Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, Volume 5, No. 2 (2007) p. 73-91

ISSN: 1653-4212

The Rise of Islam in Muslim Eurasia: Internal Determinants and Potential Consequences

Galina M. Yemelianova[*]

ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, the ex-Soviet Muslim Volga-Urals, Caucasus and Central Asia have been among the most volatile and dynamic zones of Islamic radicalization in the Islamic East. The latter, although being part of a wider Islamic resurgence that begun in the Middle East in the late 1970s, has been a specific post-Soviet phenomenon, triggered by the collapse of Communism and the break-up of the *de facto* unitary Soviet empire. For historical and social reasons the proliferation of radical Islam has been most intensive in the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia and north-eastern Caucasus. This article examines the internal sources and social base of Islamic radicalization in the three regions and identifies the differences in Islamic dynamics there. It is based on the findings of three-year international collaborative project, 2003-2005, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, UK.

Keywords • Islam • Islamic radicalism • Islamic fundamentalism • Sufism • Volga-Urals, Caucasus • Central Asia

Introduction

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington, Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic radicalism,[1] in particular, have been at the centre of media, academic and political debate in the West, in the Islamic East and in post-Communist Eurasia. This debate, however, has often been dominated by a decontextualized

[*] Galina M.Yemelianova is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, European Research Institute, The University of Birmingham, UK. For a fuller elaboration of the arguments set out in this article, see Galina Yemelianova, "The Growth of Islamic Radicalism in Eurasia", in Tahir Abbas, ed, *Islamic Political Radicalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 83-98.

[1] In this article the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' defines a reaction of Muslim believers against those influences which they perceive as a threat to their spiritual and political self-realization according to their faith. They seek to return to what is believed to be the pure, unadulterated Islam of Prophet Muhammad and the four righteous caliphs. The term 'Islamic radicalism' refers to those Islamic fundamentalists who are willing to engage in politics in order to achieve their goal. The Islamic radicals who are prepared to wage an armed struggle against 'unbelievers' and 'non-proper' Muslims are termed as 'Islamic extremists.'

approach portraying Islamic radicalism as a homeless global force, disconnected from real people, places and histories. In reality, it has numerous regional and ethnic forms that are rooted in particular local cultural contexts, traditions, ways of life, and political and social structures. This article is concerned with Islamic radicalization of the ex-Soviet *ummah* (Islamic community). Despite high political and academic topicality of this issue and excessive publications on it in the West and the former U.S.SR, there has been very limited serious research of this phenomenon. This has been due to political and security sensitivity of the subject, insufficient expertise, as well as funding constrains. Also, most of the existing research on the subject seems to overlook the internal factors behind the rise of Islamic radicalism in the ex-Soviet Muslim community, and focuses primarily either on the activities of Islamic radicals within the separate Muslim communities or on the role of foreign Islamist centres in the Islamist resurgence in the former Soviet Union.[2] As a result of such a one-sided approach, the Islamic radicalization all over the ex-U.S.SR is often portrayed as a by-product of an international Islamist 'conspiracy.'

By contrast, this article seeks to analyse the internal sources and social base of Islamic radicalization in ex-Soviet Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Volga-Urals and to identify the differences in Islamic dynamics there. It also investigates if there has been any interaction between the Islamist networks in the three regions and assesses the level of foreign involvement in the Islamic dynamic there. In conclusion it evaluates the implications of the rise of Islamic radicalism for social cohesion and stability of particular post-Soviet Muslim regions and the wider international community. The article is based on the findings of a three-year period of field-research of three major Muslim enclaves in the former U.S.SR – the Volga-Urals, Caucasus and Central Asia.[3] Its main research methods were expert interviews, textual analysis and ethnographic observation.[4] The research focused on those parts of the

---

[2] Igor Dobaev, *Islamic Radicalism: Genesis, Evolution and Practice* (Rostov-upon-Don, 2003), Alexei Malashenko, "Islamism na Vse Vremena" ("Islamism Forever"), *Svobodnaia Mysl'-XXI* (*Free Thought-XXI*), 12 (2004); Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "Muslim Nationalism in the post-Soviet Caucasus: The Dagestan Case," *Caucasian Regional Studies*, 4, 1 (1999); Alexander Ignatenko, "Ordinary Wahhabism. A Heretic Movement in Islam," <www.english.russ.ru/politics/2001>.

[3] The research was conducted by researchers from the UK, Russia and Kyrgyzstan within the Nuffield-Foundation-funded project entitled 'The Growth of Islamic Radicalism in Eurasia: Internal Determinants, Comparative Perspectives and Potential Consequences', 2002-2005.

[4] The research's objectives were met through: (i) 111 expert interviews, including with representatives of the political establishment, the official Islamic clergy, the nationalist and Islamic opposition, intellectual and cultural elites and members of the new business class. All interviews and field notes were transcribed verbatim prior to analysis. These interviews provided critical data on internal determinants of Islamic radicalization among

three regions where the process of Islamic radicalisation had been most intensive.[5]

Ethno-Cultural and Historical Background

The ex-Soviet Muslims, who number over sixty million, constitute a specific social entity which is distinguishable from other Muslim communities. All of them bear the scars of more than a century of Russian/Soviet political and cultural domination, which significantly mutated their Islamic beliefs and way of life. They have largely adhered to the popular form of Islam, which presents a synthesis of Islam with pre-Islamic local *adats* (customary norms) and beliefs; because of Tsarist Russian and Soviet suppression they are practically unaware of the intellectual form of Islam.[6] The majority of ex-Soviet Muslims are followers of the Hanafi *madhhab* (juridical school of Sunni Islam), although the Chechens, Ingush and the majority of Dagestanis adhere to the Shafi'i *madhhab*. The Azeris are largely Shiites, the *Ithna-'Asharites* or *Twelvers* (75 percent of Azerbaijan's population). Azerbaijan's Lezgins, Tatars, Kurds, Tats and Meskhets are Sunnis of Hanafi *madhhab*.[7] There is also a relatively small group of *Twelvers* in Central Asia. In the Pamir mountains of Tajikistan, there is an Ismaili community of Nizarites, the

---

different groups; (ii) ethnographic observation of Islam-related events and practices in the targeted regions; (iii) comparative analysis across the three regions of available Islamic literature and its origins; Islamic websites; staffing, curriculum and teaching materials of *madrassas* (Islamic secondary schools) and Islamic institutes; (iv) through analysis of relevant academic literature, as well as textual analysis of 35 regional and local periodicals. The use of diverse sources and the employment of a combined methodological approach were crucial in providing data on this secretive and controversial issue.

[5] The field work was conducted in: *Ferghana valley in Central Asia*: (1) Kyrgyzstan: in Bishkek (capital); city of Osh; town of Batken, Batken region; town of Djalal-Abad; town of Isfana, Lyilak district, Batken region; town of Kara-Suyu; village of Andarak; village of Kulundu; village of Andarak, Lyilak district; (2) Tajikistan: in the city of Hudjand; village of Chorku, Sogd region; (3) Uzbekistan: town of Ferghana; town of Margelan and town of Andijan; in the C*aucasus:* (1) Azerbaijan: in Baku, village of Nardaran; (2) Kabardino-Balkariia: Nal'chik (capital), Baksan, Tyrnauz, Chegem, Kashhatau, Maisk, Prokhladnyi, the villages of Babukent, Kotliarevskaia, Natkala, Nizhnii Chegem, Kashtan and Verkhniaia Balkariia; (3)Karachaevo-Cherkessiia: Cherkessk (capital), Karachaevsk, the districts of Adyghe-Khabl'sk and Prikubansk; Dagestan: Makhachkala (capital), city of Derbend; in the *Volga-Urals:* (1) Tatarstan: in Kazan (capital), city of Naberezhnie Chelny; (2) Bashkortostan: in Ufa (capital); (3) Tatar-populated regions of the Russian Federation: Samara, Orenbourg, Ul'anovsk, Nizhnii Novgorod, Saratov and Buguruslan.

[6] Isabelle T. Kreindler, "Soviet Muslims: Gains and Losses as a Result of Soviet Language Planning," in Yaacov Ro'i, ed. *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), p. 187-200.

[7] Raoul Motika, "Islam in post-Soviet Azerbaijan," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 115 (2001), p. 111-124;

followers of the Aga Khan. Shiism, at least at the everyday level, is also widespread among the Turkmen. The majority of Dagestani Muslims, Chechens and Ingush adhere to Sufi (mystical) Islam of Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya and Shaziliyya *tariqas* (Sufi brotherhoods). Naqshbandiyya is also widely spread among Uzbeks and Tajiks.

In spite of this commonality, the ex-Soviet Muslims do not comprise a homogeneous geographical, ethno-linguistic and cultural community. They vary in terms of their particular historical evolution, their ethnic make-up, their level of Islamization, their relations with Russian culture and with the Russian political centre, and the extent of their exposure to external Islamic influences. Thus, the Muslims of Central Asia who account for two-thirds of the population of the ex-Soviet *ummah* and make up over twenty percent of the total population of the former Soviet Union, belong to five major ethnic groups - the Uzbeks (about thirty percent of all the Soviet Muslims), the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz, the Turkmen and the Tajiks. The latter represent the titular ethnic groups in the newly independent states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The Uzbeks, the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz and the Turkmen are Turkic peoples, while the Tajiks belong to the Iranian ethno-linguistic family. Historically, the sedentary Tajiks and Uzbeks are more religious than the nomadic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Turkmen.

In the Caucasus, the largest Muslim groups are the Azeris (a Turkic people) who number about six million and constitute about ninety percent of the total population of the newly independent state of Azerbaijan. The Azeris are followed by the Chechens who make up about one million and the Avars who top 500,000. The other relatively numerous Islamic people of the Caucasus are the Ingush, the Dargins, the Laks, the Kumyks, the Nogais, the Lezgins, the Kabardinians, the Balkars, the Cherkess, the Abkhaz, Adygheans and the Abazins as well as representatives of over thirty other smaller ethnic groups of Turkic, Caucasian and Indo-European origins.[8] In administrative terms they belong to Russia's autonomous republics of Dagestan, Chechnia, Ingushetiia, Kabardino-Balkariia, Karachaevo-Cherkessiia, Adyghea and North Ossetiia and Georgia's autonomous republics of Abkhazia and Ajaria. The most religious among them are Chechens, Ingush and Dagestanis. The largest Muslim community of inner Russia is represented by the Tatars (a Turkic people) who number over six million, although in Tatarstan itself there are only 2 million. The Tatars

[8] The Muslims of the Caucasus are divided between four major ethno-linguistic groups. The Abkhaz, the Kabardinians, the Cherkess, the Abazins and the Adygheans belong to the Western Caucasian or Abkhaz-Adygh group. The Chechens, the Ingush, the Batsbiy, the Avars, the Ands, the Tsezs, the Lezgins, the Dargins, the Laks, the Tabasarans, the Aguls and the Rutuls belong to the Eastern Caucasian, or Nakh-Dagestani group. The Digors, the Talyshs and the Kurds belong to the Indo-European group. The Azeris, the Balkars, the Karachais, the Nogais and Kumyks belong to the Turkic group.

are followed by the Bashkirs (a Turkic people kindred to the Tatars) who number about 1.5 million and populate Bashkortostan and adjacent areas in the Volga-Urals.[9] In Ukraine's Crimea there are a quarter of million of Crimean Tatars. The Tatars and Bashkirs are the most integrated and secularised Muslims of the former Soviet Union due to their much longer period of social and cultural interaction with the Russians and their higher level of urbanization and industrialization.

Islamic Dynamic in the Volga-Urals

In the Volga-Urals due to historical, economic and ethno-cultural reasons (400 hundred years of Russian political and cultural domination, higher levels of industrialization, urbanization and subsequently secularization of the population, a large proportion of non-Muslim, mainly Russian, population), the role of political Islam has been insignificant. In Tatarstan, the attempts of various opposition forces to play the Islamic card have failed so far. In contrast to the North Caucasus and the Ferghana Valley in the Volga-Urals region, Islam has not provided a mobilising framework for opposition to the authorities. So far, the governments of Shaimiev and Rakhimov in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan have respectively secured their relative security and undermined the chances of various opposition forces, including those of an Islamist nature, to present a serious threat to them in the foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, until present time, the Volga-Ural region has witnessed some limited manifestations of Islamist activism of *salafi*[10] nature. Of some significance there has been the penetration in the region of *Hizb at-Tahrir al -Islamii* (Party of Islamic Liberation, HT).[11] It is hard to estimate the actual number of Islamists and their sympasizers in the region given very secretive nature of their network, however indirect evidence suggests that it does not exceed several dozen. Members of the *HT* are largely Tatars, although there are some Uzbeks and representatives of other traditionally Muslim ethnic groups of the ex-U.S.SR. Many have either studied in foreign Muslim colleges, or have been taught by foreign tutors at home Islamic institutions. They have been engaged in propagation of *salafi* Islam through the distribution of

---

[9] Galina Aksianova, *100 Narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (*100 Peoples of the Russian Federation*, Moscow: Staryi Sad, 2001), p. 16, p. 18.

[10] Here, the term '*Salafi* Islam, or *Salafism*' (lit. 'Islam of ancestors') is used as synonymous to "Islamic fundamentalism."

[11] *Hizb at-Tahrir* (HT) was founded in 1953 in Jordan by a Palestinian judge, Taqi al-Din Nabhani (1909-77), a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The declared goal of the HT was "to resume the Islamic way of life and to convey the Islamic call to the world" through the construction of the worldwide Caliphate. From 1977 till 2003 the HT was headed by 'Abd al-Qadim Zallum, a Jordanian national of Palestinian descent. Since 2003 the HT leader has been 'Ata Abu al Rushta, a Palestinian.

leaflets and other *salafi* literature. Among the sites of Islamist activities there have been Naberezhnie Chelny, Al'metievsk, Nizhnekamsk, Buguruslan (Orenburg region) and Penza.

A controversial issue has been the relationship between the Islamic officialdom represented by the *Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Muslul'man Respubliki Tatarstan* (Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan, hereafter referred to as the *DUMRT*) under the leadership of muftii Iskhakov, the *Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Muslul'man Respubliki Bashkortostan* (Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan, hereafter referred to as the *DUMRB*) under the leadership of muftii Nigmatullin, and other regional muftiiats, which are affiliated to the *Sovet Muftiev Rossii* (Council of Muftiis of Russia) under Moscow-based muftii Ravil Gaynuttdinov, on the one side, and *salafis,* on the other. For the last decade the latter have been recipients of financial and methodological assistance from the foreign Islamic foundations, primarily from the Gulf region, and *de facto* have sanctioned the penetration of *salafi* Islam into regional Islamic discourse through the Islamic educational establishment. This issue has been aggravated by continuous disarray in the Russian Islamic establishment, the rivalry between the Moscow-based muftii Ravil Gaynuttdinov and the Ufa-based muftii Talgat Tadjuddinov, the unitary leader of the Russian Muslim establishment - the *Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man Evropeiskoi Chasti Rossii i Sibiri* (the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the European part of Russia and Siberia, hereafter referred to as the *DUMES*) - until its break up in 1992, who has persistently accused muftii Gaynuttdinov of safeguarding the proliferation of *salafism* in the Russian *ummah.* In February 2006 the twelve most influential Russian muftis agreed to overcome the split of the Russian *ummah* and to establish a single coordination centre of the DUMs.

In Tatarstan, alongside the *salafi* ideas of outside origins, there emerged a locally-rooted opposition Muslim community headed by Faizrahman Sattarov, known as the *Faizrahmanists.*[12] The community's basic postulate is the principle, 'live only by the Qur'aan'. In doctrinal terms it represents a paradoxical mixture of *salafism*, Sufism and paganism. Sattarov recognises that this will restrict his number of followers to only the most 'worthy.' He admits that there are sources other than the Qur'an that form the basis of the shariat, but argues that 'we have no need for them as yet and we need to unite around the Koran

[12] Faizrahman Sattarov, one of the few Tatar imams of the Soviet period, received professional theological training from 1955-64 in the Bukhara *medresse* and held the post of imam-*khatib* (chief imam)in some of the USSR's largest cities (Leningrad, Rostov, Oktiabr'sk and others) and of *qadi* (Islamic judge) in the *DUMES* from 1972-6. Thereafter he fell into opposition to the official religious structures.

only.'[13] According to Faizrahman, of the seventy-three existing Islamic sects, only one is the 'sect of Allah' and the rest were invented by scholars. He pays lip service to the distinction between Sunnism and Shi'ism and the division into *madhhabs*, but in practice he casts doubt on their practicality, because 'Allah forbade disunity'. Among basic dogmas, he particularly highlights *namaz* (Islamic prayer), *zakat* (obligatory alms) and community tries, often unsuccessfully, to implement a compulsory *zakat* among community members of up to two-thirds of their income.[14]

With regard to the state and politics, Sattarov believes that the state should be secular rather than religious, citizens should be loyal and that participation in politics is permissible. The eclectic nature of the *Faizrahmanist* ideas is particularly evident in their attitude to rites and customs. A fully tolerant attitude to wake rites is combined with non-acceptance of Sufism and some religious festivals, such as, for example, *mawlid* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday). Recognition of the importance of *ijtihad* (independent judgement in Islam) does not prevent the acceptance of some aspects of *taqlid* (Islamic tradition). The *Faizrakhmanists* emphasise their native roots and their lack of links with Muslim religious organisations and foundations abroad. This self-sufficiency is evident in the work of their *medresse* which opened in 1997, where teaching is conducted only by trained members of their own community, and textbooks are written (or rather literally copied from various books) by Sattarov himself.

In general, the central vector of Islamic radicalisation in the Volga-Urals has developed within the theological and academic debate among local Muslim clerics, nationalist politicians and Islamic specialists. Among the major issues of this debate have been *taqlid*, *Wahhabism*,[15] Sufism and *bid'a* (illegitimate innovation in Islam), the essence of regional (Tatar and Bashkir) Islam and Euro-Islam. The reasons for centrality of this debate have been particular characteristics of the regional *ummah*, which distinguish it from Muslim communities in the North Caucasus and the Ferghana Valley. Among those specific features have been the almost complete loss of the Islamic heritage because of the lengthy period of Russification, Chistianization, consistent destruction of *ulema* (Islamic scholars) by the Russian/ Soviet authorities, as well as the dual script change (first from Arabic into Latin and then from Latin into

[13] Interview with imam Faizrahman Sattarov, Kazan, December 22 1998.
[14] Interview with imam Faizrahman Sattarov, Kazan, July 15 2002.
[15] *Wahhabism* is a specific form of *salafism*, which evolved into a wider political movement for the unification of mid-eighteenth century Arabia which was initiated by Muhammad ben Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92). Strictly speaking the use of the term *Wahhabism* in relation to the *salafi* movement in the Islamic regions of the former Soviet Union is incorrect because the latter is based on a wider doctrinal foundation than the teaching of Abd al-Wahhab.

Russian). As a result, there is insufficient understanding of what is the 'right Islam'.

By the second half of the 1990s, representatives of official Islam publicly admitted that *salafi (Wahhabi)* ideas had penetrated local Muslim communities. Official clerics responded to the 'threat' of *Wahhabism* by defining more clearly their own theoretical position. The central pillars of this position are: propagation of the *Hanafi madhhab*, adherence to the principles of the *taqlid*, and rejection of the need to 'open the doors of the *ijtihad*'. The rejection of *ijtihad* was seen as vital to securing a viable ideological and theoretical base for forming a fully-fledged *ummah* and preventing all possible ideological pretensions from either right (*Wahhabism*) or left (religious reforming and modernising tendencies). Official clerics view the origins of *taqlid* within the doctrine of the *madhhabs*, and are thus rooted in the teaching of the founders of the four major *madhhabs* - imam Malik, imam Abu Hanifa, imam Shafi'a and imam Ahmad bin Hanbal. The appeal to *taqlid*, therefore, is regarded as theoretical protection from penetration in the region of the ideas of both *Wahhabis* and 'modernist Muslims, whose intellect has been damaged by *kafir* (non-believer) influence deriving from western education.'[16]

Most contemporary Muslim clergy support the return of traditional religious values to society. For example, Valiulla Yakupov, the deputy muftii of the *DUM RT* criticises *jadids* (Islamic reformers of the nineteenth century) for their orientation towards adaptation and simplification of Islamic ideas to fit Western culture. He argues that Islam has always had a cult of science and therefore does not need to bring its theology in line with the achievements of science. Yakupov sees the solution in overcoming existing euro-centrism and establishing respect for the Tatar people and their culture, including Islam. He claims that Tatars must stick to their traditional *Hanafi* Islam, which has allowed the preservation of the ethnic peculiarities of the Tatars as well as local customs in the hard conditions of the centuries-long Christian occupation.[17]

The views of traditionalist majority are opposed by the modernist minority. Thus, Tatar nationalist Rashat Safin regards Islam, which he perceives geopolitically, as an indispensable characteristic of the Tatar nation. According to Safin, Tatars do not need to follow existing forms of Islam and they must have their own Islam. He argues against Tatarstan's gravitation toward Muslim countries on the basis of common religion, and advocates the transformation of Tatarstan into the

[16] Interview with Gabdulkhak Samatov, chief *qadi* (Islamic judge) of the DUMRT, Kazan April 15 2003.
[17] Interview with Valiulla Yakupov, Kazan, April 20 2003.

intellectual centre of the Islamic world in the Eurasian space, based on the *jadidist* principles.[18]

Rafael Khakimov, political advisor to president Shaimiev, propagates radical modernization of Islam and development of Euro-Islam. For Khakimov, Islam is the religion of a free man and a path to personal freedom. He argues that in order to succeed in contemporary world, Tatars and other Muslim people of the region have to recognise that the truth is not a set absolute and depends more on particular historical conditions. He argues, therefore, that some instructions given in the Qur'an and shariat are not applicable to contemporary conditions. According to Khakimov, external Muslim symbols, as well as many Islamic prohibitions and rituals, especially those which relate to women's rights, have lost their significance in the twenty-first century.[19]

Islamic Fundamentalism in the Caucasus

In the North Caucasus, the proliferation of Islamic fundamentalism, which has been widely known as *Wahhabism*, began in the late 1980s and in Azerbaijan in the early 1990s. Compared to official Muslim clerics, the Islamists have been prepared to address the key social problems. Islamic fundamentalist ideas have been generated both within local society and imported from abroad. Among its local ideologists, there have been, for example, Ahmed-*qadi* Akhtaev, Bagauddin Kebedov, Abbas Kebedov and Ayub Omarov in Dagestan; Rasul Kudaev, Anzor Astemirov, Musa Mukozhev, Ruslan Nakhushev in Kabardino-Balkariia and Muhammad Bidzhiev and Ramazan Barlakov in Karachaevo-Cherkessiia. They claim to follow the ideas of local Islamic thinkers of the early twentieth century, such as Ali Kayaev, a Dagestani, Bekmurza Pachev, a Kabardinian, and Kazim Mechiev, a Balkar. Among their foreign authorities have been Ibn Taimiia, Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, Abul Alaa Maududi, Sayid al-Kutb and at-Turabi.[20]

Among the means by which Islamic fundamentalism has been promoted from abroad have been the participation of local Muslims in the *hajj* (annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina) and the activities of various Saudi and other Middle Eastern Islamic organisations and foundations in the region. The latter subsidised construction of mosques and *madrassas*, the *hajj* of local Muslims, as well

[18] Rashat Safin, *Tatar Yuly* (*The Tatar Way*, Kazan: Iman, 1999).
[19] Interview with Rafael Khakimov, political advisor to president Shaimiev, Kazan, August 28 2003.
[20] Interview with Tahir Atmurzaev, deputy muftii of the KBR, Nal'chik, October 31 2000; interview with Mukhtar Bottaev, the editor-in-chief of the news programme, the Russian bureau, Nal'chik, October 30 2000; interview with Rasul Kudaev, one the activistists of *new Muslims*, Nal'chik, July 20, 2003; Kudaev 2003; Enver Kisriev, *Islam i Vlast' v Dagestane* (*Islam and Power in Dagestan*, Moscow: OGI, 2004).

as scholarships for those local young Muslims who wanted to study in Islamic universities and colleges abroad. Foreign Islamic foundations also supplied teachers for newly opened Islamic schools and colleges, assisted in the establishment of Islamic publishing houses and freely distributed Qur'ans and other Islamic literature, including those of fundamentalist nature. They also invested in the proselytising activities which were conducted by Islamic missionaries and in the organisation of various Islamic training courses and camps, most of which were located in Chechnya. The peak of their activities was in the early 1990s. Since the mid-1990s, and especially since the beginning of the second Chechen war in 1999, almost all the activities of foreign Islamic organisations and Islamic missionaries and teachers have been banned by the authorities. Among the few exceptions have been teachers of Arabic and shariat from the al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, who continue to be employed by the Islamic Institute of Abu Hanifa in Cherkessk on a one-year-long contract basis.[21]

The major Islamist enclaves have been in the north eastern Caucasus, in Dagestan and Chechnya in particular. In Dagestan the relations between *Wahhabis* and dominating Sufis (*tariqatists*) have been controversial, and dependent upon particular religious and political circumstances. In doctrinal terms there is an intrinsic conflict between Sufism and *Wahhabism*. *Wahhabism* allegedly represents the 'pure' and true Islam of Prophet Muhammad and the four 'righteous Caliphs'. *Wahhabis* advocate the *tawhid* (strict monotheism) and oppose *tariqatism* as a deviation from Islam. They seek the restoration of original Islam through its purging of Sufi-related *bid'a*. *Wahhabis* do not consider themselves to be bound by the Shafi'i *madhhab* which has been traditionally dominant in Dagestan, or by any other *madhhab*; they only concur with those regulations of the four *madhhabs* that can be tested by reference to the Qur'an and the Sunna. *Wahhabis* believe that on questions of *ibadat* (homage to Allah) only what is prescribed in the Qur'an and the Sunna is permissible; everything else is a deviation from Islam. In *muamalat* (social practice), everything is permitted unless it is specifically forbidden by the Qur'an and the Sunna.

The *Wahhabi* ideologists count as many as one hundred *bid'a* in Sufi doctrine and practice. They are particularly critical of the Sufi veneration of saints and shaykhs as intercessors between believers and Allah. They regard excessive worship and glorification of Islamic saints (even of the Prophet Muhammad) as a deviation from monotheism, which proscribes the worship of anyone other than Allah. Apart from clear, conceivable knowledge embodied in the shariat, *Wahhabis* rule out the existence in

[21] Interview with Interview with Ismail-haji Bostanov, director of the Islamic Institute of Imam Abu Hanifa, Cherkessk, July 19 2003.

Islam of another hidden, mystic knowledge which is supposedly accessible only to saints and Sufi shaykhs. They do not recognise the mystical ability of the saints and of the Prophet himself to intercede before Allah on behalf of Muslims, and challenge the legitimacy of praying to the saints. Neither do *Wahhabis* accept that *baraka* (blessing) can be passed down through saints, shaykhs and artefacts related to them (such as shrines). *Wahhabis* thus reject such Sufi practices traditional to Dagestani society as *ziyarat*, reading the Qur'an at cemeteries, *maulids* (chanting praise to saints or shaykhs) and using amulets and talismans. While condemning innovations, at the same time *Wahhabis* advocate the strict observance of all provisions of the Qur'an and Sunna concerning ritual and ceremony and the behaviour and appearance of Muslims, even if these provisions are unfamiliar to most Dagestanis. In particular, they insist on unshaven beards and shortened trousers for men and *niqab* (short veil) or even *hijab* (long veil) for women. On the whole, *Wahhabism* attracts new converts by its rationalism, accessibility and ability to overcome the often elitist and closed nature of Sufism.

Of special significance is the difference between *Wahhabis* and *tariqatists* on the issue of *jihad* (Islamic sacred war). *Wahhabis* accuse Sufis of distorting Islamic teaching on the *jihad* and of effectively consigning the *jihad* to oblivion. *Wahhabis* perceive the *jihad* as the core of Islam, without which it is like a 'lifeless corpse'. Unlike the *tariqatists* who interpret the *jihad* predominantly in terms of the spiritual self-perfection of a Muslim, *Wahhabis* believe that the *jihad* also implies a campaign to spread Islam all over the world. Moreover, *Wahhabi* radicals view *jihad* as a preventive armed advance in order to overcome those obstacles which the enemies of Islam place in the path of its peaceful proliferation. This approach opens up the possibility of declaring a *jihad* against the present Government which allegedly resists the effective *ad-da'wa al-Islamiyya* (summon for Islamic way of life) in Dagestan. In this respect, the *Wahhabis* strongly criticise the *tariqatists* for their ideological and political corruption and for their support of the present regime. In particular, they defy Sufis' alleged legalizing of usury, which is forbidden by *sharia* law.

Wahhabis have criticized local Islamic clerics – the old imams – for their alleged distortions of Islam and Islamic practices. They have especially opposed the existing practice of *israf* (wastefulness) in the main events of the life circle, funerals in particular, which have a devastating impact on the bulk of the poverty-stricken population.[22] Also,

[22] According to the local tradition during the first three days after the burial the relatives of a deceased Muslim have to treat his, or her friends and anybody who happened to pass by to a meal and to provide them with a food package containing 1 kg of lamb, 1 kg of sugar, 1 kg of flour and 1 kg of sweets. A similar procedure is repeated on the 40th and 52nd

compared to the old imams who used to memorize Arabic without understanding it, the *Wahhabis* have begun to conduct prayers in local languages which has enabled them to explain the meaning of the Qur'an to their parishioners. Most old imams have resisted these innovations which they regard as a threat to the 'traditional Islam' that they allegedly represent.[23] Of particular importance has been *Wahhabis*' criticism of the archaic clan-and ethnicity-based stratification of local society and their ambition to replace it by an inclusive Islamic identity. It is significant that they so far have been the most potent agents of trans-clan and trans-national solidarity.

Until late 1997 in the north eastern Caucasus *Wahhabis* were more or less equally represented by moderates and radicals. Since the second Chechen war (1999-2000), the moderates have been greatly outnumbered by the radicals. By comparison, in the north western Caucasus (Kabardino-Balkariia and Karachaevo-Cherkessiia) the *Wahhabis*, known as *Novye mususl'mane* (new Muslims) had been dominated by moderates until 2005. This had been due to the region's deeper political and cultural integration within Russia, its low level of religiosity and its multi-confessional demographic composition.[24] However, since October 2005 the radicals have prevailed there as well. While the moderates have emphasised Islamic education as the major source of gradual re-Islamization of local societies, while the radicals, or *jihadists*[25], have been prepared to directly challenge local governments. In particular, they called for the introduction of Islamic rule modelled on the nineteenth century *Imamat* of Imam Shamil. Some of the radicals have been closely linked to the international Islamist centres in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Jordan.

In the aftermath of the second Chechen war, the overt manifestations of Islamic fundamentalism have been suppressed as a result of the Kremlin's and the regional authorities' crack-down on Islamic extremism. At that time, the parliaments of the North Caucasian republics adopted new restrictive laws on religious communities. In 2002 they were reinforced by the federal decree 'fighting extremist activities.' These have provided a legal base for suppression of religious, or any other opposition to the ruling regimes in the region. As in Soviet times the local FSB (the former KGB) have begun to compile lists of active and

---

days after the burial. Interview with Ismail Akkiev, one of the elders of the village Babugent, September 1 2000.

[23] Interview with Tahir Atmurzaev, deputy muftii of the KBR, Nal'chik, October 31 2000.

[24] Interview with Anzor Astemirov, an activist of the Islamic *jamaat* (Islamic community) of the KBR, Nal'chik, February 2003; Interview with Rasul Kudaev, Nal'chik, July 20 2003.

[25] Here the term *Jihadism* defines an Islamic radical political movement under the banner of *jihad* (Islamic holy war) against the federal Russian and regional authorities which *jihadists* perceive as *kafir* (infidel).

passive *Wahhabis,* as well as *Wahhabi* sympathisers. For example, in Kabardino-Balkariia in 2002 the FSB registered over 300 *Wahhabis.*[26] The pro-government mass media have played a central role in reinforcing the anti-*Wahhabi* and anti-Islamic hysteria in all three republics. Thus, the daily regional newspaper *Severnyi Kavkaz* has specialised in 'exposing' *Wahhabis* in the region, and their alleged links with international Islamic extremist centres based in Turkey, the UAE and Syria. It has routinely depicted local *Wahhabis* as criminals and terrorists who had been trained by the Chechen rebels and subsidized by Western intelligence.[27] Regional and republican mass media have been promoting images of 'good', i.e., pro-muftiiat, and 'bad', i.e., all other, Muslims. However, the military and administrative suppression of Islamists and Muslims, in the conditions of continuous economic disorder and the paralysis of democratic processes, have objectively enhanced the underground proliferation of Islamic fundamentalism in the region.[28]

In post-Soviet Chechnya, by comparison with Dagestan and other Muslim republics in the North Caucasus, the Islamic resurgence has been determined by the dynamic of the Russian-Chechen conflict. Initially, Chechen President Dudayev fought a predominantly national liberation, i.e., not religious, war against Moscow and attributed a purely symbolic function to Islam (Sufism). However, the Russian invasion of 1994 Islamicized his politics and rhetoric, which were also aimed at attracting international Islamic support for the Chechen cause. In 1996, Yandarbiyev, Dudayev's successor and an Islamic fundamentalist, declared Islam the state religion and created shariat courts. This action split the Chechen leadership along doctrinal lines: Maskhadov, who replaced Yandarbiyev in 1997, as well as muftii Kadyrov, advocated Sufi (Qadiri) Islam,[29] while Udugov, Yandarbiyev, Basayev and some other leading Chechen politicians and warlords, as well as foreign fighters, subscribed to fundamentalist Islam (*Wahhabism*).

The war conditions have predetermined a prevalence of *jihadism* in Chechnya. Its major agents have been foreign *majahedin* (Islamic fighters), who came to assist their Islamic brethren in fighting the *jihad* against the Russian invasion, and radical Dagestani *Wahhabis.* The overwhelming majority of Chechen Islamists have been marginalised; young people who had a very vague knowledge of Islam treated *jihadism*

---

[26] Interview with A'bert Shashev, the assistant to the General Prosecutor of the KBR, Nal'chik, February 17 2003.

[27] *Severnyi Kavkaz* 36, October 22 2000, p. 2; Interview with Louiza Urazaeva, a correspondent of the *Severnyi Kavkaz,* Nal'chik, October 30 2000.

[28] Interview with Svetlana Akkieva, professor of the Institute of Humanities of the KBR, Gelenjik, May 28 2005.

[29] Thus, the distinctive Qadiri circular movements and loud *dhikr* (religious chanting) have become symbols of the Chechen resistance to the Russian imperialism.

more as a profession and means of living than a religious belief. During the second Chechen war (1999-2000), Maskhadov sided with pro-Islamist opposition, while Kadyrov maintained his adherence to Sufi Islam. Maskhadov's pro-Moscow successors Akhmad Kadyrov, Alu Alkhanov and Ramzan Kadyrov have maintained their allegiance to Sufi Islam of Qadiri *tariqa*.

However, the military and administrative suppression of Islamists and Muslims in general against the background of continuous economic disorder and the paralysis of the democratic process have objectively enhanced the underground proliferation of Islamic fundamentalism in the region.[30] Since 2002 Islamists have strengthened their presence in Kabardino-Balkariia and Karachaevo-Cherkessiia.

Dagestan has witnessed the merger between Islamism and terrorism represented in the activities of the *jamaats* Jennet (Paradise) and *Shariat*. North Caucasian Islamists have spread their activities in Central Russia. Among their new tactics has been *shahidism* (suicide in the name of Islam) which is alien to their culture and religious traditions.

In post-Soviet Azerbaijan the Islamic dynamic has been slack due to historical, ethno-cultural and economic reasons. Like Tatarstan, Azerbaijan, with its abundant oil resourses, has been more industrialized and urbanized than the North Caucasus. As a result, the level of secularization among the Azeri Muslims has been higher than among their co-religionists in the North Caucasus. Therefore, like in the Volga-Urals, the Islamic revival[31] there has largely occurred in the cultural and intellectual spheres. It has been shaped by the correlation between Shi'ite and Sunni Islam, the external Islamic influences, especially those coming from neighbouring Turkey and Iran, and Azerbaijan's significant role in the trans national oil business.[32]

Radical Islam in Ferghana Valley

Following the break-up of the U.S.SR, the Ferghana Valley, which in politico-administrative terms is divided between Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, has witnessed the rise of political Islam. There have been socio-economic, political and ethno-cultural reasons for this phenomenon.[33] The Ferghana Valley is a largely agrarian and densely populated region. It has suffered particularly badly

[30] Interview with Svetlana Akkieva, May 28 2008.

[31] Here, the use of the term "Islamic revival" is problematic because of the specific nature and low scale of Islam-related processes in Azerbaijan.

[32] See more Anar Valiev, "Azerbaijan: Islam in post-Soviet Republic," *Middle East Review of International Affaires* 9, 4 (2005), p. 1-13.

[33] The territory of the Ferghana Valley is over 100 thousand sq.km, its population is over 11 million. It is a multi-ethnic region, although the dominant ethnic groups are Uzbeks, Tajiks and Kyrgyz.

from the abrupt withdrawal of subsidies and other supplies. It has become the poorest region of Central Asia with the highest level of unemployment among its population. The situation has been aggravated by the endemic corruption and arbitrariness of local governments and the lack of social mobility. On the other side, Islam has always been an important part of identity among various inhabitants of the Ferghana Valley because of the lengthy period of its Islamicization.[34]

The first Islamists turned up in Central Asia in the mid-1980s. In the early 1990s they were largely represented by the *Islamskaia Partiia Vozrozhdeniia* (Islamic Revival Party, hereafter referred to as the IRP).[35] In the period between 1996 and 1999 the role of the most dynamic Islamist organisation in the region shifted to the *Islamskoe Dvizhenie Uzbekistana* (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, hereafter referred to as the IMU).[36] Since 1999, the main agents of Islamic radicalism in Ferghana valley has been *Hizb at-Tahrir al-Islamii* (Party of Islamic Liberation, HT) and to a lesser extent *Akramiyya.*[37] Although, HT is a part of a wider international organisation, its objectives and tactics are determined by local context. The doctrinal and legal platforms of the local leaders of the HT are characterized by vagueness and eclectism which allows significant deviation from Nabhanis's ideas. This relates, for example, to their acceptance of '*urf* (tribal law) and '*adat* which are conventional in Central Asia. HT, like the earlier IMU, seeks the creation of a caliphate. Similarly, it does not accept a separation between state and religion. Its

---

[34] Islam was brought to the Ferghana Valley in the seventh century by Arabs. In the Middle Ages its major cities, Samarkand and Bukhara, were among the leading centres of Islamic culture and scholarship in the Islamic East. See more Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (London: Tauris, 2000); Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2000); Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia* (Lanham: Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

[35] Originally the IRP in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan represented national branches of a nation-wide Islamic Revival Party which was established in 1989 in Astrakhan. The IRP of Tajikistan became the only Islamic organisation in Central Asia to be registered as an official political party. In 1992 the IRPT briefly entered the government. After the outbreak of civil war the IRPT became one of the warring parties and allied itself with many militant Islamist elements from different parts of Central Asia. As a result of the General Peace Agreement of 1997 the IRPT was legalised and allowed into the government of President Rakhmonov.

[36] The IMU was set up in 1996 by Islamic militants who in the early 1990s began their political activities in the Ferghana valley under the influence of *salafi* mullahs. The IMU propagated a violent removal of President Karimov from power and creation of an Islamic state. After September 11, 2001, the IMU suffered its greatest defeat, and its remnants fled to Pakistan for rehabilitation and regrouping. Its capability was substantially diminished, but the movement has been undertaking steps to reorganize and remobilize.

[37] An Islamist orgnisation Akramiyya emerged in 1996 as a result of a split of the group of Akram Yuldashev from the Uzbek branch of the Hizb at-Tahrir. It represented an Uzbekified, grassroots version of the HT. The Akramiyya cells supposedly exist in the Andijan region, Osh (Kyrgyzstan), Namangan, Kokand and other regions of Uzbekistan.

goal is to create a state where the leader of the state is the leader of both state and religious affairs, and the authoritative interpreter of shariat. However, compared to the Uzbek-centred IMU, HT advocates a trans-national Islamic identity. This is an important factor for its appeal among local people who bitterly resent existing barriers between states and the dominance of local barons. Also, compared to the IMU, which advocated the use of violence in order to achieve its ultimate goal, HT is against any violent actions. It is oriented towards the propagation of its ideas through the dissemination of printed (and online) materials and education. Yet another difference with the IMU is the fact that the HT accepts the possibility of creation of Islamic Caliphate, initially in a separate or a group of countries - a process that is directly analogous to the theory of revolution of Marxists and Arab nationalists.[38]

HT has a strictly clandestine organisational structure that makes it similar to leftist and nationalist groups of the past. It is built on the principal of a pyramidal hierarchy. It comprises several levels, and the party's primary cell is the *halaqa* (circle). Since 2001 the regional leader of the HT has been Abdurahim Tukhtasinov (Andijan). Although the Islamists do not provide solutions to specific problems, their general call for a caliphate is presented as the solution to many practical problems of direct concern to the individual. It is widely believed that the caliphate will dissolve state borders and shariat will eliminate corruption and social inequality. Both the IMU and HT organisations draw their support mainly from young uneducated and unemployed men and women, but their ideas attract broader discontented groups. Although it is impossible, given the dearth of verified data, to establish the actual membership of HT, Akramiyya, the IMU, and other small Islamist organisations, it seems plausible that those organisations unite between thirty and fifty thousand active members. In addition, the relatives of the activists constitute a much larger group of sympathizers.[39]

It is worth noting that alongside many similarities, there are some doctrinal and practical differences between the Islamists from the HT in the Ferghana Valley and *Wahhabis* in the Caucasus and the Volga-Urals. Among their common characteristics are their ultimate goal of creating a world Muslim Caliphate and their deep hostility towards the Shi'a. However, compared to *Wahhabis*, members of HT recognize the existence of *madhhabs* (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali), as well as *ijtihad.*[40] Unlike *Wahhabis*, they do not preach the idea of *takfir* (non-belief) and do not have a *Wahhabi* fixation on *bid'a.* In comparison with *jihadists*, the *tahriris* adhere to peaceful interpretation of *jihad.* The *tahriris*

[38] Naumkin, *Radical Islam*, p. 135

[39] This estimate represents an average figure which was generated through the comparison of Islamists' number, provided by Islamist and official interviewees.

[40] Naumkin, *Radical Islam*, p. 132

also differ from the *jihadists* by calling for a dialogue with the Central Asian regimes that the *jihadists* label as infidel, pursuing their removal and elimination. On the other side, HT's interpretation of the Caliphate (the Caliph is the guarantor of the realisation of the Islamic ideal) is similar to that of *Jama'at al-Muhajirun*[41] in the UK. Yet another distinctive feature of the *tahriris* is the female membership. In Kyrgyzstan alone, women constitute more than 10 percent of the total membership of HT, which numbers a few thousand followers.[42]

In Uzbekistan the first cells of HT emerged in the early 1990s in Namangan after the swift liquidation of local Islamist organisations, *Adolat* (Justice), *Islam Lashkarlari* (The Army of Islam), and *Tawba* (Repentance). Among its first leaders were 'Isam Abu Mahmud Qiyadati and Abd al-Qadim Zallum, both Jordanians. However, HT gained prominence only after the terrorist acts in Tashkent in February 1999 which were allegedly organised by the IMU. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 attack on U.S. soil, the Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik authorities began a crackdown on the *tahriris* and their sympathisers. HT is banned in all three countries. Following the Andijan uprising in May 2005, the Uzbek government under President Islam Karimov intensified repression against real and imagined Islamists.

In Tajikistan, HT emerged in the late 1990s. Its strongest support has been in the north and the west of the country. The major factors for its growing popularity have been public discontent with socio-economic conditions, strict official control over religious matters which leaves no room for the official Islamic clerics to provide guidelines for believers on contemporary issues, whether social or religious. There was also disappointment with the IRP, which is the only legal moderate Islamic party represented in the Parliament. There has been general frustration among the followers of the IRP, who believe that the party has given into government and that it has abandoned its ambition to create an Islamic state. Among the issues on which the IRP leadership and the official Islamic clergy are unable to speak is the U.S. military presence in Central Asia of which the HT is strongly critical.

In Kyrgyzstan, HT has had a foothold since 1999, particularly in the Jalal-Abad region around Osh in the Ferghana valley. Since September 11, 2001, HT has increased its activities in Kyrgyzstan as it has been able to exploit increasing tension in Kyrgyz society, in particular, between its southern and northern parts.

---

[41] *Jama'at al-Muhajirun* (Association of Migrants) was created in 1983 in the UK by Shaykh Omar Bakri Muhammad, the former member of the Muslim Brotherhood. It advocates the construction of a world wide Caliphate. The organisation was disbanded in 2004.

[42] Naumkin, *Radical Islam*, p. 170

Conclusion

Since the disintegration of the U.S.SR in 1991 the ex-Soviet-*ummah* has turned into one of the most volatile and dynamic zones of Islamic radicalisation in the Islamic East. The latter, although being a part of a wider Islamic resurgence that had begun in the Middle East in the late 1970s, is a specific post-Soviet phenomenon, which was triggered by the collapse of Communism and the break-up of the *de facto* unitary Soviet empire. It has emerged against the background of the dire deterioration in the social and economic situation, the formation of ineffective and corrupt post-Soviet regimes and an ideological confusion.

The proliferation dynamic of radical Islam has been congruent with social and economic conditions, the policies of the ruling regimes, the ethno-national composition of the population and the level of its Islamic religiosity. Thus, it has been considerably higher in Ferghana valley in Central Asia and the north eastern Caucasus, corresponding to Russia's autonomous republics of Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia. In Ferghana valley, the main agents of Islamic radicalism have been Islamists of *Hizb at-Tahrir*, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and *Al-Akramiyya*, while in the North Caucasus it has been so called *Wahhabis* and New Muslims.

The main recipients of Islamism have been those young men and women of various ethnic origins who have been frustrated with the continuous economic and social disorder, the proliferation of crime, alcoholism and drug abuse, as well as the overwhelming corruption and ineffectiveness of the ruling regimes and Islamic officialdom. They have accordingly seen in Islam a potent ideology for the social and spiritual revival of the people. In doctrinal terms they have adhered to *salafi* Islam and regarded the existing Islamic practices and the mode and language of prayers as deviations from true Islam.

The Islamist activities in the Volga-Urals, Caucasus and Central Asia have displayed some similarities and differences. However, there has not been any established interaction between the Islamist networks in the three regions. In each region Islamists have pursued their specific agenda. Nevertheless, all of them have developed direct links with the same Islamist centres and Islamic funding bodies in Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and some other countries of the Middle East, as well as in Western Europe. However, there has been no direct correlation between the level of the Taliban's activity in neighbouring Afghanistan and Islamists' activities in Ferghana valley. Since the late 1990s the authorities in all three regions have significantly curtailed direct foreign Islamic involvement in the form of foreign Islamic missionaries, teachers and representatives of various Islamic foundations and organisations. However, indirect foreign Islamic involvement in the form of financial, doctrinal and educational assistance has persisted. Among its main

channels have been sponsorship of the annual *hajj* of local Muslims to Mecca and Medina, local Muslims' studies in Islamic Universities and colleges abroad, foreign Islamic publications, and illegally distributed in local Muslim communities and foreign Islamist websites which, however, have been accessible to only a small fraction of the poverty-stricken population.

The impact of Islamism on local politics has remained marginal although it has varied from region to region. It has been greater in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Dagestan compared to the other target areas. In all three regions, the actual number of Islamists has still has not exceeded 5-7 percent of the respective population. However, proliferation of radical Islam has been on the rise. In the longer run, the prolongation of the existing dire socio-economic conditions, the ineffectiveness and pervasive corruption of the ruling regimes as well as official treatment of all Muslims with suspicion as potential extremists may enhance political Islam as a potent form of social protest. This could have a direct impact on the socio-political and security situation in each region, Eurasia and the wider Western European and international community.