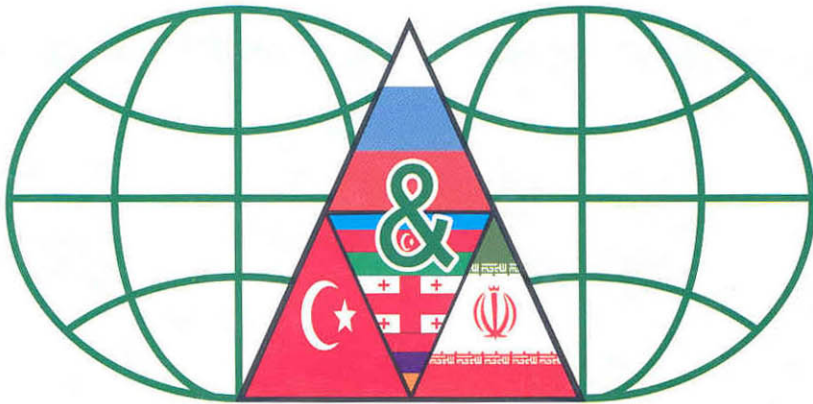




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tion and the formation of a consumer society if they do not have any sort of contemporary ideology. On the one hand, not only is it impossible to form a contemporary mountain ideology based on the national factor alone, but nor was this factor able to play a significant role in activating national movements during the first half of the 1990s. And on the other, Islamic values cannot be forcefully introduced into the mountain communities, no matter how much young people, the most radical leaders of the Northern Caucasus, would like this. The local creative and academic intelligentsia, who are mainly from the older and middle-aged generations, largely lost their high standing in society and reputation as legislators of public morals during the 1990s. And the younger generation has totally lost its reference points, some of whom have gone over to Islam. Nevertheless, we should not lose heart and be pessimistic about this process. The local creative and academic intelligentsia, despite all the contradictoriness of their interests, including political, are capable of becoming more actively involved in creating a present-day multi-cultural expanse in which a contemporary mountain ideology will also take shape as a tool in the successful search for national (and religious) self-preservation in the globalizing world.



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ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IN THE CAUCASUS: REAL THREAT AND HOW TO AVERT IT

A b s t r a c t

The author looks at the role and place of Islam in the contemporary socio-political processes in the Caucasus. He identifies the main factors responsible for the growth of religious extremism and criticizes some of the methods used to defeat it. The author is convinced that despite the socioeconomic roots of con-

temporary religious extremism, there are clear distinctions between the trends obvious in Azerbaijan and in the Northern Caucasus. He presupposes that radical ideas can be defused by efforts designed to socialize the religious communities with due account of certain Shari'a canonical rules.

The global changes have triggered complex and irreversible processes that have not only transformed the principles of interstate relationships, but also shaken the foundations of the international

security system. In an effort to translate its economic and military supremacy into cultural and spiritual domination, the West has touched the deepest layers of consciousness of other civilizations, thus disrupting its slow, yet consistent centuries-long evolution. The crude methods of interference could not conceal the global reformers' true intentions: they were not only unprepared, but also unwilling to start a dialog with the Third World. Certain Western academics, such as S. Huntington, F. Fukuyama, B. Lewis, R. Kaplan, A. Schlesinger, and others,¹ have already decided on the place the South is expected to fill in the new world system and scientifically substantiated it.

This raised a wave of religious and ethnic self-identification as a means of survival amid the chaos of social transformations and the unnatural division of societies into elites and the masses. The Muslim world was more open in its hostility to the new project: it interpreted the encroachments on Islam's superiority and universality as a threat to its continued existence.

Because of their economic and technical backwardness, low educational and cultural level, and absence of political and social conceptions of their own equally adjusted to the Muslim traditions' positive side and latest achievements, none of the Muslim countries (with the exception of Malaysia) proved able to respond to the globalization challenge. In the past, prominent Islamic scholars—ash-Shafii (767-820), Ibn Hanbal (780-855), al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), Ibn Haldun (1332-1406) and others—wrote a lot about political order and social relations. At the same time, according to Professor of the University of Wisconsin A.R. Abootalebi, they paid less attention to the political dimension of the Shari'a than to its theological aspect. Such prominent issues as the correlation between the rights of the individual and the ummah, the right to rule, the source of political legitimacy, and the right or the duty to oppose an unjust ruler remained poorly developed. The same can be said about the Islamic government's duties and functions. As a result, Shari'a-based political philosophy remained undeveloped, while Islamic political thinking continued to be purely speculative.²

The extremely negative attitude toward the West common among the Muslims is fed by their awareness of the widening gap between the North and the South, the political and military support the United States and the EU extend to the Jewish state, as well as the memory of the fairly recent colonial past of the Muslim countries and the European legacy in the shape of inadequate nationalist regimes. This created very real prerequisites for radical movements and political ideas rooted in religious dogmas.

It would be wrong, however, to concentrate on the Muslim world alone while looking for sources of Islamic extremism. The architects of the future world were very much concerned with Islam's transnational nature, the simplicity and rationalism of its postulates (a perfect monotheist tradition and the absence of church hierarchy), the Muslim countries' advantageous geopolitical situation, their huge hydrocarbon resources, the changing demographic makeup of the world, etc. Recently exploited to undermine the position of the main Eurasian rivals, Islam has been proclaimed a threat to the new "world order" even though its bellicose adherents can still be used in local conflicts and as instruments designed to check Islam's influence in the United States and Western Europe.

The Caucasus' complex ethnoconfessional composition has made the region a seat of local conflicts: since the 1990s, it has been involved in social transformation processes and statehood development. The clashing interests of several large powers developed into protracted armed conflicts. In the

¹ See: S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, London, 1997; F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, 2006; B. Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 266, No. 3, September 1990; R. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: A Journey at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, Random House, New York, 1996; idem, *Balkan Ghosts*, Vintage Books, New York, 1993; A. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, Norton, New York, 1992.

² See: A.R. Abootalebi, "Islam, Islamists, and Democracy," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No.1, available at [<http://www.biu.ac.il/SOC/besa/meria/journal/1999/issue1/jv3n1a2.html>].

context of Islamic revival—one of the most prominent social-political phenomena in the post-Soviet Caucasus—religion did not dominate any of the local conflicts. Today, however, religious extremism is one of the region's serious destabilizing factors. It threatens the local states' sovereignty and territorial integrity by adding special overtones to the international relations there; more than that, it infringes on the rights of the faithful majority that rejects extreme ideas.

To correctly assess this threat we should identify the role and place of Islam in the sociopolitical processes in the Caucasus, and the factors behind mounting political extremism there, as well as critically analyze some of the methods employed to rebuff extremist ideas.

Islam came to the Caucasus in the 7th century, but it was not until the 18th century that the local peoples finally accepted it as their religion. From that time on, Islam has greatly affected spiritual culture, traditions, and everyday life in the Caucasus. The present wide-scale religious revival is explained, on the one hand, by the desire of the common people and the academic community to go back to the traditional values in search of mechanisms for overcoming the social and economic crisis and political disunity and to find spiritual resources to fight corruption and crime. On the other hand, those who rule these people want to channel public energy in the right direction so as to reap political dividends.

The attitude toward Islam among most of the Muslim nations of the Caucasus differs greatly from that of the Arab Muslim world and of some other traditionally Islamic regions. According to Brenda Shaffer, Research Director, Caspian Studies Program at Harvard University, most Caucasian Muslims look at Islam as a component of their ethnic and religious identity; it is not, however, their primary collective identity. Islamic-based solidarity with the Muslims outside the Caucasus is minimal, yet it can be found among small North Caucasian groups. Most of the local people think highly of their local traditions, but they are not prepared to identify themselves with the Muslim world in a broader sense.³

Certain researchers, however, tend to overestimate the Islamic impact on the local processes. According to Egyptian analyst K.M. Kamel of the American University in Cairo, the Russian troops and their cruelty united all the Islamic forces against their common enemy, despite serious enmity between the Sufi brotherhoods and more radical Islamists.⁴

The above sounds like a political statement, not a description of the real situation. The Caucasus is home to about 60 autochthonous nationalities that belong to various language groups and language families. According to the 2002 All-Russia Population Census, there were 6.9 million living in eight republics of the Northern Caucasus. The population size of the three Central Caucasian states is 15.8 million (see Table 1 on p. 148).

The above demonstrates that the share of the Muslim population is assessed as 59.5 percent, and of Christians as 39.5 percent. The centuries-long experience of cooperating with the Orthodox Christian civilization affected the local peoples' world outlook and enriched public conscience with the experience of living alongside a different faith. Their cultural and spiritual affinity with the Muslim world notwithstanding, the Caucasian nations belong to the Eurasian cultural and historical system.

This should not be taken to mean that the Caucasus is an area of specific Muslim culture: the local religious tradition is represented by numerous trends that do not agree among themselves. From this it follows that Islam cannot serve as the key to political affinity there.

What is behind the radicalization of some of the North Caucasian and Azeri Muslims? Is it part of the global trend obvious everywhere throughout the Muslim world, or does religious extremism in the Caucasus stem from other, purely local roots?

³ See: B. Shaffer, "It's not about Ancient Hatreds, It's about Current Policies: Islam and Stability in the Caucasus," available at [<http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/crs/eng/Vol5/shaffer.htm>].

⁴ See: K.M. Kamel, "Islam in the Northern Caucasus: The Politics of Militancy and Revolt," available at [<http://islamonline.net/English/Views/2004/11/article03.shtml>].

Table 1

**Confessional Composition of the States and
Republics of the Central and Northern Caucasus**

Administrative unit	Population (million)	Muslims (%)	Christians (%)	Others (%)
Azerbaijan	8.3	95.6	4.2	0.2
Armenia	3.2	—	99.99	0.01
Georgia	4.3	11.0	88.0	1.0
Adigey	0.44	29.0	70.0	1.0
Daghestan	2.57	94.6	4.9	0.5
Ingushetia	0.47	95.5	4.5	—
Kabardino-Balkaria	0.90	72.0	27.8	0.2
Kalmykia	0.29	12.2	34.5	53.3
Karachaevo-Cherkessia	0.44	64.8	35.2	—
North Ossetia-Alania	0.71	8.7	91.2	0.1
Chechnia	1.10	96.32	3.68	—
TOTAL:	22.72	59.5	39.5	1.0

Russian academic K. Poliakov sees the roots of extremism in the post-Soviet expanse in the contradictions of so-called “catching up” modernization, the deforming role of “dependent development,” the demographic disproportions, the instigations of the Cold War rivals, the use of Islam as a mobilizing ideology, as well as the inner sources of Islamism contained in the doctrine itself. When writing about the special role of the foreign factor, he points out that it was fairly limited. It merely intensified the “deep-cutting sociocultural shifts inside the local societies and the inability of traditional Islam to satisfy the new intellectual, spiritual, social, and political interests.”⁵

I think that when talking about purely religious, but not ethnic, extremism we should admit that it is rooted in the non-traditional interpretation of the Quranic texts and the Sunnah, as well as the local people’s religious ignorance. Religious extremists turn to religious texts to justify their illegal acts against those who fail to share their views and ideas. Islam, like any other religion, offers broad opportunities for this. The fact that holy texts are abstract, the faithful and the unfaithful are mutually opposed at the level of religious teaching, there are religious rules related to warfare, and there is a history of far from peaceful coexistence of religions (especially obvious in the Middle Ages) allows anyone to interpret the holy texts contrary to what the religion itself teaches and expects from its followers.

Azerbaijan is not free from religious extremism: the first radical religious organizations appeared in the country in the late 1990s. The so-called Army of Allah (Jeyshullah) was one of the first; it betrayed its presence late in 1996 (in October 2000, its leader Mubariz Aliev was sent to

⁵ K. Poliakov, “Vliianie vneshnego faktora na radikalizatsiiu islama v Rossii v 90-e gody XX veka (na primere arabskikh stran),” in: *Islam na postsovetском prostranstve: vzgliad iznutry*, ed. by A. Malashenko and M.B. Olcott, Art-Biznes-Tsentr, Moscow, 2001, p. 268.

prison for the rest of his life; and 12 members were sentenced to various terms in prison—from 4 to 13 years).

On 19 April, 2006, 16 citizens of Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, and Yemen accused of terrorist activities were sentenced to 5 to 10 years in prison; the group's leader, Arif Gajiev, was sent to prison for life. So far this has been the latest case of this sort in Azerbaijan.

Most of the faithful in Azerbaijan were not tempted by extremist ideas. The efforts of foreign emissaries and their local supporters were defused by religious tolerance typical of Azerbaijan, effective work by the special services, loyalty of most local religious leaders to secular authorities, and an active propaganda campaign against religious violence. Even the Chechen refugees as the main proponents of radical ideas in Azerbaijan failed to push the Azeri Muslims to ultra-radical anti-state methods.

The situation in the Northern Caucasus, which is part of the Russian Federation, a country with a predominantly Christian population and where Christian Orthodoxy plays a special role, was different. There religious ideas blend with ethnic separatism and the idea of an Islamic state. Chechnia, which was the first to move in this direction, became the main seat of resistance to the federal Center. The religious youth, a large part of which was engaged in shady dealings, eagerly responded to the calls to a jihad against the unfaithful. The conflict in Chechnia unfolded rapidly under the pressure of the region's social and economic problems; the federal Center was obviously unable to stem the process, while foreign geopolitical actors increased the tension. The local peoples' ethnically determined features, coupled with the memory of the repressions against some of the Caucasian nations, made it even harder to put out the fire. Other North Caucasian republics and the Far Abroad states watched and waited. In August 1996, soon after the Khasaviurt peace agreement under which the federal troops were removed from Chechnia, it became obvious that the local radical orthodox believers known as the "Wahhabis" and the traditional Sufi Tariqahs could not agree among themselves. The efforts made to build up a Shari'a state in the Northern Caucasus were doomed from the very beginning; the end was prompt and tragic.

In a certain sense, the rest of the Muslims learned a lot from this bitter experience: separatism was put on a backburner; loyalty (even if superficial) to secular power and a willingness to talk were displayed. Today, however, no answer to the religious extremism problem has been devised—the use of force turned out to be the wrong one. No matter how many leaders of armed groups are exterminated, the factors behind the ultra-radical views and ideas remain in place. The cruelty of the law-enforcement bodies and corrupt bureaucrats are pushing the local people to the social margins and fanning ethnic strife.

To uproot these phenomena, public conscience in the Muslim regions should be reformed; ideas urging a synthesis of the Islamic values and liberal thinking should be supported, while the Muslims should be given the chance to become integrated into the academic and public elite. N. Kosukhin was quite right when he wrote that extremism should not be taken as a quest for a development model based on Islamic values and alternative to the liberal Christian model. "Extremists are, to some extent, a by-product of the government's unwillingness to let them take part in the democratization of public life."⁶ It would be wise to create a legal basis to allow religious associations to take part in addressing social problems. This will channel the creative energy of the faithful in the right, legal direction.

With this aim in view, the religious education system should be adjusted to the needs of those wishing to know more about the faith, in order to squeeze out foreign missionaries and incompetent preachers from this area. In fact, the entire region badly needs reform of the religious education system: the madrasahs train people unable to carry out state religious policy, their worldview and religious ideas are too specific for that. It would be wise to open full-fledged Islamic higher educational

⁶ N.D. Kosukhin, "Politizatsia islama i problema stolknovenia tsivilizatsiy v sovremennom mire," available at [<http://humanities.edu.ru/db/msg/44345>].

establishments to give students a chance to receive a compulsory secular education as well. So far, there is an acute shortage of those who can teach religious studies, the philosophy of religion, and theology at higher educational institutions. Success of the reforms depends on the time required to resolve the problem.

The existing Islamic higher educational establishments can be used to carry out the reform. There are two such institutes in the Northwestern Caucasus (in Nalchik and Cherkessk) that are functioning without proper documents; they offer no secular curricula either. In fact, A. Iarlykapov of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, RAS, is not sure that they can be described as higher educational establishments in the true sense of the word.⁷

By August 2002, Dagestan had 16 Islamic higher educational establishments with 49 branches; they educated 5,730 students, 2,830 of whom attended branches. Even the Imam ash-Shafii Islamic University of Dagestan teaches no secular subjects. A. Bulatov has assessed its curriculum as “completely corresponding to the common madrasah level.”⁸

There is Baku Islamic University in Azerbaijan with three registered branches in other parts of the republic. Since 1992, the department of theology of Baku State University has been training experts in Islamic studies. In recent years the quality of teaching has improved; nevertheless, today graduates still cannot compete with people educated abroad.

To suppress the extremist trends, the state should pay more attention to socioeconomic problems. According to the Federal Service of State Statistics of Russia, in the first six months of 2004, the average wage in Russia was 6,411 rubles; the average wage in the Southern Federal Okrug was 4,402 rubles, while in the North Caucasian republics, it was 3,000-3,500 rubles. Average wage arrears in the country were 160 percent of the wage fund of the debtor enterprises; in the Southern Okrug, 210 percent; and, for instance, in Dagestan, 445 percent.⁹ The unemployment level in the Southern Federal Okrug (13.1 percent) is much higher than the country's average of 8.3 percent. In the Okrug's regions, it ranges from 10.1 percent in North Ossetia-Alania to 51.6 percent in Ingushetia.¹⁰

To socialize the isolated groups of faithful and improve their attitude toward the authorities, bureaucratic corruption and arbitrariness should be discontinued; they should no longer be allowed to interfere with small and medium businesses in the area; programs of interest-free (because of the Quranic ban on interest loans) micro-loans should be introduced.

Real rather than ambiguous amnesty of all those who although involved in illegal armed formation stayed away from the cruelest terrorist acts (such as seizure of the school in Beslan) may become another step toward curbing religious radicalism.

Today, the government has mastered several mechanisms for opposing the radical groups, such as stemming illegal money flows to the religious associations, strict control over grants and donations for religious purposes, import and propaganda of religious literature are likewise limited, etc.

Life has shown, however, that certain bureaucrats and clerics are abusing these measures. As soon as sale of Wahhabi books was limited in Dagestan, translations of the Quran by Academician I. Krachkovskiy and Prof. M.-N.O. Osmanov were removed from the shelves, along with absolutely harmless theological works. The Dagestani clerics even “blacklisted” prayer books.

⁷ See: A. Iarlykapov, “Islamskoe obrazovanie v Dagestane: evolutsia soderzhania,” available at [<http://www.ethnonet.ru/lib/01-04-01.html>].

⁸ A. Bulatov, A. Iarlykapov, “Islam na Severnom Kavkaze: sovremennye problemy,” *Etnicheskaja situatsia i konflikt v gosudarstvakh SNG i Baltii. Ezhegodnyi doklad 2004*, ed. by V. Tishkov, E. Filippova, UOP IEA RAS, Moscow, 2005, 544 pp.

⁹ See: E. Gontmakher, “Bednost’—vzryvoopasnyi gruz,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (federal issue), No. 3579 of 16 September, 2004, available at [<http://www.rg.ru/2004/09/16/kavkaz.html>].

¹⁰ See: E. Shmeleva, T. Panina, “Biznes predlagaet GChP,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (central issue), No. 3582, 20 September, 2004, available at [<http://www.rg.ru/2004/09/20/ekonomika-metody.html>].

Society pays dearly for the wrong policies pursued by the authorities and the law-enforcement bodies. The "intimidation" policy and persecution of the faithful in Daghestan radicalized even the previously moderate Muslims and led to the deaths of dozens of militiamen and civilians. The faithful of Kabardino-Balkaria were enraged over the actual closure of mosques in the republic: in October 2005, the buildings of the security service structures in Nalchik were attacked. This does nothing to improve the situation; more than that, certain forces are exploiting this to protect their privileges.

By way of conclusion, we can say that religious extremism in the Caucasus was born by acute social, economic, and political contradictions, not by religious revival. This phenomenon cannot and should not be discussed in the clash of civilizations context, since this theory postulates that confrontation is inevitable and a dialog useless.

The present geopolitical realities and recent political achievements of the Islamist parties in Palestine and Egypt add urgency to the need to formulate a balanced and unbiased state policy regarding Islam. It would be useful to broaden regional and international cooperation in this sphere to use the positive experience of other states in the field of religious tolerance and dialog. The Islamic factor has been present in the region since ancient times; it can be used to preserve statehood and promote integration in Central Eurasia.



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TOLERANCE IN GEORGIA: RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC ASPECTS

A b s t r a c t

Paper discusses topical problems of preserving and further strengthening tolerance in Georgia as an attribute of contemporary Georgian society. An interplay between religious and ethnic aspects of conflict is a primary focus of the