resolutions and programs of Muslim organizations and resolutions of spiritual administrations of Muslims have also be appreciated for their own unique significance. These documents allowed us to perceive and assess the role that spiritual administrations of Muslims, religious organizations and socio-political organizations assign to themselves.⁹ Third, interviews, statements, and books on religious figures were examined for the analysis. These sources were helpful in studying the positions of representatives of religious confessions on number of issues that are of benefit to this analysis as well as information describing the particular roles of specific religions in modern times. Fourth, statistical materials, opinion polls and researches were examined. Such information allowed the researcher to better assess the extent to which religiousness spread in the society and the attitude toward Islam and to perform a comparative analysis

⁹ The outcome document of the IV International Forum in Grozny "Islam - the religion of peace and creation," <http://mahalla1.ru/notosti/v-groznom-zavershil-rabotu-iv-mezhdunarodnyj-mirotvorcheskij-forum-islam---religiya-mira-i-sozidaniya.php> (accessed June 3, 2011); "The main provisions of the social program of Russian Muslims," <http://www.archipelag.ru/agenda/strateg/konfess/conception/islam/> (accessed July 7, 2011); "The Mufti Council of Russia condemns the terrorist attack at Moscow airport "Domodedovo"," <http://www.islamsng.com/rus/news/1015> (accessed January 25, 2011).

based on the factual material.¹⁰ We can single out one particular study by Chechen Muslim theologian Deni Baksan, called “The Footprints of Satan on Hidden Roads of History.”¹¹ This researcher openly and hostilely opposes Russia, totally justifies the military actions of Chechen militants, and calls for a further fight with new forces.

Additionally, the author of the dissertation used information from the Russian periodical press. Due to the biased position of a number of Russian and foreign media, the author took into account the possibility that such materials were presented in a tendentious way, and also the possibility that such materials contained unverifiable information. It is necessary, however, to appreciate that although the Russian media is highly politicized and some of these media are infected with Islamophobia, they also have a massive influence on public opinion in Russia, creating particular climates and positions required for such media and those people behind them. Nonetheless, the use of such sources allowed this researcher to encounter fresh perspectives and compare these with more traditional versus of the actual events.

Fifth, Internet resources became a separate set of sources, having provided access to the above-listed types of sources and a timely provision of information about the changes in the religious situation in Russia and the world, as well as new initiatives and positions in the sphere of Russia’s Muslim clergy. Moreover, the Internet was also

¹⁰ Darya Khalturina, *Musulmane Mosky: Faktory Religioznoy Tolerantnosti* [Muslims in Moscow: the Factors of Religious Tolerance] (Moscow: publisher?, 2007); Vyacheslav Karpov and Elena Lisovskyaq, “Religious Intolerance among Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Russia,” *Religion, State and Society* 36, no. 4(2008); Michail Mchedlov, *Essays on Religious Studies: Religion in the Spiritual and Sociopolitical Life of Contemporary Russia* (Moscow: Nauchnaya Kniga Publishers, 2005); Ravil Gainutdin, *Vibori v Rossii i vibor musulman* [Elections in Russia and Muslims’ Choice] (Moscow: Veche, 2004).

¹¹ Deni Baksan, *Sled Satany na Tainyx Tropicax Istorii* [The footprints of Satan on hidden roads of History] (Grozny, 1998).

examined as a source to discover little known (or unpublished) socio-political problems that relate to the Muslims of Russia.

The originality of this dissertation is determined by establishing the objective of the research and its task is rooted in the fact that the dissertation covers a comprehensive number of related questions with regard to Islamism and Muslim historical confessions in Russia. This research is an attempt to perform a socio-political analysis of the role of Islam in the life of contemporary Russia and to examine the positive and negative features of its influence on the political life of the country. The dissertation also considers the question of the origins of the Islamist revival, and its unique characteristics within the Islamic communities of modern Russia. This research describes those changes within Islam's position in society, which heightened its place in public life. This study also considers the phenomena of so-called Islamist terrorism in the politics of the non-Muslim state and tendencies and prospects of extremism, while often separating these activities from the normative historical term "Islamic."

The theoretical and practical significance of this dissertation lies in the fact that the resulting analysis will represent theoretical knowledge about the existence of contemporary forms of Islam in Russia, its place in the social and political spheres of the society, and the proportion of the "Islamic" element in Islamist extremism. Being a social phenomenon, a religion (in this case – Islam) potentially becomes a factor in many social processes. Besides, some particular points of the dissertation could be used as the basis for further theoretical and practical studies on the question of the influence of the Islamic factor on Russia's overall socio-political development. This research could be useful for the further analysis of theoretical problems in the relationships that exist

between the Russian state and Russia's various religions, as well as the place and role of Islam with regard to political processes. The dissertation seeks to provide an objective assessment of socio-political processes and the choosing of a more thoughtful position of the authorities toward Islam in Russia in general.

CHAPTER TWO

Historical Conditions for the Formation of the Islamic Factor in Russia

Historically, the Russian state has been largely situated at the unique crossing of religions: the Catholic-Protestant world in the West; Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism in the East; and in the South, Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Judaism. In order to objectively evaluate the position of Islam in contemporary Russia and its impact on social, political and cultural components of the Russian society, it is helpful to trace the historical roots of Islam's development in Russia. Otherwise, it will be difficult to estimate its socio-political potential for further development in Russia, its political claims about the possibility of building an independent state for the Muslim peoples of Russia, and the possibility of smooth integration into the modern modified social system in Russian in general.

History provides a vast amount of factual material to aid in understanding the religious dynamics and interrelationships in its causal relationship with the complexities of each and every epoch. It is necessary to consider the fortune of Islam in Russia because Islam was "built into the realities of Russia: some places naturally, but some places artificially and under constraint."¹ Historically Russia emerged primarily as the Christian, Orthodox *Rus*, but it is also inconceivable without Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, etc. There is one opinion that assumes that Muslims and Orthodox Christians in Russia

¹ Ramazan Abdulatipov, *Sudby Islama v Rossii: Istoriya i Perspektivy* [The Fate of Islam in Russia: History and Prospects] (Moscow: Mysl, 2002), 17.

have always feuded with each other, and the Russian government has infringed upon the interests of the country's Muslim population. Scholars Andreyas Kappeler and Svetlana Chervonnaya hold to such views; they write that “we must unequivocally speak of the Russian colonial expansion.”² However, as Professor Aleksey Malashenko noted, depending on time and situation, the attitude toward Islam in the Russian Empire and the USSR changed “from rejection to recognition of it as a part of Russia’s historical heritage, the all-Russian culture.”³ Ishmael Shangareyev, co-Chairman of the Russian Council of Muftis, believes that religious conflicts has never really occurred in Russia.⁴

Today, the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims are not very noticeable as a result of the long-standing Soviet unification of the national life and general education system, predominant use of the Russian language, secularization of culture, and a long history of numerous migrations and deportations. This was not always the case, however, and there has been complex expressions of hatred and oppression, as well as mutual respect, during many centuries of coexistence between these two world religions’ representatives. To provide an objective assessment, one should consider the history of Islam in the Russian state.

How did large Muslim communities have to be formed in Russia? The time of Islam’s appearance in the Russian territory is specified differently, but everyone agrees that Islam began to spread in the Russian territory before the advent of Orthodox

² Andreyas Kappeler and Svetlana Chervonnaya, *Musulmanskie Narody Rossii: Istoricheskoe Vvedenie* [Muslim Peoples of Russia: Historic Introduction] (Moscow: Mysl, 2001), 101.

³ Aleksey Malashenko, *Islamskoe Vozrozhdeniye v Sovremennoi Rossii* [The Islamic Renaissance in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998), 6.

⁴ Rima Axmirova, “Pochemu my Boimsya Musulman?” [Why we are afraid of Muslims?] *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, [Komsomol Truth] www.kr.ru/daily/23236/27351 (accessed March 16, 2004).

Christianity. Relying on the fact that Volga Bulgaria, which had adopted Islam, made a treaty of peace with the Kievan Rus in 986 and maintained that pludge for one and a half centuries, Ravil Bukharev notes that “Islam came to Russia earlier than Christianity.”⁵ The first exposure of the Slavs to the Muslim religion, their culture and way of life began through the forces of commerce.

One significant aspect associated with the spread and adoption of Islam must be emphasized. In Bulgaria, Islam was officially enshrined by the charter of the Baghdad Caliph, but it came to Russian Bulgaria not from the Arab countries, not with soldiers or Arab missionaries. Islam came to Bulgaria from Central Asia through missionary preaching, and its coming was not the result of violent actions by certain conquerors. In this region, the spread of Islam was of a liberal, Hanafii trend in the tenth century and later. It is this trend of Islam that provides the greatest opportunity for continuous updating of the teachings of Islam with regard to contemporary times, local customs and religious traditions.

The Bulgars lived in the neighborhood of Slavic tribes who soon became Christians. There is every reason to believe that from the very beginning of its existence in Russia, Muslims and Christians were in constant and extensive communication. Thus, the Code of Prince Yaroslav The Wise regarding ecclesiastical courts, the archetype of which was formed in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, contained a range of articles prohibiting persons of different faiths from joining in marriage or sexual relations or participating in a joint table. According to Article 19 of the Code, communication between a Russian girl and any Muslims a ‘*besermenin*’ was prohibited; and according to

⁵ Ravil Bukharev, *Islam in Russia: The Four Seasons* (New York: Curzon Press, 2000), 3.

Article 51, cohabitation between Russian girls and any Muslim men was also prohibited. In the latter case, the guilty female was to pay a penalty of 12 Grivnas and be excommunicated from the Holy Orthodox Church.⁶ This suggests that the relationship between Christians and Muslims, particularly at the interpersonal level, dates back centuries.

There is an opinion that the record should be seen to commence started not from the ninth and tenth centuries, as is generally believed, but from the seventh and eighth centuries, when Islam was spread by “solely peaceful means through the voluntary choices of the ruling elites focused on a political alliance with the Caliphate of Baghdad, the Seljuk Turkey and other Muslim countries.”⁷

Russian researcher, Robert Landa, confirmed that the first Muslims in Russia actually arrived in the seventh century (the year 654) in the territory of Russia that is currently known as Dagestan.⁸ Mixed Russian-Bulgar marriages were not uncommon, particularly in the princely families of that region. After 958, relations with the Islamic world were negotiated mainly through Bulgars intermediaries which helped to establish a host of trade routes throughout the Caspian Sea region.

Galina Yemelianova, a Russian specialist on Islam, mentions the advent of Islam in the seventh century, referring to the fact that as far back as during the days of the Caliphate in Medina, the Muslim armies had began their penetration into what is today

⁶ Ravil Gainutdin, *Islam v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Fair Press Grand, 2004), 12-14.

⁷ Abdulatipov, *Sudby Islama v Rossii*, 106; also see: Ravil Gainutdin, *Islam v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Fair-Press Grand, 2004), 3.

⁸ Robert Landa, *Rossia i Mir Islama: Obchee i Osobennoe* [Russia and the Islamic World: general and special] (Moscow, 2002), 218.

part of the Russian territory. In 642, Azerbaijan was under the rule of Muslims. Muslims also occupied Derbent, a very strategic frontier town, in 658. After the conquest of the eastern Caucasus, Islamic influence began to spread in these areas without any resistance. The great city of Bukhara, Uzbekistan, fell under the power of Muslim armies in 674.⁹

Thus, it can be confirmed with certainty that the active penetration of Islam into the Russian lands began as early as the seventh century, that is, while Russia was still under the rule of Pagan Slavic tribes. As a result of extensive trading, these Slavs began to more extensively interact with Muslims and Islam itself. More active relationships occurred in areas that bordered Muslim peoples, taking in elements of a major world religion that were completely new to the Slavs. Alexandre Bennigsen described the process of Islam's spread as follows:

As early as in the ninth century, Arab merchants, ambassadors of the Caliph of Baghdad, brought Islam to the Bulgar kingdom on the Volga, and in the beginning of the tenth century, the area covering the modern Tatar territory, was mostly turned to Islam. From there, Islam spread to the Urals in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Then, thanks to Muslim merchants, Islam was brought to the Kazakh steppes, the north of the Syr-Darya River, then to the mountains of Kirghizia and, finally to Xinjiang. In the last quarter of the twelfth century, Islam ruled over the vast territory stretching from the Volga banks to Xinjiang, becoming one of the most prestigious centers of the Islamic world and remaining such until the end of the sixteenth century.¹⁰

Throughout the Russian territory, Islam was primarily established without the use of violence. It spread primarily through cultural influence and an alliance with neighboring Muslim states. The situation was different in those areas where Islam had

⁹ For more on this, see Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 3-15

¹⁰ Alexandre Bennigsen, "Islam in the USSR," <http://kitap.net.ru/benigsen/1.1.php> (accessed August 7, 2011).

became the primary religion for a long period of time. Kappeler and Chervonnaya point out that “no region that became a zone of Islamic civilization voluntarily entered into the Russian Empire.”¹¹ The conclusion of treaties between ethnic Russians and ethnic Muslims was often accompanied by political intrigues and a breach of promises; which factionalized the various Muslim communities. There were for example, attempts to set a Russian henchman on the Khan’s throne and to create appearance of voluntary accession. All this, according to Kappeler and Chervonnaya, cannot hide “the essence of the Russian invasion of neighboring Muslim world, state aggression, and colonial expansion proceeding by stages farther to the south and east from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries.”¹²

Cases of absolutely peaceful accession of new territories have been rarely observed in Russia intercultural history. The process is always accompanied by secret negotiations between the supreme rulers and with nobility driven by vested interests. So it has been the case that weak and smaller states and territories have been inevitably annexed to larger ones. This pattern characterized the rule of survival and successful development, and the strongest Russian state was Rus, in which Orthodoxy became the state religion. The problem of Prince Vladimir’s religious choice is well described by the Saint Nestor the Chronicler.¹³ When the prince, who understood the inadequacies of paganism as a state religion, was compelled to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each faith. Islam was summarily rejected because of a number of unpleasant demands

¹¹ Kappeler and Chervonnaya, *Musulmanskie Narody Rossii*, 102.

¹² *Ibid.*, 103.

¹³ Saint Nestor the Chronicler was the reputed author of the Primary Chronicle (the earliest East Slavic chronicle). <http://old-russian.chat.ru/01povest.htm> (September 2, 2011).

— bans on the consumption of pork and wine and, most notably, taking into account the foreign policy situation, faith of the states neighboring with Russia and warring with Russia for regional control.

The decision on an adoption of a faith was largely determined by both internal conflicts within the region and by targeted external influence. In choosing a faith, the power structure of the state essentially declared accession to one or another camp in the balance of forces formed by that time and distinguished by rigid opposition to Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam. Thus, declaring its commitment to Orthodoxy, Russia closely joined in a complex set of interrelationships between these competing religious communities.

The choice of *Rus* in favor of Orthodoxy radically changed the alignment of forces in the region, partly “inducing many neighboring peoples and state formations that had significant discrepancies and a high propensity to conflicts with the Russian state to accede to other parts of the system of inter-religious balance of forces rather than Orthodoxy.”¹⁴ The choice of the neighboring nations largely predetermined further consolidation of the Russian people and of Russian lands under the aegis of Orthodoxy, which -- especially after the Mongol invasion -- started to exert a determining influence on every political processes in Russia; primarily in the formation of a strong centralized government, committed to gathering Russian lands together around a single center; elimination of regional and ethnic differences between various population groups; and unification for organizing a successful defense against potentially hostile neighbors.

¹⁴ Anatoliy Batashev, “Rossia i Islamskii Faktor,” [Russia and Islamic Factor] <http://tatar-history.narod.ru/rosislam.htm> (accessed July 14, 2011).

When *Rus* came under the reign of the Golden Horde in the first half of the thirteen century, it had been familiar with the Islamic world for nearly five centuries and “was related to it much more closely... than to the Western Europe.”¹⁵ The success of Islam among the inhabitants of the Volga Region is largely explained both by the considerable geographic remoteness from the traditional centers of Orthodoxy and their weakness, and the fact that the Muslim faith largely corresponded to the nomadic and seminomadic life, since the very beginning of Islam which occurred in a similar social environment.

The relationships consolidated still more when Islam became the official religion of the Golden Horde in 1312 or 1313. That meant the inclusion of Russia in the arena of Arab-Muslim activities, which was expressed, for example, in minting coins with Arabic script in Moscow as well as joining the Golden Horde nobility with the Russian aristocracy. Noble Tatars’ “departures” to Rus and transfer of certain lands to them for “feeding” led to the acceptance by the population of Russia much of their lifestyle, customs, culture and mores. In the seventeenth century descendants of the Horde amounted to 17% (156 of 915 families) among the eschelons of the highest Russian nobility.¹⁶ Among other segments of the nobility, they were even more numerous. A number of Russian provinces consisted of descendants of the baptized Tatars and other peoples that had professed Islam in the past.¹⁷

¹⁵ Vasiliy Bartold, *Islam i Kultura Musulmanstva* [Islam and Muslim Culture] (Moscow: Izd-vo MGU, 1992), 133.

¹⁶ Evgeniy Karnovich, *Rodovye Prozvaniya i Tituly v Rossii i Sliyanie Inozemcev s Russkimi* [Generic Nicknames and Titles in Russia and the merger of Russians with the Foreigners] (Moscow: Izd-vo Mezhdunarodnogo Fonda Istrorii Nauki, 1991), 74.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74-76.

The first Muslim state in Russia in which Christians, i.e., Orthodox Christians, constituted the minority, was the Golden Horde, *Ulus-Juchi*, that appeared in Eurasia in the middle of the twelfth century. In this state, along with the Volga-Kama Bulgaria, vast steppe regions were united, including the Black Sea region, Crimea, the Ciscaucasia, Lower Volga, the Southern Urals, Western Siberia, and Northern Kazakhstan, which were populated by Turkic Kipchaks (Cumans). In the Empire of the Golden Horde, and as a result of Mongolian and Tatar invasions, the invasive wars of the Horde led to Russian principalities becoming vassal States.

How did the Golden Horde treat the religious and political powers of Orthodoxy? What were the relations between Muslims and Orthodox Christians within the Muslim state? More recent sources have confirmed that until the end of the fourteenth century, confessional antagonism between the followers of the two religions was rarely observed.¹⁸ The idea of opposition between “Muslim Tatars” and “Christian Russians” began with the Battle of Kulikov (1380) and with subsequent violent clashes between the growing Moscow State and weakening Golden Horde. This explains the birth of the concept of the "Tatar Yoke" over the Orthodox Rus at a later time.¹⁹

After some time, historical events gave rise to the creation of a new ideology—the Russian (Orthodox) “yoke” over the Muslim Tatars. In the late 1540s, a noticeably stronger Russian government abruptly changed its policy toward the Kazan Khanate. If its policy was not conquering territory for many years, the question was about the

¹⁸ Ravil Gainutdin, *Islam v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Fair-Press Grand 2004), 15.

¹⁹Ibid.

conquest of the khanate and its inclusion in the Russian state at that time. Conquest campaigns were conducted under religious flags since their beginning. The army heading for the conquest of Kazan was instructed by the Metropolitan Macarii, who interpreted that invasive war as a God's holy cause aimed at converting "godless" and "unclean" Muslims to the truth of Christianity; the soldiers who died in this holy crusade were seen to be martyrs for the true faith.²⁰

After conquering Kazan and all the lands of the Khanate, the Russian government began to implement a plan to create a mechanism for the newly annexed state, according to which "the relationships of the conquerors and the conquered found their expression in the most severe form that could only exist between winners and losers."²¹ Residents of Kazan were banned from living in the city and even entering it; all of former citizens were deported beyond the city limits. The city was destroyed and ruined; leading to a population decline of 80%. Forced eviction of the Tatars from Kazan and the ban on entering the city were accompanied by a fanatical order of the Russian government: "All the mosques must be cast out and they must be destroyed."²² In 1555, Archbishop's Cathedral was set up in Kazan and the forceble conversion of the locals to Christianity began. Sergey Solovyev, the famous Russian historian, described the departure of the newly appointed archbishop from Moscow to Kazan in the following manner in the second volume of his History of Russia: "It was an unusual departure, the first one in the

²⁰ Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam*, 16-17.

²¹ Michail Khudiakov, *Ocherki po Istorii Kazanskogo Xanstva* [Essays on the History of the Khanate of Kazan] (Kazan: Magarif, 2004), 175.

²² Michail Xudyakov, *Ocherki po Istorii Kazanskogo Xanstva* [Essays on the History of the Khanate of Kazan] (Kazan: Magarif, 2004), 176.

Russian history: the Archbishop went to the conquered, unfaithful empire to spread Christianity over there. This spiritual crusade was commensurate with the departure of the Greek clergy from Byzantine and Korsun to educate *Rus* with Christianity in the days of Vladimir; it was a completion of the conquest of Kazan.”²³

To convert Kazan Tatars to Christianity, the Archbishop received a detailed mandate from the Metropolitan Macarii. Construction of the Christian church next to the Khan's palace was started in Kazan; it was “a huge building of capital proportions, which was planned by a great power after the victory, a demonstrative insignia of Moscow’s power.”²⁴ Distribution of lands of the Khan, Kazan princes and landlords to the Russian people had begun. As a Russian historian wrote,

A huge outflow of people and incalculable material damage inflicted a tremendous blow to the Kazan Tatars. Almost all the cultural treasures accumulated by earlier generations were destroyed, refugees fled from the capital city that was crowded before, the survivors had to live out their days in the remote forest villages not thinking about the cultural acquisitions but only about a severe struggle for food... A terrible decline of the cultural level and economic regression accompanied by a transition to primitive forms of agriculture and the decline of industry and commerce, impoverishment of the population, becoming disaccustomed from active participation in building public and social lives — these are the consequences that the Russian conquest brought to Kazan Tatars.²⁵

After the conquest of the Muslim Khanate and other large areas inhabited by the followers of Islam, Russia also became a Muslim country. But it took two centuries for Russia to realize that it was a multi-faith country.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 178-179.

²⁵ For more on this see: Khudiakov, *Ocherki po Istorii Kazanskogo Xanstva*, 181-201.

Russian-Tatar confrontation at that time was primarily political, but it also had religious overtones: Orthodoxy vs. Islam. However, the religious component of any conflict, although superficial, is more of a consequence than the cause of the confrontation. In the traditional societies, religion plays vital role in the “process of socialization of individuals as a principal carrier of cultural, moral and ethical traditions, the concentrated reflection of the world outlook and national character of the community.”²⁶ When the conflict between different communities becomes protracted, it’s true that underlying causes are usually overshadowed; the confrontation becomes a part of a cultural milieu and, consequently, a part of the worldview of a given community. Thus, the conflict inevitably acquires a religious aspect. In the opinion of Batashev,²⁷ the underlying causes of confrontation between Russia and the Tatar Khanates have nothing to do with religion; going back to the opposing forests and steppes, the sedentary and nomadic societies. Nomads tend to live in harmony with nature, while the sedentary world strives to alter nature for itself. Farmers tend to plow and sow steppe lands, causing damage to the fodder resources of nomadic livestock farmers. Nomads regulated their relations on the basis of traditions passed down from generation to generation; cravings for the cult of power become important to them, as the absence of significant native handicrafts had to be compensated for through robbery. Relations between the farmers were usually built on the basis of written or unwritten laws that penalized robbery because it resulted in the weakening of sedentary farming. After the formation

²⁶ V. Veremchuk, *Sociologia Religii* [Sociology of Religion] (Moscow: Uniti-Dana, 2004), 24.

²⁷ Anatoliy Batashev, “Rossia i Islamskii Faktor” [Russia and Islamic Factor]. <http://tatar-history.narod.ru/rosislam.htm> (accessed August 13, 2001).

of a strong centralized state in *Rus*, which coincided with a revolution in military technologies (the discovery of gunpowder), however, the balance of power drastically changed, and agricultural civilization began to rapidly decrease in the nomadic world. *Rus* borrowed much from the Horde power in the area of political culture and management practices; for example, division of the population into “thousands,” “hundreds,” and “tens” was adopted for tax collection and mobilization of up to 10% of the population for military service. A great deal was introduced even after the collapse of the Golden Horde in what the Russian historian Georgii Vernadsky called “the effect of a deferred action,” through which “Tatar influence on the Russian life grew rather than decreased after the liberation of Russia.”²⁸ Kinships and consortships of the Russian aristocracy and Horde nobility were largely facilitated through the introduction of Horde practices into the public life of *Rus*, for example, through the appointment of a “younger” co-ruler (Kasimov Khan Saim-Bulat, or Simeon Bekbulatovich, in the days of Ivan the Terrible). Native Tatar nobility often enjoyed the special confidence of Moscow tsars and were more loyal to them than the descendants of former appanaged princes of the well-born Boyars. In 1600, Kasimov Tsars, among whom descendants of the Khans of Kazan, Astrakhan, the Crimea, and Siberia were noted, were given equal rights with senior Bishops of the Russian Church. Princes of Moscow included Tatar Tsareviches among the founders of their dynasty.²⁹

But there were no idylls in history, especially as it was virtually banned to openly practice Islam in Russia for over two centuries after the capture of Kazan. It was

²⁸ Georgii Vernadsky, *Mongoly i Russ* [Mongols and Rus] (Moscow: Agraf, 1997), 363.

²⁹ Vernadsky, *Mongoly i Russ*, 363.

Catherine the Great who returned religious freedom to Russian Muslims after Pugachev's rebellion. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Russia began to capture Muslim territories. But despite its repressive actions, as Dr. Abdur Rauf noted, "no reduction of the spread and popularity of Islam ever occurred in Russia." Russian Muslims maintained their fraternal relations with the rest of the Muslim world. Central Asia and the Caucasus played central role in promoting the Islamic civilization and its culture for thousands of years."³⁰

Fragments of the Golden Horde—Kazan, Astrakhan, and the Crimean Khanates, where the major part of the population turned from Paganism and Christianity to Islam—constituted a grave political danger to the Russian state. In political terms, those were the explosive regions threatening the stability of the Russian state and the tranquility of its residents. Continuous monitoring of border areas did not always bring the intended result. The conquest of Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates, therefore, was a necessary measure for the political stability of the state. As a result, this led to a significant change in the economic structure of their territories: raids ceased, slave trade declined, and many of the local population completely turned to a sedentary lifestyle. Industry began to emerge; agriculture started to turn to arable farming. As religious tolerance is fundamental to the Russian psyche, "a peculiar symbiosis of two cultures developed, and the religious factor was no longer a symbol of confrontation."³¹

³⁰ Abdur Rauf, "Islam in Russia." www.themodernreligion.com/convert/russia.html (accessed August 2, 2011).

³¹ Batashev, "Rossia i Islamskii Faktor."

Changes also penetrated into the socio-cultural realm and in the arena of intercultural relationships. A change in the domestic and socio-political order that had occurred throughout the country as a result of the integration could not but affect the worldview of the nationalities living in it. This became a major landmark in the political life of the Russian state, marking a watershed between Rus and Russia. Russia annexed a large proportion of non-Russian, predominantly Muslim, population. Proclaiming himself a Tsar, Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584) announced he was not only raising the status of his country in the international scene but also the cultural and legal continuity of the new state ideology and worldview, forging a new form of relationships within the state, which embodied the greatness of both Byzantium and the Golden Horde.

Kappeler and Chervonnaya adhere to a more rigid characteristic of the Russian state transformation, noting that

the forcible baptism, spiritual enslavement, and mass physical extermination of Muslims at the conquest of Kazan, Astrakhan, Nogai and other Tatar Khanates and free Bashkir lands, at the Russian colonization of the Volga Region, the Urals, Siberia, were a grim exordium to the future policy of the Russian state that was transformed into a colonial empire in the sixteenth century — “a prison of nations,” a stronghold of the Orthodox Church’s anti-Islamic militant attack, which started its missionary work.³²

Of course, dissatisfaction followed military takeovers and, therefore, the processes of interaction and interpenetration of Russian, Tatar, and other Muslim nations were difficult and controversial. There is evidence, however, that the government sought to carry out a conciliatory policy toward the Muslim peoples of newly annexed lands. Numerous Muslim feudals of pro-Russian orientation, without changing their religion at

³² Andreyas Kappeler and Svetlana Chervonnaya, *Musulmanskie Narody Rossii: Istoricheskoe Vvedenie* [Muslim Peoples of Russia: Historic Introduction] (Moscow: Mysl, 2001), 104.

first, preserved their land and serfs, creating a special estate of “Tatar servitors” headed by Beys, Princes and Mirzas. They were exempt from taxes, were equated with Russian Servitors, and received manors, awards, and offices at the Tsar’s court. Only upon expressing open hostility to the Tsarist authorities were they deprived of their rights and property. For example, about 1,500 Beys and Mirzas were murdered in suppressing the rebellions of the Muslims of Kazan in 1557-1558; while those who had been loyal to the Tsar were endowed with lands. They were, however, forced to get baptized by the middle of the seventeenth century, sometimes under threat of eviction. Mass baptisms, however, did not occur.³³ As Oleg Kucher indicated, intolerance toward Islam took the form of state policy after the tsar’s decree of May 16, 1681,³⁴ although fluctuations of power in this matter were constantly observed. In 1685, a decree was issued on the Muslims’ taking baptism “only voluntarily, without any coercion.” A similar decree came from the Senate in 1719, and the decrees of the Synod of 1740 and 1751 were issued.³⁵ Relations with Muslims improved after Catherine the Great’s refusal to carry out the policy of “Christianization” of Muslims, which made possible their cooperation with Russian authorities. The decree of 1773 generally eliminated discrimination against Islam. Creation of a Mufti in Ufa in 1789 marked the beginning of the subsequent

³³ Robert Landa, *Rossia i Mir Islama: Obchee i Osobennoe* [Russia and the Islamic World: general and special] (Moscow, 2002), 221-222.

³⁴ Oleg Kucher, *Islam* (Charkov: Feniks, 2004), 237.

³⁵ Abdulatipov, *Sudby Islama v Rossii*, 119-120.

organization of Spiritual Administrations of Muslims in Russia. Simultaneously, Tatar nobility acquired the rights of the Russian nobility in 1783-1784.³⁶

It is noteworthy that Muslims on the lands annexed to Russia usually considered Russian rulers as legitimate heirs of the Golden Horde. Russia captured many of the riches from the Golden Horde and its descendants but the Slavic, Byzantine, and Finno-Ugric components, remained dominant. For all the inconsistencies of the Russian policy towards Muslims, and despite all the difficulties, persecution and forced baptisms on the part of the Russian state, the endless attacks and debilitating demands of tribute on the part of the khanates, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be considered as the beginning of the formation of the “social medium of common fate” within Russia.³⁷

According to a statement with which one cannot disagree, “Islam in Russia has never been abolished. The ideal relationships between the government and subjects of various faiths, however, could not exist.”³⁸ In the middle of the sixteenth century, a new wave of Christianization of Muslims was rising, which was inspired by Moscow and later supported by the state. Adopted in 1593, a special Charter banned Tatars living in the villages together with Russians “to have mosques... in order to avoid the temptation to Christians and Kryaschens.”³⁹ That Charter was the basis for local rulers to desecrate or

³⁶ For more, see Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 39-45.

³⁷ Landa, *Rossia i Mir Islama*, 222.

³⁸ S. Senutkin, *Istoriya Islamskix Obchin* [History of Islamic Communities] (Nizhnii Novgorod, 1998), 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

destroy mosques. Christianization of Russia's Muslims was initiated from the top, leading to their eventual Russification. In 1713, Peter the Great

instructed that Muslims of Muhammedan faith in the Kazan and Azov Provinces, who have manors and estates with farmers and servants and business people adhering to the Orthodox Christian faith, must be told about the decree of the great sovereign, according to which the Muslims are to be baptized in six months without fail; but after the acceptance of the holy baptism, the manors, estates, people and peasants will still belong to them. And if they do not take baptism in six months, their manors and estates with the people and peasants must be taken away from them and signed away in favor of him, the Great Sovereign, and they are not to be given to anyone without the decree; and how many of those Muslims will accept holy baptism and how many people are not baptized, and what will be signed away from such manors and estates: the reference must be sent to the Senate Office from the provinces.⁴⁰

At the Tsar's instruction the forceble conversion of Muslim peoples neighboring with the Tatars — Mordovians, Chuvashes, Cheremisses, Ostyaks, Votyaks, etc. — was prohibited.⁴¹

According to a Senate Decree (November 19, 1742,) all newly built mosques and those built in the areas where Orthodox Christians lived were to be “broken and not constructed again;” converts to Islam “must be asked by all acceptable means, and interrogated firmly by whom and from what people or faith they were converted to Muhommedan Law and confirmed in their faith, and, according to the investigation, those to whom they will point should be administered according to the above-mentioned item, and the Chuvashes and other converts, if they refuse to be baptized voluntarily, should be imposed a penalty according to the decrees...”⁴²

⁴⁰ D. Arapov, ed., *Islam v Rossiiskoy Imperii: Zakonodatelnye Akty, Opisaniya, Statistika* [Islam in the Russian Empire: Legislation, descriptions, statistics] (Moscow: Akademkniga, 2001), 42. Also see Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar*, 37-38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 43-44.

That policy was carried out until the end of the eighteenth century.⁴³ On June 17, 1773, the Holy Governing Synod issued a decree, “On the tolerance of all faiths and prohibiting Bishops (of the Russian Orthodox Church) to engage in various matters related to unorthodox confessions and building their houses of worship according to their law, transferring all these authorities to secular rulers.” The Synod determined that “the Eminent Bishops as well as secular orders must take pains by virtue of State Laws, so that no discrepancies occur between Her Majesty’s subjects due to that case, but rather love, peace and harmony reigned between them.”⁴⁴ That decree was followed by a number of other decrees facilitating the religious life of Muslims to some extent, such as “On allowing the subjects of the Mohammedan Law to Elect Akhuns Autonomously” (January 28, 1783)⁴⁵ and “On Fast and Fair Solution of Conflicts and Complaints Occurring between Kirgiz-Kaysaks, and the Supply of the Required Number of Mullahs to Them” (April 21, 1787).⁴⁶

On September 22, 1788, Catherine the Great signed the Name Decree: “On the appointment of Mullahs and other religious officials of the Mohammedan Law and establishing a spiritual meeting in Ufa for the management of all the spiritual ranks of the law, staying in Russia.” The Muslims of Russia were able to control their religious center for the first time in their history. In the decree, its tasks were set up “so that the Mullahs and other spiritual ranks of the Mohammedan Law among nations exercising this

⁴³ Ibid., 7-13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 45-46.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 46-47.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 48-49.

faith in our Empire were determined not otherwise but through the appropriate testing.”

The idea was that the imams who were appointed by the Spiritual Assembly after appropriate testing, “were people in loyalty, reliable and maintaining good behavior.”⁴⁷

In general, it should be noted that Tsarist Russia gave considerable importance in its foreign and domestic policy to the fact that quite a considerable part of the population practiced Islam. A number of laws were designed to facilitate the existence and activities of Muslim communities, the publication of religious literature, and the training of ministers of Islam. In the Army, special Muslim regiments existed and soldiers of other units were able to perform religious rites, which an Imam regularly visited. There was a special order designed to be awarded to loyal Muslim compatriots. The intent of Muslims to build mosques in new areas of habitat was not met with the authorities’ resistance, which can be seen in the construction of mosques in the ancient Russian cities like Tver, Kostroma, and Yaroslavl. The two mosques located in Moscow and the Cathedral Mosque of St. Petersburg were built with the active assistance of Tsarist authorities. In general, the religious life of Muslims was allowed to thrive without hindrance on the part of governmental authorities.

With the exception of the Crimean Khanate, all post-Horde states were annexed the Moscow *Rus* in the sixteenth century. This was greatly promoted through Muslim feudals’ integration into the ruling class of *Rus*, while their affiliation with Islam was often maintained as it was not only in Kasimov but in Yuriyev as well, where relatives of Astrakhan Khans ruled, or in Romanov where Nogai princes ruled.⁴⁸ The light cavalry

⁴⁷ Ibid., 50-51.

⁴⁸ Abdulatipov, *Sudby Islama v Rossii*, 117.

that Muslim citizens participated in was an effective part of the Russian Army until the advent of twentieth century.

In the seventeenth century, changes came to the Crimea. Simultaneously, the Russian claimants rushed to the Caucasus, where they met powerful resistance from the mountain peoples. Invasions of the Crimea Khans were very destructive: they captured and enslaved the population of Russia for nearly three centuries. All of that habituated the Russian people living in border areas began to perceive Muslims as enemies. Russians capturing one or another area inhabited by Muslims could not get rid of the “conqueror’s complex in a hostile environment.”⁴⁹ The Muslims, accustomed to internecine wars, were not seen to be surprised by these turn of events.

The conquest of the Crimea, the Caucasus and Central Asia was the result of an armed conflict, particularly of a defensive nature, on the part of Russia. That attack caused the resistance of the Ottoman Empire and Iran, who claimed control over the Muslim neighbors of Russia, who were their agents of influence, and through whom they sought to carry out the necessary policy toward Russia. Dissatisfaction was observed in the Western states that feared Russia and took the first steps in their colonial expansion into the Russia’s Far East.

The War of 1817 – 1864 with the mountain dwellers of the North Caucasus caused the massive emigration of nearly two million Caucasian Muslims to the Ottoman Empire, in addition to extensive losses and significant destruction. It turned into a holy war—“*jihad*”—for those people, which united almost all the Muslim Caucasus against Russia. That war, as Kappeler and Chervonnaya noted, was nothing but “the greatest

⁴⁹ Landa, *Rossia i Mir Islama*, 223.

shame and moral defeat”⁵⁰ for Russia. It was necessary, however, from a geopolitical point of view. That southernmost region of border areas was not only dangerous for the population of Russia but was, and remains, one of the most strategic national boundaries. Unfortunately, the mountain peoples of the Caucasus that were quickly conquered by force formed an explosive area, in which the flame of the national liberation struggle was to blaze sooner or later; this region has remained the most unstable from Shamil’s time to the present. “Conquering the Islamic nations, Russia became the colonial power, thus inevitably approaching a catastrophe of its own decay.”⁵¹

Integration of the Caucasian land into Russia was becoming increasingly difficult. Trends of overcentralization and despotism of the crown accompanied it at the state level. As Bukharev noted, “Islam entrenched in the upland Caucasus in an atmosphere of Russian-Caucasian wars, and this is now used by those who solve problems that are far from religious ones under the guise of Islam.”⁵² But the process of political and geographical solidification was absolutely necessary to Russia national security. As a strong state claiming an active role in the international scene, Russia had to not only secure its own borders but also bring border areas, which were an important geostrategic zone, under its influence. Indeed, Turkey, Iran, and England had certain views on the Caucasus, so taking control of the land before those countries could was necessary.

⁵⁰ Kappeler and Chervonnaya, *Musulmanskie Narody Rossii*, 103. For a more neutral view on this subject see Yemeljanova, *Russia and Islam*, 45-54.

⁵¹ Kappeler and Chervonnaya, *Musulmanskie Narody Rossii*, 103.

⁵² Ravil Bukharev, “Islam in Russia.” http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Life_church/Vera_Rossia/Vera_Ross2.php (accessed September 5, 2001).

Despite the fact that it is believed throughout the Muslim Caucasus that the Russian government was the oppressor of the Caucasus among the local people (known for their recalcitrance and an extraordinary love of freedom), this is not accurate. For example, Feller said that neither the North Caucasus nor the Transcaucasia of Russia itself were too necessary from a sound imperial viewpoint. “For Russia, annexation of the Caucasus made no deep economic sense. For example, it was pointless to try to lay the inhabitants of those territories under large tributes... as the local population only fed itself and had no conspicuous wealth. So... Russia did not have any pragmatic motives to lead a difficult war for the Caucasus.”⁵³

But the interest was of another nature; not an economic one. Those were seen to be strategic areas bordering on the countries that were active entities on the geopolitical scene of the world. Russia was interested in the security of communications of the Russian Army acting in the Transcaucasia (Georgian Military Road). Mountain tribes were contracted as mercenaries for foreign powers and used by Iran, Turkey and Britain to attack Russia.

The North Caucasus became one of the major enclaves of Islam in Russia, and also the most unstable one. All complaints and grievances were usually accompanied by an Islamist militant overtone. Over the centuries, the peoples of the North Caucasus were exposed to various religious influences, having a unique evolutionary path from paganism to Christianity and then finally to Islam. In the Middle Ages, Christianity had a definite influence on the culture of the Caucasian peoples, as the ruling elite of many

⁵³ V. Feller, “Kavkazskii Sindrom” [Caucasian Syndrome]. www.conrad2001.narod.ru/russian/about_grozny/groz_text_19.htm (accessed September 7, 2011).

tribes were baptized! Islam then took root among the peoples of the Northern Caucasus with great difficulties despite the fact that its spread was carried out from three centers—the Iranian, Turkish-Crimean and Northern zones; the latter was presented by the Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates. Proximity to trade routes of Eastern merchants and their trading posts (Derbent) resulted in the eventual spread of Islam into Dagestan and much later in Chechnya (fifteenth through seventeenth centuries), as did the proximity to the Crimean Khanate and the presence of the Turkish garrisons in the area of the Taman and the coastal zone. Further attempts by the Turks and Crimean Tatars to “impose Islam and establish their supremacy in the region met fierce resistance.”⁵⁴

The alignment of forces in the Caucasus began to change with the advent of powerful new military and political players — the Cossacks. Russian Cossacks founded Terek Town (contemporary Kizlyar), which became the center of the Russian presence in the Caucasus for more than two and a half centuries. In the Caucasus, two forces were formed, which variously estimated the role of Russia in the region. Pro-Russian princes considered Moscow as a factor that would bring peace, tranquility, stability and economic prosperity to the region. Many members of the local nobility swore allegiance to the Russian throne and even entered the Orthodox Church. Accession of a part of the Northern Caucasus lands in the eighteenth century was sealed with the marriage of Ivan the Terrible and Maria Temryukovna, (August 21, 1561) a daughter of an influential Kabardian prince. The official accession of the Caucasus did not occur, however, because of the murder of Temryuk and the extermination of practically all pro-Russian elite, a part of which had adopted Christianity by that time. Others, who eventually

⁵⁴ Kucher, *Islam*, 286.

showed up within the majority, did not reconcile themselves to it and felt that the Russians constituted a threat to their existing order.

Interestingly, the Mass conversions to Islam occurred after the beginning of the Caucasian War and at the beginning of a decisive attack of the Russian Army and settlers on the positions of mountain dwellers. Islam became a factor in the preservation of the old traditions, and of a customary way of life. But for mountain dwellers, rejection of blood revenge and raids were equal to deprivation of honor; loss of their own dignity. In the Caucasus, religion was a powerful factor in the consolidation of a diverse community of mountain populations. The worldview of the mountain dwellers was largely akin to the outlook of nomadic peoples. Tough mountain conditions, the virtual absence of means of communication and, as a result, an extremely low level of industrial development and trade, chronic overcrowding, shortage of arable land, pastures, and resources necessary for the production of wealth — all of these led to the fact that the life of the population in the Caucasus was always accompanied by a series of power struggles.

In the late 1720s, an Imamate—a Muslim theocratic supra-national state—started to form in the territory of today's Chechnya and Dagestan under the banners of Mouridism.⁵⁵ For the first time, Ghazi Mohammed, hailed as an Imam in 1828 and whose

⁵⁵ The Mouride brotherhood is a large Islamic Sufi order. At the end of the eighteenth century, mouridism spread in the territory of Azerbaijan, then in Dagestan and Chechnya, becoming the ideology of the national liberation movement for the highlanders of the North Caucasus in the mid-nineteenth century. Since the beginning of the Caucasian War (1817-1864), the main content of mouridism was the idea of "holy war for the faith" (gazat). With the completion of the war in 1864, mouridism lost its political dimension.

disciple was Imam Shamil,⁵⁶ who led the war against the infidels in 1834, called for a “*jihad*” against the “infidels” (Russians in this case).⁵⁷

By the time the Crimean War began in the Caucasus (1853-1856), Russia had firmly established its dominance in the Transcaucasia between the Black and Caspian Seas. But in the North Caucasus, mountain dwellers were actually independent on the sides of the (Georgian Military Road). In the east, Shamil and his Murids; in the west, Abkhazians (and Circassians), who formally recognized the power of Russia but freely communicated with Turkey via the Black Sea Coast, received weapons from Turkey and sold captured slaves, which the Russian Fleet tried to prevent.⁵⁸ Russia’s policy lay in the defense against border attacks, as well as an intent to conclude peace agreements with mountain tribes and bring them on their side. A part of the mountain dwellers fairly consistently maintained an alliance with Russia, while others constantly floated and were unfaithful to oaths and agreements. It should be noted that in addition to aid from foreign powers with their own interests in destabilizing the situation in Russia and weakening it in order to bring that region under control, the mountain dwellers had a significant internal operative motive for continuing the war with Russia: they sought to preserve their traditional lifestyle — raids on neighbors to rob and capture slaves for sale. Therefore, such a war can be hardly called the “national liberation war,” which the mountain dwellers declared that it was. And for the West, such a characteristic and

⁵⁶ Imam Shamil was an Avar political and religious leader of the Muslim tribes of the Northern Caucasus. He was a leader of anti-Russian resistance in the Caucasian War and was the third Imam of the Caucasian Imamate (1834–1859).

⁵⁷ Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam*, 50.

⁵⁸ V. Feller, “Kavkazskii Sindrom”

formulation of the struggle always was a good excuse for their “protection” and actually interfering in the internal affairs of Russia. That practice continues to this day.

As the result of active actions of the Russian Army, Shamil surrendered himself to became a prisoner in 1859. The official end of the Caucasian war was the Russian Army’s occupation of Kbaad (*Krasnaya Polyana*) on May 12, 1864.

Batashev considers a legend that the Chechens were the most tenacious fighters in their war against the Russias. The most violent and persistent opponents of Russia, in his opinion, were the Western Caucasus mountain tribes along the Black Sea Coast. Not wanting to take down Russian power, almost all of them died in the war (or fled to Turkey).⁵⁹ Since then, Russia has not had any serious problems in the West of the North Caucasus. In the East, Shamil received money from the British Empire, and in the end, he surrendered himself to became a prisoner of the Russians.

Peace came to the Caucases only upon the achievement of compliance of Russian and mountain populations’ lifestyles, creating the necessary preconditions for the integration of the mountain dwellers into the politico-economic system of the Russian Empire. Gradual adaptation of the mountain peoples was quite successful, and Islam turned into an “important factor of stability in the south of the country and a guarantee of the progressive development of culture and identity of mountain ethnoses out of an instrument for fight against Russia.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Anatoliy Batashev, “Rossia i Islamskii Faktor,” [Russia and Islamic Factor] <http://tatar-history.narod.ru/rosislam.htm>

⁶⁰ V. Feller, “Kavkazskii Sindrom.”

The oldest center of Islamic culture in the Russian Empire was Central Asia. Control of this region unfolded quickly and smoothly. First of all, this happened because of the huge military-technical superiority of the empire and the absence of state structures in most of Central Asia, as well as a number of climatic factors such as severe water deficiency. A beneficial symbiosis between two distinct cultures began to unfold in Central Asia. This once again confirms that the religious factor may play a central role in the fight but the origins of conflict and reconciliation are dependent on factors of another kind, such as political and economic considerations.

A historic tradition of tolerance between the Muslim and Orthodox communities had always existed in Tsarist Russia. The government could be tolerant and give an opportunity to allow other religions to flourish unhindered. For example, the largest mosque of the Russian Empire was located in St. Petersburg, and most of the Imperial Order's statutes provided for different insignia for Muslims than for Christians due to differing religious traditions (the cross was replaced with a crescent). Alexander II, The Emperor of Russia, being an Orthodox Christian, conferred with the leaders of Muslims and had the title of the "Defender of the Faithful." The symbiosis of the two cultures confirms, for example, the fact that many of the artels made up of simple Russian peasants to carry out certain subcontracted works tried to find a Tatar treasurer. The explanation was that a Tatar, being a Muslim, could not drink wine, and, consequently, there was no threat that he would have drunk the shared money.

According to Ismail Gasprinsky,⁶¹ however, real convergence was not happening because due to the existing social and public conditions of household and lives, Russians and Muslims were deprived of opportunities to exchange thoughts and ideas: all relationships begin with “buy-sell,” “give-take” and then one person goes to the right, and the other one goes to the left. The difference in language and life circumstances and beliefs can in no way contribute to the development of mutual approach, lively sympathy and interest, so there is no need to search for the causes of Muslim alienation from the Russian life and activity on a background of policy or other points.⁶²

This was not true for Orthodox Christians and Muslims but was true for those people who lived in Russia for generations and the inhabitants (Muslims in this case) of newly annexed areas. Thus, misunderstandings or alienation are again based primarily on an economic and political structures. For the most part, Russia’s Muslims lived in peace with Orthodox Christians, Buddhists, and all other religious groups. The religious factor was not all that divisive.

Despite the fact that the role of Muslims in participating in the Russian state was traditionally small, the influence of the Muslim regions on the country’s fortunes grew with the growth of the empire. In fact, four Islamic political centers were set up in Russia by the Tsar; in the Volga Region, the Crimea, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Those four centers still continue to influence the politics of contemporary Russia. Historically, the development of each of these centers within the Russian state was accompanied by

⁶¹ Ismail Gasprinsky was a Crimean Tatar intellectual, politician and educator. He was one of the first Muslim intellectuals in the Russian Empire who realized the need for education and cultural reform and modernization of the Turkic and Islamic communities.

⁶² Ismail Gasprinsky, “Russkoe Musulmanstvo: mysli, zametki, i publicacii,” [Russian Islam: ideas, articles and publications] <http://intelros.ru/index.php?newsid=200> (accessed when?).

military confrontations, in which religious factors played central role. After peace-making and carrying out the necessary social and political transformations, however, religious factor became the key to long-term stability.

Accession of the Muslim areas to Russia contributed to the ending of feudal strife in their territories, elimination of slavery, revival of the economy, culture, education and health. They were drawn into the general lifestyle pattern of the country. Factories, railways, libraries, and schools for Muslims were built. The literacy rate in some places such as the Volga Region was higher than the All-Russia one and amounted to 20.4% by 1897.⁶³ It was the process of mutual learning and influence of cultures between Muslims and Orthodox Russians that erased the barriers caused by the initial intolerance or, more accurately, disbelieving, as in the case of any foreign element. Ismail Gasparinsky wrote, “Give Muslims an opportunity to know Russia, its life and the laws, allow them to acquire knowledge that would refresh their stagnant outlook through its life-giving stream, ease their access to new ideas and principles and you will see how quickly dormant and apathetic Muslim masses will revive, humanize and join the Russian thought and life. Of course, this can be achieved not through severe measures but a trustful appeal to the educational tools and language of the Muslims.”⁶⁴

Since 1800, the printing of Muslim religious literature was allowed without any restrictions in Russia, and scientific centers for studying Islam and traditional Muslim culture were set up. Outstanding Russian writers and philosophers turned to the Islamic subject; among them, G. Derzhavin, A. Pushkin, M. Lermontov, P. Chaadayev, L.

⁶³ Robert Landa, *Rossia i Mir Islama*, 223.

⁶⁴ Gasprinsky, “Russkoe Musulmanstvo: mysli, zametki, i publicacii.”

Tolstoy, and V. Solovyov are most noteworthy. Largely owing to them, a solid foundation of perception of the culture and religion of Islam and the psychology of Muslims in the Russian culture was positively developed. Among the Muslim literate, intellectuals familiar with their national and Russian cultures, such as Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Chocan Valikhanov, and Abai Kunanbayev appeared, advocating for the friendship and solidarity of Muslims and Russians.

It is no coincidence that Ismail Gasprinsky wrote, “for Muslim peoples, the Russian culture is closer than the Western one.”⁶⁵ He was committed to the convergence of Russian and Muslim communities, regarding them both as “children of one great family in our great vast homeland.”⁶⁶ His assessments is very seminal because they it refutes the perception of him as the alleged “modernist” in the West. Gasprinsky believed that the East had nothing to wait on from the West; that “direct reckoning of the Europeans lies in sowing distrust and hostility toward Russia among the Muslims, showing it as a fighter and ruthless enemy of Western culture.”⁶⁷

By the nineteenth century, Russians and Muslims had jointly come a long way in their shared history, during which time a rapprochement between the Muslim and Russian (Orthodox) cultures and an understanding and acceptance of Islam and its spiritual world into the fold of Orthodox Russia occurred. Emphasis moved from religious differences to a different level—cultural and socio-political characteristics of people. Further, the joint struggle against shared enemies only contributed to an

⁶⁵ Ismail Gasprinsky, *Rossia i Vostok* [Russia and the East] (Kazan: 1993), 62.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 63.

achievement of mutual respect and sealed a symbiosis of these two distinct cultures, which were based on two different religious worlds. Even the claim to universal influence, which is characteristic of these two religions, has not been clearly outlined in the history of relations between Muslims and Russians.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Muslim peoples who lived within the Russian Empire were not uniform in terms of their way of life, lifestyle, economy, or political and cultural values. Many features of their communal and tribal systems were preserved. At that time, with the collapse of the Russian Empire and the birth of the Soviet State, in terms of national revival, the issue of the role of Islam—whether it would remain only one factor of the growing national consciousness of those people or turn into a kind of “integrative ideology, which plays a pivotal role and prevails over all other forms of identity”⁶⁸—was a compelling controversy. Initially, the emphasis on the policy of the Soviet state was in the ethnic component, when the Republican formations were established without regard to a national factor. With the growth of widespread education, particularly among Muslims, discontent with the status and the desire for national unity inevitably grew, especially as increased ideological tensions began to emerge.

The Volga Tatars were the first of the Muslims of Russia to become involved in the national Soviet movement. Spokesmen for the national movement were merchants and Muslim clergy at that time, who were ultimately in contact with Muslims in the eastern regions of Russia. If you look at the history of Tatars, beginning from the end of eighteenth century, regularities that make it possible to take a fresh look at Russian Islam in general will be discovered. In those circumstances, “new views, concepts and rules

⁶⁸ Kappeler and Chervonnaya, *Musulmanskie Narody Rossii*, 104.

were interpreted just through the prism of Islam. The only acceptable form of renewed ideology of Tatars in the period were religious and reformist ideas within the traditional religious consciousness.”⁶⁹

Alexandre Bennigsen said of Tatar religious reformers that their influence on the development of the reformatory movement “was quite exceptional in terms of importance, not only in Russia but throughout the Muslim world. Just because their activity was poorly known in the West and ignored by the Muslim historians, Islam ceased to be an obstacle to progress, and the way for reforms in other areas of language, education and political organization was cleared.” In the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Volga Tatars’ Muslim reformism became widespread, the main component of the movement for radical (cultural and political) revisions within update traditional Muslim societies. Tatars, according to Benningsen, solved that problem through a “return to intellectual liberalism.”⁷⁰

Impulses toward the national revival came from Kazan University, which was founded in 1804. Such national educators as Shigabudtin Mardjani and Kaum Nasyri greatly contributed to the cultural revival of the people; laying the foundation for the study of Tatar history and folklore, the creation of a new literary language of Volga Tatars, and the development of Tatar book publishing, which burst forth in the nineteenth century. A narrow stratum of Volga-Tatar intellectuals responded to the new efforts of missionary activity and generally to the future of Russian-European modernization

⁶⁹ Mansur Xasanov, “Fenomen Rossiiskogo Musulmanstva,” [The phenomenon of Russian Islam] http://www.kcn.ru/tat_ru/politics/pan/index.php?tbut=12&sod=2 (accessed July 21, 2011).

⁷⁰ Alexandre Bennigsen, “Islam in the USSR,” <http://kitap.net.ru/benigsen/1.1.php>.

movement that was aimed at reforming Islam. They sought to update Tatar Muslim culture without violating its intrinsic identity. Islam was to be brought into line with the forces of modernization through a reformed school in which teaching would be carried out in the Tatar language.

So Jadidism, developed by Ismail Gasprinsky, a Crimean Tatar, became a reformist course in Islam. Gasprinsky came from an impoverished Crimean Tatar noble family line and, after a stay in Moscow, Paris and Istanbul, founded the newspaper *Terdzhiman* (Translator) in Bakhchisarai in 1883, which became a means of spreading his ideas throughout Russia within the next three decades.⁷¹ Gasprinsky understood that Islam could not be separated from the general forces of economic and social progress. And for its continued existence and successful spread, one had to enter into that inevitable progress without breaking the basic principles and postulates, to carry out modernization.

Jadidism, a splinter religious reform movement, was aimed at a synthesis of Islamic culture with the latest technologies and achievements of the natural science and progressive ideas. Teaching was not supposed to be conducted exclusively in Arabic, and by developing the reforms started by Volga Tatars, Gasprinsky introduced the concept of the general Turkic language on the basis of an updated Turkish, which was to facilitate the consolidation and integration of all the Muslims of Russia under the following slogan: “Unity in the language, thoughts, and affairs.”⁷²

⁷¹ Urii Mizun, *Islam i Rossia* [Islam and Russia] (Moscow: Veche, 2004), 230-231.

⁷² Kappeler and Chervonnaya, *Musulmanskie Narody Rossii*, 105.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Jadidism had many followers, especially among Volga and Crimean Tatars, as well as among Bashkirs and Muslims in Azerbaijan, while the Muslims of Central Asia, which did not have such close contacts with Russia, adhered to conservative Islam. Jadidism, which can be considered the initial phase of a larger religious and national movement, was primarily apolitical. Gasprinsky and (his followers) remained loyal subjects of the Tsar. However, he set up two concepts that were to become especially compelling for the political phase of the Muslim nationalist movement, namely Pan-Islamism⁷³ and Pan-Turkism,⁷⁴ which tended to increase in Russia at that time.

According to Mar Batunsky, a well-known expert on Islam, “assimilation of those fruits was simultaneously an inclusion of their own reality into the world, especially the Russian history, and an inclusion of their own culture into the mainstream of the global civilization.” The active political activity of Tatar thinkers washed out “the image of Russian history as the history of Russian Orthodox superpower, for which other people, other beliefs, and cultures based on it were the only objects of expansion.”⁷⁵ Thus, Islam in Russia not only lost its identity but also gained new contours, once again proving its versatility and responsiveness to new conditions seemingly quite unacceptable to it.

⁷³ Pan-Islamism is a political movement advocating the unity of Muslims under one Islamic state— often a Caliphate. Pan-Islamism in Russia was at the heart of jadidism, the bourgeois-liberal nationalist ideology of some Muslim nations and after the October Revolution of 1917 was one of the main slogans of the counter-revolutionary nationalist Caucasus and Central Asia.

⁷⁴ Pan-Turkism is a nationalist movement that emerged in 1880s among the Turkic intellectuals of the Russian Empire, with the aim of cultural and political unification of all Turkic peoples.

⁷⁵ Mansur Xasanov, “Fenomen Rossiiskogo Musulmanstva,” [The phenomenon of Russian Islam] http://www.kcn.ru/tat_ru/politics/pan/index.php?tbut=12&sod=2

The Islamist reform movement, initiated by the Muslims of Russia, spread its influence far beyond the limits of the Tsarist Empire going all the way into India and Egypt. As early as the decades preceding the Revolution of 1905, the tension in the relationships between Pan-Islamism and the specific ethnic and nationalist flows was revealed. This problem preserved its currentness throughout most of the twentieth century.

Numerous Jadidist schools and Tatar printing houses made Kazan a center of the reformed Islam. Crimean Tatars maintained close relationships with various reform movements inside Turkey. Gasprinsky's teaching was gradually rejected by radical "Young Tatars".⁷⁶ In Istanbul, the future leaders of the Crimean Tatar national movement and the young national state of the Democratic Republic of the Crimea proclaimed in 1917 with the Constitution adopted at the First Congress of Muslims of Crimea in December of 1917 studied. The Muslims of Azerbaijan were split in the national movement between the Ottoman orientation (prevalent mostly among the Sunnis) and the traditional Persian orientation (prevalent among the *Shi'ites*).

However, all the rudiments of successful national movements were destroyed by a rigid policy of the emerging Soviet power. Bennigsen notes that "all the Muslim territories of the Soviet Union were conquered and annexed by force and arms."⁷⁷ In some areas, the conquest was facilitated by the weakness and political disunity of the indigenous population, while in others, the Russians were met with fierce resistance and

⁷⁶ The "Young Tatars" was an organization of a radical union of the Crimean Tatar Youth. They were followers of Ismail Gasprinsky, trying to unite the Turkic peoples. The "Young Tatars" arose under the influence of the "Young Turks" in Istanbul.

⁷⁷ Bennigsen, "Islam in the USSR."

were able to establish their authority only after a continuous struggle. After the conquest almost all of the Muslim lands of Russia, there began a long period of instability, marked by rebellions and insurrections that were always followed by brutal repressions.

CHAPTER THREE

Islam and the Soviet Experience: From Near Annihilation to Remarkable Revival

Russian Muslims under Soviet Rule

The year 1917 marked the peak of Muslim political activism in Russia.¹ One of the first acts of the Soviet State was the Appeal of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR "To the working Muslims of Russia and the East," dated November 20, 1917.

Henceforward, your beliefs and customs, your national and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolable. Build your national life freely and without hindrance. Be aware that your rights, like those of all the peoples of Russia, will be protected by the might of the Revolution and its bodies, by the Councils of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies.²

This Appeal and its practical implementation played a critical role in earning Muslims' political support for the new government and in its consolidation in the areas of traditional dissemination of Islam. Over time, however, the principles of the Soviet policy on nationalities underwent significant changes.

The Bolshevik policy concerning the Muslims of Russia was quite complicated and full of controversy. On the one hand, they intended to suppress the Muslims' initiatives and to destroy the beginnings of their democratic nationhood. In the process, the Bolsheviks destroyed the Muslim shrines, demolished the mosques, and dissolved the parties of Muslims, while the leaders of Islamic movements were declared enemies,

¹ Shireen T. Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 20.

² Ravil, Gainutdin, *Islam v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Fair-Press Grand, 2004), 37.

executed and forced to become political emigrants. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks promised to “the working Muslims” protection of their rights, freedom of belief and equality with all the citizens of the Soviet Russia. At the same time, exercising “the right of nations to self-determination,” the Bolsheviks redrew the borders, carved up the territories, forcibly resettled the nations and divided them into groups of varied statuses. It was at the time of these political measures of the Soviet government that the issue of inter-ethnic relations became particularly strained for Russian Muslims, and it not only remains tangled to this day, but it also has a lasting negative impact on the political and social climate in Russia and the former CIS countries. Some nations were granted the status of Union Republics and Autonomous Republics that were named after their ethnicons, while other nations found themselves unnaturally combined with each other in bizarre bi-national or multinational autonomies. Yet other nations had never received autonomous status and their territories were divided into parts by the borders of other republics. Although this system of Soviet nation-and-state building applied to other nations apart from the Muslims, the scholars Kappeler and Chervonnaya believe that “from the very beginning, one could notice that the government was paying special attention to the ‘Islamic factor.’”³ The Soviet government’s wish to weaken and then eliminate any national movement of the Islamic people caused nothing but temporary fading and smoldering that lasted for years, but it caught fire upon the collapse of the Soviet Union.

³ A. Kappeler and C. Chervonnaya, *Musuljmanskie Narody Rossii: istoricheskoe vvedenie* [Muslim peoples of Russia: a historical introduction] (Moscow: Mysl, 2001), 109.

During the first ten years after the Revolution, the Soviet government treated Islam with greater tolerance than it treated other religions. Even before that, Vladimir Lenin emphasized distinguishing between religions and, through their comparison with Islam, gave his preference to it, hoping to earn the sympathies of the Muslim population of the Russian Empire and recruit it for the Bolshevik struggle, along with passing the “Bolshevist message” to the foreign East.⁴ However, between the years 1928 and 1930, the state turned offensively against Islam. The main elements of the anti-religious policy of the Soviet state were reflected in the following areas:

1. Political (persecution of the clergy as representatives of the ruling social class and of confessional organizations as political ones)
2. Legal (a new political and legal status of the church, deprivation of civil rights, lack of guaranteed freedom of conscience)
3. Economic (disruption of the organizational and economic basis of confessional activities)
4. Ideological (granting of the status of state ideology to atheism and exposure of a religious worldview as an invariant of a bourgeois worldview)⁵

In general, the post-Revolution situation is illustrated in the letter of P. Smidovich, Head of the Standing Committee on Cults at the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK), addressed to Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of VTsIK, and written after a meeting with Chairman of the Central Spiritual Governance for Muslims, Mufti Rizaetdin Fakhretdinov:

⁴ Hunter, *Islam in Russia*, 26.

⁵ P. Nabiev, *Islam i Gosudarstvo* [Islam and State] (Kazan: Kazanskii Universitet, 2002), 93.

Under the supervision of the Central Spiritual Governance for Muslims in the city of Ufa, there was a total of 153 *muhtasibs*.⁶ Out of this number, 34 *muhtasibs* are in exile, 23 are in detention facilities, 23 resigned from their offices, 3 ones are dead, and 57 are not in their offices and the Central Spiritual Governance for Muslims is unaware of their locations and positions. All religious organizations of Muslims are on the verge of complete destruction and vanishing from the face of the earth. For the present, 87% of *muhtasib* offices have been closed, along with 10,000 mosques out of 12,000; 90 to 97% of mullahs and muezzins have been denied the opportunity to hold cult services... The situation with the Muslim cult is worse than with other cults, but in general, the resulting picture is representative for all cults...⁷

The *shariat* courts were closed; the system of religious schools virtually ceased to exist. It became evident that the overtures of the Soviet government to the Muslim East and the “appeals to the religious feelings of the ‘working Muslims’ were in direct contradiction to the government’s aggressive anti-religious campaign, which [had] already evolved into a theomachist bacchanalia in the early 1920s.”⁸

Those terms that had been widely used during the Revolution and the Civil War as a reference to the Islamic nature of various entities (Muslim committees, *MusComs*, Muslim congresses, etc.) slowly vanished from the official vocabulary. In the area of nation-and-state building, the emphasis was moved to ethnic (rather than confessional) “self-determination” of people. The Adzhar Autonomous Soviet Social Republic, a part of Georgia, was the only autonomy based on the principle of confessional rather than ethnic and territorial formation; it was created for Georgians professing Islam.

⁶ Muhtasib - employee of a special organization that monitors implementation of the Islamic moral norms.

⁷ Nabiev, *Islam i Gosudarstvo*, 88.

⁸ Kappeler and Chervnonnaya, *Musuljmanskie Narody Rossii*, 110.

With regard to the partial rehabilitation of Islamic institutions, the few authorized Muslim higher schools, mosques and *muftiats*⁹ that historically performed the functions of Muslim self-government and the tools of control over Muslim communities, the government had considerably lower tolerance for Islam and the few encouraging steps in this direction appeared inconsistent.

When discussing the subject of persecution, the following circumstances should be taken into account. Among those arrested and killed, there were others apart from regular Islamic clergy. The repressions also targeted those who used to engage in religious activities in the past and those who earned a degree in religion. These people represented the majority of the nation's intellectuals. The repressions targeted reputed theologians and secular scholars who conducted research on Islam. These measures taken by the Soviet government had consequences that have lasted well into the present day, which is mostly evident in the weakness of the contemporary theological schools. The continuity of religious and theological knowledge was completely broken: one of the best, if not the best, theological schools in the Muslim world ceased to exist.

In order to fully comprehend the attacks on Islam from the Soviet government, one should also consider the following factors. The writing system of Russian Muslims was changed twice. From 1928 to 1931, the Arabic script was replaced with the Latin one, and in the late 1930s, the latter was replaced with the Russian script.¹⁰ In the meantime, the state did not try to conceal the fact that one of the crucial reasons behind these reforms was the intent to break the people from Islam and its related centuries-old

⁹ *Muftiate*—Muslim spiritual administration.

¹⁰ Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam*, 116.

traditions and knowledge. As a result, the national cultures lost their written foundation, and millions of people were denied the opportunity to read high volumes of handwritten and printed books. Moreover, they had been broken from religious literature and theological works. For many dozens of years, in fear of confiscations, Muslims had to hide every book that was written in Arabic script.

For dozens of years, there was not a single Islamic theological school in the territory of Russia. The Mir-i-Arab Medressa in Bukhara was the only Muslim theological school in the entire Soviet Union until the mid-1970s, when the Islamic Institute was founded in Tashkent, and it could only admit a very few young Muslims. From the mid-1920s to the late 1980s, the publication of Islamic religious literature was virtually stopped. It is sufficient to say that in all these years, the only published product was a booklet on Islamic fundamentals produced by Mufti Shakir Khilyaltdinov. However, it was published in the Tatar language and in Arabic script, which were both unfamiliar to the vast majority of Russian Muslims.

The Soviet government's attacks on Islam accompanied the destruction of the Muslim culture, and legal tradition repressed any political ambition and civil initiative among Muslims. This was carried out in the context of ideological campaigns described by Kappeler and Chervonnaya as "a powerful attack targeted at the internal ways of the Muslim world."¹¹

Eventually, the Soviet government succeeded in bringing division into the Muslim community of Russia. Due to their territorial conflict with Tatars, a great number of Bashkirs abandoned Islam as the "Tatar religion," and no common ground was

¹¹ Kappeler and Chervonnaya, *Musuljmanskie Narody Rossii*, 111.

found between those Tatars and Bashkirs who stayed among “faithful Muslims” and even formed the core group within the Central Spiritual Governance for Muslims of the European Russia and Siberia, with the invariable location of its center in the city of Ufa.¹² (In 1992, two separate governances were created to manage Muslim affairs in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan.) The borders and structures of the republics and autonomies were subject to recurring changes and abolishment, thus preserving the lasting mutual grievances and controversies between the peoples of related cultures and the same faith.

At the same time, thanks largely to the “support and endeavors of Muslim leaders, such as Mullanur Vakhitov, Mirsaid Sultan-Galiyev, and others, as R.G. Landa notes, the Bolsheviks managed to avoid disintegration of Russia.” The policy of equality and self-determination of nations had been framed with the Muslim participation. (Mullanur Vakhitov was a co-author of the historic “Appeal to All the Working People of Russia and the East from December 3, 1917.”)¹³ Nonetheless, most of those Muslim leaders later met tragic deaths under the rule of Stalin.

Batashev states that the Bolshevik Revolution victory in virtually the entire territory of the former Russian Republic served as “another proof of the successful function and stability of the cultural symbiosis that had been laid down by the preceding state-building administration.”¹⁴ Eventually, however, the Communists abandoned the cultural symbiosis in favor of the principle of “Proletarian nationalism.” “Ever since the Russian occupation of the Muslim territories, the Soviet Union had utilized all possible

¹² Ibid., 113.

¹³ Landa, *Rossia i mir Islama*, 226.

¹⁴ A. Batashev, *Rossia i Islamskii Faktor* [Russia and Islamic Factor] <http://batashev.narod.ru/islam.html>.

means to put an end to the distinct spiritual, moral, cultural and political identity of the Muslims.”¹⁵ The efforts aimed at ousting and repressing the religious consciousness in practice caused the Orthodox-Islamic dialogue to stop. “Under these circumstances,” Gasprinsky stated, “solidarity and willful sympathy are inconceivable; to the contrary, they plant gloomy expectations among Muslims, fear of the future, passive anger, and, let us say, an even deeper withdrawal...”¹⁶ This policy had kept the Muslims from having a dialogue not only with the government but with the non-Muslim community as well, forcing them to retreat into themselves until the opportunity to fight for their religious and national freedom with greater force and vigor arose. While the “freedom of conscience” and the “right of nations to self-determination” had been widely declared, it took over half a century to begin their practical implementation.

The anti-religious campaign targeted all religions in the Soviet territory. The uniform standard was applied to every part of the country and every religion, with the only exception allowed for faith in communism.

The process of state building in the Soviet Union was based upon national and territorial principles, according to which the “whole body of the former empire was divided into dozens of Union Republics against nature, Autonomous Republics, and Autonomous National Areas. It was a pride of the government and a big tragedy of the nations that the national state entities were created in those areas where such nations had never been historically present. Under the Soviet regime, as opposed to the monarchy, cross-national differences were stressed rather than mitigated.”

¹⁵ Rauf, *Islam in Russia*.

¹⁶ I. Gasprinsky, *Russkoe musulmanstvo* [Russian Islam] <http://islam.ru/pressclub/histori>.

In fact, by granting the status of national and territorial autonomy to all those willing and unwilling to accept it, the Communist regime deprived the nations of something more important—their cultural autonomy. The Soviet governing establishment failed to realize that after national autonomy, sooner or later, cultural autonomy would have to be granted as well, and genuine cultural autonomy rests not as much upon the opportunity to speak native languages as upon the existence of the nation's own writing system, press organs, folk literature, and songs. Denial of religion and the inability to make a stand for one's own rights undermines the spiritual core of the nation, thus resulting in cultural degradation. Accordingly, it is no coincidence that when the crisis broke out, it blasted the existing Soviet regime from within. After all, “the problems and controversies, which had always been completely negated in the Soviet Union, got all entangled into one knot.”¹⁷ All mistakes in the Soviet “nation-and-state building” turned into cruel experiments over Islamic people: they were exiled, ousted from their homelands, forcibly resettled into foreign lands (the deportation of 1943-44 caused deaths of nearly one-quarter of the “punished” people). They were deprived of fundamental human rights and liberties.

By 1941, in all parts of the Soviet Union religions had been destroyed almost entirely; however, all Soviet attempts at uprooting Islam failed. The cultural foundation of the nation's worldview, created through the efforts of many generations, cannot be destroyed overnight. It can only be temporarily banned from manifesting itself freely. This move, however, was fraught with danger. The accumulated discontent caused by the oppression and lack of opportunities to openly express major aspects of the nation's

¹⁷ Batashev, “Rossia i Islamskii Faktor.”

identity may cause, in its turn, if not a social explosion, then a stand-up fight for what seems to have been lost in the Soviet years. As Dr. Adbur Rauf notes, “The period of the Russian Iron Curtain from 1928 to 1968 was the most painful tragedy of the Russian Muslim history, and yet all attempts to lure Muslims away from Islam and their forcible conversion to communism became a recurring routine with those in power.”¹⁸

In the postwar years, certain improvements occurred to Islam alongside other religions, with which Islam was on a par at that time. Incidentally, the official policy on Islam was even showing a slight tendency toward favoring Islam over other religions. In 1943, in the Soviet Union, four administrative entities were established in the form of Spiritual Governances for Muslims, which should be viewed as a part of the Soviet leaders’ ideological campaign purporting to touch on patriotic feelings of the public and summon people in the face of war.

At the same time, in order to keep religious activities under control, two additional councils in the form of state agencies were set up: in 1943, the Russian Orthodox Church Council, and in 1944, the Council on Religious Cults. The function of the latter was to carry out control over all religions (with the exception of Russian Orthodoxy) that had been recognized as legitimate by the Soviet government.¹⁹ Naturally, the secularization was incomplete, particularly in rural areas. Immediately after the Russian Orthodox Church, which had a long-standing tradition of cooperating with the Soviet government, was put back in the orbit of the state governance in wartime,

¹⁸ Rauf, *Islam in Russia*.

¹⁹ Yaacov Ro’i, *Islam in the Soviet Union: From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 10-12.

Islam was the second-most favored religion in the USSR. The population of Soviet Muslims totaled approximately 25 million in 1959 and more than 35 million in 1970.²⁰

There were a lot of vast areas that did not have a single mosque for the local followers to attend. Therefore, the number of unofficial, unregistered communities, mosques, and mullahs had always been higher than the government could—or would—admit.

Because living Islamic traditions had been preserved among the Eastern people of the Soviet Union, as Moscow's authority receded, the new conditions gave rise to the Islamic revival in most Muslim areas of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet policy on the Muslim population of the country held many arguable aspects, and massive evidence of negative Russian influence over Islam can be found. It would be a mistake to overlook the instances of clearly beneficial and critically important influence of the Soviet government, namely, the fact that “Sovietization” also facilitated the modernization of the entire society, the expansion of education and social warranties, the initial shaping of civil consciousness, and also the development of legal culture.

These processes also affected the Muslim nations, as some of them had still been living in feudal societies. However, Alexandre Bennigsen writes,

[N]one of the Tatars and Kazans, and even fewer among the people of Central Asia, believe that Russians did them a great favor by bringing the material blessings of civilization and spiritual culture or dragging them out of medieval barbarism. They feel that Russians brought them separation and atheism, “in its most oppressive and flagrant Marxist-and-Leninist form.”²¹

However, in this ultra-nationalist point of view, a number of facts are disregarded. It is true that during the whole Soviet period, the nations grew closer in many social and

²⁰ U. Mizyn, *Islam i Rossia* [Islam and Russia] (Moscow: Veche, 2004), 235.

²¹ Alexandre Bennigsen, *Islam in the Soviet Union* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 176.

cultural respects. In the 1960s, the share of mixed marriages was equal to 30% in a number of large cities of Dagestan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan; 25% in Kirgizia; and 15% in Uzbekistan.²² However, the growing closeness and cross-cultural interactions did not prevent the rise of clashing national movements once such an opportunity had arisen. In the view of the Soviet government, the existing policy was the only possible way to consolidate the isolated territories that were often small and underdeveloped into a single powerful country—a country that was, for nearly half a century, writing history for the half the world. And the mistakes that had inevitably been made had an impact on all the Soviet people, regardless of their faith or ethnicity. If the Muslim territories had not become a part of the USSR, they would have necessarily been merged into another country, and in that case, who could tell their fate?

The collapse of the Soviet Union triggered various conflicts and mutual grievances that arose across the post-Soviet territory and still remain to this day, although at different stages of development. The most challenging situation came about in Chechnya, where the interests of different people, different ideologies, and different countries erupted into conflict. This mess of concerns remains unsolved.

The overview of the centuries-long Russian history leaves us with the conclusion that Islam was not a foreign element in Russia. Having emerged in the territory of Russia prior to Christianity, Islam further contributed to the religious, cultural, and political evolution of Russia and Russian society. Over the centuries, interaction between Russia and Islam has passed through various stages, including conflict and peaceful coexistence. Such variations are inevitable. No two different elements can adapt immediately and

²² Landa, *Rossia i mir Islama*, 226.

seamlessly to each other. In general, however, the coexistence of Christian Orthodox and Islamic worlds in Russia was beneficial to the interests of both parties. Even the oppression during the Soviet era affected both of the religions, although possibly to varying degrees.

It is only in recent years that Islam has been turned into a scapegoat as a result of ideological games and ignorance. Above all, politics play a major part in this. International political figures have learned to exploit religious and national factors in the initiation of conflicts.

Islam has never posed a threat to Russia. A threat could be found in Islamism, the ideology of Muslim intellectuals. Historically, however, there has been no basis for realization of this ideology in Russia. Islam has been regarded as potentially dangerous from a political perspective. The old idea of Pan-Islamism, which appeared as a drastic threat to the Bolshevik regime in its early years, remained of concern to the government at a later time. These views developed in the 1960s, stemming from the idea that Islam may promote nationalism since “every Muslim nation in the USSR identifies Islam with their own ethnic traditions and distinguishing characteristics.”²³ Consequently, the Soviet government, just like the Tsarist government did previously, prevented Islam from being transformed into Islamism despite the preconditions that existed in the nineteenth century with the Muslim intellectuals evolving and growing as a class. However, they had not grown strong enough by the time they became a target of the Soviet government. As a result, Islamic institutions have never been transformed into a single vertical structure

²³ Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, 688-689.

that would gain a high concentration of power and influence over national politics, as the Russian Orthodox Church did in Tsarist Russia and is still doing today.

Naturally, Russian Muslims who live in a non-Muslim country are keenly susceptible to potential oppression, and this is the cause of their rapidly increasing discontent and desire to not only preserve the religion but to also turn it into an essential element of identity. In particular, this is where the Muslim intellectuals place their stakes, as they see how this element can be used as leverage in order to obtain additional preferences. Recently, despite the differences in historical development, positions and statuses of the Muslim nations in Russia, the single core of all-Muslim solidarity has been showing through. From the internal sensation of their unity, they are moving toward forms of stronger political solidarity, development of methods and agendas of national and human rights movements on the platform of modern Turkism and the revived Jadid, or tolerant, Islam.

The status of Islam and Islamic organizations in the modern Russian society is greatly different from its Soviet and pre-Revolution past. Consider the two most essential distinctions of the contemporary period. First, the status of Islam, its role in the social activities, has fundamentally changed. The Constitution, the Supreme Law of the Russian Federation adopted in 1993 by nationwide vote, states that the Russian Federation is a secular state (the first paragraph of Article 14). This provision means that no religion or atheistic ideology may be established as fundamental by the state regime; religious associations are separate from the state and from the system of governmental agencies and local self-governments; the judicial system of the country does not allow creation of confessional courts; secular education is an established standard for state and

municipal schools; the state does not fund religious activities but may promote charity, cultural and educational, and other socially important activities of traditional religions, and so on.²⁴ In addition, it should be noted that in contrast to the Soviet past, “the secular nature of the state does not suggest an isolation of religious associations from the social life and social processes, primarily in culture, education, health care, and social protection.”²⁵

Therefore, we can very well refer to an essentially new climate, unprecedented in the history of Russia, in which Muslim organizations currently operate. It is this novel social and political situation that has become the basis of the Islamic revival in Russia. By virtue of the fundamental laws of the country and the practices of their implementation, the Muslim organizations have been granted a number of opportunities and rights that they have never enjoyed in the history of the country. These opportunities, if taken in the right way, may turn into meaningful tools that will enhance the role of Islam in society.

The Renaissance of Islam in Post-Soviet Russia

As early as the late 1980s, with the restructuring of Soviet society underway, an escape from the party line with respect to religion started. It should be mentioned, however, that in the areas of dissemination of Islam, such an escape had a delayed start as compared to other parts of the country. The delay was attributed to circumspection on

²⁴ M. Kuznecov, *Svetskii xarakter Rossiiskogo Gosudarstva i Ego Vzaimootnosheniya s Religioznymi Objedineniyami v Globalno Menyauchemysya Mire* [The Secular Character of the Russian State and its Relations with Religious Organizations in a Globally Changing World] (Moscow: 2002), 84-88.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

the part of the local party and Soviet elite, who feared that backtracking on policies might be possible. Nonetheless, even in the areas of the spread of Islam, the antireligious propaganda was stopped and the population began to openly show a welcoming attitude toward religion. There were a few changes in the status of Muslim organizations as well, such as registration of new Muslim associations, involvement of Muslim religious leaders in public events, establishment of the first religious schools at the mosques, and so on. Even though this was a quite timid beginning, it jump-started the Islamic revival in Russia.

The true revival of Islam began in 1991, the year when Russia embarked on the road of sovereignty and democratic reforms in its political, social, economic, and spiritual life. Revived Islam became a tangible force in Russia. Its scope of influence spread beyond the personal lives of ethnic Muslims and into their social lives. The revived Islam became a conspicuous factor in the life of the whole nation. Vladimir Putin, the [former] Russian President, said when addressing Chechen religious leaders, “In Russia, we have 20 million Muslims; we cannot disregard their views...”²⁶

The process of Islamic revival, as we believe, can be viewed and apprehended correctly if we take an impartial look at the outset, at the stage when the Islamic revival began in Russia. Aleksey Malashenko, the internationally known expert on the Islamic revival in Russia, wrote:

During the Soviet period, indifference toward religion was being planted deeply into social consciousness, while in a harsh manner here and at a sly degree there, religion itself was being replaced with “Communist mindset.” “Forcing” religion out of the lives of families and individuals, abolition of religious education and

²⁶ V.V. Putin, *Vystuplenie na vstreche s Chechenskimi duxovnymi liderami* [speech at a meeting with Chechen spiritual leaders] <http://www.kremlin.ru/eventline.html> (accessed March 17, 2003).

lack of religion courses in the Soviet school curriculum created generations of Soviet people who were strange to religion, alienated from it. It would be incorrect to speak of the complete atheisation of the society. There were plenty of believers remaining in the Soviet Union and in Russia alone. The return to religion was especially noticeable during the wartime and in the post-war years. Nonetheless, over a few decades, social consciousness had been generally deformed.²⁷

This statement may be applied not only to Islam but to other religions as well. It appears sufficient to say that if entire generations among ethnic Muslims had been raised outside of religion, we would not have witnessed such a vigorous and rapid revival of Islam today. On this basis, we will consider the question of what is to be viewed as a frame of reference for the Islamic revival in Russia.

One of the most important results of the Islamic revival, experts believe, is the proliferation of believers and overall religiosity. “This process [the Islamic revival],” R. Nabiev, wrote, “could be traced quite clearly in observing the growth dynamics among people who identified themselves as believers.”²⁸

“The post-Perestroika freedom,” according to A.B. Yunusova, professor of history, “gave a natural rise to religiosity and traditionally existing religious associations.”²⁹ “Since the late 1980s,” another scholar from the city of Ufa stated, “the situation with religion began to change. Following the debunking of the old ideology and the relaxation of the moral censoring mechanisms, a great number of people have turned to religion.”³⁰

²⁷ Malashenko, *Islamskoe vozrozhdeniye sovremennoi Rossii*, 70.

²⁸ P. Nabiev, *Islam i Gosudarstvo* [Islam and State] (Kazan: Kazanskii Universitet, 2002), 141.

²⁹ Aislu Yunusova, *Islam v Bashkortostane* [Islam in Bashkortostan] (Ufa, 1999), 57.

³⁰ R. Yakupov, *Islam v Rossii v Svete Etnografii* [Islam in Russia in light of the ethnography] (Moscow: RAN, 1998), 98.

According to the research data from Rozalinda Musina, a Kazan sociologist, from the 1960s to the 1980s, most Tatars claimed to be indifferent, or lukewarm, with respect to religion. Even in the villages, 47% of the respondents surveyed in 1967 and 59% of the respondents surveyed in 1980 put themselves into this category of indifference. A mere 15.7% of rural Tatars surveyed in 1980 regarded themselves as believers. At the end of the 1980s, the situation was undergoing a fundamental change. In 1989-90, up to two-thirds of the respondents described themselves as more or less religious. Among urban Tatars, 34.1% described themselves as believers, and 30.4% as vacillating between believing and not believing; among rural Tatars, the numbers were 43.4% and 19.1%, respectively. Only five years later, in 1994, 66.6% of urban Tatars categorized themselves as believers and 12% as vacillating. In the villages, these indicators were 86 and 9.8%, respectively.

According to the research data, an increase in religious consciousness can be observed in all social groups of Tatars, including the youth. Thus, in 1990, 24% of young urbanities ages twenty to twenty-four called themselves believers and 36.7% were vacillating; however, in 1994, 53% of urban Tatars up to twenty-five and 61% of the young people ages twenty-five to twenty-nine described themselves as believers. Likewise, a massive proportion of believers appeared among college students and professionals with a higher education. Even more impressive is the data on religiosity of the group defined as “elite.” According to the 1995 survey data, the following

proportions of respondents consider themselves believers: more than 72% of the working elite, 62% of the artistic-creative elite, and 34% of the political elite.³¹

What is the cause of the religious renaissance, the incentive for an upsurge of interest in religion in general and Islam in particular? With respect to this question, some researchers made a few points are difficult to argue with. Therefore, Roza Musina appears correct in her opinion that the sharp increase in the number of people calling themselves believers over the past few years should be attributed to neither a precipitous rise in religiosity nor an indicator of profound changes in the worldview of contemporary Tatars. Likewise, she seems correct in her listing of the following causes for the proliferation of people calling themselves believers: a reaction, to a significant degree, to the change in state ideology since the mid-1980s, when tight ideological control was replaced with an orientation toward democratic norms, particularly in matters of religious confession; the specific features of the period of transition that the society was going through, including the inherent social and economic instability, disillusionment with old ideals; and the increasingly frequent endeavors of various political forces to establish Orthodoxy as the official religion in Russia.³²

However, her line of reasoning also raises a few questions. For example, did the reaction to the change in social life in the 1980s cause religiosity or did it create conditions favoring free expression of already existing and repressed religious feelings

³¹ Roza Musina, *Islam i Musulmane v Sovremennom Tatarstane* [Islam and Muslims in modern Tatarstan] (Kazan, 1997), 212-213.

³² Musina, *Islam i Musulmane v Sovremennom Tatarstane*, 212-213.

and aspirations? Are these changes even capable of provoking such a sharp increase in religiosity?

According to Malashenko, interest in religion is generally stimulated through an increasing flow of religious literature that features the growing authority of religion in society, and because more and more young people associate religious participation with their national identity.³³ It should be pointed out, however, that in our opinion, the mentioned causes specifically bring about interest in religion and not religiosity.

Likewise, it is difficult to argue with another one of his statements: Islam, to a large extent, was an element of ethnic identity for Muslims, and a means of self-preservation and survival as a minority. He is right again that foreign Muslim countries have been involved in the Islamic revival in Russia. However, often in the Russian press, the role of foreign religious organizations is clearly overstated with regard to both the revival process and religious lives of Russian Muslims in general.

Malashenko is correct in his opinion that in contrast with Christianity, Islam has maintained a greater influence over its potential followers from among ethnic Muslims, but his explanation of the causes is open to criticism. He emphasizes a more dynamic and flexible resistance of Islam to all kinds of pressure. For this and other reasons, he believes, Islam was successful in surviving in everyday life and thus, at the outset of *Perestroika*, it had, both socially and culturally, a fundamental basis for revival.³⁴ Indeed, by the time Russia had established a socially and politically favorable climate for

³³ Aleksey Malashenko, *Islamskoe vozrozhdeniye sovremennoi Rossii* [The Islamic Renaissance in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998), 72-74.

³⁴ Malashenko, *Islamskoe vozrozhdeniye sovremennoi Rossii*, 72-74.

believers and religious organizations, Islam had a much greater influence over the lives and worldview of ethnic Muslims. However, the factors cited by the above researchers are insufficient and thus fail to explain such a complicated matter as religiosity and its present vigorous expressions.

The research conducted in the past twenty years creates grounds for a discussion about a high level of religiosity and the religious revival among Muslim nations. This data is well known outside a limited circle of experts. It has been published in periodicals that are available to the general public. However, the nature of the methods employed by the sociologists is not specified in these publications. In some cases, they cast doubt on whether the reported results are consistent with reality, as sometimes the religiosity appears to be over-reported or underreported. Finally, most of the conducted research fails to take into account specific features of religious externals in Islam. And there is no doubt regarding the existence of such specific features.

As a rule, published authors deliver end results of their research and not the detailed methods applied to classify religiosity among various population groups. In general, whether someone is classified as religious or not religious is decided based on their observance of Muslim rituals, customs and holidays, mosque attendance, and views on Islam as a component of national life and national culture. Without question, these all are critically important factors in determining a person's attitude toward Islam. However, on the one hand, Islam comprises more than rituals; its teachings offer a much richer

content. On the other hand, the Islamic teaching carries a broader impact upon the lifestyle and mentality of ethnic Muslims.³⁵

The longstanding history of Russian Muslims is attributable to one crucial aspect of their social and political history. They differed from European countries and many regions of Russia that had undergone the extended secularization process affecting social and personal lives and stemming from growth of the productive forces, emergence of new technologies, establishment of a high standard of secular education, and a rapid strengthening of the role of urban center in the life of society and the nation. Up until the October Revolution, Islam had maintained a leading role in virtually all aspects of existence of the Muslim communities. Islam was the universal value that controlled relationships between people and imposed the commonly shared system of duties and regulations. Adherence to Islam emerged as a dominant value in the consciences of millions, molding their worldview and demeanor. Over the centuries, a deep connection had been forged between the religious and the ethnic. Islam had made the deepest impact on the culture of nations professing Islam and had shaped their mentality. In a Muslim conscience, the notions of “religious” and “national” became inseparable. Being a Tatar or a Bashkir meant being a Muslim by default. For instance, it is no coincidence that when defining their national identity, the ancestors of Tatars often called themselves mere “Muslims.”³⁶

³⁵ Akhmet A. Yarlykapov, “‘Folk Islam’ and Muslim Youth of the Central and Northwest Caucasus,” in *Religion and Politics in Russia*, ed. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), 109-126.

³⁶ Ekaterina Khodzhaeva, “Muslim Youth Identity: ‘Ethnic’ versus ‘Practicing’ Muslims,” in *Will Russia Become a Muslim Society?* ed. Hans-Georg Heinrich, Ludmila Lobova, and Alexey Malashenko (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 179-209.

Did the historic heritage leave no mark on ethnic Muslims? Are there any solid grounds to assume that they are on the same evolutionary level as, let us say, Russian people who experienced, although not for centuries, a historic stage of capitalism and the related secularization?

In the years following the Revolution of 1917, many changes occurred in Muslims' lives. The changes affected their attitudes toward Islam and, to a vital degree, the functions of religion. It is fair to say that a new kind of Muslim, very distinct from his foreign brothers, emerged in Russia over those years. However, until the present, the feudal past manifested in the social evolution of ethnic Muslims, resulting in their higher religiosity in contrast to other nations.³⁷

The above statement can be illustrated with the research data on the social evolution of the ethnic Tatars presently inhabiting the Republic of Tatarstan. The Republic is well urbanized: 72.9% of the population (according to the 1989 census) lives in urban areas. However, among Tatars, there were 63.4% urbanities and 36.6% villagers. Among the Russian population of the Republic, this ratio was 85.7% and 14.3%, respectively. Therefore, slightly over a third of Tatars were villagers (and many "urbanities" became such as a result of a transformation of rural areas into urban ones). Among Tatars, the number of industrial workers was 17% less, the number of office workers was 11% less, and the number of collective farmers was 25% more as compared to the Russian population of the Republic.³⁸

³⁷ T. Saidbaev, *Islam i Obchestvo* [Islam and Society] (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), 59-78.

³⁸ Y. Garipov, *Sovremennye Nacionaljnye Processi v Pеспублике Tatarstan* [Current national processes in the Republic of Tatarstan (Kazan, 1992), 12.

In urban areas, the percentage of those engaged in primarily physical labor is higher among Tatars and lower among Russians (72.4% and 64.3%, respectively) while Tatars have a lower percentage of those primarily engaged in intellectual labor (27.6% and 35.7%, respectively).³⁹ The Tatars engaged in physical labor have lower qualifications compared to Russians. At the Kamsky Automobile Plant (KamAZ), for example, the number of highly qualified workers (labor grades 5 to 6) is almost twice as low among Tatars as among Russians (25.5% and 47.4%, respectively) while their number of low-skilled workers (labor grades from 1 to 2) is 1.8-fold.⁴⁰

Among the KamAZ employees, the percentage of Tatars with a higher education is 1.5 times lower compared to the Russians.⁴¹ An approximately equal Russian-to-Tatar ratio was found among professionals with a higher education in the Republic's national market. Ethnic disproportions can be seen in scientific intellectual circles, with Russians outnumbering Tatars again. Notably, there is a prevailing number of Tatar scientists in social and human sciences, and in natural sciences, their number is approximately the same. However, fewer Tatars are engaged in the scientific research and development industries involving modern high technologies.

The data presented above gives rise to the following question: is it possible that the feeling of faith in God, which is intrinsic to people and which has been preserved among ethnic Muslims, faded away and then recurred under the influence of democratic processes and religious climate changes? A comprehensive answer is at hand if a correct

³⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 53-55.

⁴¹ Ibid., 66.

view is taken of the changes in religiosity that occurred under the Soviet regime. These changes, vital and critical as they were, actually took place, as we mentioned earlier, and it would be a mistake to neglect and disregard them. However, the escape from religion was not universally widespread and, most importantly, it was shallow and often superficial in nature. It is true that Islam had ceased to be the power that governed the social consciousness and dominated the individual mentality and demeanor. It had disappeared from public life but not from the lives of a city block or a village, not to mention an individual. The fact that religiosity in the areas of dissemination of Islam was higher as compared to other places was self-evident to Soviet religion researchers. It was also known that Islamic rituals were observed by a number of people four times exceeding those who, according to the social survey data, called themselves believers. Virtually, the entire population adhered to such Islamic ritual practices as circumcision, weddings, and *janazah* (funeral prayer).⁴² Muslim holidays were widely celebrated, and fasting was observed.

Another factor should be taken into consideration. The democratic processes opened the door to free expression of the earlier denounced equation between the religious and the national, which scientists define as a person's self-identification with Islam and ethnic religiosity. In this regard, A. V. Zhuravsky, associate professor of the Department of Religion Studies at the Russian Academy for State Service, writes:

And what is "a believer" in the view of a member of the public, a layman? Above all, it is *recognizing* oneself as a believer and *being one*. Both identification and action are required. Notably, the action is understood to be more than a mere church attendance, fasting or adherence to rituals; it is also a conscious choice of the worldview that governs our every action or deed in their

⁴² T. Saidbaev, *Islam i Obchestvo* [Islam and Society] (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), 203-246.

entirety. It is this kind of commitment that is lacking. Being a believer is a state of mind rather than an external group membership (although it entails the latter, too). This is a status which, as perceived by the respondents, they do not have. It is easier to establish a confession since it is a tradition that you are not required to feel but may be aware of and know that your ancestors belonged to this tradition, so you may belong to it as well. Therefore, a use of the term “ethnic religiosity” is historically justified.⁴³

Another issue regards the analysis of Muslim religiosity. Referring to the “ideological weakness of Islam,” Yunusova wrote:

Islam in present-day Russia is distinguished by its followers’ incompetence in religious knowledge, dogmatic theology, ritualism, and traditions. All this is a result of an extremely harsh secularization and alienation of believers from their faith which happened over the past years. For the most part, Russian Muslims are ignorant of Islam, its history, norms, customs, or rituals...⁴⁴

Another argument of Professor Yunusova is also worthy of attention. She recalls the nineteenth-century ethnographic studies that mention preservation of pagan elements in Bashkir consciousness. She also mentions that in the Bashkir society, mullahs’ important role was shared with fortune-tellers and voodoo doctors, and mullahs themselves often performed shamanistic functions. Yunusova further notes that the modern ethnographers’ studies also bear records of certain elements of pagan cults that have been preserved in everyday life, particularly in the cooking of such traditional dishes as baked goods made from mixing flour with a lot of eggs (*boursak, chak-chak*), and other existing elements of paganism. She provides other examples that are meant to support her statement. For instance, linguists refer to the extensive magical vocabulary existing in the vernacular of modern Bashkirs. Legends of yore have left their traces in

⁴³ A. Zhuravsky, “Khristianstvo i Islam,” [Christianity and Islam] http://archive.sfi.ru/lib.asp?rubr_id=808 (accessed 14 May, 2011) .

⁴⁴ Aisli Yunusova, *Islam v Kontekste Sovremennyx Etnopoliticheskix Processov v Rossii* [Islam in the context of contemporary ethno-political processes in Russia] (Moscow, 2001), 279.

the toponymy of Bashkortostan. In her opinion, the preservation of ancient cult elements in the consciousness and practices of Bashkirs is best evidenced by pilgrimages to so-called sacred places. In the light of all the mentioned facts, the researcher raised this question: was Islam ideologically dominant in the Muslim community prior to the period of aggressive atheism? In this connection, she mentions that virtually all researchers agree that reception of Islamic morals and ethics, rules of law and cultural traditions by Turkish peoples of Russia did not replace pre-Islamic customs and beliefs in their conscience.⁴⁵

With regard to preserving pagan elements in Islam and its externals in Bashkortostan, Yunusova is absolutely right, but the pagan origin of these elements is known only to her and other experts—religion researchers and ethnographers. The believers perceive these elements as intrinsically Islamic. The case is that, not unlike other religions, Islam has absorbed many religious beliefs that pre-existed in the nations that became its followers. This is the standard in Islam literally from the outset. Instead of denial of all things that came before it, Islam has chosen an exceptionally respectful attitude toward them. For this reason, we believe that the evidence of pre-Islamic beliefs does not entitle us to challenge the dominant position of Islam in the social consciousness of pre-Soviet Muslims.

The ability of Islam to adapt to local cultural traditions is viewed by Aleksey Malashenko as one of the major evolutionary trends in Islam, which followed the establishment of four schools of theology and jurisprudence in Islam in the tenth and eleventh centuries and the closing of “the Gate of Ijtihad” (the right to make an

⁴⁵ Yunusova, *Islam v Kontekste sovremennyx etnopoliticheskix processov v Rossii*, 279-282.

independent judgment in the matters of religion and law). In Malashenko's opinion, such an evolutionary line would even "be detrimental to dogmatic Islam on many occasions."

Stability of these traditions has been maintained by virtue of remoteness of their bearers from cultural centers of the Islamic world, their attachment to the local economic patterns, strength of family relations, and paternalistic ideology. Local traditionalism is based upon a variety of secular cultures among the ethnic population that makes the Islamic *ummah*. It is specifically traditionalist rather than dogmatic Islam that forms behavioral patterns in the first place for each individual Muslim, who is, at the mundane level, a member of his ethnic and confessional community and only at the macro-level, a bearer of values and attributes of the world *ummah*.⁴⁶

Roza Musina, the Kazan researcher who also comments on the "fairly superficial and formal character of the Tatar religiosity," states,

A great many, especially young, people do not know the basics of Islam. Even among people who consider themselves believers, rare are those who adhere to all the fundamental Islamic principles indispensable for a true Muslim: shahada, five-time namaaz, uraza, zakah and sadagah, hajj.

Further, she cites relevant research data showing that a very limited number of urban Tatars pray at home and attend mosques. Speaking of the activity of youth, especially in mosque attendance, she writes:

In their modern view, a mosque is likely to be seen as an element of the national culture, as a token that accentuates the selfhood of an individual in his/her capacity of a representative of his/her ethnic group. At the same time, we should not exclude the influence of particular fashion and the conduct of friends, peers of Orthodox faith.⁴⁷

This discussion on religiosity concludes with the following statement of fact.

Adats (local norms, customs and traditions) are one of the sources in Muslim law, i.e., their existence is justified on legal grounds. Anyone who is at least slightly familiar with

⁴⁶ Aleksey Malashenko, *Islamskoe Vozrozhdeniye Sovremennoi Rossii* [The Islamic Renaissance in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998), 65.

⁴⁷ Musina, *Islam i Musulmane v Sovremennom Tatarstane*, 212-213.

the lives of various Muslim peoples knows their everyday living and customs have diversity and dissimilarities. However, they all regard themselves as Muslims, and they are Muslims, according to Islam. The point is that during the dissemination in one area or another, Islam did not just refrain from opposing and resisting the local beliefs and customs but instead absorbed them and turned them into “its own.”

In summary, the analysis conducted above gives grounds to assert that the Islamic revival in Russia did not induce but rather legalized a high degree of the preserved religiosity among ethnic Muslims. It was specifically the high degree of preservation of Islam in the consciousness and demeanor of ethnic Muslims in Russia that, over a relatively short period, resulted in a large number of new mosques, theological schools for intermediate and higher education, establishment at every mosque of religion schools for children, youth and adults, and an opportunity to publish and disseminate large volumes of Islamic literature.

The supreme law of the land, the Russian Constitution, the Russian Federation Federal Law “On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations,” and other legislative acts of the state have created a historically novel, unprecedented social and political climate, which is favorable to the activities of Muslim organizations.

The Islamic revival, as any other social process that affects interests, views and beliefs of a great number of people and of society as a whole, is very controversial and raises new issues that require attention. Thus, for a number of fair reasons, Islamic humanitarian values are far from being fully exploited for the purpose of society’s moral rehabilitation. In certain circles of Muslim youth, there are Wahhabist and

fundamentalist moods⁴⁸ that threaten to split the historically united Muslim community. Therefore, the following question must be put on today's agenda: what are the evolutionary options for Islam in Russia, and will Islam become a hurdle to Muslim youth on their way toward adaptation to present-day social realities?

⁴⁸ Yarlykapov, "'Folk Islam' and Muslim Youth of the Central and Northwest Caucasus," 124-126.

CHAPTER FOUR

Political, Social and Moral Potential of Muslim Organizations in Russia

Discourse on the feasibility and forms of participation of Islamic organizations in the political life of Russia continues. In this chapter four points of view on this issue that are common among scientists and experts will be considered.

The first point of view denies such a possibility in principle because it is prevented by the secular nature of the Russian society and the peculiarities of the legal system (Articles 13 and 14 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the Russian Federation law *On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations* prohibit religious organizations from participating in politics), concerns that this process can pose a threat to the secular society, and the actual existence of Islamophobia. Some scholars and religious leaders, government officials and human rights organizations believe that Islamic religious organizations are not a part of the political system in Russia and stay outside of the political relations in our country, and that is why they should only be involved in spiritual and social activities such as the organization of worship services, charity, helping the poor, and caring for the elderly. If so, then there is no need for public discussion and scientific analysis of both the possibility and mechanisms of participation of Muslim entities in the political life of the Russian society.

The second view is expressed in the position of the Russian Muslim organizations and their leaders, who are encouraging active participation in the political life of Russian society. For example, this is the position of Ashirov, the Chairman of the Spiritual

Administration of Muslims in the Asiatic Russia, and Geydar Jemal, a well-known Muslim intellectual. In one of his numerous interviews, Jemal spoke about the need to strengthen the ideological influence of Islam on the political processes in the world and to bring together a variety of Islamic leaders and organizations.¹ This position also justifies the need for more active political participation of Muslims and Muslim organizations in opposing the policies of the Western countries and the United States. Malashenko, among a number of scholars, has repeatedly stated such a position.²

Conceptually, this position is based on the inseparability of the secular and spiritual areas in Islam. Therefore, it is often suggested that Islam is the same for everyone, which means that Muslims and Muslim organizations in Russia must live and act like Muslims and Muslim organizations in the Muslim countries, and they primarily use the political experience of the Muslim countries in their work.

It appears that a transfer of the experience of the orthodox Muslim countries to the Russian soil (which is virtually impossible) without its constructive critical analysis is unlikely to bring positive results for either Muslim organizations, the Russian state or society as a whole. The most vulnerable spot in this viewpoint is that Russia has never been a Muslim country. This means Sharia has never been the basis for Russian law, and Muslims have never constituted a majority. A Muslim has never been the head of this state, and moreover, Russia has been a secular state for many years. Hence, the

¹ Geydar Jemal, "Rossia i Musulmanskii Mir," [Russia and the Muslim world] *Bulleten' Referativno-Analiticheskoi Informacii* no. 9 (1999): 67-70.

² Aleksey Malashenko, *Islam i Politika v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam and Politics in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2003), 22-24.

experience of Muslim countries is not applicable in our country, or it could be destructive for a number of areas of our public life, such as the security sector.

In the framework of the third point of view, secular scientists state the need for a progressive change in the views of the Russian society and state and the role of Islam in the public and political life, and they posit that there could be more active use of its positive creative potential in the social, spiritual, cultural and educational realms. For example, researchers Bashirov, Malashenko and Sukiyaiynen have repeatedly pointed out that the potential of Islam is insufficiently realized in the political life of our country and has a very poor effect on the process of progressive social development and strengthening of the democratic legal framework of the Russian state.³

Many Russian experts on Islam believe that since the early 1990s of the last century, there has been a noticeable increase in the role of Islam in many areas in Russia. Scholars have singled out four main areas: the actual religion, society, culture, and politics. The results and prospects of the “awakening” of Islam in these areas are different and contradictory. They are often not shared by society or government agencies, which is likely because the Islamic influence on Russia is still very minimal. Moreover, the state often views the potential of the domestic Islam in a negative way, as a political factor that represents a threat to democratic reforms, state integrity, and the

³ For example, L. Bashirov, *Islam i Etnopoliticheskie Processi v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam and Ethno-political Processes in Modern Russia] (Moscow, 2000), 4; A. Malashenko, *Islamskoe Vozrozhdenie v Sovremennoi Rossii* [The Islamic Renaissance in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 1998), 126.

national security of Russia.⁴ It is probably for this reason that the Russian authorities must respond to the negative political aspects of the Islamic revival.

Representatives of the fourth point of view (they constitute the majority) prefer not to speak publicly about the possibilities and prospects of the participation of Russian Muslim organizations in political life and do not rush to formulate for the Russian Ummah its own political interests. More often they discuss and analyze the social, spiritual, cultural, and historical aspects of the problem. Most of the Russian experts on Islam, and some Muslim religious leaders, take a cautious stance in the matter of relations between the state and confessions, as these relations are mainly political.

Thus, the “Message of R. Gainutdin, the Chairman of the Russia’s Council of Muftis, Mufti Sheikh to the Dagestani people,” states:

The whole of Russia and the whole world are intently following the events in your republic. Remember, followers of other religions will judge Islam, lifestyles and actions of other Muslims on the basis of your actions. Such attention binds Muslims to behave in accordance with the teachings of their religion, not to bring the situation to bloodshed, to solve urgent problems only by peaceful means through negotiations. The Russia’s Council of Muftis expresses hope that you, our dear Dagestan people, will do so.⁵

In the “Statement on the attitude toward the terrorist attack in the United States” (September 12, 2001), the Union of Muslims of Russia emphasized their policy of detachment from politics:

We consider the positions of some public and religious figures, speculating on the tragedy in order to gain political dividends and justifying terrorism in connection with the political courses of some particular governments, unacceptable. Whatever the policies of politicians are, we see that peaceful and innocent people

⁴ Leonid R. Sukiyaiynen, *Rossiiskaya Gosudarstvennaya Politika v Otnoshenii Islama* [Russian state policy toward Islam] (Moscow, 2004).

⁵ *Islam Minbare – Tribuna Islama* [Islam Minbar – Islamic Tribune], October 2001.

are dying, and their loss cannot be justified by any ideological slogans. Political gloating over the deaths of innocent people is blasphemous.”⁶

It should be noted that in modern Russia, there are no major Muslim theologians of a reformist type who would be capable of interpreting secular problems from the position of Islam; therefore, all the arguments on the issue of participation or non-participation of Muslim organizations in the political life of modern Russia are abstract in nature. That is, when somebody expresses a wish to introduce, for example, norms of the Sharia law in a secular legislation, the discussions, as a rule, are based on references to either the secular rules of law, or on some out-of-context Qur’anic norms that seem to be the most appropriate to the participants in such disputes and discussions. Also, the active position of representatives of the second viewpoint indicates their wish to use Islam for their political purposes, rather than to investigate and analyze the role and place of Islam and Muslim organizations in political life. In 1994, Jemal, noting the need to strengthen the political activity of the ummah, wrote that the united Russian Islam can become “the core of the European Muslim community.”⁷

Textbooks on political science specify the following main signs of political activity: first, the existence of entities that implement the political interests of social groups; second, a high degree of their activity; and third, a wish to gain, preserve and use a political power.

Let us consider the contemporary Russian Muslim ummah from this perspective. First, the Muslim ummah has Spiritual Administrations (DUMs) as the main entities that

⁶ Ibid., September 2001.

⁷ Ibid., October 1994.

are able to implement, among others, political tasks. However, the system of Spiritual Administrations of Muslims is just being formed, whereas other national-scale Muslim entities (political parties, socio-political movements, etc.) have not yet been formed in Russia. A relationship between the spiritual administrations and political parties and movements, promoting of the interests of Muslims, has not yet been established.

Second, the main activities of the spiritual administrations do not include participation in the work of authorities or struggle for power (Charters of the spiritual administrations do not and cannot specify such provisions). According to the Charter of the Russia's Council of Muftis, its main goals are the following:⁸

1. Organizational consolidation of Muslim religious organizations of the Russian Federation, in order to jointly address major problems that concern the whole Muslim community of Russia;
2. Coordination and mutual assistance in the activity of its member organizations;
3. Development of positions in relation to the central and local state authorities, with organizations that represent other religions, as well as with international organizations; and
4. Creation of conditions necessary to observe the rights and protect the interests of Russian Muslims.

Third, in a country like Russia, where the law is secular, spiritual administrations are not able to engage in political activities without violating the existing laws. Thus,

⁸ *Musulmanskie Duxovnye Organizacii i Objedeneniya Rossiiskoy Federacii* [Muslim Spiritual Organizations and Associations of the Russian Federation] Directory (Moscow: DUMER, 1999), 16.

Russian Islamic organizations do not currently have any real (nor intellectual, economic or legal) possibilities to engage in public political activities. However, they cannot but participate in the *political life* of the Russian society⁹ because these Islamic organizations represent the interests of a large number of Muslims who are Russian citizens. In this regard, Muslims have all the rights established by the law, including the right to vote, “to elect and be elected to bodies of state power... to gather peacefully, without weapons, and to hold meetings, rallies, demonstrations, marches and pickets.”¹⁰

There are a number of reasons why spiritual administrations of Muslims cannot remain uninvolved in political life. Spiritual Administrations of Muslims (DUMs) represent the interests of a large social community (according to various estimates, the number of Muslims in Russia is 15 to 20 million).¹¹ This means that the Muslim ummah of Russia represents a tremendous force with its own political interests, that Islam is one of the regulators of public relations (even if they are often latent), and that many of the interests of Russian Muslims are political by nature and an intervention of political authorities is required to resolve them one way or another. Currently, the political interests of Muslims in Russia are not institutionalized enough, much less enunciated.

At the same time, it is notable that the Federal Law No. 95-FZ of July 11, 2001, *On Political Parties*, forbids the establishment of political parties on professional, racial, ethnic or religious grounds (paragraph 3 of Article 7). According to the law,

⁹ Political life - a set of spiritual, sensual, emotional and practical forms of substantive political existence of man and society that characterizes his relationship to politics and participation.

¹⁰ *Konstituciya Rossiiskoi Federacii* [The Constitution of the Russian Federation] (Moscow, 2004), 31.

¹¹ Alexei V. Malashenko, “Islam in Russia,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (2009): 321.

professional, racial, ethnic or religious belonging is understood as a statement in the charter and the program of a political party whose goal is to protect professional, racial, national or religious interests, as well as a reflection of this goal in the name of a political party. Muslim political and socio-political organizations and movements are coming to naught because they are not sought after by Muslims, and legal restrictions on their development and functioning have been introduced since 2001.

There are certain parallels between the position of the Russian Orthodox Church and Muslim organizations in the secular society, which are trying to engage in dialogue with the authorities, but it has remained unclear for many years.¹² Islam, however, does not intend to remain a second-rate religion in Russia, and it will not put up with this position. With the exception of the Inter-religious Council of Russia (founded in 1995), the effectiveness of which is questioned by Muslim leaders, the two major religions of the country have not created any effective interaction mechanism. Therefore, the Russian society and the two religions need the state to perform its intermediary role as an arbiter between them.

Islam has a great potential for political mobilization, which should be used by the authorities with the purpose of consolidation of the Russian society. In several important regions of Russia, Muslims live in groups and constitute the majority, which should be taken into account both by the government agencies and the spiritual administrations of Muslims. These are the republics of Northern Caucasus, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. An increase in the number of Muslims and Muslim organizations is continuously recorded in Udmurtia, Chuvashia, the Mari El Republic, Kostroma, Moscow Region,

¹² *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], March 16, 2001.

Orel, Saint Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Sverdlovsk Region and some areas of the Volga Region: Astrakhan, Saratov, Samara, Perm, Penza, Nizhny Novgorod, and Ulyanovsk. Although such areas as Karelia, Moldovia, Siberia, and the Far East are regarded as the allegedly “traditionally non-Muslim regions,” this territory now has spiritual administrations, Muslim press and electronic media, and establishes active contacts between the DUMs and the authorities.

Local Muslim organizations that are creating communities, building mosques, reviving the religious education system, and conducting congresses and scientific events are actively involved in the process of socialization of Muslims. For example, in the preparation for the Congress of Muslims in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania in 1994, the idea to invite all denominations represented in the country was met with a mixed reception from many Muslims.¹³ Guluev, the head of the Islamic Cultural Center of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, commented on this issue:

We were able to prove that [entities] must enter the Islamic community in a civilized manner, not opposing themselves to other believers but living in peace with them, respecting their own feelings and the feelings of other faiths, together solving problems that are common for all of us in order to achieve peace and reconciliation in the region.¹⁴

Participation of Muslim organizations in the social and political life of Russia should be based on the social and political interests of Russian Muslims, which are:

1. To overcome the tension, misunderstanding and suspicion between the authorities (federal) on the one hand, and Muslims, their institutions and

¹³ For more, see Galina Ymelianova, *Musulmane Osetii: Na Perekrestke Civilizacii* [Muslims of Ossetia at the Crossroads of Civilizations] (Moscow: RAN, 2003), 250-251.

¹⁴ Ymelianova, *Musulmane Osetii: Na Perekrestke Civilizacii*, 251.

- leaders, and national political elite of the regions, traditionally spreading Islam, on the other hand, so that they will not feel discriminated against politically, ideologically and spiritually in the Russian state and will not be forced to constantly draw the attention of the state leadership to their problems
2. To achieve real participation of the national political elite of the regions traditionally spreading Islam in the affairs of the Russian state, in making political and socially important decisions, implementing economic projects, budget planning and allocation, use of military and law enforcement agencies in Russia, provision of an adequate representation of Muslims in the government agencies, and making a public (and not only latent) influence on the government agencies of the Center and the regions possible.
 3. To provide the Muslim ummah of Russia with the possibility to freely exercise their constitutional rights. In addition to construction of mosques, it is planned to organize a *Hajj*, develop a system of religious education and Islamic media, and to revive domestic religious traditions, including the Sharia ban on alcohol, drug consumption, and smoking.
 4. To create an environment of free and unimpeded communication with Muslims around the world and familiarization with the global Muslim culture.

Many researchers studying Islam believe that the main political interest of Muslims is to create a Muslim state.¹⁵ However, this assumption is refuted by the document “The main provisions of the social program of the Russian Muslims,” which

¹⁵ *Rossia i musulmanskii mir. Buletnej referativno-analiticheskoi informacii* [Russia and the Muslim world. Bulletin of the Abstract-analytical Information] no. 1 (1999): 214.

states, “Islam does not instruct nations to use a particular form of government, leaving it up to the citizens of their country—in accordance with its established traditions and political culture. A Muslim person, like any citizen, can express his [or] her disagreement with the government or local authorities on any matter within the law, making every effort in order to avoid actions that could disrupt social harmony and peace or lead to bloodshed and disorder.”¹⁶ Thus, construction of an Islamic state in Russia is neither the goal nor the means of the activity of Russian Muslim organizations.

Some of the main features of Russian Muslim organizations’ participation in the political life of the Russian society include:

1. Muslim organizations operate in such conditions when the Muslim elite is virtually absent in Russia.
2. The Muslim ummah in Russia is disengaged religiously, organizationally, and ideologically.
3. A complete and stable system of relations between the Russian state and Russian Muslim religious organizations has not been formed yet.
4. Currently, there is no economic basis for the operation of Muslim religious organizations in the Russian Federation.

The main features of the participation of Muslim organizations in the political life of the Russian society deserve detailed consideration. The issue of the existence or absence of Muslim elite in Russia is still debatable. On the one hand, the Muslim elite is regarded as a group of religious figures who have unquestioned authority among the

¹⁶ *Osnovnye Polozheniya Social'noi Programmy Rossiiskix Musulman* [The Main Provisions of the Social Program of Russian Muslim] <http://www.archipelag.ru/agenda/strateg/konfess/conception/islam/> (accessed June 7, 2011).

faithful. Taking into consideration the fact that the number of religious figures in the country increases due to the growth of spiritual administrations, communities, and mosques, one can assume that the influence of the Muslim elite of Russia will become stronger. At the same time, religious figures are also becoming public figures. Therefore, the Muslim elite should also include eminent experts on Islam, as the institution of Ulama is traditionally respected in Islam.¹⁷

The Russian Muslim elite is still young in terms of its experience of participation in the political life of Russia, as during the Soviet times, it was practically deprived of participation in the political life. In modern Russia, as noted by researchers,¹⁸ there is not a single strong theologian who could become a spiritual leader of the emerging Muslim elite. Modern leaders of the majority of spiritual administrations of Muslims have no serious theological education, and some of them have no religious education at all.

Currently, we can see an active, objective process of ‘dilution’ of the old Muslim elite and its ‘saturation’ with young people. Thus, Talgat Tadzhuddin, the Chairman at the Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia, has held his current post since the Soviet era. Most heads of the DUMs are much younger than Tadzhuddin; they received their posts on the tide of *Perestroika* and later. Therefore, the conflict between the three main Muslim centers in Russia is caused, among other reasons (aspiration for power being one), by the change of generations, as the younger leaders differently assess

¹⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values of Humanity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2002), 148-149.

¹⁸ This is the view of A. V. Malashenko, A. A. Ignatenko, L. R. Sukiyainen and L. A. Bashirov.

the place and role of Islam in modern Russia. Currently, there are three Muslim Centers in Russia, which are more or less equal in their influence.¹⁹

Tensions within the Muslim clergy in Russia arise from two factors: first, the wish of Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin, the successor of the DUMES (Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of European Russia and Siberia) head, which was later renamed the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia and the CIS—(TSDUMR) to preserve the position of the sole leader of the Russian Muslims, and, at the same time, to represent their interests before the secular authorities. Second, there are the ambitious aspirations of young (or relatively young) imams and muftis who want to get rid of their dependence on the Ufa Center, and, if there is a chance, to express themselves across the whole of Russia.

Mufti Ravil Gainutdin says:

[The] collapse of the USSR...and its consequences affected Muslims...Borders of the canonical territory of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of European Russia and Siberia were disrupted...A number of new states were created on the canonical territory of the DUMES. This made it more difficult to have religious contacts and provide for spiritual leadership of Muslims because it is almost impossible to lead the Muslim communities while staying in Ufa today...That is why it is high time to introduce some changes in the structure and forms of the religious administration.²⁰

A short scheme of the TSDUMR (former DUMES) bears examination. Its supreme body was the Congress (*Majlis*)²¹ of the delegates of the clergy and parishes

¹⁹ Russian President meets with several leaders of DUMs, sometimes separately, but always with all three leaders in discussing serious issues.

²⁰ Ravil Gainutdin, “Moskva Stanovitsya Musulmanskim Centrom?” [Does Moscow become the Center of Muslims?] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], May 1994.

²¹ *Majlis* used to describe various types of special gatherings among common interest groups, be they administrative, social or religious, in countries with linguistic or cultural connections to Islamic countries.

elected at parish meetings. The Congress convened every five years. Congress elected the mufti (head of the DUMES) for a period of five years. Congress also elected three of the six members of the Presidium of the administration for a period of five years. The other three members were appointed by the mufti. Three members of the Council of Ulamas were elected, and the other three members were appointed by the mufti. The Congress also elected the Central Auditing Commission. The head of the Muslims of European Russia and Siberia, who would also become the Chairman of the DUMES, was elected at a congress of clergy and parishioners.

In the period between congresses, the supreme legislative and executive power belonged to the plenum of the spiritual administration, which was convened by the Mufti. In the regions (*oblasts*, or autonomous republics), the spiritual life of Muslims was organized by the *muhtasibates*,²² which consisted of several parishes. The *Board of Administration (Council) of Muhtasibate* was elected at a meeting of the heads of parishes and parish council chairmen for only five years. The Board of Administration of Muhtasibate appointed the Imam-Khatib, who had been recommended by the board of TSDUMR. A parish is a Muslim community that has been formed around a mosque. A parish is formed on the basis of the voluntary consent of the persons who are attending it, provided that their number is not less than ten people. Each parish is headed by an Imam-Khatib who is elected by an Assembly of Muslims but approved by the TSDUMR.

²² Among the Tatars of the Russian Empire the *Mahtasib* was a Muslim functionary expected to keep vigilant watch on the execution of the Sharia. In 1920s, after the October Revolution and ban on religion, their service was abolished. Since 1990s they have been reestablished, but play only a religious role, as the sharia has no official role among Muslims of the Russian Federation. There are about 44 *muhtasibates* in Tatarstan alone.

Even a cursory glance at this scheme is enough to understand that its main feature is a rigid centralization where lower structures are fully subordinate to higher structures, and there is a lack of possibility for the parish imams to show any independence. The dependence of individual muhtasibates on the DUMES somewhat resembled the former subordination of the DUMES to the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia, which had always been disliked by Tadzhuddin himself.

The aspiration of the regional imams to come out of the control of the DUMES can to a large extent be explained by Tadzhuddin's authoritarian methods of governance that showed intolerance toward critics and opponents. His position can be explained both by his experience of working in a command and administration system and his wish to make every effort to remain the sole spiritual leader of Muslims.

The Council of Muftis of Russia (CMR) (an alternative to the TSDUMR) is mainly an advisory structure that operates based on the principle of coordination and consists of DUMs (or associations of DUMs) enjoying equal rights. Their heads automatically become the co-chairs of the Council. The Chairman of the CMR ("first among equals") is elected, and this post is not deployed for life. A large number of the members of the CMR are united by their dislike toward Tadzhuddin and a wish to protect themselves from dependence on Ufa; however, this wish is not strong enough to sacrifice their independence. The CMR pertains to all Muslim communities within Russia. The total number of communities controlled by the members of this organization exceeds 3,000; three quarters of them are mahallahs of Dagestan and Tatarstan.

The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of European Russia (DUMER) constitutes the core of the CMR and, at the same time, is the only structure that is fully

controlled by Mufti Ravil Gainutdin, its chairman. This organization states that it has about 150 communities. As the name implies, DUMER pertains to all Muslim communities the west of the Urals but in fact, it controls only the Central and Central Black Earth economic regions. In Moscow, DUMER took the leading position only in the spring of 1999, after it established control over the Historical Mosque and, as a consequence, the Memorial Mosque. Such a policy of DUMER led to a rotation of the communities within the Council of Muftis (in 1998, the communities of the Penza Region that formerly were a part of the Volga DUM were moved to the jurisdiction of the Moscow Muftiat) and caused a poorly concealed irritation among some members of the CMR.

Muslim leaders themselves are aware of the problems they face. Thus, according to the statement of the CMR (“On improvement of administration of the religious life of the Muslims of Russia”), the processes of revival in Islam are largely quantitative in nature. Religious practice insufficiently reflects the rich teachings of Islam, especially its moral side, and often is reduced to a mechanical performance of religious rites. The content of the modern religious propaganda requires a major restructuring. The statement expresses a concern that the leadership of the religious communities mostly consists of the people who do not have a sufficient secular and religious education. It turned out that they were not ready to build their work with account of the changes that have occurred in the mind and demeanor of modern Muslims and their increased cultural level. DUMs were not able to create up-to-date curricula and textbooks for religious educational institutions and provide them with qualified teachers. Religious schools are operating in

virtually all the mosques but most of their teachers do not have a sufficient secular and religious education.

As a result, Islam (according to the statement), which had always distinguished itself by its ability to reflect social changes and modern times, is often showed by its ministers as a conservative religion committed to the idea of immutability of the norms of life from the past. Muslim organizations have failed to take that place in the community that befits the number of Muslims and the influence of Islam on the population, and they do not actively participate in the measures that are taken by the government in order to strengthen the state.²³

The author of the dissertation agrees with Professor Sukiyaïnen that Russian Muslims still have a relatively low level of an actual religious culture, and this is partially caused by the lack of highly educated religious leaders who would be seen by the faithful as not only spiritual leaders but also as recognized experts on the Islamic understanding of the secular concerns in Russia and the world. There are several negative factors: the absence of a common religious center, the intense rivalry between the spiritual administrations of Muslims, and the continued dependence of some of them on foreign Muslim organizations, whose assistance is not always aimed at addressing the most pressing problems of their Russian co-religionists.²⁴ It may be noted that there are few influential people in Islam in Russia today.

²³ “Rossiiskie Islamskie Organizacii i Nacionalnaya Bezopasnostj Rossiiskoi Federacii” [Russian Muslim Organizations and the National Security of the Russian Federation] (document from the Russian State Archive), 222.

²⁴ Leonid R. Sukiyaïnen, *Rossiiskaya Gosudarstvennaya Politika v Otnoshenii Islama* [Russian State Policy towards Islam] (Moscow, 2004), 117.

At the same time, the absence of strong Islamic theologians is related to the organizational and ideological dissociation of the Muslim community in Russia. Different regional Islamic leaders have different viewpoints on the participation of religious organizations in the political life of the society. Russian muftis do not have a common viewpoint on practically anything. They do not have a common viewpoint on the issue of forms and methods of Muslim organizations' cooperation with the power-holding structures. The absence of strong Islamic theologians is also related to the low degree of politicization of the Russian Muslims. After the Council of Muftis of Russia conducted their first research on political issues ("Electoral Preferences of Muslims in Russia"), Sheikh Gainutdin, the Chairman of the CMR, noted, "the research showed that there is a low degree of politicization of Russian Muslims, and most of them adhere to the middle, so-called 'centrist' positions."²⁵

The authorities also have different viewpoints on the Muslim community's political participation in public affairs. Thus, according to Zorin, the former Minister for Nationalities of the Russian Federation, Islamic organizations in Russia developed their own directions of political development and participation in the political life of the society.²⁶ He believes that that all Muslim leaders distance themselves from the leadership of political parties and prefer to build relationships with their local agencies. Nevertheless, the Muslim clergy in Russia still cannot give a consolidated answer to the

²⁵ Ravil Gainutdin, *Vibori v Rossii i Vibor Musulman* [Elections in Russia and Muslim's Choice] (Moscow, 2004), 111.

²⁶ Vladimir Zorin, "Intervyu s Vladimirom Zorinim [Interview with Vladimir Zorin]" *Otechestvenniye zapiski* [Domestic Notes], 5 (2003): 75-76.

question of whether religious figures are able (and need) to study political issues, and how they should participate in the political life.

Divergence of the Muslim leaders' opinions is also shown in their ideological positions and in how they justify their different, sometimes opposing, political viewpoints. This ranges from total loyalty to a rigid opposition to the authorities and from adjusting Islamic arguments to political tasks to viewing politics simply as a means of implementation of Islamic doctrines. Moreover, there are contradictions between the concepts of the political participation suggested by Muslim leaders and organizations and their real actions.

Muslim organizations in Russia feature weak development on the religious basis of their socio-political activity and lack a clear plan that would harmonize Islam's involvement with politics and the realization of its principles. This applies to both the Muslim leaders and structures that are actively cooperating with the authorities and the leaders and movements that oppose themselves to the state. In particular, official spiritual administrations of Muslims, as a rule, confine themselves to announcing the most general principles of their political activity (passivity is not uncommon), which is normally determined by some pragmatic approach and a wish to be closer to the authorities. This position was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter as one of the most common positions of Muslim leaders in Russia.

Cooperation of the legal Muslim organizations (those who operate in accordance with the Russian law) with the government institutions is a very important starting point in realizing their humanistic and moral potential. However, the level and nature of

cooperation between the state and Muslim religious organizations leave much to be desired.

Recently, a number of spiritual administrations of Muslims made attempts to determine their lines of conduct in politics. For example, the Council of Muftis of Russia stressed that its relation to the state is based on sound principles, protecting freedoms and establishing orderliness in accordance with the Islamic notion of *dar al-sulh* (the abode of peace), which is a form of agreement between Muslims and a non-Muslim state. However, the exact political and legal meaning of this principle is not explained, which again proves that the official Muslim structures insufficiently developed the Islamic basics of their political participation.²⁷

This peculiarity also applies to the political concepts of the Russian Islam in opposition (for example, the idea of Jemal that Russian Muslim organizations need their own “Islamic project”). The theoretical postulates of the ideologists of radical Islam (who are commonly referred to as Islamic extremists, fundamentalists, Salafis, and Wahhabi) are permeated with the Islamic arguments and look like programs of a practical implementation of the Islamic norms and principles, normally through violence. Currently, these destructive forces (both international and local terrorist organizations) happen to be armed with the ideas of a political Islam. Unlike them, the Muslim organizations that are loyal to the authorities have not yet offered (for different reasons) their detailed and convincing concept with regard to the topical socio-political matters. Moreover, they avoid any direct and substantial policies and limit their contact with the

²⁷ *Osnovnye Polozheniya Socialnoi Programmy Rossiiskix Musulman* [The Main Provisions of the Social Program of Russian Muslim] <http://www.archipelag.ru/agenda/strateg/konfess/conception/islam/>.

radicals and extremists. Even if they try to oppose them, they do it ineffectively, avoiding any sensitive issues and simply using general declarations and statements.

The contradiction of the role of Islam in the Russian society is also based on its intellectual unpreparedness (some authors write about Islam's marginality²⁸), which was caused by the Soviet Union's state atheism policy. However, even in the [post]-Soviet era, Islam in Russia was probably further rejected by the public opinion and its exclusion from the public sphere due to Russia's orientation on building and operating a secular state and its secularization of the social relations. For many Muslims, following the Russian Orthodox Church, which is actively increasing its political potential and status in the majority of political matters, doesn't favor the legitimization of the Russian Muslim organizations.

Hence, many scholars consider the idea of a specifically Muslim political project as, on the one hand, a mechanism of integration of the Muslim community, and on the other hand, as a tool that would give Islam an opportunity to keep up with the Russian Orthodox Church in building relations with the authorities. For example, Malashenko notes that each Muslim area (the Volga Region and the North-Caucasian Region) has its own particular way of how Islam solves various political problems and builds its relations with the authorities.²⁹ In contrast, Yusupova believes that Islam does not have an opportunity to have its own, specifically Muslim, political project: "In Russia, it is

²⁸ Marginalization of Islam in Chechnya as a product of Soviet heritage notes, for example: F. Dimaeva, *Islam v Sovremennoi Chechne: Vozdeistvie na Socialjno Kulturnye i Politicheskie Processi* [Islam in contemporary Chechnya: the impact on the socio-cultural and political processes] (Moscow, 2003), 19.

²⁹ Aleksey Malashenko, "Rossia i Islam [Russia and Islam]" *Otechestvenniye zapiski* [Domestic Notes], 5 (2003): 56.

impossible to revive something that never existed—that is a political Islam. In a political sense, Islam in Russia is untenable due to historical reasons.”³⁰

It is necessary to note that neither the Russian Orthodox Church nor Islam ever had—and will never have—their own political projects in the Russian Federation. In Russia, religious organizations never opposed the political authorities and never pretended to be the state power. Moreover, Islam should not have its own political project in a non-Islamic society. It should (and can) function in the society using the religious and social means and methods that are inherent to it.

However, some processes that took place in post-Soviet Russia could be considered as a display of a political activity by the Muslim organization. During the 90s, several Islamic political organizations were created in the Russian Federation. Some of these organizations intended to influence the whole of Russia, whereas others worked only within their region or oblast. There are some examples of the organizations of the first type: Union of the Muslims of Russia, Public Movement NUR, and Islamic Renaissance Party (which broke up in 1994). The Islamic Cultural Center (the activity of which was also somewhat political in nature) should be mentioned separately. Among the regional organizations, there are the *Muslims of Russia* movement (which operated in the Middle Volga Region, particularly in the Saratov and Penza Regions, for some period of time); the *Jamaat-ul-Muslimi* (officially registered as a religious society), the *Islamic Party* (which was created after the split of the Islamic-Democratic Party); the Chechen party *Islamic Way*; the Tatar party *Ittifaq*; and the movement *The Muslims of Tatarstan*.

³⁰ Aislu Yunusova, *Islam v Kontekste Sovremennyx Etnopoliticheskix processov v Rossii* [Islam in the context of contemporary ethno-political processes in Russia] (Moscow, 2003), 273.

None of these parties achieved as much influence as the parties (even the smallest ones) that are represented in the State Duma or directly and indirectly participate in the work of the power-holding structures. In this case, it is important that such parties appear at all and increase their activity, and that their leaders' ambitions grow as well. During periods of political activity in the country, particularly during the State Duma elections and presidential elections (Muslims constitute 10 to 12% of the Russian electorate), these leaders step out of the shade and not only support some particular secular leader but also speak about their own interests.

The idea of Islamic solidarity, however, is alien to the top authorities of Tatarstan and Bashkiria, who emphasize the international character of their republics, and they are concerned about conflicts on inter-confessional grounds. This can be illustrated by an opinion of the former President of Tatarstan expressed after one of his meetings with Mufti Gabdulla Galliullin. "They [meaning the mufti and his supporter] want to see Kazan as their second Mecca,"³¹ Shaimiev said. It is not accidental that in 1996 Shaimiev, an active supporter of an Islamic-Christian dialogue, was decorated with the Order of Holy Prince Daniel of Moscow (first class) by (deceased) Alexy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

Just before 1999, the heads of the journal *Musulmane* ("Muslims") conducted an exclusive interview with the President of Tatarstan. When they asked Shaimiev what he thought about an Islamic approach to running a state and to a political activity, the latter answered that in this case, it was necessary to take into account the history of Tatarstan.

³¹ *Vechernia Moskva* [Evening Moscow], March 29, 1996.

When we seriously analyzed the reasons for the split of the republic's Muslim community, which existed until the uniting congress, and spoke about the unity of Muslims, we were told that religion is separated from the state and advised not to intervene into this matter.... Religion is not separated from the society, and I am as much responsible for the state of the society as I am responsible for the economy or any other area. That is our understanding. I believe that this is the approach I need to use.³²

The Islamic Renaissance Party was the first political organization of Muslims in Russia (the former USSR), and its founding congress took place in Astrakhan in June of 1990. Representatives of many Muslim nations of the USSR took part in the creation of the IRP. The party really had the right to be called an "All-Soviet Union" organization; however, this title had never been formally used in its official name. Tatars, Tajiks and Caucasians (Dagestani) were most represented at the congress in Astrakhan. After the collapse of the USSR, when the Tajik division of the IRP was transformed into an independent party, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), some of its members stated that they played the main role in founding the "All-Soviet Union" IRP. Tatars and Caucasians strongly object to this statement.

However, the IRP did not become a harmonious political organization. It immediately split into several independent groups: Dagestani, Moscow, Tajik, and Uzbek. Formally, the IRP adhered to fundamentalist principles, as it was supporting the idea of turning Dagestan into an Islamic state and promoting the idea of the "purity of Islam." This caused dissatisfaction among the Muslim traditionalists, most notably the Naqshbandi sheikhs, who accused the IRP of "Wahhabism." The activity of the IRP greatly contributed to the intensification of disagreements between the supporters of the

³² *Musulmane* [Muslims], January 1999.

idea of “purity of Islam” and the followers of the Sufi orders,³³ Naqshbandi and Qadiriyya, who were called with a sign of contempt “followers of the tariqa” (the word *tariqa* means a way used by Sufis to perfect themselves).

A gradual disappearance of the IRP was not a sign that Islam’s politicization slowed down. At the beginning of the 90s, local radical party *Ittifaq* was still active in Tatarstan, and various political organizations of the North Caucasus were gaining more experience. It is necessary to note that after an almost year-long “pause,” Islam once again made an attempt to return to politics and cover the whole of Russia. In 1995, the All-Russia Muslim Public Movement NUR and the Union of the Muslims of Russia were created.

Their creation can be explained by three reasons. First, the process of politicizing Islam was developing according to its own logic, and only banning could stop it. Muslims, being a confessional community, started developing their common (even if not clearly defined) interests, which were primarily focused on the protection of their right to a religious revival. There were many cases when the authorities impeded the return mosques, refused to provide an area for their construction, and interfered with the work of the clergy. The young and active members of the Muslim community believed that politicians were protecting these interests better than the clergy. Some of the imams fell over politics, too.

The second reason is absolutely tactical: the creation of Muslim organizations happened on the eve of the of the State Duma elections (December 1995), and some of their newly-created leaders dreamt of getting to the State Duma. The third reason is that

³³ Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: Historical Survey*, 167-169.

some secular parties used Muslims for their own political benefit. Thus, the wave of political activity that came after the breakup of the IRP was much more significant. It differed from the approach of the “Russian-Muslim intellectuals,” as it featured premeditation and a wish to achieve particular goals.

All these events took place on the eve of parliamentary elections, in which the Union of the Muslims of Russia was hoping to take part as a separate entity. The UMR did not submit correctly prepared lists of signatures on time, and they were rejected by the Central Election Committee. The Public Movement NUR, however, took part in the elections and managed to receive 0.58 % of the votes (393.5 thousand people voted for this movement) and took twenty-second place among the forty-three parties that had taken part in this political race.³⁴

Still, this movement had a good debut in the political struggle at the All-Russia level. Formally, their participation looked unsuccessful. The NUR was very far from reaching the five percent threshold level that would allow them to get into the parliament. However, the very fact of their participation is more important in this particular case. There is no doubt that Muslims (not only the NUR movement) would have been more successful if the political leaders had managed to find a common language with the clergy and receive their support. These elections showed that Islam had not exhausted its political potential.

At the end of 1998, the situation changed, which was related to the appearance of the All-Russia political movement *Refah (Blagodenstviye)* in the political arena. The movement was created by representatives of Muslims and indigenous people of Russia in

³⁴ *Izvestiya Bashkortostana* [Bashkortostan news], March 1, 1996.

November 1998. In October 1999, the Refah movement, together with six other public and political organizations, became founders of the Inter-regional movement Unity (*Medved*) and took an active part in the State Duma election campaign. The Council of Spiritual Advisors was created under the Refah movement, and it was headed by Mufti-Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, the Chairman at the Council of Muftis of Russia.

By the spring of 2000, the All-Russia political movement Refah had (de facto) its regional subdivisions in 63 federal territories of the Russian Federation. On December 19, 1999, the longstanding initiatives of Muslim politicians were crowned with success. Five deputies from the Muslim party Refah entered the State Duma through the party list of Unity. Thus, Refah became the first party in the parliament that had been created on the basis of religion. Later, Refah added more of its deputies to the State Duma, and the interests of the All-Russia political movement Refah are currently represented by twelve people in the State Duma. It has more deputies than, for example, the party *Our Home is Russia*, which has seven deputies.

The positive characteristic of the Refah movement is that it contributed to the convergence of the gradually emerging Islamic movement (even if of an enclave character) with its own politicians who have a Muslim origin and had already gained some authority in the secular bodies. Over a period of time, this cooperation could lead to an emergence of new authority figures, both from the bottom and the top. A search for a sole leader (especially given that this place could be taken by an authoritative imam or mufti) will, most probably, continue indefinitely, and could even turn out to be unsuccessful due to a number of objective and subjective reasons. The main reasons are differences in how Muslims of the Caucasus and Muslims of the rest of Russia view their

place in Russia, rivalry between Muslim politicians, and their lack of required experience.

In the near future, the Russian ummah will not become united and monolithic. At the same time, Russia will remain a part of the Muslim world for a long time, and processes taking place in the Muslim countries will have an effect on the position of Russian Muslims.

In Russia, there are no stable traditions of Muslim organizations' participation in political life. Currently, Russian Muslims prefer to use social methods of battling for their political interests. These methods include addressing their issues to the state bodies, courts, media and political parties; participation in strikes and hunger strikes; rallies and referendums; and so on.³⁵

Muslims and Muslim organizations' viewpoints on different political matters are normally expressed by secular scholars,³⁶ whereas Muslim leaders prefer to keep quiet, as any statement of their own position could be interpreted as their participation in the political struggle in favor of some particular political force.³⁷ Still, it is necessary to admit that the state bodies and Russia's Muslim organizations are gaining some experience of cooperation with each other. One of the examples is the preparation of the draft law *On Fighting Wahhabism*, which was initiated by the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Dagestan and considered in the State Duma of the Russian Federation. At that time, the

³⁵ See more: G. Gazieva, G. Melkov, *Musuljmanskaya Umma v Sovremennom Rossiiskom Obchestve* [Islamic Ummah in Contemporary Russian Society] (Moscow, 2003), 52.

³⁶ See works of A. Ignatenko, M. Shevchenko, M. Tuljskii.

³⁷ It should be noted that some works on the political issues by the Russia's religious leaders start to appear. See for example: Ravil Gainutdin, *Vybory v Rossii i Vybor Musulman* [Elections in Russia and Muslims' Choice] (Moscow, 2004).

Council of Muftis of Russia and several other spiritual administrations acted as the experts of the draft law and evaluated it negatively.

The ummahs' participation in political life is still initiated by government institutions. That is why the Council of Muftis of Russia had to note in the "General provisions of the social program of Russian Muslims" that "the state and its laws are considered a result of an agreement between all social groups with regard to the general norms of their co-existence on the same territory and within one legal and economic system."³⁸

The process of building the relations between the Russian state and the spiritual administrations of Muslims is very similar to the analogous relations between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church. Muslim organizations and the Russian Orthodox Church have similar positions on such matters as the freedom of speech and religion, as well as various social matters and charity. The divergence of their opinions occurs when they discuss more pressing and sensitive political problems.

There are many problems and areas of activities in which these two religious structures (the Russian Orthodox Church and the Spiritual Administrations of Muslims) must build their relations virtually from scratch, as during the Soviet era, when they had practically no relations with each other. Today, each of the confessions is building its relations with the state, according to its influence in society. Thus, according to "the Basics of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church," the "Church can rightfully expect that the state will build its relations with religious unions while taking

³⁸ *Osnovnye Polozheniya Social'noi Programmy Rossiiskix Musulman* [The Main Provisions of the Social Program of Russian Muslim] <http://www.archipelag.ru/agenda/strateg/konfess/conception/islam/>.

into account the number of their followers and their place in the formation of the historic, cultural and spiritual image of the nations, as well as their citizenship.”³⁹

The central direction of the activity of the ROC and Muslim organizations is building relations with the Russian state. It is necessary to admit that the ROC has been more successful: it affects Russian politics to a greater extent than Muslim organizations. In 2003 alone, the ROC made and renewed contracts with several governmental structures. Thus, the ROC and the Russian Academy of Sciences signed an agreement on cooperation in the scientific, research, cultural, and educational areas on January 15, 2003. On March 5, 2003, the Moscow Patriarchate signed an agreement on cooperation with the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation. On May 8, 2003, a meeting of representatives of the ROC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation took place in the Department of External Church Affairs of the Moscow Patriarchate. The participants of the meeting discussed issues related to the collaboration between the Church and Russia’s state and public bodies in the area of development of the spiritual and cultural links of the Russian state with the member countries of the CIS. They also spoke about problems of protection of Russian citizens in neighboring countries.

A web site of the Russian Orthodox Church notes:

Over the 200 years of the existence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ROC has worked with Russian diplomats, who maintained close and constructive relations with the Church at all times (including the years of the Soviet regime, which were unfavorable for the Church), having a good understanding of the importance of its missionary and peace-making work in the world.⁴⁰

³⁹ *Osnovy Socialnoi Konceptcii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Cerkvi* [the Basics of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church] <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/141422.html> (accessed July 21, 2011).

⁴⁰ See <http://www.mospat.ru/archive/nr305134.htm>.

Thus, one may state that the ROC has won the right to discuss problems of both the domestic and foreign policies today. The ROC is actively involved in the socio-political life of Russia; the Patriarch is regularly included in the list of the 100 most influential Russian politicians.⁴¹ From among the Muslim leaders, only Talgat Tadzhuddin, the Chairman at the TSDUMR, was several times included in the first hundred of Russian politicians in 1999-2000.

It is necessary to note that Muslim organizations gradually gain experience in building relations with the power-holding structures. Muslim leaders try to be very active: they regularly meet with the president of the Russian Federation and participate in scientific events, celebrations and organizational arrangements that are held by the Presidential Executive Office, the RF Government, and heads of the RF subjects.

Despite the demonstrative and superficial distancing of the ROC and Muslim organizations from politics, they do not want to be pushed aside. Still, neither the Orthodox Church nor Islam has managed to fully analyze the issue of their participation in the public and political life of contemporary Russia. “The Basics of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” demonstrates this contradiction of the ROC’s approach. In words, the ROC refuses to have anything to do with politics but in practice, it is unable to avoid some political involvement.

Today, the Russian Orthodox Church is trying to separate political and religious organizations in order to develop future methods of how they will interact:

⁴¹ This refers to the project of “*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*” [Independent Newspaper] to choose by the experts, one hundred leading politicians in Russia. During 2000-2003, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church was in of the top ten. In March 2004, he took 16th place. See more: *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], March 1, 2004.

The existence of the Christian (Orthodox) political organizations and Christian (Orthodox) units of larger political associations is considered by the Church as a positive phenomenon, which helps the laity to conduct political and state activity together on the basis of Christian spiritual and moral principles. These organizations, being free in their activity, are encouraged to consult the church authorities and coordinate their actions in implementing the Church's position on public issues.⁴²

The document "The main provisions of the social program of the Russian Muslims" is the most detailed and frank in describing the viewpoint of Muslim organizations on politics:

In conditions when there is a law that protects fundamental human rights and freedoms, all Muslims have a civil and religious duty to observe the law of their country as the main agreement between the citizens... However, any political system and any political regime must guarantee fundamental human rights and freedoms. Only in this case, the power that is recognized by its citizens can be considered as not only legal but also legitimate.

Despite the adopted documents, Islam has little influence on political life in terms of introducing such inherent principles of Islam as moderation, search for compromise and tolerance into this arena. At the same time, as it is noted by Sukiyainen, the ideological heritage of Islam provides a theoretical basis for such principles as moderation, stability, loyalty to authorities, wish for compromise and consensus, and avoidance of harm.⁴³

Islamic leaders and organizations (those who support the authorities and seek to use the potential of Islam for the benefit of the state and society) do not show sufficient skill and persistence, and, therefore, they are less noticeable in the political arena today.

⁴² *Osnovy Socialnoi Konceptcii Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Cerkvi*
<http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/141422.html>.

⁴³ Leonid Sukiyainen, "Rossiiskaya Vlast i Islam," [Russian Authorities and Islam] *Otechestvenniye Zapiski* [Domestic Notes], no. 5 (2003): 412.

This is, perhaps, related to the fact that the ummah does not have its own economic base or the possibility of creating one. Without economic independence, it is impossible to influence the socio-political processes in contemporary Russia. Thus, Nurullina, the researcher, notes, “In the process of modernization of the Islamic world, a lot of effort is put toward socialization of the economic activity. These are joint efforts of religious and public figures, scholars and business people.”⁴⁴

Russia has tried to introduce “Islamization of the banking system.” Over the past 20 years, Russia has made several attempts to create an Islamic bank. In 1992, the United Islamic Commercial Bank was opened in Kemerovo (currently, this organization is not listed in the register of the Bank of Russia). There is information about at least one more unrealized project of this kind, which was organized in Makhachkala in 1996. As of today, there are no banks operating according to the Islamic model in Russia.⁴⁵

The analysis shows that in the near future, the Russian ummah will not be able to create and implement even a minimal economic basis for their activity. There are no objective or subjective preconditions that would make it possible, as Russian Islamic organizations have virtually no financial support, either from the state (which is natural, given its secular nature) or from the poor Russian population. Mechanisms of regular collection of funds that could be used to help religious organizations exist and function properly have not been created (the mechanism of *Zakāt* is not yet widespread).

⁴⁴ G. Nurullina, *Islamskaya Etika Biznesa* [Islamic Business Ethics] (Moscow, 2004), 5.

⁴⁵ However, the deputy mufti of Tatarstan, Valiulla Yakupov, believes that sooner or later a strong Muslim bank will be established in Tatarstan since a pool of capital seeking Islamic forms of finance is growing in the republic. He says that such a bank will be able to accumulate funds that are received by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan from *zakat* and *waqfs*. See more: Alexei V. Malashenko, “Islam in Russia,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (2009): 327-328.

Thus, on the basis of this analysis, it may be concluded that Russian Muslim organizations have little influence on the social and political life of Russia. This is primarily due to the indistinct relationship between spiritual administrations of Muslims and power-holding structures, and hence, the insufficient use of the political potential of the Russian ummah and, as noted previously, the intellectual and organizational weakness of the Muslim elite and the lack of an economic base for its independent activity.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Influence of Islam on Social Processes and Ethno-Political Situations in Russia

The modern socio-political situation in Russia is closely related to the process of the religious renaissance, characterized by the spread and consolidation of the positions of all confessions. Since the 1990s, under the conditions of democratization of the socio-political life and liberalization of state-church relations, the interest in religion has been accompanied by heightened activity on the part of religious figures of all confessions in Russia. Their influence has also expanded into government policy.

The religious renaissance in the country is related, first of all, to the profound changes in its world outlook, the beginning of which was marked by the change from tight state control to democratic principles. Additionally, social and economic instability, typical for the transition period, and disappointment in the former ideals paved the way for the change in the religious and political environments.

In Russia today, Orthodoxy, Islam, and other confessions strive to play the role of tradition keepers by giving a certain degree of spiritual support. Religion claims it will become a symbol of national identity. This factor strengthens the national self-consciousness. Surveys conducted in the eastern parts of the North Caucasus showed that 56% of Avar, 50% of Dargin, 43% of Chechen, 41% of Ingush, and 48% of Lezgin consider themselves Muslims “in general,” paying little attention to affiliation with a particular Muslim group. For the rest, it was more important to belong specifically to the Islam of the Caucasus, either to the Hanafi or Shafi madhabs (religious juridical schools)

or one of the Sufi tariqats (brotherhoods). In the western parts of the North Caucasus, 88% of the Adyg, 94% of Cherkess, 86% of Kabardin, and 80% of Karachaev consider themselves Muslims “in general.”¹ The mufti Ravil Gainutdin thinks that without restoration of the traditions, consecrated by religion, society will inevitably decline.²

Islam as a part of political life is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It may be used for consolidating society and to strengthen or weaken a state. Islam became more frequently used to solve the tasks regarding the rise of the national self-consciousness as well as ethnic mobilization through conflicts with representatives of other nationalities and sometimes of other religions. In connection with the events in the Chechen Republic, the so-called “Islamic factor” has become one of the most relevant for Russian society, but “politics” and the “nation” are secular concepts. For Russia, the difficulties of Islam, such as striving to live on the basis of democratic principles, are captured in the fact that religious and political power is not separated in Islam. Secular and spiritual principles are one. In Islam, the religion is not separated from the state power. That is why in “Islamic republics,” the tendency for penetration of Islamic principles into state institutions is so strong.

The Russian Federation is a state with a predominantly Russian ethnicity and the Orthodox religion. The dialog between Islam and Orthodoxy is one of the favorite subjects of clergymen of both confessions, as well as of politicians and of journalists. In

¹ Alexei V. Malashenko, “Islam in Russia,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (2009): 325. On the question of Islam and national identity, see K. Krivitski, *Religiozni Faktor v Etnopoliticheskoy Situatsii na Severnom Kavkaze* [The Religious Factor in Ethnic and Political Situation in the North Caucasus] (Moscow, 1997), 40-47.

² Ravil Gainutdin, *Islam v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Fair-Press Grand, 2004), 50.

the official media, including electronic ones, an enduring stereotype prevails in the dialog, being successful as well as being an integral factor of Russian religious and socio-political life. Officially, it is difficult to dispute such an opinion. It is confirmed by numerous statements in favor of such an opinion and by participation of representatives of both religions in peace-making efforts, holding an abundance of conferences, seminars and others meetings, the names of which contain an iteration of such words as “dialogue” or “cooperation.”

One of the aspects of such a dialog is mutual understanding and mutual tolerance of Muslims and representatives of other religions, especially the Orthodox ones. The overwhelming quantity of the latter, as well as the historic tradition, inevitably forms the solid idea among Orthodox believers that Russia is an Orthodox state. Such an opinion often insults Muslims residing in Russia, which is a country that has declared itself a secular state where freedom of belief is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation. Islam, despite its deep roots in the country, is the religion of the minority in Russia. Thus, it defines the place of a Muslim in the confessional and the ethno-political landscape of modern Russian society as marginal.

The rapid growth of the number of Muslims, however, will promote an increase of influence of the Islamic factor in Russia. Taking into account this fact, one can assume that Muslim influence on the social, political, and national development of the country will be gaining strength.

Despite the fact that Muslim adherents in the country are much more numerous than those fully devoted to Islam, everybody gets involved in the political aspect of life since, as a rule, even a non-believing Muslim is concerned about the issues of religious

equality of rights and national originality, of national self-determination and culture. For both Muslims and members of other confessions, religion is part of the national culture and part of national and family traditions that are getting increasingly harder to keep in a society impacted by the universal processes of globalization and integration. Geydar Jemal emphasizes that “since 1917 Russia has become a necessary factor in the political life of Ummah as a source of its stability.”³

Some Russian researchers forecast further rapid growth of the followers of Islam. For example, Yurii Kobischanov expects an increase in the number of Muslims in Russia to 65 million people in the near future, which will be almost comparable to the number of ethnic Russians.⁴ The question arises as to whether Russia will be a Muslim country in fifty to one hundred years if the number of Muslims in the country continues to increase in the same way. Sergey Melkov, Advisor to the Chairman of the Russian Council of Muftis, wrote that 50% of the population of the Russian Federation will be Muslims in fifty years and it will be virtually a Muslim country.⁵

Feller, another researcher of this issue, gave an unusual forecast to the immediate future of relations between Islam, Christianity, and the Russian state:

As early as the first half of the twenty-first century, the Russian elite will have to move closer together and give the place at the sources of authority to the Islamic and Turkic elites of the Russian Federation. The Russian Church will have to not

³ Geydar Jemal, *Osvobozhdenie Islama* [Liberation of Islam] (Moscow: Umma, 2004), 199.

⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], April 9, 1996.

⁵ Sergey Melkov, “Vliyanie Vneshnego Islamskogo Faktora na Rossii” [The Influence of External Islamic Factors on Russia. www.orient.libfl.ru/archive/islam/melkov.html (accessed August 1, 2011).

only abandon pretenses to full spiritual authority in major Russian cities but also recognize the full equality of Islamic institutions with the Orthodox ones.⁶

According to his forecasts, the country's elite will gradually become Slavic-Turkic-Jewish. In the first half-century, the Muslim population will grow, and the major factor in this case will be migration flows in the thirties and forties of the twenty-first century. This growth will contribute to their winning key positions in political and economic systems of the Russian Federation.⁷ Sergey Gradirovsky noted that although the life expectancy of the Turks and Slavs is approximately the same, it will differ to the disadvantage of the latter due to more rapid extinction of the Russian village.⁸ But these are only theories and assumptions based on the birth rate and data of the migration flows.

Objectively, dispersal movements (or migration processes) from Central Asia and the Caucasus are of great importance for the demography of Russia because if one examines the migration dynamics, it is evident that the Russian-speaking population was dominant in the first half of the 90s, and its share declined in the second half of the 90s. In the current decade, the main migration flows are not composed of the Russian and Orthodox population but rather the Islamic population. Thus, the number of Muslims in Russia will inevitably increase due to various demographic and migration processes.

Russia experiences difficulties. Almost annually a decline in indices that influence the mobilization potential of the state can be observed, such as the population

⁶ V. Feller, "Mir 2030 i Rossiia: Nove Nauchno-poeticheskoe pogruzhenie" [The world in 2030 and Russia 2010: A new scientific and poetic immersion]. <http://www.fact.ru/www/arhiv8s91.htm> no. 8 (accessed August 2, 2011).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Sergey Ggradirovsky, "'Russkii Islam' kak Yavlenie i kak Predmet Issledovaniya'" ["Russian Islam" as a phenomenon and as a research subject] www.religare.ru/print4454.htm (accessed May 11, 2011).

of those under able-bodied age and the number of newly-born. As for the number of the deceased during the Soviet period, the following situation illustrates a notable shift: in 1970 this index was 8.7 per 1000 people. In 1994 and at present it is approximately 13.8. The population in Russia is steadily decreasing: in 1992 the natural population loss was 1.5 per 1000 people, and in 1997 it was 5.2.⁹ This is especially true for people of Slavonic nationality.

Nonetheless, researchers should not attach too much importance to disturbing forecasts concerning the transformation of Russian society. The total Russian population, together with migrants, is about 145.5 million people. Russia ranks seventh in the world in terms of its population size, after China, India, the U.S., Indonesia, Brazil, and Pakistan. Russia is one of the most multi-national states in the world, and this country should not have any problems with Islam.

Today in Europe every country has on average 9.5 nationalities, while in Russia there are about 160. Most citizens of Russia consider themselves to be Russians (116 million people, or 80%). Next come Tatars (5,560,000 people). Among those peoples whose numbers are more than one million are Ukrainians (2,940,000), Bashkirs (1,670,000), Chuvash, Chechen, and Armenian peoples. The number of people of the other 23 nationalities is more than 400,000.¹⁰

As of 2010, labor migrants from 119 countries of the world were registered in Russia. Russia is turning into an attractive country from the point of view of migration.

⁹ *Russkii Statisticheskii Ezhegodnik* [Russian Statistical Yearbook] (Moscow: Nauka, 2000), 97.

¹⁰ A. Shelexov, *Islamskii Faktor dlya Rossii* [Islamic Factor for Russia] www.religare.ru/print7400.htm 11.18.2003 (accessed May 15, 2011).

In thirteen years, about 11 million migrants have come to Russia and about 6 million people have left.¹¹ Thus, Russia ranks third in terms of the number of migrants, after the U.S. and Germany. Due to this migration, the number of Azerbaijani and Tajik people has increased and a natural growth of adherents of Islam is taking place.

The increased weight of the Islamic factor is observed in almost all fields of the social and political development of Russia. What really matters in this process is the fact that Russian Islam is a peaceful Islam that has never set any strongly expressed political goals. The traditional, peaceful Islam in Russia has been mainly represented by two schools (or, *madhabs*): the Hanafi School¹² and the Shafi'i School.¹³ These are the most peaceful of the four law schools in Islam. This explains the fact that Islam in Russia has distinguished itself in terms of its ideological and political tolerance toward other confessions and its proactive adaptability to various social, economic, and political systems. These madhab adherents have not demanded the creation of an Islamic state, have not considered Islamic governments to be mandatory, and have not urged the overthrow of the non-Muslim government or aggravated the religious situation in the

¹¹ "Skolko Migrantov v Rossii," [How Many Migrants in Russia?] <http://svpressa.ru/society/article/22937/> (accessed August 8, 2011).

¹² Within the Sunni Muslim tradition, Hanafi is one of four "schools of law" and considered the oldest and most liberal school of law. Hanafi is one of the four schools of thought (*madhabs*/*Maddhab*) of religious jurisprudence (*fiqh*) within Sunni Islam. Named for its founder, the Hanafi school of Imam Abu Hanifa, it is the major school of Iraqi Sunni Arabs. It makes considerable use of reason or opinion in legal decisions. Broad-minded without being lax, this school appeals to reason (personal judgment) and a quest for the better. It is generally tolerant and the largest movement within Islam. The Hanafi school is known for its liberal religious orientation that elevates belief over practice and is tolerant of differences within Muslim communities. This explains the fact that the Hanafi Islam was willingly accepted by the Caucasian mountaineers, the Turkic and other peoples of Eurasia, who cherish their patriarchal traditions.

¹³ The Shafi'i school is considered the easiest school and the Hanbali is considered the hardest in terms of social and personal rules. Hanafi took Shafi as his rival and vice versa. Tradition, the consensus of the Muslim community and reasoning by analogy are characteristics of this school.

country. Russian Islam is characterized by a low degree of politicization, tolerance of adherents of different faiths, and its recognition of secular law as an independent legal source, which has allowed Russian Muslims to live peacefully and to collaborate with adherents of different faiths. For example, in Tatarstan the influential state power is reformed Islam called Jadidism, combining Muslim values and ideas of liberalism.

As a result of this centuries-old coexistence, interaction and interpenetration of the Orthodox and Muslim cultures, the Muslims of Russia have integrated into the Russian society quite profoundly and organically, becoming part and parcel of its historical development. That is why disregarding and even underestimating this fact is dangerous for the country in terms of politics, first of all. According to Nikolay Fedorov, the former President of Chuvashia,

The historical fact that Islam is not imposed on Russia from without, that it is not a phenomenon that is alien to it, but part of its fate, must become an absolute imperative for those who would wish Russia peace and prosperity. To be opposed to Islam, and moreover, to struggle against it in Russia means to oppose its own peoples.¹⁴

That is why it is necessary to make every effort for the cultural and social contact to be developed as a dialogue, not as enmity.

As for Muslims, their attitude toward Russia has never been definite. Some of them agree that coexisting in the same state has turned out to be fruitful. Others insist on Islam being alien to the Russian tradition and consider a separate existence to be optimal, which in reality can only be realized as a result of Muslims leaving (or being separated

¹⁴ F. Muhametshin, *Islam v Sovremennom Rossiiskom Obchestve* [Islam in Contemporary Russian Society] (Moscow: Logos, 2002), 33.

from) the Russian Federation.¹⁵ For several years, certain Islamic leaders in the North Caucasus have been adhering to this radical position. Thus, Islam, especially recently, has acquired a significant role as a factor in the political life of Russian society. In this process there are several aspects.

First, there is the creation of political organizations, such as Islamic organizations that make strictly religious claims that provide every Muslim with conditions to follow the Muslim way of life. Second, Muslim clergy, who are taking part in the political life of the country, are becoming involved in politics by expressing their opinions or reactions regarding certain events. Their proximity to power leads to more effective ways of influencing it. Third, secular politicians and those who are adherents to Islam or who belong to Muslim ethno-groups, turn to Islam. Drawing the electorate's sympathy through the religious factor plays a significant part here.

Islam has always been and, to a great extent, will always be a factor of the ethnic self-identification of Muslims as a means of their self-preservation. A particular growth of religiousness can be observed among Tatars and Bashkirs. According to the Kazan sociologist Musina, who has researched Tatars as the biggest Muslim ethno-group from the 1960s to the 1980s, the majority of Tatars consider themselves to be indifferent to religion. Even in villages 47% of those interviewed categorized themselves as such in 1967. In 1980, 59% made such a categorization. In 1980, only 15.7% of the interviewed rural Tatars considered themselves to be believers. By the end of the 80s, the situation started changing dramatically, and in 1994, 66% considered themselves believers. In

¹⁵ Malashenko, *Islamskoe Vozrozhdenie v Sovremennoi Rossii*, 7-8.

rural areas, this index was 86%.¹⁶ According to the researcher's data, development of the religious consciousness is observed in all Tatar social groups, including young people.

The increasing social activity of Russian Muslims manifests itself in the restoration and creation of mosques as the material basis of the process of dissemination of Islam. The Muslim world of present-day Russia is a socio-cultural, moral, ethno-psychological, and political reality. Before the revolution, there were about 12,000 mosques in the territory of the Russian Federation. During the period of mass religious persecutions in the 1920s and 1930s, most of them were closed, and by 1937 there were only about 100 registered mosques.¹⁷ From 1991 to 2000, their number greatly increased. In 2000 there were more than 7,000 functioning mosques.

It should be mentioned that the state Duma adopted the third edition of amendments for a number of legislative acts, which provides a gratuitous assignation of land for unlimited usage by religious organizations. The law suggests giving land to religious organizations for unlimited use and not as their property in the hope that "it will prevent abusing the law, as land is assigned for usage until the end of the existence of a religious organization itself."¹⁸ In connection with this, many Muslims expressed hope that laws will help to settle numerous arguments about returning mosques to Muslims. As was mentioned on the Islam Internet site www.islam.ru, the law guarantees the

¹⁶ R. Musina, *Islam i Musulmane v Sovremennom Tatarstane* [Islam and Muslims in Modern Tatarstan] (Kazan, 1997), 212.

¹⁷ N. Ivanenko and A. Shegorcov, *Islam v Rossii* [Islam in Russia]. www.russia-today.ru/2001/no_10/10_dossier.htm (accessed June 1, 2011).

¹⁸ "V Rossii Prinyat Zakon o Vakfax" [Russia Enacted the law on Waqf]. <http://new.islamnews.ru/news-246.html> (accessed June 7, 2011).

possibility of implementing the Islam's principle of *waqf* (inalienable property for religious purposes) to the land where mosques are located.¹⁹

Most mosques can be found in the Northern Caucasus. In Dagestan there are about 2,000; in the Tatarstan, about 1,000; and in Bashkortostan, about 600.²⁰ Mosques are becoming spiritual centers for the Muslim population and strong points in the process of the mass dissemination of Islam through the creation of social organizations for youth and women, focused on growth in spirituality, education, and charity.

Muslim organizations operate in an environment considered friendly by the authorities, because they are self-organized and able to consistently defend and lobby for their interests. There are representatives of Muslim nationalities in all the levels of state authority, and the influence exerted by them on the political processes is significant. Religious organizations perform their religious and social duties freely both among believers (and in the society in general). A good example is celebrating of Muslim holidays: *Uraza-bairam (Id-al-Fitra)*, which is a holiday after the end of a month-long fast, and *Kurban-bairam (Id-al-Adha)*, a holiday of sacrifice. It has already become a tradition that Muslims are congratulated on their holidays by the head of the state. There are also congratulations from other higher officials of the state. Solemn public worship in the main mosques of Moscow and Ufa are regularly broadcast by Russian national television channels. In some republics (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chechnya, Dagestan,

¹⁹ "Musul'manskoe Pravo Sobstvennosti," http://pda.islamrf.ru/news/analytics/islamic_finance/15128/ (accessed March 23, 2011).

²⁰ S. Gradirovskii, "Russkii Islam," [Russian Islam], *Expert* (2003): 54.

Ingushetia), where the indigenous population is traditionally adherent to Islam, Muslim holidays are celebrated as official holidays.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the impact of Islam in Russia has become a stable factor that influences the social and political development of the country. The Islamic factor has a strong impact on the stratification of the modern Russian society. It should be remembered that religion is not only an ideology but also a considerable social power. If, in pre-revolutionary Russia, Muslims belonged to the stratum of treasurers of *artels*,²¹ in modern Russia Muslims realize in full their business acumen. Researchers should consider retail trade in markets where those who come from southern republics hold the major share. The above-mentioned fact is explained by the presence among the Russian population of a predominant stereotype that trade is reprehensible, whereas in the Muslim world, trade is one of the most honorable jobs. Mufti Ravil Gainutdin points out that the Qur'an can positively influence economic and social activity because it preaches sobriety as a principle of behavior, both in economy and in morals.²² Calling Muslims to take an active position in life, the Qur'an, will be able to facilitate successfully overcoming hardships of the transitional period to market relationships.²³

Today, contradictory global processes lead to obliterating national differences in many fields, including cultural and religious ones. They are accompanied by the creation of unified religious demands and renunciation of centuries-old conceptions.

Globalization has involved, and is going to involve, even more regarding all the Muslim

²¹ *Artel* is a general term for various cooperative associations in Russia, historical and modern.

²² Ravil Gainutdin, *Islam v Sovremennoi Rossii* [Islam in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Fair-Press Grand, 2004), 198.

²³ *Ibid.*, 199.

countries and the Muslims themselves. This stirs up protests among them and helps to create a large number of organizations that struggle against the advancement of globalization and Western influences on Muslims. According to Ravil Gainutdin, the present process is going to greatly affect Muslims of Russia as well.²⁴

While characterizing Islam as an independent factor of the social and political life of Russia, it cannot be considered without other factors, including specific local features. For many Russian ethnic groups, gravitation toward Islam is historically inherent. Muslims have their own national and territorial entities, whose representatives are members of the Federation Council. In many cases, for representatives of these ethnic groups, adherence to Islam seems to be the only opportunity to preserve their national identity and to avoid assimilation. Malashenko posits that Tatars and Bashkirs, who lived in the Christian environment, owe the preservation of their ethno-cultural identity to none other than Islam, which in the Soviet period was on the verge of vanishing.²⁵

The processes of revival in different confessions take place differently and at a different pace. As a result, some of them win, enlarging their control and influence in various areas, and others lose. This situation provokes conflict, causing sharp political arguments about the revival of confessional communities.

At present, Islamic revival movements in Russia are not accompanied by an artificial tension between Islam and the secular power. There are no obvious, serious, interfaith conflicts over the participation of Muslims, with the exception of a few republics of the North Caucasus, including Chechnya. Most Muslim religious leaders do

²⁴ Ibid., 163.

²⁵ Malashenko, *Islam i Politika v Sovremennoy Rossii*, 9.

not support extremist antics labeled under Islamist slogans. The Hanafi school (with the exception of those in the North-Eastern Caucasus) comes from a traditionally moderate orientation. This factor, to a certain extent, deters the politicization of Islam.

Since the 1990s in Russia, quite a number of Islamic organizations and movements have emerged. The first, the Islam Party of Revival, was created in June 1990. It could not become an influential organization, however, even though it was able to give an impetus to the politicization of Islam in the USSR and, in the post-Soviet era, to all Muslim territories. Today, the majority of Muslim parties and movements do not provide any programs which advocate for the creating an Islamic state. They are ready to realize their tasks of religious, social, and cultural revival of Muslims within the framework of the secular state, which was established in the Russian Federation and, on a more global scale, all over the CIS.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the creation of six more secular Muslim states such as in Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Azerbydzhan. There have been attempts to create Muslim states in Chechnya, Dagestan, Tatarstan, and Karachayevo-Cherkesiya. In view of these processes, faces of political Islam (Islamism) have attempted to play a key role as a way of fighting for power with methods that sometimes contradict the spirit of Islam but are nonetheless under its protection. According to Abdulatipov, interference of religion in political affairs, as well as the politicization of Islam itself, greatly distorts its basic principles.²⁶

²⁶ Abdulatipov, *Sydyby Islama v Rossii*, 57.

The politicization of Islam is accompanied by its active usage as an instrument in politics with the help of secular powers. However, some researchers, such as Leonid Sukiyaiynen, think that there are more reasons to speak not just about the politicization of Islam, but about the Islamization of politics and about the usage of Islam as a tool to reach political goals.²⁷ Recently, Muslim intellectuals have been trying to use this instrument more actively. Sunni Islam followers and spiritual leaders have taken an active part in the political life of the country using religious argumentation, appealing to believers' feelings, aiming at civil mobilization of people, and raising the religious banner of Islam to fight for power for "national interests" and to implement their political goals. Some Islamic organizations have tried to cooperate with authorities. Others, being in opposition, act from national and religious positions. This phenomenon might not be so disconcerting if not for the lack of control under the conditions of the weak state.

Today in Russia, there are hardly any visible religio-political movements, especially those capable of obtaining power. Muslim politicians, who are actively interacting with the authorities, are not yet united. Currently, there is no unified Russian Muslim community. There is a Russian Muslim network, with its religious, ethnic, and political interests, and there are attempts to unite on the religious level as well as on the religious-political level. In Russia, however, there is neither a single Islamic center, nor a single political movement, and, most probably, (according to Malashenko), there will never be.²⁸

²⁷ Leonid Sukiyaiynen, *Shariat, Adat i Rossiiskoe Zakonodatelstvo* [Sharia, Adat and Russian legislation] (Moscow: Nauka, 2002), 55.

²⁸ Aleksey Malashenko, "Chto Znachet Islam dlya Rossii" [What Islam means for Russia] www.religare.ru/print4565.htm (accessed May 22, 2011).

The religious factor includes ideas and principles that are the basis of various political programs. Some people point out the specific role of the religious factor in the process of election campaigns. Others speak of its insignificant influence on the results of voting, but it is clear that those groups openly claiming their confessional adherence, both Orthodox and Muslim, are experiencing failure so far. The factor of religious adherence is not of primary importance because unresolved economic issues push it into the background. That is why the use of the confessional factor to reach political goals by the present-day elite exists, but it is not yet a determining factor.

As for Islamist parties, their failure is mostly connected to the fact that today in Russia, there are stereotyped views of the role of Islam. Islamophobia is growing because terrorist acts happen to be perceived incorrectly. Quite often, it is Islam (and the adherents) that are viewed as the main reason for extremism and terrorism. The so-called conservative nature of the teachings of Islam and its ability to develop and evolve in new social, economic, political, and cultural conditions is emphasized and sometimes called into question. Activities of some Islamic political organizations occur against a background of conflict in the North Caucasus, where Islamists have tried to give their fight religious grounds and use the slogan of the Islamic Jihad.

Often, the radicalization of Islam takes place against the background of displeasure with Muslim officials, who are corrupt and distant from solving the problems of ordinary citizens, with their inactivity and inability to cope with economic hardships. Ultimately, all of the above determines the fact that some Muslims' social protests and the desire to protect their ethnic interests and to improve their political status, can acquire

religious overtones. It is particularly obvious in the Northern Caucasus.²⁹ This environment of the displeased is easy prey for radical ideas and for recruiting people into extremist groups. It should be mentioned that the political Islam that is predominant in the Northern Caucasus is being politicized so much that sometimes, there is nothing left but phraseology. There, we can observe an increase of fanaticism and religious intolerance. In a view of Ramazan Abdulatipov's earlier assertions, radicals want to transform the monotheistic outlook into a totalitarian, pseudo-theocratic world order. In fact, it is religious officials who are actually in power.³⁰

Despite statements of Muftis Talgat Tadzhuiddin and Ravil Gainutdin (and other representatives of the Russian Islam) about the non-interference of Islam in politics, they cannot separate themselves from the political process. It is becoming easier for them to carry out their activities, because Islam, is a way of life in general, where there is a fusion of ecclesiastical and secular, urges itself to be implemented into politics and to closely interact with it.

The Spiritual Boards of Muslims (DUMs) today are the ecclesiastical people who are trying to use mass media to disseminate their opinions concerning specific political issues, including military politics, especially in connection with the events in Chechnya, relationships with Muslim states, and the situation there and in Islam-oriented regions. Besides, theoretical issues of Islam are also becoming the focus of attention (including *Jihad*). Muslim spiritual leaders take part in scientific seminars; conferences dedicated to the relationship between the state and religion; problems of national and international

²⁹ For more on this, see: Malashenko, *Islam i Politika v Sovremennoi Rossii*, 12-13.

³⁰ Abdulatipov, *Sudby Islama v Rossii*, 62.

safety; and international relationships and globalization. Despite all of this, at present, the Russian society is worried about the dissemination of the ideas attributed to extremist, or oppositional Islam. Ravil Gainutdin explains this by asserting that Islamic theology in Russia cannot yet undertake such a responsibility in modern conditions. It cannot cope with problems that are created by our time.³¹ This can partly explain both the appearance in Islam of undesirable, negative phenomena that contradict the true interests of not only believers, but also of the whole society. Among them is the emergence of extremist and Wahhabist attitudes among certain groups of Muslims in Central Russia.

Mass media has largely contributes to the escalation of the situation and creates a negative image of Russian Islam. They often present a one-sided view in the news, when they speak about terrorists, and Muslims and Islam in general. Lately the number of newspapers and magazines dealing with a range of religious problems has grown considerably. From time to time, in the Russian mass media, articles and programs appear that insult Muslims' feelings. The influence of mass media is huge, especially on the outlook of the youth. Among the growing generation of 16 to 20 year-olds, religious intolerance is much higher than among the representatives of older generations.³²

Recently, a situation characterized by social pressure and economic instability has developed. It is accompanied by escalation of interfaith contradictions and the growth of religious intolerance. According to the leader of the Moscow Helsinki group, Ludmila

³¹ Gainutdin, *Islam v Sovremennoi Rossii*, 167.

³² For more, see Alexander Verkhovsy, "Who is the Enemy Now? Islamophobia and Antisemitism among Russian Orthodox Nationalists before and after September 11," *Patterns of Prejudice* 38, no. 2 (2004) : 127-143; Alexander Verkhovsy, "Muslims, Society and Authorities in Contemporary Russia," in *Will Russia Become a Muslim Society?*, ed. Hans-Georg Heinrich, Ludmila Lobova, and Alexey Malashenko (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 121-150.

Alekseeva, there is a purposefully created bias in the Russian society toward Muslims. She points out that in connection with terrorist attacks, the opinion is that Islam is a hostile, aggressive religion that has been created and supported by both the press and the authorities.³³

Russian Islam is a confessional-cultural tradition that is perceived differently by non adherents. The attitude toward Muslims used to be more tolerant than the attitude toward Islam in general. In recent decades, there has been a shift of focus in the opposite direction. Islam is perceived more peacefully as a world religion that brings its believers ethical and moral values: Muslims are often viewed cautiously. Social tension in the country (and Islamophobia) that grows with every new act of terror which results in people paying nervous attention to Islam. Russians frequently associate a Muslim with a certain ethnic group that traditionally follows Islam, as well as with Caucasians, which sometimes causes extreme forms of fear negativity. New signs of Islamophobia in Russia have been confirmed by sociological studies conducted by the Foundation “Public Opinion” on June 19, 2003.

Muslims are sometimes depicted as the enemy of Russia. Stereotypes are especially dangerous in the environment of modern Russia when the dialogue between religions, worldviews, and various cultures; is a prerequisite for strengthening social stability. Prejudices are quite dangerous for the progress of the civilization on the whole. Already, there have been theorists such as Samuel Huntington who have appeared in the West and have spoken about a coming clash of civilizations based on cultural and

³³ “Well-known Human Rights activists alarmed by the rise of Islamophobia in Russia.” www.islamnews.ru (accessed May 19, 2011).

religious factors, including Islamist ones. According to the Mufti Ravil Gainutdin, the reality is just the opposite:

The human values of the Muslim universalism, such as charity and nobleness, responsibility and moderateness, humbleness and tolerance, ability to observe prohibitions and make good things, as well as justice, can play an important role in the survival of humankind and help it to meet the challenge of global problems.³⁴

The desire of Muslims to expand their influence to more social groups, which is (characteristic of all world religions), is another serious conflict-provoking factor. This often causes rivalries among confessions that often turn into confrontations among their followers. Because the religious passion has powerful potential for mobilization, politicians strive to use that potential for their own interests, which results in further aggravation of interfaith contradictions. For example, providing Orthodox Churches with more privileges compared to other religious entities, on the one hand, makes ethnic and confessional minorities extremely frustrated. On the other hand, it contributes to forming public opinion that supports making Russia an Orthodox state.

Confession-based discrepancies have a negative influence upon the larger goals of national and state consolidation. This is also emphasized by the fact that since bringing its troops to Afghanistan in 1979, the USSR and later Russia has been continuously taking direct and indirect part in seemingly anti-Muslim conflicts. All these conflicts result in an adverse effect on mutual understanding between the Islamic and Orthodox believers. Islamophobic attitudes are especially widespread throughout the Russian society, which contributes to the growth of tensions not only in the areas where the Slavic

³⁴ Gainutdin, *Islam v Sovremennoi Rossii*, 166.

and the Muslim population are in direct contact, as in the South of Russia, for example, but also in other regions where the number of migrants from the Caucasus is growing.

Despite the fact that in modern Russia, Muslims are hard to recognize by their clothes, language, and behavior, because of the cautious attitude toward Muslims in Russia, some of them started to wear clothes with features that indicate their Islamic confession. It is a sign of solidarity with the whole diaspora, with other Islamic adherents, as well as a protest against the discrimination of Islamic adherents. Non-Muslims, scared by terrorist attacks, and provoked further by mass media, subconsciously associate a person in Muslim clothes with danger. The fear is quite clear. Terrorists in Muslim clothes are shown on TV screens, referring to Allah in their speeches, as well as a constant warning (a necessary one, of course) to watch for suspicious persons, all of which contributes to the growth of Islamophobia. That is why the terrible terrorist attacks, which have deprived many hundreds of their lives, are associated directly with those who are often adherents of Islam.³⁵

In Moscow, after the tragic incident in Beslan, the vivid signs of anger with the Muslims appeared.³⁶ Some Russians started insulting Muslims openly and accusing them of supporting terrorists. Even women who look Slavic are insulted and accused if they

³⁵ Alexander Verkhovsy, "Muslims, Society and Authorities in Contemporary Russia," in *Will Russia Become a Muslim Society?*, ed. Hans-Georg Heinrich, Ludmila Lobova, and Alexey Malashenko (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 127-132.

³⁶ The city of Beslan school hostage crisis of early September 2004 was a three-day hostage taking of over 1,100 people that ended in more than 380 deaths.

have their heads covered with hijabs.³⁷ The old ignorance setting people against each other according to religious or other signs is manifested.

Russian researchers Georgy Engelgart and Aleksey Krymin, think that from the European point of view, there are no persecutions of Muslims in the Russian Federation: believers are not prevented from worshipping and they are not made to give up their beliefs.³⁸ In Russia, they argue, Islam is among the traditional religions, which puts it beyond the formal and non-formal limits that are characteristic non-traditional religious movements. Islamophobia in the Russian society, according to most Russian scholars, has no real grounds. As for xenophobia, Russian scholars are positive that xenophobic attitudes are found in any country that experiences an influx of (internal and external) migrants.³⁹ According to Georgy Engelgart and Aleksey Krymin, it is people of different origins, (and not confessions), that xenophobia is directed against.⁴⁰ In Russia the majority of migrants are adherent to Islam. The religious factor is closely connected with the ethnic factor, and therefore, with the national question, but the generalization that a Russian is an Orthodox and a Tatar is a Muslim should never be made. For religions of the world, people are not divided according to ethno-national features, and this should be actively affirmed in Russian society.

³⁷ G. Kozhevnikova, "Radikalny Nacionalizm v Rossii: Proyavleniya i Protivodestviya" [Radical Nationalism in Russia: Manifestations and Responses] http://www.library.cjes.ru/online/?a=con&b_id=677 (accessed May 23, 2011).

³⁸ Aleksey Krymin and Georgy Engelgart, "Islamophobia," *Otechestvennye Zapiski* [Domestic Notes] no. 5 (2003): 76.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

“Oh, Muslims are just like Russians, And Islam could have been Russian!”⁴¹

Ethnic balance is changing in Russia in parallel with the revival of Islam. In a number of national republics, the homogenization of the title population is going on actively. That is, the quantity of Tatars in Tatarstan or Chuvashes in Chuvashia is increasing steadily. This process will go on in the future, and thus, ethnic areas of the region will further form enclaves, which can cause them to pose demands for privileges for each specific ethnic group, ungrounded from the point of view of the State, as well as for their reinforcement by legislature.

Cultural autonomy basically presupposes the growth of responsibility of ethnic groups for their future. Under these conditions, there is a massive return to religion, especially among those ethnic groups whose representatives have traditionally been adherents of Islam. This return to historic cultural roots enhances, to a great extent, growth of the local patriotism in regions; the development of a feeling of pride about one's land, people, religion; and an intensified interest in their history.

One more problem connected with the Islamic factor lies in the legal sphere. The issue of correlation between Islamic law, *shariah*, and European law is a serious point of concern among Muslims. Some constituents of the Russian Federation has tried to introduce elements of Islamic law within their territories. Such activities break the unity of a legal framework in the state as a whole and is unacceptable. However, the position of local authorities can also be appreciated. What can they do, if the active legislation

⁴¹ Velimir Khlebnikov, *Xadzhi-Tarxan* [Hajji Tarkhan]
<http://www.rvb.ru/hlebnikov/tekst/02poemy/204.htm> (accessed September 23, 2011).

does not correspond with the Islamic religious tradition and local customs, for example, of criminal prosecution for polygamy?

There are many dangers in the blind imitation of old traditions. A case in point would be claims that the democratic criminal legislation and legal proceedings appear ineffective in the struggle against crime, while Muslim legal tradition, with its abundance of physical punishments, which also authorizes the death penalty in many instances, is not always objective. Similar measures might be effective only for a traditional Middle Age subsistence economy, but by no means for post-industrial and informational societies.

According to Leonid Sukiyaev, (an expert on *sharia* and legislation), the issue of Islamic law and local legal traditions “is impossible to ignore, but should not be encouraged blindly either.”⁴² Indeed, Federal authority can delegate finding resolutions for a number of legal problems (first of all, criminal and correctional) to local entities by provision of a special law. As for rules of Muslim law, they should be adopted with extreme caution. For example, in the Caucasus Mountains, along with polygamy, the tradition of forcing women into marriage persists. It concerns not only the ritual of bridal kidnapping (that, in the absence of voluntary consent of a “bride,” automatically falls within the Criminal Code articles on kidnapping and rape), but also pressure that the clan puts upon a man, whether forcing a bride upon him, or forcing him to divorce a spouse of a different religion or nationality. In the opinion of Sukiyaev, in this situation, “for Russia with its numerous Muslim populations, it is probably necessary to codify an

⁴² Leonid Sukiyaev, *Musulmansko Pravovaya Kultura i Rossiiskoe Zakonodatelstvo* [Muslim Legal Culture and the Russian Legislation] (Moscow: Nauka, 1998), 57.

‘upgraded version’ of Muslim law that, under reasonable restrictions, should be taken into account when drawing up local and federal laws.’⁴³

In the principal provisions of the Russian Muslims’ social program, it is noted that the possibility to introduce individual elements of Islamic law in Russian legislation has not been initiated by Muslim organizations themselves and can be solved only in the course of lawmaking within the framework of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (and in the spirit of social consensus).⁴⁴

All Russian citizens, regardless of their religions or national identity, must observe the Law of the Russian Federation. In a secular state, the legal system can accept only elements of Islamic life that fit into it—that is, those laws which are not directly connected with religion. A dialogue with Islam, especially if such a dialogue is considered to be a starting point of strategic cooperation, should be started not in the legal context, but in the cultural one.

The influence of Islamic factors on the social and political environment in Russia can be described as rather complicated and fraught with unexpected aggravations. Politics and religion are an interconnected social phenomena. Ministers of religious organizations take part in politics; the church or mosque often helps to settle political and social conflicts. Politicians have to take into account the condition of the religiousness of a given society; and the attitude of various strata of society toward various religions.

⁴³ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁴ Konstantin Kanevskii, “Osnovnye Polozheniya Socialnoi Programmi Rossiiskix Musulman: Islam i Svetskoe Gosudarstvo. [The Main Provisions of the Social Program of Russian Muslims: Islam and the Secular State] <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2003/12/d1474/> (accessed June 7, 2011).

Therefore, it is possible to speak both of politics becoming religious and of religion becoming politicized.

The following are the main reasons why the “Islamic factor” is becoming more important within Russia:

1. Availability in the country of a multi-million Muslim community.
2. Muslims’ awareness of their specific interests.
3. Conflicts taking place in Muslim regions and in the Islamic-Christian border areas.
4. Influence of foreign countries.

The following main areas of religious and political interaction can be highlighted, which arise in Russia today:

1. Religion as a certain ideological system has great influence on the minds of its followers, largely determining their social behavior and political action. Thus, sociologists have recently noted the highest level of political tolerance in individuals who subscribe to an atheistic worldview. In 2002, the proportion of the tolerant among atheists was 40.7%, and it was 17.9% among the faithful.⁴⁵
2. An indicator of a certain influence of the faithful on the state’s policy is an expression of discontent with regard to an unlimited spread of freedom of speech, although this is not true of one’s own religion, and requirements of the authorities to tighten control over the spread of other religions. This is largely due to ideological adherence and an uncompromising stand of the faithful

⁴⁵ Vladimir Veremchuk, *Sociologiya Religii* [Sociology of Religion] (Moscow, 2004), 82.

based on their commitments to a particular doctrine. This encourages the followers of one religion (or another) to actively lobby for their interests in government agencies.

3. Among the elements of the religious complex, which influence the policies, a special place belongs to the clergy itself. Despite the fact that most confession leaders are in favor of non-participation of religious organizations in political life and against intervention in parties' policies and state affairs, implicitly and sometimes explicitly, this influence is permanent. And the purposes they pursue are often politically motivated, thus turning them into political forces.
4. The interaction of religion and politics is carried out through politicians' use of religion as well. In this case, various means of influence are applied: the provision of various material privileges, administrative pressure on religious organizations, and appeal to common interests. Political and public officials tend to receive a blessing for their many socio-political undertakings. The authority of religion in military collisions is used (in Chechnya and Dagestan). Modern political opposition is also seeking to build the social and public authority of the church-mosque; enunciating the policy of collaborating in the socio-political field with the latter.
5. The religious factor is present in politics and in the case of citizens' appeal to religion, which is particularly indicated since the early 1990s due to distrust in the line pursued by authorities.

The growing influence of Islam on social and political life in Russia is becoming more prominent. This trend will continue in the near future. There is a steady tendency,

on one hand, to increase social and religious activity of the Islamic factor in socio-political areas of society, bringing order to interpersonal, family, and national relations. On the other hand, Islam is gradually politicized to the point where Islamic “awakening” is accompanied, in some instances, with restoration (or creation) of new Islamic political movements, sometimes with evident extremist traits.

In general, there is a high level of religious freedom in modern Russia. In the age of democracy, vast opportunities for the development of Islam exist. In parallel, attempts to transform Islam into a political ideology, or Islamism, are made. The religious factor is also used increasingly by Russian elite. The activation of some Muslim intellectuals’ aspirations to turn Islam into a visible political ideology stems from the fact that first, the state interfered with this in every possible way, and now it gives relative freedom to religious organizations while being engaged in the solution of other vital problems that are sometimes turned into connivance. Beliefs are chosen to confirm the actions of those who cannot be criticized. Clerics may interpret even extremism as too zealous an adherence to doctrinal theology. Appealing to Islam, the Muslim elite seeks to solve its immediate problems and also seeks to solve political problems.

Religious and ethnic elites seek positions in government in order to advance their own interests. Despite the fact that within recent years, elections in the State Duma have shown that the religious factor is not dominant in the preferences of citizens, its importance will grow. The more stable the situation becomes, the more attention individuals will pay to issues of a religious, ethnic, and ideological nature. Therefore, contemporary Russian elites will be more active in using the religious factor.

Islamophobic sentiments dexterously nurtured in the country, stirred up by some media in Russia (and throughout the world), deliberately make a threat of Islam, which has a clearly negative impact on relations within the society. The religious factor in the geopolitical space is suitable excuse for an outbreak of conflicts that will last for a long time and provide political instability in a particular region; contributing to weakening of ethno-religious communities involved. The State cannot step back from the problems of inter-confessional relations. First, it must ensure the social and political stability in the country, and must to eliminate dangerous social conflicts. Second, implementing constitutional principles of freedom of conscience and equality of religious associations before the law and the rights of believers depends upon the success of relations between confessions.

In this complicated situation, religious organizations of various denominations (and especially their leaders) should try to unite their efforts to decrease the heat of inter-confessional fervor for the sake of social consolidation. In this regard, the Hegumen Phillip (Zhigulin), the head of the Sector for International Connections of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, believes that a peaceful coexistence of people professing Orthodoxy and Islam depends on establishing cooperation between representatives of these two great religions.⁴⁶ Islam and Christianity and their representatives have much in common. As early as in the nineteenth century, Islam-bey Gasprinsky addressed the relations between Russians and

⁴⁶ Igumen Filipp, "Mir i Stabilnost v XXI Veke vo Mnogom Zaviset ot Uspexa Dialoga Xristian i Musuljman [Hegumen Philip: Peace and stability in the twenty-first century will largely depend on the success of the dialogue between Christians and Muslims]. <http://www.cerkov.by/page/igumen-filipp-mir-i-stabilnost-v-xxi-veke-vo-mnogom-budut-zaviset-ot-uspeha-dialoga-hristian-i-musulman> (accessed June 28, 2011).

Muslims and believed that no great obstacles to normalization of relations between

Muslims and other peoples of the Russian state existed. He wrote:

I am strongly convinced that only ignorance, misunderstanding and misconception deter Muslims from a close, active and sympathetic introduction to an all-Russian national life. Islamism itself is not a hindrance in this case. There is something stronger and older than it, which hinders and messes everything up—it's ignorance, the struggle against which is not yet properly organized, and the best Muslims and Russians must come together to struggle against it...⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Ismail Gasprinsky, *Russkoe Musulmanstvo – Mysli, Zametki i Publicacii* [Russian Islam: Thoughts, Notes, Observations] (Bakhchisaray, 1881). <http://www.intelros.ru/index.php?newsid=200>.

CHAPTER SIX

Islam in the Specific Circumstances of Ethno-Political Processes in the North Caucasus

Conditions and Factors of the Spread of Islamic Extremism in Russia and the North Caucasus

The Muslims of Russia are currently passing through an interesting stage of confessional development; called the “Muslim Rebirth” by some scholars and the “Muslim Renaissance” by others. As far as the degree of the politicizing process is concerned, there is currently no agreement of opinions—which, however, does not prevent the recognition of the fact that the religious consciousness of the Muslim peoples in the Russian Federation is increasing markedly.

Caused by the influence of Islamic revolution in Iran and the war in Afghanistan, this process got its “second wind” in the early 90s. The major contributors at that time were the socio-political changes taking place in the territory of the former USSR: democratization of society during perestroika; gradual weakening of the influence of communist ideology, followed by its collapse due to the stoppage of activities carried out by the party and state bodies existing at that time; legalization of Islamic religious institutions and the establishment of closer contacts with the Muslims from the Middle East, etc.

Currently, a number of Muslim charity, educational, and political organizations, (the subsidiaries of which are located all over Russia), are functioning in the post-Soviet territory: in the Urals, in the Volga region, in Stavropol territory and in the Asian part of the Russian Federation, and also in the Caucasus. These promote pan-Islamic ideas such

as uniting all the Muslims in the region and creating a single Islamic state. These federal-scale organizations include the *Islamic Committee* (IC), the *Union of Muslims of Russia* (UMR), the socio-political movement *The Muslims of Russia*, the *Islamic Rebirth Party*, and also a number of regional organizations such as the “Islamic Way” in Chechnya, for example. The Islamic Committee, an international Islamic political organization established as an Islamic ideological center in 1993 at the World Islamic Congress, carried out in Khartoum (Sudan), is particularly active.¹ In Russia, the *Islamic Committee* was officially registered in 1995. It unites ideologists and political and social figures from many countries. Famous Muslim public figures from Russia, France, Italy, Switzerland, Sudan and the Republic of South Africa take part in its work.

Opening the Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Moscow contributed to energizing the activities of Islamic organizations and centers mostly financed by the *World Islamic League* (WIL) (Saudi Arabia) in Russia and the countries of the CIS. Step by step, the Embassy started attracting different Saudi funds and organizations to work inside Russia. By the mid-90s in Moscow and other cities were the recipients of gifts from groups such as “Ibrahim Ben Ibrahim,” “Akhmed ad-Dagestani,” “Organization of Islamic Solidarity” of King Fahd Madrasah, and “Shamil Society” were opened. Their main goal was to establish the Saudi influence (and in broader terms, the Islamic one) in the Caucasus and throughout Russia.² To achieve this goal, the broadest spectrum of means was used, from the large-scale free distribution of the Qur’an (and other religious literature) to

¹ Kamaludin Gadzhiev, *Geopolitika Kavkaza* [Geopolitics of Caucasus] (Moscow, Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya, 2001), 257.

² Ramazan Jabarov, “Ekstremisty protiv Tradicionalistov,” [Extremists against Traditionalists], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 20, 1999, <http://www.ng.ru/ideas/1999-10-20/extremists.html>.

construction of Mosques and other Islamic cultural centers of different kinds. As Ramazan Jabarov remarked,

In 1992-1994, in the territory of Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkess, Bashkiria and Dagestan, Saudi organizations, through the structures created by them, started opening a network of underground half-military camps, supposedly to study the basics of the Muslim religion in them. But in fact, intensive ideological and military training of young people, “the future defenders of Islam,” was carried in the camps... Under the leadership of foreign missionaries and instructors, these camps turned into centers training the Islamic militants.³

In the territory of the north Caucasus attempts at synthesizing Islam and nationalism had largely political purposes. Jointly they became a kind of an ideological platform for the forces promoting far-reaching aims of squeezing Russia out of the Caucasian region. This has resulted in the formation of two conflicting groups, those who were committed to traditional interpretations of Islam and those committed to different variants of Islamism, most notably Wahhabism.⁴ “The growing influence on people is made by different sorts of radical Islamic organizations, such as “Brother Muslims,” “Jamaat-e-Islami,” “Islamic Youth,” and others having generous financial and other kinds of material support from Saudi, Pakistani, Lebanon and other organizations.”⁵

Analysis of affairs shows that the Islamic tradition in Russia was formed with the help of large socio-political changes taking place in the territory of the former USSR. Many scholars, however, came to the conclusion that the rebirth of religious beliefs was

³ Ibid.

⁴ Wahhabism (Salafism)- the religious-political movement in Sunni Islam preaching a return to the purity of early Islam since Muhammad, adherence to the principle of monotheism, the rejection of worship of saints and holy places, non-borrowing innovations; requires Muslims to eschew all manifestations of luxury in clothing, life, and worship.

⁵ Jabarov, “Ekstremisty protiv Tradicionalistov.”

an attributive one; with ethno-national, territorial, clan, and language-dependent socio-economical antagonisms between the peoples of the North Caucasus and the rest of Russia. One decisive influence upon the formation of the Islamic tradition was made by the Russian Muslims living far from the world *ummah*. These circumstances also became key to the penetration of radical teachings into Russian Islam.

The less knowledge Muslims have about the moral and ideological potential of Islam, the more chances that radical movements have at penetrating into Russian territory. The farther away the state is from building relationships between Muslim communities, the more likely it will be that Islamic organizations will be defenseless against the external forces of radical movements. The less centralized over Russia Islamic organizations is, the more exposed it's to the external influences. However, the Islamic values can make an important contribution to making the moral climate in a number of North Caucasian republics more militant resistant. Moderate Islam can become a defense against the influence and spread of radicalism.

Since the USSR's collapse, the population of the former Soviet republics has been in a situation of political and social uncertainty. The loss of the former values of social life resulted in the release of a huge amount of socio-psychological energy, which was utilized in the search for new political, social and intellectual reference points. At a given breaking point, these societies have become open for experimental; the search for alternatives for its development. At the end of the twentieth century, Islamic fundamentalism became one of such alternatives. Social and political uncertainty at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries describes the situation in the North Caucasus. The region has developed under conditions of economic, political

and ideological struggle for self-determination, and the intensiveness of this struggle has been determined by the clash of groups supporting different ideologies and having different religious commitments. The most vivid side of this process has become the prominence of Islamist extremism.

What are the key socio-political conditions that promoted the distribution of Islamist extremism ideas in the North Caucasus, (in particular in Dagestan and the Chechen republic). The most important condition sustaining its spread was the unclear policy of the Russian state in relation to Islam. In July 2001, at the Fourth All-Russia Workshop of the Leaders of Spiritual Governances for Muslims carried out in Moscow, Niyazov, the deputy of RF State Duma and the Chairman of the All-Russia socio-political movement “Refakh” remarked,

Spiritual governances for Muslims are not supported by the state because the state declared the principle of secularity and implements this principle. Unfortunately, the idea of separation of religious organizations and the State sounds somewhat ugly. For some reason it is represented in the context of segregation, isolationism of the state from religious organizations. This is fundamentally wrong, because the religious organizations consist of people, the very taxpayers who are the citizens of our country. It is wrong to comprehend the separation of religion from the state as the separation of believers or their isolation from the state.⁶

The lack of state attention to Islam resulted in the fact that (in a number of regions of Russia), Islam started actively influencing political power. In Chechnya, Islam tried to implement its own project: to determine the social development ideology, and to make the authorities act according to the Muslim rules for building a new society in which religious norms determined the policy and social development.

⁶ “Economicheskoe i Finansovoe upravlenie Musulmanskix Religioznyx Organizacii: Realii i Perspektivy,” [Economic and financial management of Muslim religious organizations: realities and perspectives] From the archives of the Spiritual Board of Muslims in Moscow (Moscow, 2001), 25.

The consequences of this crisis has been a certain vigilance in the relationships between the Russian State and Russia's multi-million Muslim communities. At the same time, the phenomenon of terrorist warnings in politicians' fear-intolerant speeches acquired the almost-mandatory epithet "Islamic." This raised a question about growth of Islamophobia in the country; Islam started to be considered as a major threat to the stability of Russian society.

The sociological research carried out in 2001-2002, "Russian Muslims: Who are They?"⁷ shows that on the whole, the Muslims of Russia are not very interested in politics. A part of the Russian Muslims, those with incomplete secondary and special secondary education, (aged 21-30 and married), are still guided by the Muslim organizations and their estimation of the power of authorities is rather low (with the estimation of the President remaining high). "The Russian Muslims wait for the improvement of the situation in the country most of all."⁸

To avoid intensive Islamization of the young generation of Russian Muslims it is necessary for the State to increase the efficiency of social policy related to Muslim populations. Then, it will be possible to rely on the growth of trust between citizens government authorities. In the North Caucasian region for example, it seems expedient to provide strict control over the missionary activity of foreign Muslims; to develop a basic program for studying the Muslim religion for local citizens; to carry out theological

⁷ G. Gazieva and C. Melkov, *Musul'manskaya Umma v Sovremennom Rossiiskom Obchestve* [The Muslim Ummah in contemporary Russian society] (Moscow, 2003), 21.

⁸ Ravil Gainutdin, *Vybory v Rossii i Vybory Musulman* [Elections in Russia and Muslims' Choice] (Moscow, 2004), 113.

education-related work through mass media; and to teach Islam-related issues to Muslims within the frameworks of Russian higher educational institutions.

The second condition is the weakness of Islamic organizations that are traditional for the country. The long-term organizational and ideological pressure Islam has been exposed to during the years of Soviet power helped to create an unfavorable atmosphere for its real assessment. Official Islamic structures lost much in the course of this crisis; the collapse of spiritual governance existing in the Soviet Union for Muslims, (including the Spiritual Governance for the Muslims (DUM) in the North Caucasus). That took place at the first congress of the Muslims of the North Caucasus (in May 1989). Further, the DUM failed to maintain regional unity, which caused its split apart over internal competition. As a result, there are now seven independent Spiritual Boards for Muslims (DUMs) without a single center. The recovery of their numbers, their authority, and reestablishment of trusted Islamic elite started in the Russian Federation not long ago. Thus, “for the period from 1991 till 1999, the number of spiritual governances for Muslims in the country grew from two to 51; that of communities, from 868 to 2,907.”⁹ As of the end of 1999, over 100 Muslim secondary and higher educational establishments were registered by the Russian Federation.¹⁰ This trend holds so far, as the governance system for the lives of the Russian Muslims only now being formed.

According to the Russian Islamologists, the weakening of religious unity of Russian Muslims has caused the rise of the host of regional forms of Islam; among

⁹ M. Murtazina, ed., *Islam i Musulmane Rossii* [Islam and Muslims of Russia] (Moscow: Logos, 1999), 205.

¹⁰ *Musulmane Izmenyauchaysya Rossii* [Muslims of the Changing Russia] (Moscow: Institute of the Russian History, "Russian Political Encyclopedia," 2002), 9.

different ethnic groups and as the result of religion's entwinement with the local customs and traditions. Leonid Sukiyaiynen, when speaking about Islam's variety in Russia, divides it into "Folk Islam oriented at traditional forms of life modes, cultural traditions and samples of Muslims' secular behavior; and "Official Islam", which embodies the religious cult and dogmas manifested in the activities of mosques, religious associations and centers."¹¹ The diversity of Islamic confession forms is underlined by the fact that different forms of Hanafi Madhhab, (the school within Sunni Islam that is the most loyal and flexible to the common law *adat*), is mainly predominant in the central and western part of the North Caucasus. In the territories of Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, all Islamologists note a higher degree of Islamist politicizing.

The third important condition, which has also made an impact on the spread of Muslim extremist ideas, was the long-term isolation of Russian Muslims from the major world centers of Islam and its orthodox political and legal culture. Many Muslims know practically nothing about do the basics of Islam; the life of Muslims in the world; and the Arabic language. The desire to train numerous clergy during the early and mid-90s has served as a strong impulse for sending youth to different training centers throughout the Muslim world. Among those centers were numerous Islamist ones, i.e., those committed to implementing political practice aimed at the creation of the Islamic society based on *shariah* norms. Islamists try to literally follow only those Qur'an orders which God-ordained. Besides, any policy, including the power one, is the most important for them if it is aimed at implementing the goals of full Islamization. The former president of

¹¹ Leonid Sukiyaiynen, *Shariat i Musulmansko-pravovaya Kultura* [Shari'ah and Muslim legal culture] (Moscow: Izd-vo Nauka, 1997), 6.

Tatarstan, Mintimer Shaimiev, noted that many believers were able to receive educations in different ecclesiastical educational institutions throughout the Muslim world. “It is not infrequent that they come back and start preaching Islamist teachings which very differ from the ones existing in Russia so far, and in a number of cases it is dangerous.”¹²

The fourth condition for Islamist extremism spreading in Russia was the low level of people’s economic wellbeing in 90s, which pre-determined a tense socio-political situation. Such a state of affairs in the territories of Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia was caused by the influx of refugees, uncontrolled economic migration, sharp citizens’ property differentiation, etc. The situation existing in the mid-90s of the twentieth century denuded some part of the population of hope for achievement of social stability.

As a result of reforms in Dagestan there was an abrupt fall of industrial production, the collapse of agriculture, mass unemployment, an abrupt fall of standards of living (80% of the local residents are four times poorer than the average Russian citizen) and corruption, which negatively heated up the situation in the region.¹³ In this background, organized crime, sometimes of an ethnic nature, grew in the Republic.

Impoverishment of young people was especially dangerous. Unemployment, which in the rural areas was up to 80% of the total employable population, became threatening (about 5.5% of youth had been unemployed). At the beginning of 2001, Dagestan was oversaturated with a labor force, which significantly worsened the socio-economic situation. At the same time the upper crust (about 200 families and several

¹² *Interfax*, February 9 2000.

¹³ K. Polyakov, “Dagestan: Vnutrennie Trudnosti Rossiiskogo Mashtaba,” [Dagestan: internal difficulties of the Russian scale] *Interfax*, May 10 1999.

dozen thousand of their related compatriots) “concentrated 85% of the republican national riches in their hands.”¹⁴ Such a situation partly broke the traditional authority of *Jamia* elders, family elders, heads at work and clergymen.¹⁵

The empathic promises of Islamists were in harmony with the feelings of poor, unemployed youth, and with the holy dreams of the poorest peasantry of Dagestan. Reviling luxury and acquisitiveness awoke echoes in peoples’ hearts, and the ethics of brotherhood, unity and social harmony of all Muslims began to attract them. At the same time, Muslims started connecting the prospects for their situation’s improvement with the instinctively-felt opportunity for their self-protection in the ways of religious extremism. The fact that part of the Muslim Community did not accept the occurring changes was used by some politicians for support. Characterizing them, the Russian Mufti Ravil Gainutdin explained that Islamists “see the way out of the crisis situation by building an Islamic state in some entities of the country, in the dominance of *Shariah* norms in all areas of life, in denial of everything brought into the life of Muslims of the modern age.”¹⁶ In 1991, (at the congress of Karachay Muslims), the Imamate of Karachay responded by establishing a moderate “center for the Muslims of the Republic” and, although unrecognized by local authorities, transformed their efforts into the more moderate cultural and educational organization, “*al-Islamiya*.”¹⁷

¹⁴ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, [Independent Newspaper] August 8, 2001.

¹⁵ *Jamia* is the Arabic word for gathering or the path to follow.

¹⁶ Gainutdin, “Rolj Islama v Duxovnom Vozrozhdenii Rossii,” 8.

¹⁷ Cvetlana Chervnonnaya, *Turskii Mir Ugo-Vostochnoi Evropy: Krym – Severny Kavkaz* [The Turkic World of South Eastern Europe: Crimea - the North Caucasus] (Berlin, 2000), 217-218.

Since the 90s, the idea of an Islamic State become increasingly attractive due to its simplicity and availability in the terms of its practical implementation: First, “in the minds of people being the social basis of Islamic fundamentalism in Russia, an ‘Islamic order’ started being associated with the cessation of legal nihilism.”¹⁸ Federal laws in many cases, especially in the North Caucasian region were not observed. In this case *Shariah*, as the legal foundation of society, looked more universal, its norms simple and clear, all the statements regulated strictly enough and most important, was noticeably different from laws adopted in the center, or from the “rules of play” also established there, with *Shariah* priority to the laws gradually penetrating into people’s minds. And finally, *Shariah*, as the Islamist leaders asserted was a set of eternal, everlasting laws of divine origin.

Second, Islam considers all Muslims to be one community (*ummah*), no matter what ethnicity they belong to. Under conditions when a person’s nationality becomes a matter of investigation of his/her identify, the Islamic way seemed the only option for a population nostalgic about the former “friendship of peoples,” no matter how imperfect it was, to get rid of inter-ethnic conflicts or ethnic discrimination.

Third, Islamic democracy supposes that the power over the people cannot belong to people because it belongs to Allah. The leadership, (i.e., the performance of administrative and management functions), can be carried out only by the man elected by the whole Muslim *ummah*, who is the most capable of making decisions according to Qur’an and Sunnah. He remains in his position until his actions meet the strictest

¹⁸ K. Polyakov, *Arabskii Vostok i Rossiya: Problema Islamskogo Fundamentalizma* [The Arabic East and Russia: The Problems of Islamic Fundamentalism] (Moscow: Veche, 2001), 50.

requirements of Muslim morals. However, an expert opinion about the "service adequacy" (if it is possible to put it in these terms) of the ruling caliph is made by the group of experts most knowledgeable in theological and legal issues (*ulemas*).

Finally, in the socio-economic sphere Islam provides social justice achieved by the *Shariah* taxation system. The incomes received from it are spent for the sake of the whole Islamic community. The main tax in it is the tax in favor of the poor. The attempts of the "Islamist order" opponents to refer to examples proving that social harmony cannot be achieved in any societies with *Shariah*-based governance because of the following thesis: the supporters of the "true Islam" declared that "either the Muslims of these societies have sunken in the mire of sins, heresy, and modern interpretations and, cannot be considered the faithful ones, or, the rulers in these countries do not correctly implement the statements of Qur'an and Sunnah."¹⁹

The fifth condition that made a significant impact on spreading Islamist ideas was the absence of a reasonable information policy related to Islam. The number of experts in this religion remains small, but the mass media gave, and are still giving, information about Islam in a negative manner, demonstrating either ignorance or political partisanship. In the second half of the 90s, the threat to Russia from Wahhabism, was actively discussed in the country's mass media. It is hardly a coincidence that the term "Wahhabists" started to become suspiciously common in people's minds when applied to certain armed groups in the North Caucasus. The Russian researcher Makarov remarked, "The imposed ideas about the existence of a certain united movement acting under

¹⁹ K. Polyakov, *Arabskii Vostok i Rossiya: Problema Islamskogo Fundamentalizma* [The Arabic East and Russia: The problems of Islamic Fundamentalism], (Moscow: Veche, 2001), 51.

Islamic slogans and the attempts to connect this movement with one type of Islamic ideology called Wahhabism not only provoke Islamophobia in the Russian society but also make it harder to search for an efficient strategy of coping with the challenge of radical Islam in the North Caucasus.”²⁰

In the late 90s it was too early to speak about the great popularity of Islamist ideas in Russia. In the context of general processes of the "new Islamization" of certain Russian regions, a maturing problem emerged: the attempts of some political forces to play a “Wahhabi card” in order to terrorize public opinion with the threat of a new wave of Islamist extremism and putting pressure upon the political establishment of the Russian state.

A significant impact upon political processes in the North Caucasus and Dagestan was underline by the chaotic situation in the Chechen Republic. A portion of the political forces of Ichkeria carried out an active information war to destabilize the social situation in the Chechen Republic. They supplied Moscow journalists with “information” about the Wahhabi movement in Dagestan within the frameworks of the “national liberation struggle,” as if it were much more extensive that it actually was. Through that they provoked the central government to take bold action in the North Caucasus.

Currently, there is no constructive dialogue related to the issues of having no common information space between military press and civil mass media. The military press has objective limits to its influence upon the civil population: it is used as a source

²⁰ D. Makarov, *Radikalni Islamizm na Severnom Kavkaze: Dagestan i Chechnya* [Radical Islamism in the North Caucasus: Dagestan and Chechnya] (Moscow, 1999), 42.

of information by 5-8 % of the population. Civil mass media has a much broader readership and audience, but they often distribute information half-truths, and political put-up jobs. As of today, the structure of the information field both in the North Caucasus (as a whole) and in the territory of the Chechen Republic does not seem stable yet. A reliable mass media have not been formed yet (i.e., one able to become the centers of media space, to set the reference points and to form steady public opinion).

The sixth condition became the formation of Russian Islam as a hierarchical system under the influence of its social and political institutions. Thus the vertical hierarchy of Islamic clergy, including training, was mainly oriented at the specific situation found in Russia. Of course, ethno-religious tensions had a significant uniting value from the point of view of domestic policy, and it allowed the Soviet and later the Russian administration to control the situation with the tighter hand of control.

Currently, the public opinion is not an instrument to rely upon when relationships such as the ones between the Russian Orthodox Church and domestic Muslim organizations are measured. Of course, one can assert that any religion promotes tolerance. However, as far as sharp political issues are concerned, the situation does not seem so simple: for example, when the number of believers of a certain faith is determined (the events before the National Population Census of 2002 showed that vividly), this can affect the general attitude toward policy, political authorities, and cooperation with them; relationships with the foreign coreligionists; settlement of property-related issues, or of temple construction; preaching in specific regions and settlements; the legal opportunity to influence the national education system; and interpretation of the historical role of a certain confession in the society and state

development. The same goes to the issue related to the permit to work in the military and force structure and financial aid from the governmental structures, tax exemption, etc.²¹

Besides the freedom of conscience and belief, there are plenty of problems in relation to which two religious organizations must improve intercultural relations. Thus, the *Basis of Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* reads as follows: “The Church has the right to expect that the state, while building relationships with religious associations, will account for the number of its followers, their place in the formation of historical, cultural and spiritual image of the people, and their citizenship.”²²

Currently one can speak about the influence of certain confessions upon policy; but not about their active political activities. Thus, while the Chairman of the Spiritual Board for the Muslims of the Asian part of Russia, Mufti Nafigulla Ashirov, considers the combination of religion and politics a natural quality of Islam, the Chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, the Chairman of the Spiritual Board for the Muslims of the European part of Russia, Mufti Ravil Gainutdin is of the opposite opinion. The official Islamic structures within Russia try to distance themselves from the opportunity to influence the state policy. Because there are numerous Muslims in the country, the Orthodox Church has actively sided with those within the political elite makes Islamic leaders also search for their place in Russian politics. The Deputy Chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, Imam Marat Murtazin sees the need to define “What is Russia?” as the first task in the relations with the Russian state. Although it is not the

²¹ Gaunutdin, *Vibori v Rossii i Vibor Musulman*, 27-30.

²² “Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,” <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/141422.html>.

"House of Islam" (*dar-al-Islam*) because the Muslims are not the majority of the population and the laws of Russia do not comply with *Shariah* provisions, it is also not the "House of War" (*Dar Al-Harb*), which is obligatory for Muslims to fight against. According to Murtazin, Russia for Muslims is the "House of truce" (*Dar al-'Ahd*), where Muslims can come to an agreement with the state that at this stage should grant them full they religious rights and freedoms.²³

The situation existing in Russia (in 2011) proves that confessional problems have become central to a host of political processes. Many Russian Islamologists feel that the role of Islam has been increasing since the early 90s in three main directions: religious, socio-cultural, and political. However, some of them, such as L. Bashirov, A. Malashenko, and L. Sukiyainen have emphasized that Islam's potential is not used much in the political life of the Russian Federation and it has had a weak impact upon the process of progressive social advancement and strengthening the democratic legal foundation of the Russian statehood.²⁴

The real political potential of the Council of Muftis of Russia, for example, allows one to allege that its "partnership" with a State which is not its equal. Russian Muslim organizations can do only those things in the political sphere that are approved by State authorities. At the same time, the leaders of a particular officially registered confession

²³ Marat Murtazin, http://infox.ru/blog/37995/2011/01/19/Myezhryeligioznyyye_.phtml (accessed August 2, 2011).

²⁴ See for example: Leva Bashirov, *Islam i Etnopoliticheskie processy v Sovremennoy Rossii* [Islam and Ethno-political processes in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: RAGS, 2000), 4; Aleksey Malashenko, *Islamskoe Vozrozhdenie v sovremennoi Rossii* [The Islamic Renaissance in Contemporary Russia] (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center, 1998), 126; Leonid Sukiyainen, "Islam protiv Islama: Ob Islamskoi Alternative Ekstremizmu i Terrorizmu," [Islam vs. Islam: On Islamic Alternative to Extremism and Terrorism], *Central Asia and Caucasus*, 21, no. 2 (2002).

get into a difficult political situation when any response to the actions of secular authorities has unfavorable consequences for a given religious organization. For example, participation of the Chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia side by side with leaders of traditional confessions of Russia at the inauguration of the President of Russia is treated by some representatives of other confessions as a violation of the equality of rights of religious communities. In this case, however, it is the political power that decides whom to prefer. The state offers benefits to Islamic organizations in exchange for ideological support; however, their rapprochement with the state within the framework of the secular nature of the state will inevitably bring the Muslim organizations not only benefits and advantages, but also a strengthening of state control over Islam.

This unstable situation quite possibly suits the leaders of national Muslim organizations. The political influence of one Muslim leader obtained as a result of the attention paid to him by the state spreads throughout the clergy. As a result, any Mufti or Imam may exert pressure on the authorities. However, this opportunity was brought not only by the authoritative resources of the Muslim clergy, but by the fact that authorities use the Muslim clergy for their own specific political goals. That is why it is impossible to tell whether Muslim organizations will be able to gain political power and become strong opponents of state power.

From the point of view of mobilizing of Muslims to solve problems socially important for Russia, the authorities seem to treat the *Spiritual Board of Muslims* (DUM) headed by the *Council of Muftis of Russia* in the form they exist in Russia as rather universal structures. Their main weak point is the inability of the DUM to resist informal

(including extremists) Muslim structures without the help of political power. Thus, while newly established informal Muslim structures may address political objectives, the DUM is not intended to solve independent political objectives. The Spiritual Board of Muslims in Russia, established under the laws of Russia, nearly completely depends on the political power of the state.

The ability of Islam to mobilize people for constructive political activity creates inevitable conflict situations. Islam's participation in actual political life brings an element of irrationality into it, reduces the significance of secular legal norms and makes participants in the political process dependent on the "superior power," whose will is interpreted by everyone in their own ways. That allows informal Islamic structures to set (and fulfill) certain political objectives. Such political participation will contribute to increasing the conflict nature of the relations between Muslims confessions and government authorities.

As far as extremist organizations are concerned, (in contrast to the official Muslim structures not yet having a simple and clear concept of political participation), their programs for implementing Islamist principles are clearly reasoned and based on the well-developed ideas of the political Islamism (such as Geydar Jemal's idea of the need for Russian Muslim organizations to have their own "Islamic Project").²⁵ Besides, the formal Islamic structures evade direct informative policy and full-value work with radicals and extremists; even if they try to confront, they do it inefficiently, avoiding urgent problems and being restricted to general declarations and statements.

²⁵ Geydar Jemal, "Rossia i Islamskii Fundamentalizm," [Russia and Islamic Fundamentalism] <http://www.archipelag.ru/authors/djemal/?library=967> (accessed August 8, 2001).

*Violence and Conflict in the Russian North Caucasus: Chechnya and Dagestan
Compared*

As Russian Islamic scholar A. Savateev points out, “Islamic fundamentalism is far from being homogeneous as it contains a range of quite various opinions, from the spiritual and religious point of view, and reflects the interests of various social layers of Muslims. In the spiritual and religious sense, the term ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ denotes a combination of views and moods of several categories of Muslims.”²⁶ The following data confirm this statement. In the 1990s, several Islamist political organizations formed in Russia, some of them claiming all-Russia status, others limiting themselves with the frameworks of a distinct district or a region.

The first group included the *Union of Muslims of Russia*, established in 1995 (its Chairman, Nadirshakh Khachilaev, had previously participated in establishing the religious organization of the Lak people (Dagestan), “*Jamaat al Hurriat*”); a social movement, *Nur*; and the *Dagestan Islamic Revival Party*, also called “*Nakhdatun*.”²⁷ Provisions about the need of “spiritual revival” and “political awakening” of Muslims were declared the main goals of that fundamentalist organization.²⁸ Ahmet-kadi Akhtaev, Nadirshakh Khachilaev, deputy of the Dagestan Parliament Surakat Asiyatilov, Ajub Astrakhanskiy, Bagauddin Magomed and Magomet Tagayev, all of whom who were interested in uniting Islam and power, i.e., essentially for a restoration of a theocratic state, became the ideologists of that fundamentalist party.

²⁶ A. Savateev, “Vaxxabit Vaxxabitu Roznj,” [The Different types of Wahhabism], *Asia and Africa Today*, no. 2 (2002): 5-12.

²⁷ From *Al-Nahda*, Arabic for “awakening” or “renaissance.”

²⁸ Enver Kisriev, *Islam i Vlast v Dagestane* [Islam and Power in Dagestan] (Moscow: OGI, 2004), 52.

The *Islamic Revival Party* (IRP) included in its program provisions on uniting the peoples of the republic, overcoming the consequences of atheist policy, and transforming Dagestan into an Islamic state in the future, if certain conditions were met. In 1994, IRP nearly became defunct because none of its leaders attempted to re-register it.

Unfortunately, at that time, a serious chance to attract the majority of radical Islamists who strived for strict observance of law, order, and corruption liquidation to a party acting legally, and in accordance with the Constitution of Russia, was lost. At that time there was a real opportunity to direct the evolution of radical (Wahhabi) sentiments of Muslims into the course of a legitimate political process that would make it possible to protect common Muslims from extremist interferences. The regional authorities proved unable to understand the benefit of that situation. Moreover, with their actions, they provoked the transformation of potential allies into the opponents of the secular power and the state.

The second group of regional organizations includes the *Muslims of Russia* movement, the influence of which had spread for some time within the Middle Volga Region (mainly Saratov and Penza Oblasts) - "*Jaamat al-Muslimin*," acting in Dagestan (officially registered as a religious community); the Islamic Party, established after the split of the *Islamic Democratic Party*; the Chechen Party "*Islamic Way*"; the Tatarstan party "*Ittifak*"; and the movement "*Muslims of Tatarstan*."

None of them could gain influence equal to that of the parties, but they were represented in the State Duma and (directly or indirectly) participated in the activities of power structures. The very fact of the appearance of such parties is instructive, as well as the ambitiousness of leaders, who in the most critical periods of the country's political

activities. In particular in the course of elections to the Duma and President elections (Muslims comprise about 10-12 % of the Russian electorate) come out of the shadows and not only support a certain secular leader but also declare their own interests. Political participation of such organizations, as a rule, takes the form of a protest. Radical ideologies, slogans, and a lack of trust of the political regime assist the activation of protest grasps. For example, the leader of the radical flank of the North Caucasian extremists, Bagauddin Kebedov from Dagestan, had always been inclined to public activities, and in the early 1990s had started to build an organization of Radical Islamic fundamentalists called “*Jamaat*” (“Community”). In 1997, radical ideologists headed by Kebedov made an abrupt stand against the leader of a moderate group, A. Akhtayev, whom they accused of religious ignorance; his followers were accused of intimidating those who believed differently. Kebedov had many times claimed that registration of mosques and fundamentalist communities had no principal importance:

We have already been registered with Allah; we do not want to take the power in our hands. We want the power to be in the hands of Allah. Geographic and state borders are insignificant for us; we work and act where we can. Today Dagestan is governed from Moscow; we do not have an Islamic community similar to the one in Chechnya. We would approve, for example, a complete prohibition for selling alcohol, but for us belief (iman) and monotheism (tauhid) are more important. In the Islamic state we would like to implement the office of muhtasibs.²⁹

Even from these statements by Kebedov the political role in the Islamist radical approach can be seen well enough. In his opinion, Islam is comprehensive system of daily life. Consequently, it could not help, including attempts of building "the Islamic community and statehood."

²⁹ *Russia and the Muslim World*, January 20, 2003.

Such an attempt was most successful in the towns of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi in the Bujnak region of Dagestan. The *Jamaat* program had been implemented there in 1997-1999. Young people from all over Dagestan and other republics of the Northern Caucasus had been coming there in search of “pure Islam”. The result of radical extremist’ actions was the establishment of an independent Islam *Jaamat* republic in the Kadar zone in 1998; the inhabitants of which were guided with *Shariah* norms.³⁰

On August 20, 1998, Sergei Stepashin, who was the Minister for Internal Affairs at that time, visited the towns of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi. He came to an agreement with the local people that they might be guided with the laws of *Shariah* on the condition that they cooperate with Dagestan authorities on all other matters with all the decencies observed. The political act of the Minister for Internal Affairs did not bring any tangible results in that case, but demonstrated the insufficient competence of State authorities to the Islamic factor in the Northern Caucasus. It is known that the leaders of the Karamakhi community in 1999 continued to use the military training system “*Taliban.*” Its use was noted by Kevedov as early as in the period of the first Chechen campaign, with the concept of the need to perform “small *jihad*,” which meant military actions against the federal forces.³¹

The development of Islamist views took place under the close attention of international Islamic organizations that unfolded their activity in the republic in the late

³⁰ M. Roshchin, *Sled Islamskogo Fundamentalizma na Severnom Kavkaze* [The Trace of Islamic Fundamentalism in the North Caucasus] (Moscow: RAN, 2003), 63.

³¹Ibid., 64-65.

1980s. Such ideological groups called for the establishment of an ideal Muslim community guided with Qur'an and *Shariah* laws. They stood for "purifying" the existing Islam, accused officials of corruption, and propagated a way of life in accordance with their understanding of Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Their opponents, representatives of traditional Islam, often dismissively called the extremists "Wahhabis."

In spite of the extremists' promises to create a "Muslim state" in Russia, the expansion of this Islamist movement was stiffly opposed by the traditionalists. The invasion of Chechen armed gangs into Dagestan in August 1999 was a turning point in the opposition of radical fundamentalists and traditionalists, or supporters of *tariqa* Islam. A significant number of clergymen refused to recognize this invasion as *jihad*. Their opposition lay in the fact that the first ones who were successfully armed with ideas of conservative fundamentalism declared everything not complying with Qur'an and *Sunnah* "non-allowed innovations" (*Bid'ah*) and even as manifestation of polytheism. This category covered the Sufi brotherhood, the hierolatry, worshipped places and many local customs.

Most of the Dagestani decisively stood against the "liberators." This is because the extremists and the more moderate, traditional Muslims held different positions in relation to social and political order existed in Dagestan. By rejecting traditional Sufism, the radical extremists also rejected the entire traditional social order. After the defeat of the armed gangs, the republican authorities, together with traditional clergy, achieved material gains in the struggle with radical Islamists: in the Kadar zone all the radical organizations were closed, as well as the charity funds that were accused of financing radicals. During the combat, the People's Assembly of the Republic of Dagestan,

influenced by the Spiritual Boarder for the Muslims of Dagestan and main-stream politicians connected with the *tariqa* clergy, prepared a draft law “On Prohibition of Wahhabi and Other Extremist Activity on the Territory of the Republic of Dagestan.” On September 1999 it was unanimously adopted after the first reading. The Law has become an important milestone in creating an image of contemporary relations between the ruling power and religion in the Republic.³²

After the events of 1999, trying to keep control of processes taking place in the Muslim communities of Dagestan, the authorities created an Islamic organization that would have exclusive control of the religious sphere. The authorities in cooperation with the clergy managed to accomplish a great deal. The path to expansion of extremism has been hindered; the missionaries’ activities on the territory of the Republic have been taken under control, and the group is publishing religious literature, organizing *hajj* and education abroad. The attempts to establish control of religious education are seen most clearly: Currently it is represented by 17 higher education establishments, 44 subsidiaries of these institutions, 132 *madrassas*, and 245 primary schools under Mosques teaching people of all ages how to read the Qur’an, from seven-year-old kids to the elderly. The total number of students in Islamic educational institutions is about 14,000: among them in higher education establishments there are about 3,000 youth; in subsidiaries, over 2,000; in *madrassas*, over 5,000 children and in primary schools, over 3,000 students.³³

³² M. Roshchin, *Sled Islamskogo Fundamentalizma na Severnom Kavkaze* [The Trace of Islamic Fundamentalism in the North Caucasus] (Moscow: RAN, 2003), 67-69.

³³ Igor Dobaev, “Islam v Sovremennyx Respublicax Severnogo Kavkaza,” [Islam in the Contemporary Republics of the Caucasus], *South Russia Research Review*, no. 11 (2002), 27.

In the opinion of Kaflan Khanbabaev, Deputy Chairman of the Religious Affairs Committee under the Government of the Republic, about 13 Islamic higher education establishments are not certified and have no license, and about 5,000 students attend those schools. Those schools do not have uniform curriculums; they have not been certified by the Russian Ministry of Education; although they do offer Islamic education.³⁴ Clearly, ideas of radicals will attract the Islamic youth standing on the threshold of poverty and social disruption. The public speeches, broadcasts, and publications condemning extremism are organized in the mass media, and with the clergy's participation. The steady process of thorough scientific research of the key directions in which the radicals influences the political processes in Dagestan and the North Caucasus is marked in the republic.

The strike on the Islamists' positions in 1999 weakened them, but did not destroy this movement in Dagestan. Several trends can be seen: The first one includes the rage from those whose ideology provides for armed establishment of theocratic power. Their ideas are met with enthusiasm from unemployed youth who has no hopes for the future.

The second category of extremists supporters are the wealthy members of several major *jamats* located not far from the industrial and transportation centers. According to Sokolov, a member of the group of human rights defenders from the "Memorial" society, this group comprised 10-20% of the total Dagestan population as of 1999.³⁵ A high level of religiosity sustained Muslims through the communist era, as well as the success they have achieved in current conditions due to industriousness that has assisted in

³⁴ Ibid., 28.

³⁵ Roshchin, *Sled Islamskogo Fundamentalizma na Severnom Kavkaze*, 72.

radicalizing extremist sentiments. Many communities, for example, in the cities of Kyzyl-Yurt and Astrakhan, settlements of Pervomaiskoye, Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar, consisted mainly of wealthy middle-class citizens. In the post-Soviet era the key source of the means of subsistence for these Muslims was the transit trade between Iraq, Azerbaijan, and South Russia.³⁶

The third group of Islamic extremists supporters includes intellectuals. It includes some experts in Islamic law and theology, young graduates of Islamic universities of the Middle East, and a small part of the secular intelligentsia, having found meaning through the new religious movement. Islamist youth do not want to recognize spiritual governance and keep far away from local Sufi traditions. Islamists offer clear and logical answers to the questions asked by their religious consciousness. Therefore, this religious movement remains attractive.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century the radical extremism had turned into a significant factor of political destabilization, not only in Dagestan, but also in neighboring Chechnya. If the crisis of the radical movements of Islamist extremism was clearly marked in Dagestan in the late nineties, however, the movements aimed at the “purification of Islam” in Chechnya found themselves in a difficult situation. On the one hand, it became the ideology of extremists - and on the other hand, it began to experience the repressive policy of state authorities.

In spite of the great number of mass media publications devoted to the problems of Islamist extremism in the North Caucasus, this question remains unresolved. Unfortunately, some scholars have simplified the approach to the studies of this religious

³⁶ Ibid., 72-73.

movement and often identify it as a radical, religious-and-political Wahhabi movement. It is helpful to remember that the term "Islamist radicalism" can be applied only to certain parts of all ideological movements in Islam.³⁷ It follows thence that the terms "Islamic radicalism" and "fundamentalism" are far from being the same. The "ordinary" fundamentalism, like the "ordinary" components of other ideological movements in Islam ("religion-faith") makes the fundamental content of Islam a religion of peace, kindness and tolerance. The radical part, however, can be present in all three movements. Fundamentalism itself is of no danger to the Russian society until it becomes the focus of attention for the forces fighting against the state power.

Not only did separatism-oriented leadership, having come to power in Chechnya in the early nineties, not prevent Islamic radicals from consolidating their positions, but they did everything possible to strengthen them. Jokhar Dudayev³⁸ explained that carrying out the Islamization of Chechnya in a radical form was the consequence of the external pressure from Russia. In an interview in *Time* magazine he stated, "They [Russia] have forced us to take the way of Islam even if we were not properly prepared to embrace Islamic values."³⁹ This comment proves that Islam became just an instrument in the hands of top leaders of the Chechen Republic elite.

Spreading their ideas in Chechnya became possible when Dudayev supporters declared that they were building the Islamic state, which needs a uniform ideology.

³⁷ Igor Dobaev, *Islamskii Radikalizm: Genesis, evolucia, praktika* [Islamic Radicalism: Genesis, evolution and practice] (Rostov-on-Don: SKNC publisher, 2002), 28.

³⁸ Jokhar Dudayev was a Soviet Air Force general and a Chechen leader, the first President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

³⁹ Yuri Zarakhovich, "Terms of War and Peace: Chechen Leader Jokhar Dudayev," *Time*, March 4, 1996, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,984203,00.html> (August 7, 2011).

According to the plan of Dudaeyv's ideologists (M. Udugov, Yandarbiev, etc.), the radical movement of Islam, which is often called Wahhabism, was supposed to become such an ideology. It is important to pay attention to the applicability of the terms "Wahhabism", "Wahhabi" to the modern political reality. In this research the terms extremism and radicalism, but not Wahhabism, will adequately reflect the essence of the Islamist movement. The search for this social phenomenon in a row of historical phenomena and ideological directions allows it to be given the most accurate terminological name.

Thus the name "extremism" is used in the West for similar Muslim socio-political movements of the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century, spread in the Middle East countries. Malashenko uses the term "*salafiyyah*" to identify the modern Caucasus "Wahhabi" and qualifies this movement as a fundamentalist one. Another specialist in Islam, Stepanyans considers it wrong to use this term for characterizing modern Islamist movements. The reason for such an opinion is the fact that the political meaning of Wahhabism is striving for unity under the conditions of liberation from foreign oppression.⁴⁰ How in the North Caucasus did the leaders of radical Islamist groups, sheltering beneath the ideas of Arabic ideologists, aim at capturing power and establishing an Arabic Caliphate? A well-known expert in Arab studies, Aleksey Vasiliev, considers the term "Wahhabism" to be not completely correct when used to mark modern socio-political movements popular with Muslims of the former USSR.

⁴⁰ M. Stepanyans, *Musulmanskie Konceptii v Filosofii i Politike: XIX-XX vv.* [The Muslim concept of philosophy and politics: XIX-XX centuries] (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 46.

After the completion of warfare in 1994-1996, the leaders of Chechen nationalists finally staked on the Islamist movement. It remains an obvious fact that the numerous foreign “*mujahideen*”⁴¹ who came to Chechnya during the first war campaign had some influence upon Islamist radicalization on the territory of Chechnya. A typical milestone of this process was forming a detachment of foreign mercenaries called *Jamaat al-Islami* in the territory of Chechnya in the spring of 1995, under the commandment of Ibn Al-Khattab, a Jordanian of Chechen origin.⁴²

In 1996, with the help of the Jordanian Chechen community, a training center was established near the settlement “*Sergen-Yurt*”, Shalinsky district of Chechnya, called the “*Caucasus Institute of Islamic Appeal*” (“Caucasus Institute – *Dava’a*”), which was actually a subsidiary of the international extremist organization “Muslim Brothers.” The institute was a specialized camp, training saboteurs and terrorists. For example, in 1997, 155 potential “*mujahideen*” aged 17 and older were trained there. They studied the key provisions of Islamist extremism for two months and passed special military training. Some were then sent to foreign Muslim countries for probation.

In early 1997, Khattab became a member of the “*Dava’a*” management. In June of the same year, he addressed the governments of all Muslim countries with the proposal to condemn the spread of Sufism in Islam in Chechnya. At the “Institute,” Khattab personally trained the future militants in the methods of “partisan war” in Chechnya and in carrying out commando-type reconnaissance actions in other regions of Russia. The

⁴¹ Mujahideen, or "strivers," fought -- and won against--the Soviet Army after their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

⁴² For more on this see Lorenzo Vidino, “How Chechnya Became a Breeding Ground for Terror,” *The Middle East Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (2005) : 57-66. <http://www.meforum.org/744/how-chechnya-became-a-breeding-ground-for-terror> (accessed when?).

core of the “*Dagestan Islam Army*,” preparing to overthrow the constitutional order in Dagestan, was formed from his students. Khattab appealed to the future terrorists that they should hate the Russians. Instructing them, he recommended that they should “accuse all the patriotically-oriented Russians of fascism. Those of them willing to stand under the saint banner of prophet must be bound with blood.”⁴³

Thus, as late as 1996, in the territory of Chechnya and Dagestan, a sort of territorial jumping-off-grounds were made, with infrastructure formed that provided its political expansion into the future. At the same time, the leaders of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria determined to build an Islamic state based on the Sufi religious values traditional for the Republic. President Aslan Maskhadov, in his speech on national television (in April 1998), declared that an independent Islamic state, with the norms of *Shariah* obtaining the status of law, would be built in Chechnya. According to his words, “only Islam and *Shariah* norms will be valid in the Chechen state, which will be called the Chechen Republic “*Nokhchiyo*.” Qur’an will become the foundation of its Constitution.”⁴⁴ Declaring the goal of building such a state, Maskhadov was supported with the traditional Islamic structures headed by the then-Mufti of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov.

However, Maskhadov and Muslim traditionalists were immediately opposed by “Islamists,” headed by Shamil Basaev, M. Udugov, Z. Yandarbiyev and A. Khattab. Against that background, a trend toward consolidation of Chechen and Dagestan

⁴³ <http://www.crynews.ru/persprint/439.html> (accessed August 17, 2011).

⁴⁴ “Masxadovskie Vlastnye Reformy,” [Maskhadov’s Political Reform] <http://www.kurginyan.ru/publ.shtml?cmd=sch&cat=539&vip=13> (accessed June 3, 2011).

Islamists, deserves special attention. On August 22, 1997 at the congress of 35 Islamic movements of Chechnya and Dagestan, a non-governmental political organization, “*Islamic Nation*,” was formed, aimed at providing conditions for defense of an Islamic nation against aggression; opposition to anti-Islamic aggression of Russia in the Caucasus; revival of Dagestan in its previous boundaries; and assistance for a real uniting of the Caucasus peoples based on Islamic ideals. Statements of Udugov, the leader of this new organization, show that it was a political, and not a religious movement.⁴⁵ At the “*Congress of Peoples of Caucasus*,” held in Grozny (in August 1997), another informal organization was formed: the socio-political union “*Caucasus Confederation*,” where the ex-president of Chechnya, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, was elected as the leader.⁴⁶

Later, other organizations were formed, setting similar goals for themselves, among which was the Caucasus solidarity organization “*Caucasus House*” (with Raduev as its General Secretary). The political platform for this movement was an unimplemented idea of Jokhar Dudayyev to unite all the peoples of the North Caucasus. The ideology of the organization, although it did not seem too radical, was clearly anti-Russian.

In April 1998 in Grozny, a “*Congress of Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan*” was formed, which fixed in its documents the unity of Chechen and Dagestan fundamentalists. Shamil Basaev was elected as a Congress Chairman and declared that it was necessary for Chechnya and Dagestan to unite into a single state.

⁴⁵ “Masxadovskie Vlastnye Reformy,” [Maskhadov’s Political Reform] <http://www.kurginyan.ru/publ.shtml?cmd=sch&cat=539&vip=13> (accessed June 3, 2011).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The key program provisions regulating the Congress of Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan (CPID) activity are as follows:

- Strengthen the Islamic Chechen state as the basis for revival of the single Islamic state Deg'istan;
- Consolidate socio-political forces of Ichkeria and Deg'istan;
- Revive Islam and Islamic values as the single spiritual root for the peoples of Ichkeria and Deg'istan;
- Develop the CPID strategy and tactics of movement toward the goal set and their practical application;
- Oppose anti-Islamic expansion in the Caucasus;
- Defend peace and agreements, ensure stability and safety in the Caucasus, revive “Deg'istan;” and
- Promote real unity and a strengthening of Islamic ummah of the world in every way possible.⁴⁷

The Congress granted itself the rights to any actions, including the political ones, on behalf of the peoples of Dagestan and Chechnya. CPID also adopted the “Declaration of the Rights of Ichkeria and Dagestan Peoples,” based on *Shariah* and conflicting with the effective Russian legislation. As a matter of fact, CPID turned into a military and political organization, whose activity was supported by the force of the so-called “*Islamic Peace-Making Battalion*,” under the commandment of Khattab.

⁴⁷ Igor Dobaev, *Islamskii Radikalizm: Genesis, evolucia, praktika* [Islamic Radicalism: Genesis, evolution and practice] (Rostov-na-Donu: SKNC publisher, 2002), 145.

In spite of the fact that there were fewer followers of al-Wahhab in Chechnya than in Dagestan, they were a real military force there, aimed at taking away the power from the hands of Aslan Maskhadov. After the collision near the TV center in Grozny and in Gudermes, radical Islamism was outlawed by the decree of the President of the Republic, and illegal armed opposition groups were discontinued. However, these militant Islamists disobeyed the order and went on expanding their military might. Thus, in November 1998, the CPID leader Shamil Basaev announced that within the frameworks of the Congress, an armed group was formed, called the “*Islamic Peace-Making Brigade*,” which could intervene in any conflict in the Caucasus “to separate the conflicting parties.” After that, in January 1999, Khattab began to form a “foreign legion” from foreign volunteers.⁴⁸

In February 1999, as a result of a severe struggle with the opposition, Maskhadov ceded to the pressure and introduced *Shariah* rule in the Republic, and by decree formed an advisory body under the President to provide consultations in political, economic, and legal issues (“*shura*”). His opponents, who immediately declared the secular post of the President illegitimate in Islamic Chechnya, formed their own “*shura*,” including the famous warlords and supporters of the Republic’s “Wahhabizing.” According to the separatists’ ideologist Yandarbiev, this “*shura*” was supposed to elect a “legitimate” head of state from its members who would be accountable to it. The increasing disagreement between the leadership of the Republic and radically thinking fundamentalists made them transfer their main activity to the territory of Dagestan.

⁴⁸ “Masxadovskie Vlastnye Reformy,” [Maskhadov’s Political Reform] <http://www.kurginyan.ru/publ.shtml?cmd=sch&cat=539&vip=13> (accessed June 3, 2011).

Maskhadov's retreat was not unnoticed by the broad masses of population exhausted by war and poverty. At that period people's trust in him began to steadily decrease. The negative experience of their independence, after Maskhadov's election, became a mighty motive for re-uniting with Russia. As Lubov Baskhanova stated in her work, people explained Maskhadov's presidential election with the hope in his ability to come to an agreement with Russia.⁴⁹ The Chechen people were disappointed in that period due to objective reasons: high level of unemployment, a badly working economy, conflicts of groups, and the growth of Islamic extremism.

However, in 2000-2001, the situation changed. The recognition of the real power of the Chechen Republic Administration, headed by Akhmad Kadyrov during 2000, grew, but the growth came at the expense of an increase within the female sampling, at 2.5 times larger.⁵⁰ It is important to mark the greatest desire of Chechen people, tired of war, to come back to peaceful life, the population striving at constructive labor, peace and agreement.

So the decree by the Head of Chechnya Administration Akhmat Kadyrov banning "Wahhabism" in the Chechen Republic actually made non-Sufi movements in Islam equal to extremism. According to Kadyrov, "Wahhabism" is not a religious movement,

⁴⁹ Lubov Baskhanova, *Chechnya: Obcshestvennoe Mnenie v Usloviyax Etnopoliticheskogo Konflikta* [Chechnya: public opinion in terms of ethno-political conflict] (Rostov-na-Donu: SKNC Publisher, 2004), 140.

⁵⁰ Lubov Baskhanova, *Chechnya: Obcshestvennoe Mnenie v Usloviyax Etnopoliticheskogo Konflikta* [Chechnya: Public Opinion in Terms of Ethno-Political Conflict] (Rostov-na-Donu: SKNC Publisher, 2004), 140.

but a terrorist and extremist one.⁵¹ After the terrorist act on May 9, 2002, the mufti of Chechnya Akhmad Hadji Shamaev stated that the “extremist movement in Islam imposed on Chechen people must be declared out of law.”⁵² Today, the Islamist movements in Chechnya opposing the legitimate authorities are not an integrated whole, and the idea of Islamist extremism is just a shelter for certain activities in the struggle for power. Most acts of terrorism are performed not because of religious beliefs, but as a result of financing, often coming to the Republic from abroad. There is mutual disbelief and dislike between different groups.

The tendency to mechanically transfer fundamentalist values, bearing the impress of other socio-historical conditions, to Chechen soil facilitates the high degree of Islamists’ social proneness to conflicts and their alienation from broad layers of traditional Chechen society. As the events of past years prove, the radical Islamic ideology of fundamentalist character and the rhetoric accompanying it was, and is, used by different extremist forces, being, as a rule, far from the values of true Islam. They are guided either by the principles of radical Chechen nationalism (for example, Basaev, Udugov, Yandarbiev and others) or often by personal or corporate profit-oriented interests, including those of a criminal nature.

Thus, the nationalism-oriented elite was armed by the ideas of Islamic fundamentalism in Chechnya and received active financial support from abroad. The

⁵¹ R. Kadyrov, “Kadyrov Prizivaet k Reshitelnoi Borjbe s Vaxxabizmom v Chechne,” [Kadyrov calls for a decisive fight against Wahhabism in Chechnya] <http://muslem.ru/кадыров-призывает-к-решительной-борь/> (accessed April 6, 2011).

⁵² Akhmad Shamaev, “Mufti Chechni Osuzhdaet Terrorism” (Mufti of Chechnya condemns the Terrorism] https://www.chechnyafree.ru/article.php?IBLOCK_ID=367&SECTION_ID=0&ELEMENT_ID=44462 (accessed March 16, 2011).

secular Chechen leaders, in this case, implemented their own interest: a declaration of Chechnya's independence. The famous orientalist Malashenko commented on their actions as follows: "Practically all the *salafyyah* supporters... were (and still remain) the secular politicians, and the ideas of coming back to "true Islam" and the establishment of Islamic state plays for them the instrumental role."⁵³

Political Future and the Islamic Perspective of the North Caucasus

The North Caucasus, unlike any other region of Russia, is phenomenally poly-ethnic and poly-confessional: 70 of over 160 Russian ethnic groups that consider themselves believers in different faiths live here. This explains why the region has an increased level of conflict which has an ethno-confessional and ethno-political nature. The true phenomenon of the North Caucasian poly-ethnicity and poly-confessionalism, however, is the fact that in spite of different ethnicities (Caucasian, Turkic, Slavic, etc.), the difference between faiths (Islam, Christianity, Judaism etc.); very complicated economic conditions (the lack of farmland and roads); natural and geographical separation; difficulty accessing the settlements in the mountains; language barriers; and different levels of social and cultural development; there have been no major inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts between North Caucasian peoples for centuries.

Caucasians, dwelling in mountain areas, represent to the world the phenomenal paradigm of the way inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations can be harmonized, the vitality of this paradigm proved by contemporary ethno-confessional diversity dating back to ancient times. Only having articulated and used efficient mechanisms for the

⁵³ Aleksey Malashenko, *Islamskie Orientiri Severnogo Kavkaza* [Islamic Factor in the North Caucasus] (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2001), 114.

prevention of conflicts, and only having created the conditions for ethno-political stability, would it have been possible to keep the ethno-confessional diversity at a comparatively limited area of North Caucasian region, i.e., to prolong the history of the ancient aboriginal peoples of the Caucasus and to give opportunities for other ethnic groups having moved there centuries later to develop.

This region has become a kind of laboratory in which the principles of inter-ethnic peaceful coexistence and methods of bloodless conflict (dispute settlement) have been created, tested, and improved for centuries. It was long understood in the North Caucasus that peace is the main condition for the collective survival of all mountain dwellers, so the ability to keep friendship was a categorical imperative in Caucasian ethical principles. Those who understood peace-making negotiations and brought the conflicting parties to peace in patient manner were honored. The mountain-dwellers were brought up with a respectful attitude toward others which, if violated, must have to have been paid for by their own lives; they grew up respecting the representatives of all fraternal peoples, of any nationality and faith.

North Caucasus ethnic groups have elaborated successful moral and ethical techniques, as well as folk regulatory institutions fixed in their tradition serving as the moral and organizational basis to keep the mountain dwellers' society stable. Unwritten laws (*adat* – from Arabic word “customs”) were of incontestable authority among the mountain people and had a cementing effect upon each separate ethnic group and inter-ethnic unity of North Caucasian peoples, helping to develop the specific mentality of mountain dwellers; no matter what ethnic group or religion they were from.

The traditions and customs of peoples living in the North Caucasus have a general name - *adat*. Fedor Leontovich, a pre-revolutionary ethnographer, who investigated the life of Caucasian peoples, wrote that *adat* has a threefold meaning: first, the folk custom kept in the folk legends; second, the way to settle court proceedings; last, the local law, obligatory to follow only in a certain area and related to internal affairs of a certain community.⁵⁴

Magomet Mamakaev, a researcher of Chechen *teips*,⁵⁵ speaking about the *adat* role in the life of Chechen people, wrote that the “Chechen people firmly refused to recognize *Shariah* law which came to replace *adat*.”⁵⁶ Even today, many issues related to the family and everyday life are settled by Chechens on the basis of *adat* customs; not *Shariah*.

Traditional regulatory institutions containing the moral norms of social life helped the North Caucasian peoples survive Stalinistic repression and conditions of extreme exile (while authorities were total indifferent to their fate). Moreover, it was the repressed North Caucasian peoples that kept their mentality of mountain-dwellers, and their traditions purer (due to the exilic conditions) than the peoples more “loyal” to the Soviet power, who had been exposed to “reeducation” – the total ideological and psychological brainwashing under the theory of national relations worked out by Lenin

⁵⁴ Fedor Leontovich, *Adaty Kavkazkix Gorcev: Materialy po Obychnomy Pravu Severnogo i Vostochnogo Kavkaza* [Adat of Caucasian Highlanders: Proceedings of the Customary Law of the Northern and Eastern Caucasus (Moscow, 1998), 4.

⁵⁵ *Teip* (also *taip*) is a Chechen and Ingush tribal organization or clan, self-identified through descent from a common ancestor and geographic location.

⁵⁶ Magomet Mamakaev, “Chechenskii Taip,” [Chechen Teip] (Groznyi, 1973), <http://kavkaznasledi.ru/archives/948> (accessed June 5, 2010).

and Stalin. In this era, small ethnic groups were deprived of any historical prospects, (except for assimilation with major ethnic groups); and national traditions (which did not correspond to a uniform Soviet pattern) were declared the harmful “survivors of times past,” to be extinguished without mercy.

Soviet realities artificially originated the inter-ethnic contradictions, having split the North Caucasian peoples into two categories: the “loyal” ones, meaning more Soviet-oriented ones, and the former repressed peoples, having passed the severe school of the total deportation and police regime and having suffered from losses and the offense of national humiliation. The repressed peoples were extremely sensitive to any impairment of their rights and freedoms and to any limitation of their traditional national order; the mode of life kept by them through their many years of political exile.

Although over 50 years have passed since the political rehabilitation of the latter, (and in spite of the fact that it was not their fault that their historical destinies tragically diverged in the recent past), the contradictions between groups have not vanished, the trust has not yet been fully recovered. It is also important to note that it was only non-Christian (and mostly Muslim peoples) that were repressed. This fact has increased inter-ethnic tension, especially in two-nation republics, (such as Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia), so that they join the peoples of distinct ethnicity and language (Caucasian, Turkic) with peoples of different history (the repressed and the “loyal” ones), the formerly repressed ones having the larger charge of aggressive nationalism and more national isolation and a national separatism-oriented attitude. However, the nationalism-oriented settings of “loyal” ethnic groups who do not want to lose their privileged positions, do not seem less dangerous.

The knot of inter-ethnic antagonism latently expending has several sources: first, the unfavorable historic memory, related to the cruelty of the Caucasian war carried out by General Ermolov,⁵⁷ (which meant the total hatred against mountain-dwelling peoples, especially Chechen); merciless depopulation (with special destruction of male population); stealing property; and burning down mountain villages. The contemporary practice of bringing Chechnya to peace is a too-vivid reminder of the colonial war of the nineteenth century not to wake anti-Russian, recessionist sentiments again all over the region.

The second factor is the ongoing practice from the Tsarist and Soviet times of ranking peoples according to the degree of their "loyalty" to the central authorities and according to their confession -- demonstrative political support of the peoples who are of the same faith with the Russian people, such as Ossetians (and Armenians in Transcaucasia). Peoples belonging to other religions become the least trusted. Most suspicion, however, is reserved for Muslim ethnicities (such as Chechen, Ingush, Dagestan, Karachay, and Balkar peoples), which has become a possible social base for the radical Islamism.

It has been the federal authorities, with their national politics not fully developed, that have prepared the field for the grains of Islamist radicalism to grow: the practice of political ranging of the North Caucasus peoples puts them in an unequal position, (i.e., violates the principles of the Russian federalism fixed in the Constitution of the Russian

⁵⁷ Aleksey Yermolov (or Ermolov) was a Russian Imperial general of the 19th century who commanded Russian troops in the Caucasus War (1817–1864).

Federation), weakens respect to authorities, and provokes ethno-confessional conflicts.

Professor Ramazan Abdulatipov writes:

“The ignorant and impulsive work of the federal authorities at all levels, who act in the region using the methods of dalliance and indifference, ...does not meet the interests of the peoples in the region and of the prospective state strategy in the Caucasus. An especially destructive role is played by a historically established stereotype that still dominates in the Caucasus that the ‘force is respected in the Caucasus,’ which causes the attempts to rule the Caucasus by the military and administrative methods. It is important to realize that force is met with force and friendship is met with the friendship. The situation in the North Caucasus testifies to the deep crisis of forms and methods, and the practice of the state, national, and the federal politics as a whole.”⁵⁸

Abdulatipov’s judgment remains accurate today as the ethno-political situation remains tense. This is because the basic conflict provoking factors have yet to be neutralized but only swept under the rug.⁵⁹

An example of ignorant, and impulsive politics can be seen in the so-called Ossetian-Ingush conflict, in which the authorities occupied a position that was counter-productive: Russian authorities supported the "loyal" nation, thus harming not only the conflicting parties, but general state interests as well (the political and ethno-confessional stability in the region). As a result, the conflict is not settled, and can start again any moment. This bloody conflict could have been avoided entirely if state authorities had used the traditional methods of peace-making diplomacy accepted among the mountain-dwellers, which was clearly in place at that time.

Aleksey Malashenko states: “In spite of the great number of programs related to the settlement of the general crisis situation in the Caucasus, it must be acknowledged

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

that the Center has no clear and real strategy in this region. Its prescriptions are just a set of directives and appeals of the "prevent"-, "improve"- "increase"-type and so on."⁶⁰ It is hard to object to the Malashenko judgement that the "Center does not realize the extent to which the North Caucasus is the region socially and politically single, and how strong the local specific features are in some of its fragments."⁶¹

It would be instructive to list the main sources contributing to the continued knot of ethno-confessional antagonisms in the North Caucasus: unawareness; misunderstanding; the underestimation of, and even neglect of, the system of moral values; traditions and common laws; and practices used to harmonize inter-ethnic relations. These resources are especially topical because the current stage of the North Caucasian situation faces the problem of conformity between the legislation in the Republics, being the constituent entities of the federation and the Russian Federation. Not only must there be compliance between Republican constitutions and the Russian constitution, but also there must be compliance between the Constitutions of the national Republics and the traditional common law of the mountain-dwelling peoples, (including the full spectrum of moral, ethical, legal and religious norms). There is a clearly defensible ethno-confessional factor in the social and political life of modern Russia.

Leonid Sukiyanin, an expert in Muslim law, writes,

In the areas where the Muslim people dominate in the population and Islam is one of the carrying supports of the society, of a traditional mode of life, and of the citizens' outlook, the secular authorities act in the conditions of mostly Muslim and not secular society. So, in order to influence such a society and even more so to rule it, the state authorities cannot but account for its Islamic component (which

⁶⁰ Malashenko, *Islamskie Orientiri Severnogo Kavkaza*, 11.

⁶¹ Ibid.

is actually closely intertwined with the local traditions and customs). And not only taking into account the Islamic institutions, norms and values is meant but using them purposefully, and making steps according to them. Without that the authorities risk getting no social support and being not considered legitimate by the Muslims.⁶²

Total neglect of regional peculiarities has been one of the consequences of the Russia's federalist underdevelopment which has always made (and will always make) the ethno-confessional and legal situation in the country more complicated, and more prone to future interethnic conflicts.

All Federal and regional laws that do not take into account the ethno-confessional factor (and are not adapted to the internal national life of mountain-peoples) are perceived by locals to be something that can be brushed aside, the laws for someone else to follow, and not obligatory. Such laws are ignored as governmental authorities enforce them. This external, federal coercion has made locals feel displeased with those who have ignored national traditions and do not wish to know or understand local religious values, (imposing other values and modes not accepted by them). This is the direct pathway to inter-national and political (between the republics and the center) confrontation.

Unfortunately, the courts (and other law-enforcement systems) in contemporary Russia do not take into account specific features of the Muslim legal consciousness in their law enforcement practice.⁶³ In Sukiyaïnen's opinion, "the position of the Russian state in respect to the Muslim legal culture should be reconsidered... The Muslim legal

⁶² Leonid Sukiyaïnen, *Rossiiskaya Gosudarstvennaya Politika v Otnoshenii Islama* [Russian state policy towards Islam] (Moscow, 2004), 14-15.

⁶³ Ibid., 13-14.

culture has strong positive potential, which is quite possible to find its place in the legal development of some constitutive entities of the Russian Federation with the Constitution strictly observed.”⁶⁴

Democratic Russia must help the mountain-dwelling peoples to become law-abiding citizens; to get rid of moral and legal dualism; to start embracing federal laws as their own ones; and to start understanding that the laws of the Russian Federation give them the right to live according to their national norms and traditions -- not limiting the basic human rights. Currently, federal authorities act from the position of the out-of-date prohibitions, trying to make the constitutions of the national republics comply formally with those of the Russian Federation. However, the essence of the problem seems more complicated: the constitutions of the national republics should not be copies of the federal constitution, (the text of which is almost never read by people), but they should become filled with the vital ideas that reflect their own national life.

The Tsarist administration, having realized the need to have a special program for integration of Caucasian peoples into the Russian legal frameworks (through studying the common law of the mountain-dwelling people and bringing it to conformity with the Russian laws), established a special department under the Juridical Society in St. Petersburg (1897) to study the national legal norms in the following key directions: civil and penal law and judicial proceedings.⁶⁵ Begun in the nineteenth century, an enormous

⁶⁴ Sukiyaev, *Rossiiskaya Gosudarstvennaya Politika v Otnoshenii Islama*, 14.

⁶⁵ For more on this, see: Robert D. Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 13-15.

amount of work was carried out by Russian ethnographers and lawyers to collect and to study materials related to the common law of the mountain peoples.

Studying (and using) the traditional folk-judicial institutions in practical national politics in the North Caucasus will ensure mutual understanding and respect between the mountain peoples and federal authorities, thus keeping ethno-confessional and ethno-political stability in the region. The contemporary national politics in the North Caucasus must be based, therefore, on the principles of a particular historical approach while making the federal and republican constitutions correlate together.

It is vital not only to recover positive traditions of the mountain peoples, but also to get rid of moral and legal duality in the life of people (when the norms used at home are under *Shariah* and *adat*, and the ones valid outside are the state laws), but also to include the historic peace-making experiences of the Caucasian peoples in this work, to move the central point of international peace-making activity from the state authorities to the sphere of local diplomacy: in other words, to trust the locals themselves with this complicated process, while also providing the necessary legal frameworks.

The source of many antagonisms in this ethno-confessional sphere has been the sovereignization process. After the disintegration of the USSR, with Russia declaring its independence, the factor of ethnic identification of all the peoples within the Russian Federation has also increased significantly, particularly in the North Caucasus. For example, Adygei Autonomous Region seceded from the Krasnodar territory, Karachay-Cherkessia seceded from the Stavropol territory, and these two principalities became republics, the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. The Chechen-Ingush Republic further divided into two national republics peacefully, remaining as members of

the Russian Federation. Thus, the sovereignization process (being the consequence of the fast growth of the North Caucasian peoples' ethnic self-awareness) seriously changed the structure and the membership of the Russian Federation: the federation structure became simplified and more democratic: the entities within the entities (national formations included into the territories) achieved the status of fully legitimate constituent entities of federation, and the number of national republics, the entities of the Russian Federation, increased in size.

The sovereignization process has been applied to the social and religious (confessional) sphere as well. National political elite started attracting religious leaders (and religious communities) to garner support and to use these functionaries in their political struggle. It was with these political goals that the struggle for the establishment of numerous “national Spiritual Governance” bodies was connected, as well as disintegration of Islamic communities according to narrow national and territorial principles. This made internal Islamist antagonisms stronger and the positions of traditional, Russian Islam (including the North Caucasian and local *tariqa*⁶⁶) weaker against the threat of penetration of the radical Islamist forms, (such as Wahhabism).

A labyrinthine sovereignization process sharpened the inter-ethnic situation in the North Caucasus. First of all, it adversely impacted relationships between the mountain-dwellers and Russian ethnicities (the Cossacks),⁶⁷ which have always had a somewhat privileged position in national republics as the representatives of the metropolitan nation. Relationships between the mountain-dwellers and the Cossacks were historically

⁶⁶ A *tariqa* is a school of Sufism.

⁶⁷ Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam*, 142-143.

controversial: on the one hand, there was an institution of “*kunak*” relationships (friendship), when the families or settlements of Cossacks and mountain dwellers fraternized and mixed marriages made them relatives of each other; on the other hand there was strong confrontation.⁶⁸ The social role of the Cossacks in the course of colonial wars of the nineteenth century in the North Caucasus is well known: they actively “brought to heel” the mountain dwellers, according to the Tsar’s will. The Cossack population, being the stronghold of Russian imperial politics at that time, was rewarded for the “good service to the Tsar and the Fatherland”⁶⁹ with the best lands and pastures taken from the mountain dwellers. The Cossack families often got the property, cattle, and houses confiscated from those mountain-dwellers who were not “loyal” to colonial administration, (the so-called “non-peaceful” ones).

Deep-rooted dislike between the Cossacks and mountain dwellers is manifested from time to time, (or to be more exact, it is purposefully stimulated by certain political forces). During the “First Chechen War” there was even a special Cossack regiment named after General Ermolov, formed and advertised by the mass media just to remind Chechens of their colonial past and awaken Russian nationalism. Such provocations in the North Caucasus purposefully destabilize the situation, being harmful for all the peoples and for the geopolitical interests of Russia in the region.

The ethno-confessional balance between the Cossacks and mountain-dwellers is so fragile that it can splinter any moment, thus converting the whole South of Russia into a zone of crisis. If the balance is maintained, it is only marks to the wisdom manifested

⁶⁸ Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam*, 45-47.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

by two neighboring ethnicities and thanks to some political figures who are not encouraging the “Chechen phobia” but actively using the methods of Caucasian peoples’ diplomacy and peace-building traditions. The wars in Chechnya extremely sharpened all the antagonisms in the North Caucasus, both the latent features of this region and those brought from outside:

- social and political tensions caused by privatization, generating the rise of criminal tribal clans with their own mini-armies and security services. Corrupted local authorities, being far from the social interests, discredited themselves in the eyes of the people, finally surrendering their power functions to the criminal ethnic clans;
- ethno-confessional tensions which divided people according to ethnic and religious features, thus facilitating the formation of ethno-political and religious and political unions, parties and movements, and giving the space to exposure of the mountain-dwelling peoples to the external radical Islamic influence; and
- ideological and political tensions between the supporters of radical Islam (the proponents of building the Islamic state) and the much larger portion of the Muslim population supporting the secular modes of life and still keeping the features of the Soviet mentality and an internationalism-oriented outlook.

Establishment of peace and recovery of international trust serves the interests of Russia and the Russian society, i.e., political stability is the pre-requisite necessary to implement the country’s strategic geopolitical interest in this region. The problem is of another kind: how the “living spaces” of different peoples are made to fit together: by

forcible divestiture of the other people's living space or by a civilized agreement. Currently this question sounds very topical in connection with the North Caucasus. If Russia is interested in keeping the Caucasian Republics as fully legitimate constituent entities of the Russian Federation, it is a matter of civilized agreement and accounting for mutual interests, but if Russia needs only control over the North Caucasian territories, it means continuing armed conflicts within the country.

The geopolitical interests of Russia in the North Caucasus (military strategic, political, economical, cultural and civilization ones) are connected with the following: the geographical situation of the region (the "gates" from Europe to Asia, the "bridge" between the Caspian and the Black seas, the way to Transcaucasia and the Middle East); the mineral resources (oil and gas, transportation of which through the Russian North Caucasus may bring enormous profit); material and moral (political) resources competed for by Russia, Turkey, and Western countries, such as the USA and the UK. One should not underestimate the legal rights and interests of North Caucasian republics, (being members of the Russian federation and having broad political authorities according to the Constitution of the country), have in the development of their own region's economic potential. Infringement of their interests is fraught with new bursts of separatism and armed conflicts under the conditions of local and federal political elite's corruption.

The tension between the Orthodox faith and Islam had always existed in the North Caucasus, but it became especially vivid after the fall of the USSR, when relationships between the North Caucasian (*tariqa*) Islam and the Muslim world, with its numerous movements, including the extremely radical ones, became close and caused the stronger influence of Islamic fundamentalism upon the mountain-dwelling peoples. An important

role in Christian-Islamic antagonisms is also played by the fact that multi-confessional Russia is developing more and more features of Christian orthodox country, and the Russian society, influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church, is becoming more and more Orthodox-oriented, (again edging Islam to the periphery of the country's political life, as it was in Tsarist times). This circumstance has become a strong catalyst not only for Islamization of the North Caucasus, but also for the growth of nationalism in mountain-dwelling peoples considering political practice of the federal power and of the Russian Orthodox Church as infringement of their national and religious rights. Inter-confessional tensions are also increased by official policy and by the mass media. When the Chechen, Ingush, Balkar, Karachay, and Kalmyk people returned after their deportation, they found the remaining mosques and *datsans* either destroyed or turned into utility premises. However, the Communist party authorities strictly prohibited restoration of mosques or building new ones. This could only increase tensions in inter-religious relations, all the more so in conditions when the Orthodox churches functioned everywhere in the central parts of cities and villages. It took the Muslims of Grozny, for example, ten years of struggle for their lawful rights to open a mosque. But they were not granted the right to publish the *Quran*, Sharia'h codes, and other religious literature until after the collapse of the USSR.

Currently, ethno-confessional tension is being whipped up by politicians and mass media that, while speaking about the past wars in Chechnya, often use religious terminology, such as "Islamic extremism," "fundamentalism," "Islamism," "Wahhabism," "jihad," etc., in rather a free-and-easy manner. That strengthens the negative confessional dominance of ethno-political processes in the North Caucasus,

which are already sharp (and are getting sharper), along with further delaying the solutions for the social, ethno-confessional, and political problems of the region.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Islam-Orthodox Dialogue: Status and Prospects of Development

The Russian city of Kazan offers an unusual sight: a mosque and an Orthodox Church stand inside the Kremlin walls, symbolic of the importance of two religions in the history of Tatarstan [and Russia]... While the view of the Kazan Kremlin offers a picture of serene coexistence, the relationship between Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church faces thorny dilemmas. Demographic changes and the role of religion in the Russian state place increasing pressure on Muslim-Christian relations.¹

One of the most compelling topics of successful development of any country is the relationship between the State and religion. A well-thought-out system of interactional mechanisms of the institutions of state management with religious institutions is a necessary pre-condition for achieving civil peace and political stability, as well as normalization of public life in the country.

Today in Russia, one constantly hears encouragements directed to representatives of power and religious confessions to inter-confessional dialogue dealing with several aspects, one of which is mutual tolerance of Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and representatives of all other religions. Under Soviet rule there was no such problem: inter-confessional differences were ignored because religion had been declared a “dying phenomenon.” Liberalization that started at the end of the 1980s in all spheres of life has brought a revival of religiousness into the country and an awareness by the citizens of their own confession.

¹ John Elliot and Amy Beavin, “Religious Tolerance,” *Transition Online*, <http://www.tol.org/client/> (accessed November 19 2011).

With new borders, and with new principles for the development of the State, Russia is trying to set a course for successful socio-cultural development. There are more than 160 nationalities and more than 70 religions within the Russian Federation. Currently, in virtually every region, there are individuals of at least 50 to 60 nationalities that are followers of 20-30 confessions (or religious movements). From the point of view of an impact of confessional relationship on to the public stability and political development of the Russian State, the relations between Russian Orthodoxy and Islam are most significant; since these two religions are the two most numerous ones within the country.

It is not easy to estimate the place of religion in modern Russian society. According to one estimate, the Orthodox Church unites about 60% of Russians.² Archpriest Dmitry Smirnov estimated that number at 70%, according to other data, it is 80% of Russians³. Russia, being the successor of the Orthodox Russian Empire, continues to be considered by the overwhelming majority of Russians to be an Orthodox State. Islam is the second confession, by population. Until 1991, approximately 52 million Muslims lived in the USSR. The Soviet Union used to be one of the largest Islamic empires of the world, but by 2001, in the Russian Federation, Muslims totaled only about 8% of the population.⁴ In comparison with Orthodoxy in Russia, Muslims

² Remir Lopatkin, "Konfessionalnyi portret Rossii" [Confessional Portrait of Russia]. www.religare.ru/analytics181.htm (accessed May 7, 2011).

³ O. Zharenova, "Vozmozhna li Ekspansiya Pravoslaviya v Rossii?" [Does the Expansion of Orthodoxy in Russia Possible?] www.spic-centre.ru/arhiv/religio2.htm (accessed April 14, 2010).

⁴ Shireen T. Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 44.

represent a distinct religious minority. The impact of the Muslim world is shown in “religious order” inside Russia, which is undergoing serious pressure from the outside.

In Russia today, according to different estimates there are 12 to 30 million Muslims (8-20%), belonging to more than 40 ethnicities (scientists of the Russian Academy of State service and Mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin estimate 15 million Muslims; according to data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, it is 17 million; Mufti Ravil Gainutdin estimates 19 million; many political scientists cite 20 million; and ideologist of political Islam Geydar Jemal suggests 30 million Muslims). The number of faithful people, i.e., truly believing, devout Muslims, is much less and, according to various estimates, totals only from three to five percent of all Muslims in Russia.⁵

The Muslim population is growing significantly faster than the representatives of other religions. As Abdulatipov has mentioned, this fact is not intended to confirmed the “thesis of ‘Muslim threat,’ as it is done sometimes, but based on the objective tendencies of the development of demographic processes in the country, which in many ways is due to Muslim ‘family traditions.’”⁶ On the one hand, demographic growth among Muslims helps to keep an average level of the population in Russia; on the other hand, it is mostly Tatars, Bashkirs, and nationalities of Caucasus. Thus, the ratio of ethnic Russians (Slavic people) is inevitably reduced.

⁵ Ibid., 43-45. See also: Alexei V. Malashenko, “Islam in Russia,” *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (2009): 321-322.

⁶ Ramazan Abdulatipov, *Sydyby Islama v Rossii: Istoria i Perspektivy* [The Fate of Islam in Russia: History and Perspective] (Moscow: Mysl, 2002), 18.

One can speak of the number of followers of any religion only approximately; because officially we do not have such statistics, and the number of believers is estimated by the number of representatives of any nationality, which do not always coincide with their traditional faith. In addition, when individuals call themselves Orthodox, or Muslim, (or a representative of any other religion) in response to some questionnaire, most of the respondents do not mean the fact of believing in God per se, but the fact that they come from this given ethno-cultural environment and thus, they consider themselves Orthodox, Muslim, Buddhist or other cultural traditions. That is why an Orthodox individual, for example, can lack the true faith—they merely identify themselves with Russian Orthodox culture. Moreover, individuals who call themselves Orthodox may not believe in God at all.

Frequently, in the minds of respondents, confessional self-identification serves as a substitute for ethno-national identification. Thus, the question about the number of Muslims in Russia depends on exactly who is to be considered Muslim. In Russia, historically there are certain ethnicities that have traditionally follow Islam. And so, when speaking of Tatars, Chechen, or Bashkir, as a rule, we mean representatives of Islamic religion. The degree of interpenetration, the confluence of national and religious in the sphere of Islamic ethnos of Russia, is more visible than in other groups. For as small as ethnic Islam has been, (and still is), the means is not only of self-identification, but also of self-preservation as the largest so-called “Muslim” ethnos in the Russian Federation. For example, individuals who traditionally confess Islam are Tatars and Bashkirs.

Regions of compact resettlement of Russian Muslims are the Northern Caucasus, Volga (region), The Urals, and Western Siberia. A large portion of Russian Muslims live in nine republics: Adigeya, Bashkiriya, Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Cabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, Northern Osetia, Tatarsiya, and Chechnya. The rest live in various regions of the Russian Federation: in the Central region, in the Volga region, in Siberia and in the Far East. The degree of the religiousness in different territories of Russia is also widely variant. For example, if one looks at Dagestan mosques on Friday, it produces a great impression of the number of the Muslims who has come to pray. As for the territories where Muslims are a minority, the situation is quite opposite.

In Russia, one can speak of three levels of one's self-identification: ethnic, civil, and religious. In certain situations, according to Malashenko, undoubtedly contradiction can take place between religious and civil identity, such as pertinence and ethnic self-identification that, as a Russian, may come into conflict with pertinence to Islamic *ummah*.⁷ That is why the task of the authorities in such a multi-national and multi-confessional country as Russia is to implement literate and delicate confessional and ethnic policies; in order to smooth these contradictions.

Each people, culture, religion, and individual in Russia, undoubtedly, must have an opportunity to discover their distinctive character; but this should be done in harmony with Russian society and state. As Stolypin wrote, "All citizens that populate Russia, regardless of their nationality and confession, must be absolutely equal citizens of

⁷ A. Malashenko, "Bez Vyrabotki Otnosheniya k Musulmanskomu Miru ne Sostoitsya Pereustroistvo Mira..." [Without the development of relations with the Islamic world, the transformation of the world will not take place...] http://www.religare.ru/2_4565.html (accessed May 28, 2011).

Russia.”⁸ Despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of citizens in this country confess Orthodox Christianity, Russia is not an Orthodox State.

Attempts to form a nationwide idea as a system of religious value, which could rally modern society, have been activated within the country. Ramzan Abdulatipov focuses his attention on the negative, (from his point of view), side of this process. He says that there is a preference to “predominantly one religion both on regional and nationwide levels, instead of uniting the potential, values and other religions.”⁹ Naturally, he is talking about Orthodox Christianity. Malashenko notes that “equality of religions, including between Islam and Orthodoxy, is absent, although it is being declared all this time. And this is an objective situation. Orthodoxy is still more ‘equal.’”¹⁰ Abdulatipov writes that the leaning of the state as a whole, (or one of the regions), to one religion provokes conflicts; Abdulatipov further declares that idea that Orthodoxy plays a dominating role in today’s state is not really correct, just as the requirements of the construction of an Islamic state in the territory of Russian Federation (in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Tatarstan) are not correct.¹¹

The process of formatting a cohesive Russian state policy on the issues of interreligious relations is extremely difficult. As Abdulatipov notes, adoption of one law

⁸ P. A. Stolypin, *Zhizn i Smert* [Life and Death], (Saratov, 1997), 407. Pyotr Arkadyevich Stolypin served as Nicholas II's Chairman of the Council of Ministers—the Prime Minister of Russia—from 1906 to 1911. He is often cited as one of the last major statesmen of Imperial Russia with a clearly defined political program and determination to undertake major reforms.

⁹ Abdulatipov, *Sydney Islama v Rossii: Istoria i Perspektivy*, 30.

¹⁰ A. Malashenko, “Radikalnyi Islam – eto Normalnyi Fenomen,” [Radical Islam is a Normal Phenomenon] *Political Journal* 38 (2004): 35.

¹¹ Abdulatipov, *Sydney Islama v Rossii: Istoria i Perspektivy*, 30-31.

“On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations” cannot replace the work on formation and education of conscience among citizens.¹² The process of framing state policy within relations to Islam within the framework of a united conception of State (and confessional relations), protecting the rights of citizens, freedom of worship, and society, and the support of a State committed pluralism is a complicated agenda. It is important to observe, (both from the side of the state and from the side of Islam), the ratio of components of secular, religious, and public relations. Given relations should be composed of genuine provision of rights to the citizens for the freedom of worship, and “so that regulations between religious and public institutions meet the tasks of consolidation and stability of multi-national and multi-confessional Russian society and its spiritual revival.”¹³ V. Glagolev gives an exhaustive definition of inter-religious dialogue:

Inter-religious dialogue is assembly of discussions of various theological, religious and moral, public and political, as well as social and cultural and other issues, which take place among the representatives of various *religions* and religious entities for the purposes of obtaining a common point of view or similar approaches.¹⁴

Glagolev notes that ideologists and religious leaders of “traditional” religious structures are often extremely unwilling to relinquish in the *doctrinal theology* and religious *cult*.¹⁵ The fact that neither Christians nor Muslims will ever relinquish the

¹² Abdulatipov, *Sydyby Islama v Rossii: Istorია i Perspektivy*, 35.

¹³ F. Mykhametshin, *Islam v Sovremennom Rossiiskom Obchestve* [Islam in Contemporary Russian Society] (Moscow: Logos, 2002), 42.

¹⁴ V. S. Gglagolev, *Mezhkonfessionaljnye Dialogi Sovremennosti: predposylki, usloviya, tendencii i limity* [Interfaith dialogues of modern times: preconditions, conditions, trends and limits] (Ulanu-Ude, 2007), 292.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 293.

issues of doctrinal theology and cult is not only seen from historical experience, but also in modern practice. However, Muslims and Orthodox communities of Russia today are not ready to discuss issues that are directly unconnected with doctrinal theology and cults. They have disregarded the claims of each other's views of history, teachings about religious disciplines in secular educational institutions, and have continued proselytizing activity of each against the other.¹⁶ These traditional confessions, especially the dominant one, has declared that they are not separated from the society and are ready to take part in the decision-making process on social and political problems. So far the input of "traditional" confessions in the decision-making process of publicly significant issues has not been noticeable; first of all, the Russian Orthodox Church has contradictions with virtually all other Christian confessions, (to say nothing of Islam), with which it is connected by the relations of multiple-age spiritual competition. In other words, there has been no word about a dialogue on the problems of doctrinal theology and cult and, all the more, "on confluence of...world outlook."¹⁷ The main task for religious voices is to work out common positions on the vital social issues and actively participate in the creation of a solid civil society, democratic institutions, and the genuine federalism of the Russian state. For this, Muslim-Orthodox dialogue is constructive factor in the cohesion of Russian society.

¹⁶ For more on this, see: Alexander Verkhovski, "Muslims, Society and Authorities in Contemporary Russia," in *Will Russia Become a Muslim Society*, eds. Hans-Georg Heinrich, Ludmila Lobova and Alexey Malashenko (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 121-150; John Elliot and Amy Beavin, "Religious Tolerance," *Transition Online*, <http://www.tol.org/client/> (accessed November 19, 2010); Giovanni Codevilla, "Relations between Church and State in Russia Today," *Religion, State and Society* 36, no. 2 (2008) : 114-138, etc.

¹⁷ Glagolev, 295.

However, such dialogues should be understood not only as a form of exchange of opinions for the purposes of achieving consensus, but also as a principle of social life and as a political tool; without which, any commonality among individuals catastrophically disintegrates. The absence or limitation of the dialogue as a priority principle of the functioning of the socium and power characterizes their anti-democratic, totalitarian essence. Inter-confessional dialogue is not simply a discussion of theologians of various confessions, where religious credenda are discussed or comparative analyses of various sources, definitions and religious practices are described. The dialogue in the sphere of confessional relations is key element of domestic and foreign state policy, which has its own specific strategy and social tactics. Harmonization of international relations in modern Russia mostly depends on the coordination of inter-confessional relations. If national minorities could solve the problem of maintenance and development of their own national cultures, language, and political sovereignty by secular, democratic means, then religion would find little place in the decision-making of a complicated and burning “national issue.” Therefore, the dialogue between Orthodoxy and Islam under the circumstances of modern Russia goes outside the framework of a solely confessional problem; more clearly obtaining the significance of a political one.

Actualization of such dialogue is associated mainly with changes in the political and socio-religious lives of individuals in the post-Soviet context: First of all, putting the religious factor onto the role of one defining (more or less) the political situation in the former Soviet republics. As is well-known among non-Slavic people of the USSR, the unity of nationality and religion has always been accepted as the norm. During the

sovereignty and stormy awakening of national self-awareness, “traditional” confessions (Islam) have become a vital factor for the religious and political unity of the nation.¹⁸

Secondly, actualization of Orthodox-Islamic dialogue is associated with a clearly defined tendency toward strengthening the influence of socio-religious factors in general. In the circumstances of a modern pluralistic context, it is religion that probably has the most mobilizing strength. Religion is not only an intimate matter for each person, but also a significant part of social cohesion.

Thirdly, the emergence of Orthodox-Islamic dialogue is associated with the stormy growth of the political and religious influence of Islam in Russia as well as the rest of the world; it has acted as an equal partner with and even a competitor of Christianity in general and Orthodoxy in particular. Today, the Muslim world is presented as politically independent and rich, which the most developed countries and international organizations are obliged to consider (and have partnerships with); whereas the Muslim *ummah*, which has been formed under its name, has become influential and attractive for all Muslims, including Muslim affiliations of Russia.

International relations require interreligious dialogue as the most vital component in a general intercultural dialogue. As for the problem of inter-religious dialogue, it turns out to be highly topical not only in the sphere of extremely interreligious mutual relations, but also as a factor that influences the cultural, social, economic and political life of the society. The process of development and deepening of such a dialogue has

¹⁸ See Vahit Akaev, “Islam and Politics in Chechniia and Ingushetiia,” and Domitilla Sagramoso, “Islam and Ethno-Nationalism in the North-Western Caucasus,” in *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Galina Yemelianova (New York: Routledge, 2010), 62-81, 112-145; Tamara Sivestseva, “For Us, Religion Is Life,” in *Religion and Politics in Russia*, ed. Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2010), 130-141; and Azat Khurmatullin, “Tatarstan: Islam Entwined with Nationalism,” in *Russia and Islam*, ed. Ronald Dannreuther and Luke March (Routledge, 2010), 103-121.

many obstacles, particularly the possible advancement of radical religious fundamentalism, the followers of which are present in all confessions, and who, in principle, refuse the dialogue as communication of equal participants. Fundamentalism, in this case, is understood not as the eagerness to recreate a traditional religious way of life, but as a radical religious and political movement directed to the fight with humanitarian values of modern pluralistic society.

The obstacle to the interreligious dialogue is not so much the radical fundamentalist movement as the absence of interest in the dialogue—the lack of desire to participate in such initiatives. Virtually all religious organizations are busy with domestic problems and struggle with their own “dissidents.” They try to justify their disinterest in the dialogue on various religious, social, and economic, moral and other problems by the relegating their problems with other confessions, to a lack of unity or agreement.

Meanwhile, inter-confessional relations in Russia remain highly intense, which undoubtedly, can be seen in the dialogue between faith communities. The results of sociological research, which has been implemented in Russia by Vyacheslav Karpov and Elena Lisovskaya, show the steady advancement of Islam-phobia among Orthodox people.

Our empirical data clearly demonstrates the high level and wide spread of religious intolerance in Russia. For example, among the people who consider themselves Orthodox, only 30% think that Muslims can be allowed to preach Islam publicly; as for Judaism and representatives of Western religions, the level of tolerance drops down to 26% and 17%, correspondingly.¹⁹

¹⁹ It seems that the basis for religious intolerance in Russia, is ethnocentrism. www.religare.ru/article23878.htm (accessed May 14, 2011).

According to these researchers, “Muslims show higher tolerance to the Orthodox people than the Orthodox to Muslims.”²⁰

As complicated as relations are between Orthodoxy and Islam, they have become even more complicated lately due to the introduction of teaching the *Basics of Orthodox Culture* in State and municipal schools. In the Moscow Patriarchate this class is considered to be a secular course. Muslim leaders are convinced that under the guise of this class in secular schools the “law of God” is being taught. Member of Social Chamber, lawyer Mikhail Barshchevsky notes that the name of the class is *The Basics of Orthodox Culture*, this title:

creates tension in our multi-confessional society...I am not even talking about the legal aspect of the issue: the positions of Constitution on the secular character of our state, about the separation of Church from school... In the type and volume in which this class is taught in some regions of Russia, it is precisely a simplified version of the Law of God. In fact, Orthodoxy is being taught, which is unacceptable within the framework of state education....²¹

According to the data of *The Social Chamber of the Russian Federation*, “various courses of Orthodox culture in the country are taught by 5,000-6,000 students of state and municipal educational institutions, whereas courses of Islamic culture—150-200,000, courses of philosophy and religion-study content—50,000, courses on history and culture of Judaism – more than a thousand, Buddhism – 10,000, traditional religions of minority

²⁰ Vyacheslav Karpov and Elena Lisovskaya, “Religious Intolerance among Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Russia,” in *Religion, State and Society* 36, no. 4 (2008) : 365-369. For more on this, see the extensive and the highly qualitative research done by professor and leading Russian Sociologist Michail Mchedlov. M. Mchedlov, *Essays on Religious Studies. Religion in the Spiritual and Sociopolitical Life of Contemporary Russia* (Moscow: Nauchnaya Kniga Publishers, 2005).

²¹ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], June 6, 2007.

people of the North – 10,000 people. In total, 700-800,000 people, and correspondingly not less than 20-30,000 teachers, are employed teaching these classes.”²²

Religious education in State and municipal schools takes place de facto, and, Muslims are actively engaged in teaching their students Islam within state schools. However, there is no agreement on this matter between the Council of Mufti of Russia and the Moscow patriarchate. Teaching of the class *Basics of Orthodox Culture* in a range of regions of the Russian Federation contradicts the Federal Constitution according to the head of the *Council of Muftis of Russia*, Ravil Gaynutdin, (in conversation with the Minister of Education and Science, Andrei Fursenko):

We cannot remain unconcerned by the attempts to attach new estimates of Russian history, connected with exaltation of one people and abjection of others. In violation of the principle of the Constitution of our state, the class of Basics of Orthodox Culture has been introduced into the curriculum of the schools in 74 regions. ... Teaching only this class puts Muslims, Jews and Buddhists into the situation of younger brothers... If a lop-sided decision is made, a bomb is put for the decades ahead, and a conflict is inevitable if today the culture of only one religion is taught in schools²³

According to the mass media, the Moscow patriarchate insists on the introduction of the class of *Basics of Orthodox Culture* in the schools. In July 2007, a letter was sent to the former President Vladimir Putin from a group of scientists and academicians, headed by Nobel Prize winner Zhores Alferov, criticizing the Russian Orthodox Church’s promotion of religious education in schools and theology in secular universities.²⁴ In response, church spokesmen attacked the political motives behind the letter, which they

²² Ibid.

²³ “Shkoly i ‘Osnovy Pravoslavnoy Kultury’” [Schools and the Foundation of the Orthodox Teachings] <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/> (accessed January 30, 2011).

²⁴ “Academicians Protest Orthodox Interference in Public life,” <http://www.svobodanews.ru/content/transcript/403912.html> (accessed November 3, 2010).

attributed to antireligious elements within the education ministry. In 2007, during the meeting with hierarchs of Russian Orthodox Church, Putin restated his position²⁵ that the constitutional separation of church and state could not be undone and “admonished the ROC from insisting on teaching the basics of Orthodoxy in schools,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* writes. And further, “representatives of the Church oppose the cancellation of the regional component (within the framework of which ‘Basics of Orthodox culture’ is taught in regional schools).”²⁶ Mr. Putin noted that “the issue is about learning not only one particular religion... when learning confessional oriented classes, the principle of free will should be observed.”²⁷ However, the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church during this meeting thrashed over this issue, which “seemingly was of main concern among the representatives of ROC at the moment, making them forget the rest: the problem of teaching *Basics of Orthodoxy* in schools.”²⁸

The process of teaching the class of *Basics of Orthodox Culture* continues to expand, despite the protests of the Council of Mufti of Russia. As for the dialogue on this issue between Orthodoxy and Islam, it is absent and is not in view for the foreseeable future. This is shown by sociological data from Karpov and Lisovskaya. Thus, “the biggest protests were expressed by respondents in regard to the opportunity of teaching

²⁵ Different position on relationship between Vladimir Putin and Orthodox Church, see: James W. Warhola, “The Kremlin’s Religion Temptation,” *Current History* (2007): 340-345; James W. Warhola, “Religion and Politics under the Putin Administration: Accommodation and Confrontation within ‘Managed Pluralism,’” *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 1 (2007): 75-95.

²⁶ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Independent Newspaper], November 20, 2007.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

the basics of religion for Catholics and Protestants in schools (it is considered as possible only by 8.2% of Orthodox and the same amount of Muslims).”²⁹

Those who are intolerant toward individuals of other religions follow non-religious motives: “Significant correlation is seen between intolerance to the followers of other religions and refusal of the necessity of providing all citizens of the country with equal rights in following their own faith, religious ethnocentrism, anti-Semitic and anti-Western lines as well as common political intolerance.”³⁰ In other words, “religious intolerance in Russia is not actually [a] religious phenomenon and has social and political roots.”³¹

In ethno-confessional relations one unsolved problem leads to another; creating obstacles on the way to dialogue. Serious discontent was expressed by the Council of Mufti of Russia after the publication of a book by a former employee of the Moscow patriarchate, Roman Silantyev. It is said in the compellation of Council of Mufti in Russia to the Presidium of Inter-religious Council of Russia:

recently published book *Newest History of Islamic Community of Russia*, written by Executive secretary of Inter-religious Council of Russia (ICR), Roman Silantyev, is incompatible not only with the principles of honest and objective discussion, but also with rudimentary norms of human ethics and morality, and moreover ethics of inter-religious communication. There is no sign of scientific research, either.³²

²⁹ It seems that the basis for religious intolerance in Russia is ethnocentrism. www.religare.ru/article23878.htm (accessed December 14, 2010).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Zhestkaya Kritika Knigi Silanteva,” <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/islam/?act=news&div=8150> (accessed September 5, 2010).

The ROC dissociated itself from the author of the book on Islam, noting that the position of Silantyev does not correspond to the position of the Russian Orthodox Church in relation to Islam. This book is an “expression of personal opinion and estimates of the author,” it is said in the release. The release also noted that the position of the ROC “assumes unchanged respect to the thousand-years-old Islamic tradition on the territory of Russia.”³³

Archbishop of Tashkent and Central Asia Vladimir (Ikim) says in his book *Look for Friends in the East* that Christianity is often called the religion of love, whereas Islam is called the religion of justice; further: “the essential difference in our world outlooks is in the definition of which of these two feelings must dominate when worshipping God. But in mortal life justice has nothing to argue about with love.”³⁴ He adds:

Clearing out common characteristics of our religions is the line that should not be crossed in Orthodox-Islam dialogue. Sharpening our differences, discussion of mutually unacceptable doctrines, and polemics cannot bring anything but damage. Neither Muslims nor we need this. It is important for us and is in fact necessary not to discuss the peculiarities of teachings; rather, we should clear out the basics for the purposes of mutual understanding and common good deeds.³⁵

According to experts, hopes have not been justified for the creation of a stable structure for institutionalized interreligious dialogue, connected with the creation of the Council on reciprocity with religious unities under the President of the Russian Federation. The *Inter-religious Council of Russia* (ICR), which was meant to become an institution of inter-confessional dialogue, has not justified its purpose, either. The state

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Archbishop of Tashkent and Central Asia, Vladimir, *Look for friends in the East. Orthodoxy and Islam: confrontation or community?* (Tashkent, 2000), 12.

³⁵ Ibid.

will have to become an arbiter in smoothing inter-confessional dialogue because the leaders of the confessions themselves failed to set constructive dialogue due to domestic contradictions.

According to Aleksey Malashenko, the absence of a true theological Muslim-Christian dialogue in Russia is explained, (among other reasons), by the fact that neither Orthodox believers nor Muslims have enough experienced theologians that are capable of conducting this outgoing dialogue.³⁶ According to Mark Smirnov, authentic dialogue of Christianity with other religions, (including Islam), is possible only under the conditions of a secular society, when none of the religions have special privileges from the government.³⁷ The author assumes, (not without reason), that Russia has such a confession that takes special privileges from the government.³⁸ Muslim theologian Ayrat Muhametzyanov writes:

Orthodoxy and Islam can play a major role in the stable development of the country [in Russia] only under the condition that they set equal dialogue, which would primarily assume acceptance by both sides of the equality and closeness of the main positions of two religions and the wide-ranging explanation of this idea among Orthodox Christians and Muslims.³⁹

³⁶ A. Malashenko, "Religia i Obchestvo" [Religion and Society]. www.newsru.com (accessed March 6, 2010).

³⁷ Mark Smirnov, "Religia i Obchestvo" [Religion and Society]. www.newsru.com (accessed March 12, 2010).

³⁸ There are many scholars who believe that the Orthodoxy becomes a kind of official state ideology, for example: James W. Warhola, "The Kremlin's Religion Temptation," *Current History* (2007): 340-345; James W. Warhola, "Religion and Politics under the Putin Administration: Accommodation and Confrontation within "Managed Pluralism"," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 1 (2007): 75-95; Giovanni Codevilla, "Relations between Church and State in Russia Today," *Religion, State and Society* 36, no. 2 (2008): 114-138; John Anderson, "Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church: Asymmetric Symphonia?" *Journal of International Affairs* 61, no. 1 (2007): 185-201; Christopher R. Preston, "Islam in Russia under the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religion Associations: Official Tolerance in an Intolerant Society," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2001, no. 2 (2001): 773-815; etc.

³⁹ Ayrat Muhametzyanov, *Islamskie i Xristianskie Cennosti v Dialoge Kultur* [Islamic and Christian Values in the Dialogue of Cultures] (Kazan, 1998), 179.

Muhametzyanov wonders, “Is such a dialogue possible between two religions; is there a valuable basis in their religion studies for such a dialogue?” For him, the answer is obvious: “Yes, it is possible. The doctrine of Islam contains a range of principal provisions that make this dialogue with Christianity realizable on multiple religious and moral problems.”⁴⁰

The existing atmosphere of mutual suspicion and distrust does facilitate religious dialogue. Russian religious organizations have compiled numerous vexing issues that require joint discussion and the adoption of coordinated decisions. Not only declarations of the representatives of confessions on their negative relation to these conflicts, but also consolidated joint coming forward, a common position of religious leaders on vital issues, is highly important in the circumstances of modern ethno-political conflicts, to which they try to give religious character. The dialogue between confessions, of course, should not be limited only to ethno-confessional conflicts, which are the consequences of serious problems in the sphere of economics, politics, international relations, social and religious life. The subject matter of the dialogue can and must be a wide range of social problems.

Between the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the spiritual management of Muslims there are mutual claims on the issue of unacceptability of proselytism, like the conversion of the representatives of other confessions into their own faith, where Orthodox people turn to Islam and Muslims to Orthodoxy. In March 2006, the Committee on Islam-Orthodoxy dialogue was founded under the Council of Mufti of Russia. “The goal of inter-religious dialogue is not proselytism, not conversion, but

⁴⁰ Ibid.

enlightenment, which will help us to learn more about each other, respect each other and create peace,” said the chairman of the Committee, deputy chairman of CMR Muhammed Karachay.⁴¹ “We will have dialogue not only with the Russian Orthodox Church, but also with other Christian confessions and organizations, recognized in Russia and in the world. We had a very good experience with the Catholic Church; we will communicate with Protestants and Tolstoyists,”⁴² emphasized the leader of Russian Muslim Union Aleksandr Kazakov.⁴³

Members of the committee noted the importance of the development of the relations with “brother-Jews,” as well. In short, the Council of Mufti of Russia was set for the active dialogue with all confessions of Russia, regardless of their number, since there is simply no other form of agreement on positions, overcoming of contradictions and harmonization of inter-confessional relations.

However, the ROC reacted highly negatively to the initiative of the CMR. The declarations of organizers of this Committee were not taken into consideration. ROC does not welcome the idea of creating an organization that is alternative to the Inter-religious Council on Islam-Christianity Dialogue. The Deputy Head of the Department of Foreign Church Relations of Moscow Patriarchate episcopo Yegoryevskiy (Mark), has stated:

⁴¹ “Islam-Orthodoxy dialogue,” <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/interfaith/christian-islam/2006/03/d7446/> (August 7, 2011).

⁴² The Tolstoyan movement is a social movement based on the philosophical and religious views of Russian novelist and intellectual Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910).

⁴³ <http://www.sova-center.ru/religion/news/interfaith/christian-islam/2006/03/d7446/> (accessed August 7, 2011).

Thanks to the Inter-religious Council, a lot has been and is still being done in Russia; it became an organization that is well-known and respected not only in our country, but far beyond its borders. The idea of creating alternative organization is just a short-sighted approach.

The offer of the Council of Mufti to include Catholics and Pentecostals, in addition to the representatives of Orthodox Church, did not find any support from the Moscow Patriarchate: “It needs to be understood that Christian non-Orthodox organizations have always been and still are minority communes of our country, which do not have any serious impact on the life of Russian people,” said Episcopo Mark.⁴⁴

If there is no dialogue, the existing contradictions between the confessions will never be resolved. It is necessary to move from mutual claims to a dialogue, (which, of course, will not solve all problems). In addition to liturgists, politicians, economists, philosophers, sociologists, entrepreneurs, and public characters, must act as subjects of a broader and constructive inter-confessional conversation. For the Russian Federation, the significance of the Muslim-Orthodox dialogue is growing because Islam in its territory is has not been brought here immigrants from traditionally Islamic states. It is historically rooted among the region long before the arrivals of Orthodox Christianity. A unique Eurasian civilization, in which Orthodox Christians and Muslims share a major role, has been developing for more than four centuries. Their inter-relations have been (and remain) complicated.

Muslim enclaves that are dispersed all around the country represent a significant part of a complex Eurasian body of Russia, without which the Russian Federation loses its distinctive definition. The breakup of the USSR, with all of its negative

⁴⁴ <http://i-r-p.ru/page/stream-event/index-4007.html> (accessed August 11, 2011).

consequences, cannot be compared with the possible catastrophic consequences of inter-confessional (Orthodoxy-Islamic) opposition inside the Russian Federation. All who cheer for Russian patriotism and for the expansion of the social and political sphere of action of Russian Orthodoxy to the detriment of Russian Islam and other confessions, inevitably destabilize Russia's domestic political situation. The peculiarity of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional conflict rests in the fact that they mature inconspicuously, for a long time, maintained in latent condition, but under any political conflict can powerfully explode as its activator.

When estimating the condition of inter-confessional (Orthodoxy-Islamic) dialogue in modern Russia, one can note two major points: first of all, it is highly limited and of little effect. Secondly, it is used mainly as a means of foreign policy and diplomatic influence on the partner nations of the Islamic world.

Illiberality and (lack of effect of this dialogue) is evident in the fact that it is being implemented on a narrow institutional level, exclusively between Orthodox and Muslim ministries that are obtaining a public voice in rare jointly-adopted declarations on the most troubling social and political problems. As for the dialogue on distinctly interpersonal level, there is almost nothing to say about it, besides the fact that anti-Islamic sentiments are spread among a significant partion of the population.⁴⁵ Many Russians do not know anything about Islam and are not interested in this religion; despite the fact that millions of followers of Islam have been living next to them for centuries.

⁴⁵ For more on this, see: Christopher R. Preston, "Islam in Russia Under the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religion Associations: Official Tolerance in an Intolerant Society," *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2001, no. 2 (2001): 773-815; Darjya Khalturina, *Musulmane Moskvy: Faktory Religioznoy Tolerantnosti* [Muslims in Moscow: the Factors of Religious Tolerance] (Moscow, In-t Afriki RAN, 2007), 5-145, etc.

Absence of inter-confessional dialogue and the negative attitude of the federal mass media in the light of tense conditions in traditionally Muslim Republics of Northern Caucasus have led to a phenomenon of Islam-phobia that is extremely dangerous for Russia. The absence of a constructive Orthodox-Muslim dialogue in modern Russia is explained by several reasons:

1. Relics and preconceptions regarding Islam, which are maintained in the public mind and psychology of Russians. In Tsarist Russia, when Orthodoxy was the state religion and Islam was merely a “tolerable” religion, there was no question about searching for ways to come closer between two un-equal religions: Orthodox ministry and authorities did not see an equal partner in Islam for dialogue. The consequence of the absence of dialogue between Orthodoxy and Islam, the experience of searching for mutual understanding, and the confluence of viewpoints not only on social and economic and political issues, but also theological ones, are preconceptions that were born on the basis of religious contradictions. Today, these preconceptions play a major role in strengthening ethno-confessional suspicion. The absence in Russia of dialogue about traditions is due to the under-development of democratic institutions, and it undervalues the relevance of dialogue as a form of social communication. Modern Russian religious and political leaders, unfortunately, have not achieved such a level of political culture that dialogue is perceived as a norm of social and political life. In the conditions of a one-party (Communist party) political system and a total ban on any dissidence (including the one on the issues of ethno-confessional relations), there was no

need of dialogue. It was absent per se, and it was replaced by orders from above. As experts note, inter-confessional dialogue amounted to the episodic communication of the ministry of various confessions and their participation in the political events conducted by the state. Properly speaking, the main point of such dialogue amounted to the joint approval of foreign and domestic politics of the Soviet administration from the point of religious positions.

Something similar is taking place now, where inter-confessional dialogues are organized and demonstrated to please current political interests by politically engaged representatives of ministries from one side or the other.

2. The special position of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Russian Federation, which traditionally is used as a state religion
3. An organizational disunity of Islam in Russia. Unlike the Russian Orthodox Church, which has a structured system of agencies that implement interaction with the state and society on federal and regional levels, Muslim communes have no such structure or unified center that would coordinate the activity of regional Islamic organizations. Today, the Muslim commune of Russia is divided not only organizationally, but also ideologically. Many sociopolitical as well as domestic Muslim problems are viewed differently by different Muslim leaders, who publicly oppose each other in their devotion to radical Islam and Wahhabism.

Today, the Russian Orthodox Church takes a high position in Russian domestic and foreign policy and in the whole system of governmental authorities and the political organization of Russian society. The social point of this phenomenon cannot be casually

estimated. On the one hand, referring to national spiritual sources and moral potential of “the religion of fathers” is a positive step toward restoring the social and psychological climate in the country, lowering the growth of drugs and crime, and implementing religious and moral absolutism as a psychological therapy for a frustrated Russian society. On the other hand, the social point of artificial overvaluation of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the life of Russia demonstrates the under-development of the civil society. The reliance of the authorities on the church, and the excessive hope of its mobilizing role in political consolidation of the Russian society, shows a lack of moral resources for the state itself. A strong government sees its reliance on civil society, which provides it with healthy opposition, and is responsible and effective.

In the circumstances of post-Soviet ideological (and subsequent moral unrest), the thematic problem of the society was the search for the spiritual core of its unity. During crucial historical epochs in the search for the solutions of such scale, individuals have always returned to the fundamental values of the past, such as national centuries-old experiences, paradigms of culture, and the highest manifestation of spirituality. That is why the use of the moral and cultural potential of Russian Orthodoxy is perceived as quiet, lawful, and productive; however, it should not be forgotten that analogous processes take place in the public mind not only of Russians, but also of other groups who follow different religious viewpoints, who have their own specific civilized peculiarities, their own perceptions of cultural and moral values and, their own politicians that are ready to use the mobilized potential of national religions.

This fact actualizes the necessity of inter-religious dialogue even more: First of all, it cannot be allowed that objective cultural and religious differences of Russian

peoples are used by regional politicians as a means of their mutual rejection and enmity; second, the ethno-confessional diversity of Russia should not be underestimated as a factor of cultural, moral, and religious mutual enrichment of its peoples; third, the unique geopolitical situation of this Eurasian country and its unique historical experience of coupling the united area of several types of civilizations gives Russia a chance to present the world a viable model of inter-civilized interaction in all spheres of socio-religious development. It is politically and socially unjustified when the state sets Orthodoxy exclusively as a spiritual factor of unity of “the state-forming Russian ethnos.” The approach to the definition of Russia as an Orthodox Russian country carries the potential to become a powerful destabilizing element.

Some Russian priests and liturgists, especially the ones who work in national, traditionally Islamic Republics (or in the geographical ranges of Islamic distribution in the Russian Federation), understand the situation better and oppose those politicians who obtrude this idea of pseudo-patriotism. For instance, Archbishop of Kazan and Tatarstan Anastasiy considers that Orthodoxy cannot be an official religion. “In our multi-national and multi-confessional country, it is impossible to give a priority to only one religion.”⁴⁶ According to Anastasiy, personal sympathies of the leader of any religion are possible in regions and republics but as a representative of authorities he/she must, in any situation, observe parity among religions, which “is the pledge of stability of the society.”⁴⁷

Experts justifiably deem the current state of the Orthodox-Muslim dialogue as “incomprehensible.” This is due to the fact that the State’s position on principal

⁴⁶ *Islam Minbare* [Minbere Islam - Islam Tribune], September 2000.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

problems, such as its interactions with a confessional sphere and an inter-confessional (in this case, Orthodox-Muslim) dialogue, in particular, is not clearly defined. The state is obliged to remain as the upholder of democracy, social justice and humanity; ensuring that these principles of social life are higher than those of religious, political, and ethno-political interests and sympathies. “Native” nationalism (religious extremism) is no better than “foreign” nationalism; since both lead to social catastrophe.

The Council of Mufti of Russia’s call to the administration of the Russian Federation with the Declaration *On Preserving and Strengthening of National Unity in the Russian Federation* was a serious reminder of this truth. This declaration is connected to the facts of historical and cultural order that one tries to use for the purposes of “artificial opposing of the peoples...in the light of strengthening the anti-Islam campaign implemented by the all-Russian and local mass media including the state ones” due to political folly or malice of separate politicians and state officials.⁴⁸

Including the day of the fight in the Kulikovo Field in the array of national holidays became a specific reason for concern by the Council of Mufti of Russia. This holiday is now officially called the “Victory of Russian soldiers over Mongol-Tatars,” and (according to the authors of this Declaration), it is impossible to interpret it differently than as an unacceptable “opposition of one group against another, national self-exaltation at the humiliation of others.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “O Soxranenii i Ukreplenii Nacionalnogo Edinstva v Rossiiskoi Federacii,” [Preservation and Promotion of National Unity in the Russian Federation] <http://orthomed.ru/news.php?id=10222> (accessed September 1, 2011).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Development of an Orthodox-Muslim dialogue would help the citizens of Russia to appreciate that the Russian state has been formed as a peaceful union of Orthodox Christians and Muslims together. A fundamental basis of all confessions is principally peace loving. However, in the basics of a social conception of the Russian Orthodox Church, the problem of interaction with Islam is absent: either hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church could not work out a consolidated position due to constant domestic disputes or Orthodoxy does not see Islam as an equal partner for a genuine dialogue.

The Russian Orthodox Church has shown diligence in establishing an Orthodox-Islam dialogue with foreign Muslim countries. According to the Russian mass media, a seventh colloquium of the Joint Russian-Iranian Committee on the dialogue *Islam and Orthodoxy* took place in Tehran on May 31, 2010. The results of that dialogue were approved by the Holy Convocation, and the latter considered the position of the Russian Orthodox Church for continuation of the dialogue on religious and public issues that are of interest for Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and contemporary society in general.⁵⁰

According to *Interfax-Religion*, Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kirill (now the Patriarch of Moscow and Russia) visited Yemen in December 2005. It was the first visit of a hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church to this state. Answering the questions of journalists in the airport of Sana regarding the purposes of the visit to Yemen, Kirill emphasized that his visit was “one of the steps of the Moscow Patriarchate in the development of a Christian-Muslim dialogue.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ The 7th Meeting of Joint Russian-Iranian Commission for Islam-Orthodoxy Dialogue Opens in Teheran”, <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/41958.htm> (accessed August 3, 2011).

⁵¹ “Visit of Metropolitan Kirill in Yemen,” <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/67071.html> (accessed August 2, 2011).

The international conference *Perspectives of a Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Modern World* was held in Amman, Jordan. The conference was initiated by the *Fund of Unity of Orthodox Christians* together with the Orthodox Community of Jordan. The participants of the conference discussed issues that are germane for the whole world in the context of the spiritual experience of Orthodoxy and Islam. “The main tasks that were assigned to the world religions in modern times are the development of a dialogue between the representatives of different confessions, the return of individuals to spiritual values, and condemnation of violence,” the participants of this event noted. “In our days, when one of the main problems is the loss of moral guides, the voice of authorized Orthodox and Islamic officials is especially important,” Sheikh Izzedin at-Tamimi, the counselor of the King of Jordan on religious problems, said during the opening of the conference.⁵²

The Russian Orthodox Church shows readiness to establish dialogue with foreign Islamic states. Undoubtedly, such activity should be welcomed. If the same eagerness in establishing the Orthodoxy-Islam dialogue within the country existed, there would have been a much greater benefit than what is seen now. So far, inter-confessional relations in Russia leave much to be desired. Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and Russia, declares that Russia “is an Orthodox country with national and religious minorities.”⁵³ This statement shows that some hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church do not consider “religious minorities” as fundamentally equal partners in the dialogue.

⁵² “Prospects for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Modern World,” http://www.st-catherine.ru/international_orthodox_conference (accessed July 15, 2001).

⁵³ “Russia – the Orthodox rather than a Multi-denominational country,” <http://orthodox-newspaper.ru/numbers/at29097> (June 18, 2011).

Tariq Ramadan, a Professor of Islamic Studies on the Faculty of Theology at Oxford University, poses many questions regarding the necessity of establishing an inter-religious dialogue. Many questions that he raises are relevant for an inter-confessional dialogue in Russia. Ramadan said that the need for an inter-religious dialogue is not in doubt even though some people still do not understand its real value and purpose. What exactly is this dialogue about? Is one group trying to proselytize another group? Can one be involved in interfaith dialogue without a hidden agenda? What is the real impact of all these friendly words about respect and peaceful co-existence when we see how the followers of each distinct religion act? These questions simply cannot be ignored. They are of primary relevance because if they are answered unclearly, we will risk obtaining an externally nice dialogue that will not preclude distrust and suspicion and will lead nowhere. As Ramadan noted, the Qur'an contains not only the acceptance of the necessity of dialogue but also the instructions regarding the form in which this dialogue should be conducted. This should not be simply an exchange of information. It should be a way of communication and relations. Ramadan concludes that if a dialogue is necessary (and if the method of conversation is important in itself), we are encouraged to establish the relations of forgiveness and justice with everyone who respects our freedom of worship and our human dignity.⁵⁴ Dialogue is an act of persuasion, hearing out, self-understanding, and self-consciousness and heart: Together, these qualities create discernment.

⁵⁴ See Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity* (Islamic Foundation, 2009) and Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

An analysis of the existing social and religious life in Russia, accompanied by the study of the condition of inter-confessional state, (and confessional relations), shows that inter-confessional dialogues are necessary, (along with all their drawbacks), on the content of problems that are discussed as well as their results. In these circumstances, a dialogue between Orthodoxy and Islam in the Russian Federation will go beyond the framework of an inter-confessional one and is assigned a political significance. The need for such a dialogue is a vital part of the domestic and foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Moreover, the initiator, organizer, and active participant (third party) of any inter-confessional conversation must be the authorities, of the state that have direct relations to the condition of inter-confessional contacts within the country.

In the near future, the political, social, and economic climate in the Russian Federation will (in many ways) be defined by relations between the two largest confessions: Orthodoxy and Islam. That is why it is necessary to conduct regular dialogues between Orthodox and Muslim ministries on such issues as war and peace; the role of religion in military and political conflicts; the development of mechanisms for the prevention of ethno-confessional conflicts; the national and religious policy of federal and regional authorities; education and culture; fighting against drugs and alcoholism; the commonality of historical fates of the peoples of Russia; the formation of tolerance; a liberal attitude toward religion; and other facts, for the purposes of overcoming suspicion while strengthening mutual understanding between both institutional ministries and regular followers of these confessions.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

In the course of the centuries-long evolution of Islam within the territories of the Russian state, it has enough favorable conditions for existence. Islam flourished in an era of struggle between Christian *Rus* and the Tatar Mongol Yoke and seizure of the Islamic Khanates. After seizure of Kazan, Islam in Russia was effectively prohibited for over two centuries. Nevertheless, Catherine II returned religious freedom to Muslims after the Pugachev Rebellion (1773-1775). Later, atheism was promoted by the Soviets. During the first ten years after the 1917 revolution, however, the Soviet government treated the Islamic religion with more tolerance than they did other religions. Many aspects of the USSR politics towards the Islamic religion were controversial but the fact that “sovietization” facilitated modernization of all society, expansion of the scope of education and social safeguards, and the beginning of the formation of the civic self-consciousness and the progress of Muslim communities (while some of them were still in the developing stages of feudalism), should not be forgotten. Consequently, all these events contributed to the setting of a foundation for a unique Christian-Muslim Russian community. A low level of politicization, leniency toward adherents of different creeds, and acceptance of the Soviet statutory power as an independent source of law, enabled Russian Muslims to live in peace with their neighbors.

Today, Russia endeavors to launch its development in new conditions as a multiconfessional and multinational state. For the most part, the Muslim community in

the Russian Federation consists of Russian indigenous populations living in this territory for more than thousand and a half years, who were converted to Islam many centuries ago (some of them before the prevalence of Christianity in *Rus*).

Russian Muslims comprise the second largest confessional group in the country. According to different statistics, is estimated that there are between 15 and 30 million Russian Muslims. In reality, its socio-political influence in the country is beyond the sums of a simple population count. Over the course of history, three widespread, stable Muslim areas have formed within Russian Empire (and later in the USSR): Muslim nations of the Volga Region – Tatars, Bashkirs and others; Muslims of the North Caucasus; and Muslims of the Central Asia, who merged into the Empire later than others and who have preserved the most of ethnic culture and confessional independencies, living habits, and traditional economic structures.

The process that has been described as Russia's "Islamic revival", (i.e., a new way for Muslims to refer to their own religion with its centuries-old traditions in a search of spiritual support), is as natural, as it is predicated by profound changes in the public life of the country. The revival of religion as a form of public conscience is extremely prescient to the self-identification of the nation.

Analysis of the socio-political situation and study of the main tendencies of influence of the Islamic factor in Russia shows that Islam is a foundation for self-identification and a means of self-preservation for a distinct part of the nation. This tendency will be preserved in the near future. Despite the tense situation in Russia, counter-terrorist operations in Chechnya and lack of proper regulation of numerous consequences of the collapse of the USSR, a stable environment was established for an

the Islamic revival and this movement will continue to integrate itself into the socio-political and socio-cultural life of the country.

Russian Muslim communities have formed social interests that can be summarized as follows:

- They consider themselves lawful citizens of Russia preserving their Islamic religion;
- The Russian Muslim community is treated with respect in the state ideology and politics;
- Development of their own system of religious education;
- Strengthening their ties with the world Muslim community.

The “Islamic factor” is increasingly influencing the socio-political life of Russia. Active collaboration between religion and politics is emerging in the political scope of the country. Government and religious leaders need each other and mutually exert an influence and (at times a force). Participation of Muslim clergy in politics is constantly growing as they become more involved in the political life of the country, voicing opinions, or reacting to various events. Association with political power allows them to more successfully influence it.

Politics and religion are inter-influential aspects of Russian social life. The Islamic revival in Russia is not yet accompanied by opposition, from both Islamic and secular authorities. Discrepancies arising between them have been solved by negotiations. Islamist revivalism is also based on activation of political movements under religious slogans and Muslim ethnic groups’ aspiration to defend their own independence and interests under the stressful conditions of world globalization. The

number of new Islamic movements and parties lobbying their own interests and actively participating in election campaigns is dramatically increasing. The overwhelming majority of the Russian Muslim movements do not propose a program to establish a distinct Islamist state. Most are prepared to resolve the issues of religious, social, and cultural revival of the Muslim nation within the existing framework of a secular state system. However, Russian Islam cannot actually remain outside politics, no matter how much Muslim clergy wish to declare its own official indifference toward political changes. Practically, it is impossible to dismiss “political Islamism,” because this is a specific feature of our modern political situation. Even internal issues of division and coalition among the *Spiritual Board of Muslims* (DUM) have underlying political reasons, and can be understood only in the context of a certain political course within the Russian Federation. The politicization of all Muslim parties, blocks and Muslim press is increasingly more apparent.

Today, Muslim religious leaders in Russia are not united due to a host of factors. Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been structured into a vertical hierarchy and has almost dissolved into new layers of bureaucracy. Thereby, the ROC has an opportunity to actively influence politics within the country and affect the decisions of the political leaders. In reference to Islam, the Russian state was able to avert the internal formation of such strong structures; therefore, it should be called a horizontal hierarchy, whereby Muslim leaders become inner politicians and actively lobby for their own interests. As a whole, they have much fewer possibilities for this in comparison with the ROC.

Currently, the formation of the united DUM is not in the interest of the state and will be justified only if its leadership will exist under the control of the state. Otherwise, it can develop into a state within the state or an independent “political” body trading with the state in pursuit of its own goals. The state does not want to allow the growth of an Islamic organization into a bureaucratic structure, as is happening with the ROC. Russian governmental authorities needs to lessen the influence of the clergy on politics as a whole, in order to protect the secular interests of the country, and sanction the equality of all religious, and ethnic and social groups in order to prevent the influence of external forces or promote Islamist aspiration for independent state structures.

Thus far, there have not been any major inter-confessional conflicts with Muslims, with the exception of some outbreaks of Islamophobia after recurrent terrorist attacks in Russia. Social tensions within the Russian Federation (and growing Islamophobia) draw wary national attention to Islam, which sometimes leads to aggressive actions against its followers. Negative stereotypes are especially toxic given the intercultural tensions that exist in Russia. An Islamophobic climate, skillfully manipulated by the mass media by intentionally intensifying a threat from the Islamic religion and its followers, has a negative effect on all Muslims’ relationships within the society, thus forming an unnecessary warped conceptions of all Muslims. Indeed, the tradition of Russian Islam formed in close interaction with Orthodoxy became an inseparable constituent, and an organic part of Russian statehood. If Islam had been an enemy of Russia, it would not have survived in Russia for so many centuries. Russian nationals must understand that the lack of alternatives for Muslims, Orthodox Christians,

and representatives of all other religions to cohabitate in the country is a key factor for the stability and peace, and national consent.

Moreover, terrorism does not have a long-term hold in Russia for the following reasons:

- Russian Islam is a part of peaceful *madhabs*;
- A unique symbiosis has emerged during long years of the development in the Russian state, in close proximity to the Russian Orthodox culture;
- Occurs as a consequence of political confrontations between the various forces, both internal and external, which principally have a way to be resolved;
- Occurs as a consequence of the social stratification and spiritual crisis in the society related, among other things, to the collapse of the Soviet empire, crash of the entire governmental system, crisis in the all scopes of life, and loss of life orientation.

Due to the strategic importance of the Russian Southern regions, an intent interest from different countries will continue to increase, especially considering the depletion of natural resources in other parts of the world. Therefore, the southern borders and Russian boundaries will remain at the center of multiple forces resorting to extreme forms of battle for their own interests.

In light of informational globalization, the Russian Muslim community cannot afford to stand back from the processes that affect the entire Islamic world. Today, the Muslims of Russia (and the Islamic world) are coming closer together and, consequently, an infiltration of new elements with questionable influence may become inevitable.

Since the late 90s, Russia has been overrun by masses of religious missionaries often bearing ideas alien to traditional Russian Islam: The tendency to politicize Islam is most evident in Tatarstan and the North Caucasus. Incidents of the formation of religious political movements of an extremist nature have occurred, instigated by the interferences of the external forces through intermediaries of various foreign Islamic funds and organizations. However, their mass dissemination in the “Muslim” population of Russia is attributable to Sunni Islam, hence predetermining its peaceful, non-aggressive nature from apolitical point of view. Therefore, the views of extremists do not have organic prospects of broad response in Russian Muslims, (not in the near future, in any case).

Currently, the power structures do not always have a clear vision of the role of an Islamic factor in the Russian society and state. However, the dismissal of this factor is very imprudent. Russia must work out a comprehensive strategy dealing with various Muslim communities within the country. Special attention should be paid to the fact that there is an objective necessity to introduce religious education for the Muslim clergy in order to prevent infiltration and implementation of the antagonistic radical Islamist ideology. The Islamic revival process shall be guided in the direction of an Islamic traditional, orthodox community that is adapted to distinct Russian conditions.

The multiplicity of various forms of Islam is intertwined with the dynamic diversity of the ethnic populations which comprise a cultural treasure of Russia. This same dynamic also harbors the possibility of the upsurge of the ethnic and national antagonisms and the aggravation of conflicts. Russian society faces an imperative mission of consolidation as one of the vital conditions for recovering from economic recession, ensuring national security, and advancing harmonious progress. The

prerequisite for achieving all this in a multinational and multiconfessional society is education, proclamation of national and religious tolerance in Russia, and guidelines for tolerant awareness and behavior. As was stated by the former Council under the President's Plenipotentiary in Chechnya and member of the *Board of the Fund for Supporting Democracy and Social Progress*, Shamil Beno, "Islam is not a religion of peace and it is not a religion of violence. It is just a religion."¹ The state must impede the cultivation of Islamophobia as it might ignite in the country a religious and multinational hatred.

Today, the "Islamic factor" is not a significant threat for Russia. The Russian Federation is primarily a non-Muslim country and Islam does not have prospects of becoming a national or, at least, a dominant religion. During its long-lasting history of co-existence of religions, Russia has already generated an example of the peaceful alliance between representatives of traditional religions. Russia enjoys a vast interchange of the cultures. General Rostislav Fadeev arrived already in nineteenth century at the idea that "like Janus, Russia has two faces: one looks toward Europe and the other toward Asia. We did not create such status; we were born as a country conjoined to Europe and Asia."²

Russia has historically been able to organically accomplish an integration of the cultures of the two completely distinct civilizations, Christian and Muslim. Much remains to be done in that direction. Herewith, the Islamic factor can be both a factor of

¹ Ivan Sukhov, "Musulmane opyat prishli v obchestvennoe dvizhenie" [Muslims Came Again to the Social Movement]. <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1111215120> (accessed September 1, 2011).

² Rostislav Fadeev, *Kavkazskaya Voina* [Caucasian War] (Moscow: Algoritm, 2005), 24.

stability for Russia, and for the wellbeing and prosperity of its citizens and a threat to its vital interests. It will depend on Russian politicians as to how this factor will play out.

The key goal of the state is to ensure stable political and socio-economic development for the Russian society in all regions of the country, regardless of the nation's religious beliefs. This can be achieved only by actually making an allowance for the "Islamic factor" in every interior and foreign policy decision and observant and balanced attention to Islam by the authorities. It is imperative to understand that the Muslim *ummah* historically has been (and still remains) a dynamic part of Russian society.

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