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The «Caucasus Knot»: the new lap of violence

Sergey Sukhankin

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ABSTRACT

Three terrorist attacks in the Russian city of Volgograd allegedly committed by the «Caucasus Emirate» were said to have been related to the determination of its leader Dokku Umarov to derail the Sochi Olympic Games. However, from another prospective it seems that these acts of violence had a much deeper meaning, exposing a broad array of underlying problems and unsolved issues within both the North Caucasus region and Russian society. In particular, attacks carried out by young radicalized Muslims revealed failed Russian attempts to establish regional peace and security by the transmission of wealth and power into the hands of one segment of the local society. Secondly, developments in Chechnya for the past decade (due to the regime of R. Kadyrov) have contributed the spread of radicalism to neighbouring republics, jeopardizing stability all over the Caucasus. On the other hand, the escalation of conflict has had ramifications for «ethnically» Russian regions that have taken various shapes and forms. Moreover, it should be admitted that the phase of «hard war» on the North Caucasus (1994-2009) has grown into a sophisticated multidimensional conflict composed of ethnic, religious and ideological components that will be given closer attention within the scope of this research paper. The scientific discipline that this Working Paper is operating in is mostly related to contemporary history.

Subjects: North Caucasus, terrorism, «Caucasus Emirate», Chechnya, intra-Muslim conflict, Volgograd, regional security.

RESUM

S'ha dit que els atacs terroristes contra la ciutat russa de Volgograd, presumptament comesos per l'Emirat del Caucas, estaven relacionats amb la voluntat de Doku Umarov, líder d'aquesta organització, d'arruïnar els jocs olímpics de Sotxi. Tanmateix, des d'un altre punt de vista sembla clar que aquests actes de violència tenien un significat molt més profund i posaven de relleu un ampli conjunt de problemes subjacents i qüestions no resoltes tant al nord del Caucas com en la societat russa en general. Particularment, els atacs que portaren a terme joves musulmans radicalitzats van evidenciar el fracàs dels intents russos d'implantar la pau i la seguretat regionals mitjançant la transferència de riquesa i poder a un sector concret de la societat local. En segon lloc, els esdeveniments a Txetxènia durant la dècada passada (a causa del règim de Ramzan Kadírov) han contribuït que s'estengui el radicalisme a les repúbliques adjacents, de manera que s'ha posat en perill l'estabilitat a tot el Caucas. D'altra banda, l'escalada del conflicte també ha tingut derivacions, tot i que amb diferents configuracions i característiques, en regions «ètnicament russes». A més, cal tenir en compte que la fase de «guerra dura» al nord del Caucas (1994-2009) s'ha desenvolupat fins esdevenir un conflicte multidimensional amb components ètnics, religiosos i ideològics que aquest *working paper* analitzarà detingudament, principalment des del prisma de la història contemporània.

RESUMEN

Se ha dicho que los ataques terroristas contra la ciudad rusa de Volgograd, presuntamente cometidos por el Emirato del Cáucaso, estaban relacionados con la voluntad de Doku Umarov, líder de esta organización, de arruinar los juegos olímpicos de Sochi. Sin embargo, desde otro punto de vista parece claro que estos actos de violencia tenían un significado mucho más profundo y ponían de relieve un amplio conjunto de problemas subyacentes y cuestiones no resueltas tanto en el norte del Cáucaso como en la sociedad rusa en general. Particular-

mente, los ataques que llevaron a cabo jóvenes musulmanes radicalizados evidencian el fracaso de los intentos rusos de implantar la paz y la seguridad regionales mediante la transferencia de riqueza y poder a un sector concreto de la sociedad local. En segundo lugar, los acontecimientos en Chechenia durante la década pasada (bajo el régimen de Ramzan Kadyrov) han contribuido a que se extienda el radicalismo en las repúblicas adyacentes, de manera que se ha puesto en peligro la estabilidad de todo el Cáucaso. Por otra parte, la escalada del conflicto también ha tenido derivaciones, aunque con diferentes configuraciones y características, en regiones «étnicamente rusas». Además, hay que tener en cuenta que la fase de «Guerra dura» en el norte del Cáucaso (1994-2009) se ha desarrollado hasta convertirse en un conflicto multidimensional con componentes étnicos, religiosos e ideológicos que este *working paper* analizará detenidamente, principalmente desde el prisma de la historia contemporánea.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s the North Caucasus and Chechnya in particular have been one of the main topics actively discussed by international civil society and NGOs in terms of regional instability, peace and human rights violations. In the meantime, successive presidential administrations of the Russian Federation have tried numerous strategic approaches (frequently very contradictory in nature) in order to solve the «Chechen puzzle». A popular myth that portrayed Chechnya as the only source of regional instability was also born during the first years after breakup of the Soviet Union. Therefore, not being able to identify the real threats and dazzled with grim prospect of Chechen insurgency Kremlin went as far as to become ready to satisfy a broad array of Chechen aspirations, whereby substantially increasing the local level of autonomy and pumping up the local economy with tremendous monetary subsidies. When in 2009 the Antiterrorist Operation in Chechnya was officially declared over and triumphant President Ramzan Kadyrov openly boasted that terrorism and extremism in the Chechen Republic was practically extinct, very few realized how dangerous and sophisticated the path that the Islamic radical movement was going to follow. Pressured both by Moscow and the local Chechen administration loyal to the Kremlin, extremist underground forces have done their utmost to spread the seeds of war far beyond Chechnya, proving that the region is dominated by forces of militant strife and violence.

Therefore, I believe that the internal conflict that the region has been involved in for several decades is growing, encroaching stretching beyond the North Caucasus area and involving ethnically «Russian» areas. Secondly, I would contend that what used to constitute the essence of the regional conflict on North Caucasus a decade ago has now taken a rather different shape and evolved into a process that may be qualified as a civil war. Thirdly, ineffectiveness of the regional policies developed by the Kremlin that included «promotion» of R. Kadyrov to the position of Chechen president have precipitated the

outbreak of a new phase of violence in the Northern Caucasus – these issues are included within the scope of this research. Fourthly, I would make special emphasis on the impact that Caucasian conflict has had on the «ethnic» Russian population, which primarily boils down to substantial proliferation of ultra-right nationalist ideology and massive anti-Caucasian campaigns led by educated Russians resisting the way the Kremlin solves existing problems. Fifthly, in scopes of this research special attention ought to be paid to such an important issue as what forces in Russia actually benefit from development of violence and instability incurred by terrorism.

In the final analysis, I would point out that the article is primarily concerned with discussing of new tendencies and traits that the regional conflict in the North Caucasus has acquired, which have been catalyzed by the emergence of the organization known as the «Caucasian Emirate» and three terrorist attacks (that are said to have been related to this organization) that occurred in the year 2013 in the city of Volgograd.

This research paper is aimed to contribute to the process of exploration of ethno-religious conflict in the North Caucasus, especially its the inception of its most recent phase which took place in the year 2013 and its repercussions both for the Russian population and the North Caucasus itself. This research is divided by three major parts. The first segment is to take a closer look at the legacy of two armed conflicts that resulted in conception of the «*Chechen syndrome*» and erroneous methods that the Kremlin used in order to cope with this internal malaise. The second part will take a closer look at the internal (as well as the most viable external) conditions that contributed to the process of radicalization and precipitated the new outbreak of violence. The last part is to assess the nature of Islamic terrorism in Russia, its complicated and unequivocal role for various parties involved and its impact on various layers of Russian society. In the end, the article presents further thoughts and reflections that are indissolubly connected with growing Russian international ambitions and its domestic conundrums that might affect its position in the long run.

2. TWO CHECHEN WARS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS

2.1. ISLAMIC RADICALISM AS A LEGACY OF TWO CHECHEN WARS: THE PERPLEXING CROSSROAD

Caucasian wars that Russia has been waging for centuries (the first war dragged from 1763 until 1864) may conditionally be divided into an active (and rather short primarily concerned with open military engagements) and a latent phase (significantly longer, that involved unconventional forms of warfare). In this context, it would be relevant to mention that the two bloody armed conflicts that occurred in Chechnya¹ within a very brief historical interim were very similar yet extremely distinctive events in the Russian history. The first war came to be largely associated with degradation, anarchy, separatism, instability and a corrupt and largely inefficient central government, whereas the second one signified important (and I would add, in a certain sense, fateful) shifts within the socio-economic, political and military domains of the Russian Federation: transition toward centralized, stiff political structures and institutions «supervised» by Vladimir Putin personally with the support of his «inner circle». On the other hand, it is generally considered that the first war (which was mistakenly supposed to be a small victorious war) was a product of shadow economic growth (i.e. black economy), unfulfilled personal ambitions and multiple political and diplomatic blunders that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent civilians and unprepared mil-

1. There is no official credible data available. During the New Years eave 1994-95 approximately 2000- 3000 Russian soldiers lost their lives. For more information see: http://www.belgazeta.by/ru/2004_11_22/arhiv_bg/8578.

itary men. This armed conflict was also a direct outcome of personal tensions between General D. Dudaev (leader of unrecognized Chechen state) and B. Yeltsin (the Russian President), whose ruthless and frequently ill-prepared attempts to dismantle Communism resulted in the outburst of separatism, which the Russian Federation witnessed in the early 1990s.² However, it was Chechnya, where a farrago of military experience (many would-be field commanders had successfully served in the Soviet military),³ political ambitions and foreign aid (especially from Turkey and the Middle East) as well as half-hearted (some have openly called it «treason») steps from Moscow resulted in open military conflict that took President Yeltsin aback. The overall outcome was a tragedy that left a deep scar on historical memory of both Russians and Chechens: a huge death toll (from both sides involved in the conflict), consequential regional destabilization, disruption of the regional/local economic and cultural connections, resulted in a new military conflict that became a logical consequence of the antecedent events.

Many would have found the events that occurred in the year 1999 and the new war that ensued (which incidentally reinstated Russian sovereignty over the Republic of Ichkeria)⁴ as a consequence of many factors that erupted into a new lap of violence that would plunge North Caucasus into the flames of war. Many would also have acclaimed V. Putin's decision to put up with the Chechen quasi-independence explaining it with the fact that by 1999 it had become a major source of banditry, slave trade, illegal arms and munitions smuggling and an example of a culturally and politically degrading entity.⁵ A quasi-state that was steadily but surely becoming the safe heaven for international terrorism – something akin to Afghanistan during Taliban rule. Above all, I

2. C. Marsh, J.W. Warhola. Ethnicity, Modernization, and Regime Support in Russia's Regions Under Yeltsin,- University of Maine, 24 Dec 2007, p. 25.

3. For instance, D. Dudaev was a General who successfully performed military campaigns during the war in Afghanistan against his fellow Muslims; A. Maskhadov was a Colonel etc.

4. For more information on this term see: Udug Movladi «Security in Exchange for Independence» (available at http://www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/islam/conception/security_for_freedom.shtml).

5. For more information on this topic, see: http://www.rg.ru/anons/arc_1999/1126/22.htm.

would argue that the second Chechen campaign signified Vladimir Putin's emergence as a strong politician and the leader of a recovering Russian Federation – the new state that is known nowadays with all its strengths and drawbacks. It should also be mentioned that the active phase of military operations was followed by sound rhetorical escapades,⁶ unexpected and picturesque actions and active and rather skilful military activities (contrary to the first war, when Russian military commanders were perceived as an embodiment of unprofessionalism, whereas the army simply performed the role of «cannon fodder»). The outbreak of military conflict and incursion upon Dagestan in 1999 along with ensued terrorist attacks on the Russian territory⁷ in a very apropos way coincided with Vladimir Putin's presidential campaign that was waged under the shield of war with terrorism, gathering of Russian lands⁸ and establishment of order and justice.

Nonetheless, as undisputed a success as it might have appeared at first glance, it in fact caused a new round of tensions and regional instability that constituted the conception of the «*Chechen syndrome*»⁹ as an integral element of Russian internal (as well as external) development.

Another previously unknown trait that the two Chechen conflicts brought with them – *Islamic terrorism* that has grown into a scourge that determines many aspects of Russian life and stipulates a fare share of existing security concerns. It should however be mentioned that the *Islamic terrorism* that will be reflected upon in this research paper was not particularly supported by D. Dudaev and became a reflection of growing radical Islamism in Chechnya accompanied by

6. *Desiat'let vlasti Putina – vse nachnalis's «zamochim w sortirie»* (Десять лет власти Путина – всё началось с «замочим в сортире»), available at: <http://www.newsru.com/russia/09aug2009/mn.html>.

7. For more information see: <http://www.terror99.ru/commission/doc42.html>.

8. This process had been borrowed from the Russian history (13 – 15 centuries) and was an example of a contradiction between Christian Rus and the pagan (later Islamic) Golden Hoard. For more information see: *The Cambridge History of Russia*, - Vol 1, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 127-188.

9. This topic as well as the issue of terrorism will be taken a closer look at in the forthcoming sections of the paper.

proliferation of the overall number of mercenaries from Middle East and Saudi Arabia who had extensive experience of using methods of terrorism to pursue certain goals. Many of them had been trained in Pakistan (in particular, Waziristan)¹⁰ and took part in regional military conflicts with extensive use of terrorist attacks (in Central Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan and even during the Yugoslav conflict).¹¹ In the final analysis, growing radical Islamization had split Chechen insurrection movement into two branches and culminated in open military conflict that occurred in the year 1998 between two fractions of insurgent forces, when Aslan Maskhadov (by then the President of Ichkeria after D. Dudaev had been killed) officially outlawed radical Islamic movement on North Caucasus territory. However, this decision of the «old» leadership was not perceived as an imperative by other forces. The tide had already changed its direction; the old forces that stood at the beginning of insurrection movement (who had either Soviet military background or were involved with Communism) were losing popularity. Whereas radical Islamic ideas (backed by substantial financial means from abroad) were gaining momentum among a new generation of field commanders who were less concerned with the establishment of a nation state than with profit and personal ambitions. On the other hand, it was romantic audacity and strict orientation on religion that were appealing for the younger and poorly educated sections of the local Islamic community.

In the end, I would contend that the victory of radicalism became a great disadvantage for the Chechen idea of sovereignty. It was used by the Kremlin as a justification (in the eyes of both the international community and the Russians for whom the first war was extremely unpopular)¹² for use of military force as the only possible and acceptable response to terrorist threat.

10. For more information see J. Lang. *Zbrojni radykalowie Islamscy z Azji Centralnej*, OSW, November 2013, Warsaw.

11. For more information see: *Dogs of war* (Documentary), parts 1- 4, 2010. Available at: http://films-online.su/news/psy_vojny_likvidacija_film_1_4_j_2010/2011-06-01-6846

12. For more information see: http://ruskline.ru/monitoring_smi/2012/06/19/lev_rohlin_myatezhnyj_general_zheleznyj_lev.

Interestingly enough but the new phase that brought about profound changes for both Chechnya and the North Caucasus as a whole was ushered in by an act of terrorism as well. When the head of Chechnya Akhmad Kadyrov (who participated in the first Chechen war on the side of the rebels and would later become a trustworthy associate of Putin's regime) fell pray to meticulously planned terrorist attacks on 9 May 2004,¹³ the Kremlin came to perceive *Islamic terrorism* as the most visible threat to its sway over the Northern Caucasus. In fact, it seemed that the Kremlin became ready to sacrifice huge resources (whereby eclipsing other issue that would later gain enormous weight) to finally deal with Islamic extremism. Assassination of a statesman of such caliber and influence was clear evidence that the broad array of issues and threats that made the North Caucasus a «bleeding ulcer» of the Russian Federation did not come to any solution – a distinctively new approach was required. On the other hand, it became obvious that methods introduced by *Islamic terrorism* were gaining popularity and enjoyed significant approval among radical field commanders, whereby superseding tactics, strategies and philosophic approaches used by D. Dudaev and the «old generation» of Chechens.

2.2. R. KADYROV'S ASCENSION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE «NEW ORDER». BIRTH OF STABILITY OR A PRELUDE TO THE NEW STORM?

The ascension of Ramzan Kadyrov as his father's successor that occurred in February 2007 has become a crucial turning point for the entire North Caucasus and the Russian Federation – the gravity of this decision taken in Moscow will be revealed in the coming years. The assassination of Akhmad Kadyrov vested tremendous powers into the hands of his son Ramzan. Development of the «*Chechen syndrome*» – a set of measures and actions undertaken by the Kremlin

13. Available at: <http://analysisclub.ru/index.php?page=putin1&art=1391>.

based on subconscious fear of repeating an open military conflict on the territory of the Russian Federation as an impediment to both internal development of state and international image of Vladimir Putin as a self-sufficient politician who is in charge of the situation. The emergence of this unique phenomenon made Moscow ductile in relations with representatives of the Chechen elites who had been able to hammer out substantial concessions from the Federal Center. The policy that signified the emergence of the new approach came to be known as «*Chechenization*» – passing of the most important governmental posts to ethnic Chechens, while excluding Russians from participation in the life of the republic. One of the most salient outcomes of this policy that has been indicated so far is the process of the «de-Russification» of Chechnya (this is also applicable to the North Caucasus as well): as a result, Chechnya is becoming less of a subject of the Russian Federation and more of an actor with its own broad (and frequently practically uncontrollable) autonomy. Many political scientists dealing with the problem of North Caucasus have expressed their doubts whether Chechnya may be considered to be a part of the Russian Federation at all. For instance, the republic has its own law code, traditions, armed forces and constitution. Chechen youngsters do not participate in the military draft, which has always been one of the most important means of keeping different parts of the country together (this was the case both for Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union). More importantly however, is that above-mentioned elements do not match Russian criteria of statehood being foreign and rather outlandish. Moreover, in 2013 R. Kadyrov proclaimed his own vision of Chechnya in the future (in fact, one might argue that this model is a combination of D. Dudaev's and A. Maskhadov's perception of the matter):

1. Chechnya as part of Russia (as long as Russia provides financial support this criterion will undoubtedly remain in force).
2. Chechnya as a land for/of Chechens (this may be seen as a part of the nationalist agenda that had been put forth by D. Dudaev in the early 1990s).

3. Chechnya as an Islamic state (ideas of that sort were reluctantly pursued by A. Maskhadov under the pressure of the new field commanders after 1996).

Moreover, I would argue that during the last several years Ramzan Kadyrov has been providing a policy that he has clearly may be defined as «*new nationalism*» – phenomenon that has not been experienced by the Russian Federation before. This supposition is based on the following facts:

1. R. Kadyrov construes himself as a sole representative of all Chechens (both from the Republic and those who live abroad).
2. He manifested his ambitious plans for Ingushetia and Dagestan, whereby including them into his own sphere of influence (under the pretext of necessity to purify them from Wahhabits) – his public declarations that Chechnya needs access to the sea sound rather ominously.
3. He openly admits Chechnya winning the war against Russia, who is now compelled to pay a tribute in a form of significant monetary assistance (which has met a wave of protests from Russian nationalists and military).
4. The Chechen president has come up with sound foreign policy advice that he addressed directly to the Russian President:¹⁴ for instance, R. Kadyrov has expressed his determination to «physically exterminate Georgia and Ukraine» as enemies of the Russian Federation. Moreover, the most recent events (the war between Ukraine and Russia) that occurred in 2014 have shown that the Chechen President has been very eager to send his troops to «protect ethnic Russian population against nationalists».¹⁵

Needless to say that R. Kadyrov has had no scruples while imple-

14. For more information see: <http://ukranews.com/ru/news/ukraine/2009/12/24/8634>; <http://vlasti.net/news/176862>

15. This resembles D. Dudaev's «proposition» of friendship to B. Yeltsin in 1991- 94 that included an idea of breaking the back of political opposition to B. Yeltsin.

menting his agenda: the most brutal measures possible have been used irrespectively of the wave of critique and discontent emanating both from abroad and the progressive sections of Russian society. With his actions President Kadyrov is hiding under the habit of the ongoing warfare with Wahhabi movement and religious extremism, as well as concern for Russian security prior to the Sochi Olympic Games (and other grand projects meant to boot Russian weight abroad) as well as general stability in the region, which President Putin sees as his foster child and a matter of personal pride. Keeping in mind the causes that made it possible for D. Dudaev to assume power (when the Kremlin did not provide adequate support to the opposition represented by R. Khasbulatov and D. Zavgayev in early 1990s) it seems obvious that the Kremlin made its choice in favor of R. Kadyrov in order to avoid repetition of such circumstances that would create multiple centers of power in Chechnya. These developments allowed Ramzan Kadyrov to acquire his personal army,¹⁶ enjoy generous economic subsidies¹⁷ (Chechnya is the number one in the list of major recipients from the federal budget),¹⁸ the ability to settle accounts with any person he (or his associates) deem their personal enemies (the only required justification - the war with Wahhabism).¹⁹

As a result, Chechnya is being extensively dominated by rites of primitive society and tribalism with brutal force being the only criterion of justification of power – theological autocracy combined with

16. According to different estimates, his troops are equal to 10.000- 30.000 people. This figure exceeds the number of troops D. Dudaev had in 1994-95.

17. Rossijskaja Gazeta. Zakon Chechenskoj Respubliki ot 31 dekabria 2013 goda (Российская Газета. Закон Чеченской Республики от 31 декабря 2013 года №45-РЗ „О бюджете Территориального фонда обязательного медицинского страхования Чеченской Республики на 2014 год и на плановый период 2015 и 2016 годов»). For more information see: <http://www.rg.ru/2014/01/10/chechnya-zakon45-reg-dok.html>

18. Kto w Rossii kogo kormit. Polnyj spisok donorov. For more information see: <http://www.aif.ru/money/29229>.

19. The case of Umar Israilov – not an isolated incident Kadyrov’s criminal network abroad, – European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, Berlin June 2011. More detailed information about human rights violation in Chechnya is available on: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/russia?page=2>

personal dictatorship has become the only conceivable form of governance. Therefore, on numerous occasions, the fate of many Chechens who do not exactly approve these tactics has been gruesome – growing immigration both to the EU and other parts of the Russian Federation is becoming a salient problem of Chechnya (and other republics of North Caucasus). This process leads to the development of ethnic tensions with local Russians, spreading the conflict to further ethnic Russian territories, whereby nurturing nationalist and ultra right forces that are now raising their heads.

In this context, the political moves of President Putin seem to be rather awkward. The notorious «*Chechen syndrome*» spurs the Federal Center to make one concession after another catering for narrow interests of a select group, leaving the rest of population aside and not taking into account needs of the majority. This however brings quite opposite and somewhat unexpected reactions - every new concession (or personal favor) is perceived by the ruling elites as an implied sign of the Center's weakness, which enables the local elites to come up with new claims, using the card of Wahhabism and potential separatist movements that is a serious scarecrow for the Kremlin.²⁰ Given that V. Putin is determined to upgrade Russian international prestige, turning it from an «energy superpower»²¹ into a «independent political pole», existing terrorist threat is obscuring Russia's international image and warding off potential large investors. Nevertheless, one should not get the wrong impression that the significant autonomy enjoyed by the Chechen leadership concerns solely relationships with the Kremlin, rather it may be construed as freedom from responsibility and accountability for the local ruling elite, not being required to give any sort explanation for their actions to the civilian population. These events have led to two major consequences for the Northern Caucasus. On the one hand, the leadership and the ordi-

20. W RF za pryzhyk separatizmu predlagajut sazhat na 20 let (В РФ за призыв к сепаратизму предлагают сажать на 20 лет). For more information see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2013/11/131108_russia_separatism_ban.shtml.

21. For more information on this topic see: P. Rutland. Russia as an Energy Superpower,- New Political Economy, Vol. 13, No. 2, June 2008.

nary population of the adjacent regions such as Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia and Ingushetia (generally severely underfinanced compared to Chechnya and suffering dire economic situation – the real level of unemployment is said to have reached 50% of population)²² have expressed open discontent over amounts of unconditional financial help and the level of autonomy that Chechnya enjoys. This sets potentially very dangerous precedent for the Federal Center – it shows that the only conceivable way of hammering new concessions for the local elites on the North Caucasus is to earn them via engaging in military hostility against the Federal authorities (as in the case of Chechnya). On the other hand, the younger generations (mostly unemployed and impoverished) are turning to radical Islam as a remedy against corrupt elites and unjust rulers. These factors have contributed to the outbreak of intra-Muslim tensions, which have brought instability and elevated the general level of regional confrontations to a much more significant level.

As a result, instead of being a «master», the Kremlin has accepted the role of arbiter, allowing personalization of policy in Chechnya, which as it has already been mentioned, shows other republics the way to hammer out privileges. However, by supporting A. Kadyrov and his vision/version of Islam, Moscow is bypassing growing interest to Wahhabism and «pure Islam» that professes to fight against oppressive regime of traitor (as he is described by adherents of Wahhabi ideology) R. Kadyrov and introduce emergence of the «*Caucasus Emirate*». Such propaganda, emanating from foreign and local proselytizers is particularly appealing for mislead and confused young Muslims. Nevertheless, the social base of supporters of the above-mentioned ideas has drastically increased and expanded over the years.

It must also be said that in dealing with R. Kadyrov, Vladimir Putin has been put in a rather precarious position. In fact, the Kremlin has

22. Problema Severnogo Kavkaza nie w kolichestwie deneg, a v tom, kak oni raskhodujutsja (Проблема Северного Кавказа не в количестве денег, а в том, как они расходуются). Available at: <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/interview/Ruslan-Grinberg-Problema-Severnogo-Kavkaza-ne-v-kolichestvie-deneg-a-v-tom-kak-oni-raskhoduyutsya.html>.

very few candidates who seem to be eligible to substitute R. Kadyrov (who incidentally became a president of Chechnya contrary to the Constitution rules).²³ Should one take a closer look at the pool of specialists in the Russian Federation that could assume key positions in the republic, it would become apparent that there are practically no cadres available, that would meet the required criteria (be experienced in North Caucasus and respected by its population, be Muslim and be willing to be dispatched to this region).

In the end, I would suggest that the presidency of R. Kadyrov has had merely palliative effects and did not result in the creation of regional stability, insured security and peace building processes. On the contrary, the situation has become even tenser and newly born activities have emerged and transformed into potentially dangerous developments. This is signified by growing terrorist activities and proliferating numbers of young Muslims that have joined underground radical movement, submerging the entire region into an abyss of horror.

2.3. ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL DIVISIONS BETWEEN MUSLIMS IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS: SALAFISM, SUFISM OR ISLAMIC RADICALISM - WHICH PATH TO CHOOSE?

Speaking of ethno-religious confessions and religious diversification within Islamic community of the Northern Caucasus it ought to be mentioned that pertinence to one branch of Islam or the other is stipulated by adherence to specific territories where particular groups of the community reside. The first one includes Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia - the Northeastern Caucasus (Sufism as the main religious branch of Islam), whereas the second - the Northwestern Caucasus that include North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessk and Adygea (it consists of traditional Islam and elements of popular

23. Constitution of the Chechen Republic, Chapter 4. Available at: <http://chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=63>

culture including paganism).²⁴ Therefore, it would be safe to suggest that North Caucasian Islamic tradition represents a phenomenon that comprises both religious and popular traits and rites with inclusion of paganism and local traditions that do not represent homogeneous religion as a basis of popular identity and belief. The local elites are very susceptible to the role of religious superiority of one version of Islam over the others, which does explain the nature of existing regional conflict being partly based upon significant religious dichotomy.

Reflecting upon historical roots and preconditions that resulted in a conflict between Salafi and Sufi ideologies on North Caucasian soil, it should be pointed out that the open tensions between the two groups erupted in the mid-1990s, when Muslim youth who had studied abroad finally returned and started practicing this version of Islam. Originally, Wahhabism (which is frequently associated with Islamic fundamentalism) is a form of Salafism, which calls Muslims to return to the so-called 'pure' Islam of the times dating back to the Prophet Muhammad and the Four Caliphs.²⁵ The most important ideological aim that Wahhabism sought to achieve was purification of traditional Islam by relieving it from local contaminants and hindering factors.

In USSR Wahhabism became a byproduct of Gorbachev's policy (Perestrojka and Glasnost) that allowed certain religious freedoms, which brought numerous delegations from the Middle East, Egypt, Syria, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to the North Caucasus. However, it was Dagestan where processes of rapid Islamisation (yet, not Islamic radicalization)²⁶ were accelerated with particularly high rapidity.²⁷ Despite pervasive opinions, the initial version of «pure Islam» that was

24. Akayev Vakhit Kh. The Conflict between Traditional Islam and Wahhabism in the North Caucasus,- Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Oslo, Norway, 12 October 2010. Available at: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=123142>, p.2.

25. Ibid, p. 15.

26. Burchujev B. Malashko A. Wahhabism nado ostavit w pokoje,- Big Caucasus, 7.01.2013. <http://www.bigcaucasus.com/events/top-day/07-01-2013/82007-malashenko-0>.

27. K.M. Khanbabayev, 'Stages in the spread of Wahhabism in Dagestan', in *Alimiy i uchenyye protiv Wahhabisma* (Religious teachers and scholars against Wahhabism). Makhachkala, 2001, p. 105.

spreading within certain territories of the Soviet Union did not call for violence: for instance, the Islamic Revival Party set up in the city of Astrakhan,²⁸ the first one to emerge in the Soviet Union put forth the following objectives:

- more freedom for practicing of *Sharia* law
- facilitate religious revival on the Northern Caucasus
- freedom to commit religious practices and expanding general knowledge of Islam
- learning Arabic and providing necessary help to other members of the community

The second group that emerged in the early 1990s were militant Salafi elements (represented mostly by Bagautdin Kebedov), their place of origin was also located in Dagestan. In literature, that group acquired the name ‘Wahhabi’, their cradle were two Dagestani villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi (in the Buynaksk district).²⁹ This group shared certain understanding of methods and tactics with emerging Chechen militants (Arbi Baraev and Shamil Basaev), who frequently used religious rhetoric as a shield for banditry and the kidnapping of people for ransom.

Nevertheless, methods used by this wing of Islam did not find broad support among the Muslim population in North Caucasus. The argument can be supported by the circumstances of August-September 1999 events – when Dagestan was invaded by the so-called Dagestani *mujahideen* Bagautdin Kebedov in cooperation with Shamil Basayev (who would later be known as the main stalwart of spreading the war beyond Chechnya) and Ibn al-Chattab,³⁰ which resulted in proclamation

28. E. Kisriev. ‘Islam i vlast v Dagestane’, OGI, Moscow 2004. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/5750423/E.F._Kisriev._Islam_i_vlast_v_Dagestane._Moskva_OGI_2004_Review_in_English.

29. M. Falkowski, M. Marszewski. The «tribal areas’ of the Caucasus. The North Caucasus – an enclave of «alien civilization» within the Russian Federation,- OSW, April 2010, Warsaw, p. 46.

30. Later he would be known as Chattab. His name (the longer version) was bearing the Arabic sign and his adherence to Wahhabi ideology.

of Islamic Republic of Dagestan. Lack of support found out such reflection when men who possessed weapons took part in the conflict on the side of Federal troops. The true motives of such a raid were soon revealed: in fact, one of the main leaders S. Basaev sought to strengthen his position with regard to the then President Aslan Maskhadov in order to gain additional bargaining power and expand his own influence. Chattab on the other hand, was primarily concerned with showing foreign donors that the North Caucasus was a good place for «investment» (in terms of mercenaries and financial means).

The failed attempt to grab power by one decisive thrust made radical Islamism fall back on the weapon that would bring incalculable human sufferings and striking fear into the lives of many ordinary Russians – terrorist attacks.³¹ Emergence of the so-called «*Caucasus Emirate*» marked a new chapter in development of radical Islamism in Caucasus, where terrorism was to be used on a systemic basis as a tool against various groups and social layers in such regions as Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, the Stavropol Krai with terrorist attacks spreading further on the Russian territory.

In this context, one might be able to discern several important reasons of why the tactics and strategies prized by militant Islam prevailed in the end over ideas disseminated by «pure Islam» (to be more precise, its original version that emerged in the USSR in the 1980s). Firstly, I would make special emphasis on the so-called «*crisis of state*» theory. The demise of the USSR and total collapse of Communism (even though it was enforced upon the population of the North Caucasus in a violent and ruthless manner) brought about a breakdown of state structures, social instability, confusion and insecurity (activities very similar to those experienced by the «Big Russia»). As a result, the Muslim population of the Northern Caucasus suddenly became unsure of its historical destiny and bereft of a national republic.

31. The Russians are mostly afraid of Islamic Fundamentalism. Available at: <http://www.baltinfo.ru/2014/01/05/Zhiteli-Rossii-bolshe-vsego-boyatsya-islamskogo-fundamentalizma--SMI-400389>.

These processes were followed by major discussions among local intellectuals (many had already returned from abroad and had been influenced by Salafi ideology) regarding necessity to search for new identity (which was definitely going to be Muslim, yet which turn would it take was still uncertain) that required a transformation of ideology. For this purpose, new religious teachings were introduced, many of which were deliberately distorted in such a way as to be able to cater for achieving certain goals and ambitions. Some of them were specifically aimed (and distorted in such a manner) to make the North Caucasus a new tinderbox of Eurasia and a transit point for drugs, munitions, oil, diamonds and slave trade.

Secondly, having encountered the aforementioned predicaments and deliberations, traditional Islam did not offer any steady framework that would have resulted in the introduction of clearly identified state structures, whereby elevating Islamic nationalism over Islamic radicalism, which might have resulted in the inception of state building processes. In this regard, the «Chechen experiment» of state building that did not work out became a sound disappointment and determined the general line of further development. Therefore, it would be safe to assume that it was the collapse of the Chechen nationalist aspirations – namely, inability to build a nation state (despite the fact that between 1991 and 1998 Chechnya was practically independent), which led to the fading of nationalist agendas and their gradual replacement by radical Islamic thought. In fact, nationalism as a tool of the sovereign nation state establishment was extensively blamed for heavy destructions, mass unemployment, tremendous corruption and widespread criminalization of all spheres of public life, prostitution, alcoholism and havoc – activities that did not happen in the Caucasus during Communist rule, nor did it match main postulates of Islam ideology. Therefore, traditional Islam (represented by a certain group within the local elites) was being defined by some as a sordid and needed to be purified (even if violence was required extensively).

Another important aspect that resulted in growing negative reaction among many Muslims was the approach adopted by Vladimir Pu-

tin, which can be characterized as «*domestication*» of local elites and leaders of the most powerful clans. In this juncture, significant financial help that is received by the region should be seen as a mixed blessing – frequently it is redistributed by leaders of the most favored groups, which deprive ordinary people from being able to benefit from it. As a result, local elites are being corrupted by power, money and inviolability, whereas ordinary people on numerous occasions barely can make the ends meet.

Another reason of militant's Islam rise in popularity may be explained by deeply rooted tradition of warfare with Russia, its existence in local history and culture. The military conflict between local tribes and the Russian Empire broke out in the second half of the eighteenth century and was officially over primarily due to the broad array of privileges and concessions that the Central Government was ready to sacrifice as a means of pacification of the local powers. Moreover, for some Militant Islam is the unifying ideology (very conservative and traditional) that is deemed as the best response to moral degradation and amoral style of governance pursued by R. Kadyrov and his closes associates supported by Kremlin (which makes it responsible in the eyes of many). Following this path of thought, it ought to be mentioned that the fare share of responsibility lies on the Kremlin that has adopted very dangerous (taking into account local ethno-cultural and political environment) tactics towards the North Caucasus that can be summed up in the following maxim «divide and rule». So far, this strategy has alienated and disgruntled wide masses of local population many of whom have come to realize that they are merely being manipulated by both local and federal authorities. In the end of the day, historical experience of the entire post-Soviet space has shown that when conditions become apropos, deeply engrained problems (may they be stipulated by ethno-cultural, economic, linguistic or historical reasons) will explode, bringing to light issues that were deliberately hushed down by the Soviet leadership. The main problem for the North Caucasus and Chechnya in particular is that Wahhabism claims to be primarily concerned with the idea of unification of the North Caucasus and its diverse population,

which juxtaposes it to the Russians (and supported by them local elites), who are construed as an enemy and a divisive rather than a unifying force.

2.4. THE «CAUCASUS EMIRATE»

Evolution and a change of tactics that Islamic Fundamentalists have adopted on the North Caucasus is primarily connected with an entity that emerged in the fall of 2007, the so-called «Caucasus Emirate» (*Imarat Kavkaz*). This is an extremely loose quasi-state that is supposed to comprise Muslim population of the North Caucasus republics and parts of the Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai.

Since 2006 Dokku Umarov³² who was known first to have used this term as a successor to the 'Chechen Republic of Ichkeria' (incidentally, D. Umarov was its 5th president). The idea of the «Caucasus Emirate» goes deep into history, its predecessors were «the Imamate of Shamil» (during the Caucasian War of the 19-th century) and «the North Caucasian Emirate» governed by Najmuddin Gotsinsky prior to the advent of the Communism.

On 31 October 2007, Dokku Umarov accepted the new name Abu Umar (following the Arabic tradition) and officially proclaimed emergence of the «Caucasus Emirate» that was to spread its swa over the following territories (which also acquired new names):

- Nokhchiycho (Chechnya)
- Galgayche (Inguszetia)
- Kabarda-Balkaria (Karachay)
- Step Nogayski (southern part of the Krasnodar Krai)

The «Emirate» is an underground Islamic organization (which makes it impossible to be designated as a «state» since it does not fulfill of-

32. For detailed information on D. Umarov, see: Kevin Daniel Leahy. From racketeering to Emir: a political portrait of Doku Umarov, Russia's most wanted man,- Vol. 4 (3) - Summer 2010. For more information see: http://www.cria-online.org/12_4.html

ficially adopted requirements of «statehood»)³³ whose main goal is conducting the *jihad* (the «wholly warfare») against various groups and segments of population («the infidels») in order to accelerate the process of establishment of the Islamic state that would include the above-mentioned territories. The «Emirate» comprises approximately several hundred members (at most, several thousands) yet the accurate data is unavailable. According to claims put forth by leadership of the organization, the ultimate goal is establishment of «an independent state in the North Caucasus governed by *Sharia* law». The main tool deemed appropriate for these goals to be achieved is extensive use of force to those who would hinder this process. However, provided that the «Emirate» and its military structures does not wield substantial military capabilities and is unable to wage open military conflict akin to the one that occurred within the period 1995 – 2000, terrorist tactics are deemed appropriate means of achieving goals put forth by the «Emirate». Incidentally, the «Emirate's» leadership has presented neither any documented programme of actions nor any road map that would stipulate constructive steps related to the process of institutions building. What makes it particularly dangerous is that the central command has only a nominal power, the so-called *mujahideen* squads (the «Emirate's army») enjoy large autonomy and therefore operate within a wide latitude, which make the task of their identification especially complicated.

Particularly curious seems to be ethnic composition of the «Emirate» - Chechens, Ingush and Dagestani prevail but in the recent years Russians who have converted to Islam have become an important part of these formations (the reasons thereof will be discussed later on), whereas the number of foreign mercenaries has fallen sharply.

Speaking of rhetorical proclamations, it would be difficult to escape the fact that they are very appealing to many Muslims (particularly young and impoverished segments of society): such notions as egalitarianism and brotherhood of all Muslims make them the only

33. S. Pahuja. The Postcoloniality of International Law,- Volume 46, Number 2, Summer 2005.

viable force in the Caucasus, which is attempting to overcome ethnic and clan divisions and unite Caucasus. This model is very different both from one pursued by Russia (which was discussed earlier) as well as the approach of R. Kadyrov whose methods and tactics of «unification» of Caucasus under his leadership³⁴ are simultaneously loathed and feared by many Muslims.

In academic circles very popular is an idea that suggests that the «Emirate» employs very radical ideology, which makes it tantamount to the Saudi Wahhabites, the Taliban, al-Shabab, and Somali tribal militia.³⁵ The essence of such radicalism was introduced by Z. Yandarbiev, who in times of his «presidency» (1996-1997) introduced the Law Code of Sudan³⁶ based on violent sadism (masked under Islamic values, which obviously have nothing to do with that) and is abominable to the «civilized community of nations».

The tactics is no less radical than words, as it has been mentioned previously terrorism became the main tool of fight, which is mostly spearheaded against Muslims collaborating with the Federals, official clergy, local militia, civilian authorities and Orthodox clergy that is collaborating with FSB. In this regard, it is deemed to be necessary to briefly outline the main stages of evolution that terrorist tactics have undergone:³⁷

1. *Guerilla warfare (31 October 2007-26 April 2009)*. This stage bore some traits of guerilla fighting with attacks on Russian (and local loyalists) military and paramilitary formations – it coincided with the official end of the Second Chechen campaign

34. Sergey Sukhankin. Kadyrov's «Intermarium»: From the Caspian to the Black Sea, - Eurasian Hub, May 2014. Available at: http://www.amazon.es/Kadyrovs-Intermarium-From-Caspian-Black-ebook/dp/BooKNBM9T6/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1401447969&sr=8-2&keywords=sergey+sukhankin

35. For more information see: Ruslan Kurbanov. Talibanizatsiya Kavkaza, <http://www.russ.ru/pole/TalibanizaciyaKavkaza>

36. Documentary film «Dogs of war – the ideology of death», Part 1, 2010. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOt_9-gjrrA.

37. Gorecki W. Rosyjski Kaukaz bez zmian lokalna wojna na przedpolach olimpiady, - OSW, No.47, Warsaw, 2014. P. 19.

and had numerous representation of foreign mercenaries as well as local veterans who had experienced open fight with the Federals and could boast skills in the art of warfare.

2. «*The indiscriminate onslaught*» (25 April 2009-2 February 2012). With depletion of skillful experienced fighters, the Emirate's leadership became more and more prone towards suicide bombing³⁸ to claim as many lives as possible in order to attract attention of the world terrorist network towards North Caucasus: this step was triggered by the open summon made by D. Umarov to commit terrorist attacks.³⁹ In this context, it should be reasonable to list some of the most sound attacks:

- An attempt to assassinate President of Ingushetia Junus – Bek Jevkurov (June 22, 2009).
- Nevski Ekspress derailment (27 November 2009, 28 people dead).
- Double explosion in Moscow Metro stations (29 March 2010, 41 people dead).
- Diversion on the Hydroelectric station in Kabardyn- Balkariya (21 June 2010, 2 people dead).
- Terrorist attack in Vladikavkaz (9 September 2010, 19 people dead).
- Terrorist attack in Domodedovo Airport (24 January 2011, 37 people dead).
- Series of terrorist attacks in Kabardyn – Balkaria (18-25 February 2011, 6 people dead).

3. *Selective strikes* (2 February 2012 – 3 July 2013). The previous stage had severely damaged «Caucasus Emirate's» status of a

38. I would however argue that it was the year 2004 (after the Beslan tragedy) that brought about the «suicide bombing» (a clear evidence of «foreign influence» and steady ties with international terrorist organisation, since that tactics had not been used before) as one of the main tactics used by Islamic radicals.

39. Imarat Kazkaz na puti ot Yemena k Alziru (part 1), Prague Watchdog, 6.06.2009. <http://www.watchdog.cz/?show=000000-000024-000004-000004&lang=2>

guerilla force. Heavy losses of civilians that were a direct result of its activities led to the fact that the organization was recognized as a terrorist formation, first by the Russian side (February 8, 2010), afterwards the US found its activities to be terrorist in nature (May 26, 2011) and finally the United Nations Security Council added the «Emirate» to the list of entities associated with Al-Qaeda (July 29, 2011). Those developments suggested that this formation was a terrorist organization. Moreover, the «Emirate» started to experience troubles with financial support, logistics and manpower. In addition, signs of public discontent within Russian population with Kremlin's strategies led the leadership of organization to the conclusion that this result was a direct outcome of the organization's activities. Therefore, D. Umarov had declared a new approach: civilian targets on the mainland Russia were not to be touched,⁴⁰ with the center of terrorist activities to be shifted on North Caucasus.

4. «*The total war*» (3 July 2013-?). On 3 July, D. Umarov annulled the «moratorium» on terrorist attacks on the Russian territory, threatening to derail the Sochi Olympic Games as an answer to the Russian government that construed his «moratorium» as a sign of weakness and inability to commit major operations on Russian territory.⁴¹ In many senses this proclamation made by the radical leader of this organization did have a pivotal meaning – it signified the outbreak of the new lap of violence on North Caucasus and the entire territory of the Russian Federation. Obviously, derailment Sochi Olympic Games was a highly unrealistic goal primarily due to the measures that were expected to be taken by the Russians (in fact, steps that were actually taken by far exceeded those officially declared). Therefore, Islamic radi-

40. Umarov prikazal bojevikam izbegat' atak na mirnyje celi (Умаров приказал боевикам на Кавказе избегать атак на мирные цели), Kavkaz-uzel, 3.02.2012. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/200452>.

41. Umarov prizval voоруженное подполье k sryvu Olympiady w Sochi (Умаров призвал вооруженное подполье к срыву Олимпиады в Сочи), Kavkaz-uzel, 3.07.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/226558>.

cals used the slogan of endangerment of large targets in order to mask their forthcoming attacks upon least significant and ill-secured targets. The first major attack that was committed on 21 October 2013 in Volgograd signified two major events. First, it signified the outbreak of the new level of violence that the Russian Federation was destined to experience. On the other hand, this event confirmed existence of the ongoing civil war that now encompasses not only the entire North Caucasus but also adjacent areas. It also may be counted as a sign of growing ambitions and existing capabilities that the «Caucasus Emirate» does possess. Even though its leader would be liquidated as a result of Russian security services operation (allegedly it took place in March 2014), the overall trajectory of development was clear – Islamic radicalism did not die down permanently, it has merely been recuperating its strength and the idea of violent warfare with the Russians did not lose its acuteness.

Mentioned phases have clearly shown evolution of tactics and strategies that the Emirate has been employing over several years. Having lost its original core, extremist forces started to generate their own resources and apply new tactics (evolving into a very distinctive form of radical movement) benefiting from growing discontent of many young Muslims with situation in the Northern Caucasus, including ethnic Russians converting into Islam who are highly dissatisfied with situation in Russia due to different reasons. In the end, it should be noted that over the last several years Islamic radical movement has become a marginal power with the «Caucasus Emirate» as its center. Nonetheless, apparent weakness and visible volatility does not mean that these forces are unable to incur harm and preserves hidden highly inflammable potential. After all, the year 2013 has proven this concept.

3. HARD WAR VS. HIDDEN RADICALIZATION: THE NEW LAP OF VIOLENCE

3.1. INTRA MUSLIM TENSIONS, GROWING RADICALIZATION AND THE CONFLICT SPREADING BEYOND

In previous sections, I have tackled the essential difference between Sufi and Salafi ideologies as well as other crucial differences between these two schools of Islamic thought. On the other hand, I tried to depict the role of Sufism as a «state promoted» religion, which is visible both in the policies of the local ruling elites as well as Moscow's strategic approach to the Sufi vs. Salafi conflict. As it has been explained previously, these behavioral patterns create a fertile soil for the intra Muslim tensions to gain particular acuteness. In the final analysis, this activity (forcible and rather violent exhalation of one religion over the other) has brought about substantial harm and contributed to the outcome when certain groups (followers of Salafi movement) are becoming socially marginalized segment of society (creating a subculture of their own), which provides a basis for the underground resistance to thrive. It is also necessary to mention, that North Caucasian tradition ascertain religion as a domain of public, private and political life that determines one's status within society and belonging to one or another group. Religious affiliations also determine one's legal status and the level of tolerance that certain religious/social groups will be able to enjoy. For instance, all sorts of support for spiritual organizations in North Caucasus are primarily stipulated by belonging to one of the eight Spiritual Boards of Muslims. Therefore, only being part of this formation any organization/individuals may be recognized and receive various forms of state support, and a right to exist in the local Muslim society. Salafi religious organizations are not affiliated with the Spiritual Boards, which make

them illegal and unwelcomed by local elites. Moreover, since Moscow derives information from local political and intellectual elites, Salafi movement is frowned upon by the Kremlin as well.

In Chechnya Sufism is officially state-enforced ideology, which Ramzan Kadyrov is known to be a strong stalwart. After his fathers assassination R.Kadyrov adopted a tactic of forceful actions against Salafi, who in his view are members of fundamentalist and Wahhabi movement. With resources, immense powers and legitimacy transmitted to him by Moscow, R. Kadyrov strive against Salafi underground movement has been rather successful: he has been able to either physically eliminate the militants and ideologists of Islamic Fundamentalism on the territory of Chechnya (under this motto peaceful members of Salafi movement are also severely oppressed) or make them flee. However, this approach (violent attempt to break resistance) has not resulted in promotion of regional stability and complete elimination of terrorism. On the contrary, restless pursuit of Salafi has resulted in the conflict getting significantly much more violent and spreading far beyond Chechnya, evolving into a fully fledged *civil war* smiting the entire North Caucasus, where the underground movement is fighting officials (both spiritual and lay) loyal to the Kremlin and making the way for their own agendas. The overall situation becomes even more complicated mostly because the fire of war has shifted upon Dagestan, Ingushetia, Karachay- Cherkessia, Adygeja and even ethnically «Russian» areas such as Krasnodar Krai and Stavropol Oblast incurring destabilization and setting these territories ablaze.

One might get an impression that the more brutally and severely radical Islamism is being squeezing out of the region the more it becomes popular, resilient and its self-perpetuating power. Moreover, nowadays the essence of the conflict between Salafi and Sufi ideologies has included members of other religious currents and formations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami, the followers of Said Nursi and other spiritual organizations,⁴² enabling centrifugal

42. Vatchagaev M. Intra-Muslim Conflict Becomes New Dimension to Instability Dagestan,- Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 10 Issue: 21. Available at: <http://www.jamestown>.

forces to take precedence. The conflict is now developing along three major lines: *Muslim – Muslim* (Sufi vs. other religious groups), *Muslim – Federal Center* (separatist forces vs. Moscow and its local puppets) and *Muslim – Russian* (in ethno – cultural sense).

The situation is aggravated with the fact that the baton of strive is being intercepted by the young generation of Muslims who are highly dissatisfied and disappointed with the existing *status quo* on North Caucasus and their respective native republics. Certain layers of society have found themselves alienated from participation in socio-economic life and the process of wealth redistribution: noncompliance with established rules and customs make these (frequently poorly educated and unemployed) young men and women to found themselves to be practically cut off their community and opportunities. In addition, many have developed strong feeling of being betrayed by local authorities that emerged within this decade (this idea is also actively disseminated by members of radical underground movement). Having witnessed two wars, death of their keen and kith, immeasurable sufferings, these youngsters are now excluded from public, economic and political life of their respective republics. On the other hand, «domesticated» local elites (who used to fight against Federals) opted to comply with the rules set by Kremlin, trading «conscious» for material profits and sovereignty.

In order to be able to understand the main factors that have facilitated spread of radical thought among Muslims, to ascertain the causes of regional destabilization and a general failure to promote peace and security on the North Caucasus, it would be reasonable to take a closer look at each republic in question: Dagestan, Ingushetia, Karachay- Cherkessia, zones where the regional conflict is maturing and involving new members.

In recent years, Dagestan has by far outstripped Chechnya judging by the level of terrorist attacks and the spread of radical thought. This southern republic has transformed into a breeding ground for radical

Islamist movements that has generated many female suicide bombers, turning the region into a zone of terror and internal conflict. Similarly, the local underground movement has acquired a new trait, it now unites not only destitute layers of society (as was the case in the 1990s and early 2000th). What seems to be particularly curious is that intellectual forces (for instance, Yaseen (Makhach) Rasulov published an article «*Jihad in the North Caucasus*») as well as young and educated Muslims dissatisfied with injustices and corruption are filling the gap that has emerged after many «veterans» of the movement were eliminated. The latest figures suggest that terrorist activities in Dagestan are gaining momentum – out of 144 cases of terrorism that occurred in Russia up to 2013, 122 of them were committed in Dagestan.⁴³

It is true that in the year 2011 alone, 368 Islamist militants were killed and 804 detained in Dagestan, and following years have only boosted that tendency. This data reflects two important changes that have occurred within last several years. Firstly, state security forces have become more proficient in detaining terrorists (which is corroborated with a number of arrested on the spot rather than being killed), and secondly, the trend shows that nowadays the number of «professional» terrorists involved in the radical underground movement has diminished, which claims participation of more amateurs and inexperienced youth.⁴⁴

A great number of scholars have argued that these are internal conditions in Dagestan that have created necessary circumstances for radical forces to preserve their internal strength and project influence beyond this particular region. On the one hand, existing Salafi community is being oppressed and uprooted with utmost severity: the former mufti of Dagestan went as far as to call Wahhabism a «pseudo-religious» and «alien» trend and claimed that «any Muslim who kills

43. FSB: w 2013 godu w RF zafiksirovano 144 terroristicheckich projavleniya, iz nich 120 w Dagestanie (ФСБ: в 2013 году в РФ зафиксировано 144 террористических проявления, из них 120 – в Дагестане), Kavkaz-uzel, 8.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/231311>.

44. Abramova E. Evkurov: za 20 let Ingushetija sdelala ogromnyj rywok, no naboty eshe mnogo (Екатерина Абрамова, Евкуров: За 20 лет Ингушетия сделала огромный рывок, но работы еще много), Mir24, 11.03.2013. <http://mir24.tv/news/politics/6648308>.

a Wahhabi will get to paradise»,⁴⁵ which can be construed as a clear instigation to genocide and civil war. The events of 1999 also became a turning point for Wahhabi members, since then they have been pursued by officials with despicable violence, affecting many Salafi who had no connection to terrorist movement, generating hatred and vindictive sentiments. After all, according to North Caucasian customary law and local traditions, in case members of one's family need to be avenged, violence can be justified (so-called «retributive justice» concept). This provoked many Muslims to seek revenge and «go forest» joining underground movement as the only conceivable way to deal with ruling elites, taking into account that generally recognized norms (such as «rule of law», «transparent judicial process») have found no practical support in the region. Some might be baffled with the fact that it is Dagestan that has become the new «safe heaven» for radical Islamist movement, since significant number of researchers point out such factor as socio-economic development to be a decisive factor in proliferation of terrorism. However, the level of socio-economic development in Dagestan does not drastically deflect from the average Russian.⁴⁶ Moreover, the shadow economy is particularly strong in this region (some consider it to be as high as 60 % of GDP), which practically make official statistical data void (incidentally, even during the Soviet times this republic had one of the highest levels of corruption and shadow economy), suggesting that the real income is higher than official figures suggest. Therefore, it would be adequate to assume that the true essence of problems lie much deeper than the level of socio-economic backwardness. Rather, it stems from ethnic diversity (on such a small piece of land reside several dozens of ethnic groups) and intra-Muslim tensions, which in the context of Dagestan is an incendiary element for the ongoing conflict, anarchy and instability. Another reason might be found in the immense precipice that exists between ruling elites (and their close associates) and wide layers

45. For more information see: [youtube.com/watch?v=RfX1CkqWwBg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfX1CkqWwBg)

46. For instance, in 2013: average wages are 510 USD compared to 710 USD in Russia; population accretion is 11,9% compared to – 0,8% in Russia; unemployment 11,7% compared to 5% (official data – to be treated cautiously) in Russia.

of ordinary population. Dagestan may also have been endeared by radical Islamists because this particular republic has significantly greater amount of businesses to be blackmailed (then other North Caucasian republics) with the purpose of money extraction to provide underground movement with financial support. In addition, unlike Chechnya Dagestan does not have powerful military forces ready (and more importantly willing) to crush underground movement as well as centralized religious leadership, which would be universally recognized and undisputed power able to appear as a unifying force. Thus, it seems unclear what should be seen as the major threat for Dagestan. Whether it is spread of radical Islamic thought and terrorist threat, or such activities as all-encompassing corruption, open banditry and absence of clearly defined rules and norms of behavior (may they be stipulated either by Moscow, or by Sharia customs) to be followed and appreciated by different layers of the local society. Another source of tensions might be distinguished from extremely high level of religious intolerance that is instigated by the Federal Center that is clearly incompetent in such rather perplexing issues lacking expertise and advisors. Above all, clumsy attempts of Moscow to bring about stability via financial injections (that are gobbled up by local elites) and offering amnesty to former members of Wahhabi movement (who will further be dealt with by the local secular and religious elites) bereave both sides of the conflict of transparency and mutual trust. So far, it seems clear that the general strategy adopted by the Kremlin in dealing with Dagestan has not proven to be effective. Two particular goals: to reach spiritual unity and induce members of radical underground to put up with fighting have brought very insignificant results. Assassination of Said Afandi has clearly shown that the peaceful dialogue between Salafi and adherents of traditional Islam is impossible under current circumstances. On the other hand, such instruments as «Commission for adaptation of the former underground fighters to civilian life» established by the presidential decree on 2 November 2010⁴⁷ has been a

47. Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Dagestan (Указ Президента Республики Дагестан № 264 от 2 ноября 2010 г.) Available at: <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/176479>.

sound failure: very few people have expressed their willingness to participate in its work. The most recent political-administrative transformations regarding North Caucasus triggered by the Kremlin (for instance, appointment of General S. Melikov as the Russian president's representative in the North Caucasus Federal District that occurred on 15 May 2014)⁴⁸ is a clear evidence of the new trajectory that will be pursued. It seems that Moscow becomes determined to break the back of Dagestani religious extremism with application of additional force and violent measures. Positive outcome of such a strategy seems to be rather dubious and highly debatable given the prior experience.

Other republics such as *Ingushetia*, *Kabardino-Balkaria*, *Karachay-Cherkessia* and *the Republic of Adygea* are perhaps the least developed subjects of the Russian Federation and may be considered to be regions with highly explosive potential. Despite their territorial proximity, these republics have different sets of problems that create very distinctive milieu for different types of radicalism to develop and flourish. For instance, ***Ingushetia*** is not endangered with militant Islamism but its potential conflict with Chechnya based on historic, territorial and ethnic tensions, spurred with the policy adopted by the Chechen president R. Kadyrov,⁴⁹ might bring about detrimental consequences for regional security. In ***Karachay-Cherkessia*** and ***Adygea*** the danger of terrorism is not an imminent threat as well. Rather, the main source of concern are perpetual ethnic tensions that make these republics a genuine powder keg: an extremely high level of criminal activities is stipulated by the «war» of criminal clans that are divided by ethnic principle (*Abaza*, *Abkhazians*, *Turkish Nogay*, *the Karachays* as well as significant Russian population and growing number of Armenians).

Among other regional subjects, it is perhaps, ***Kabardino-Balkaria*** that represents a very specific and distinctive case, where the Emirate and Islamic radicals have set up a sophisticated underground

48. M. Vatchagaev. Appointment of General Melikov to Replace Khloponin Points to Kremlin Bid to Subdue Dagestani Insurgency,- Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume 11, Issue 92. Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=42375&cHash=1cfe90321091a5f45a133e371fc92977#.U4bKonbPv6c](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=42375&cHash=1cfe90321091a5f45a133e371fc92977#.U4bKonbPv6c)

49. For more information see: Sergey Sukhankin, *Ibidem*.

scheme.⁵⁰ Islamic fundamentalism along with the ongoing ethnic and political conflict creates an atmosphere of utmost acuteness: underground fundamentalist movement acts inseparably from the local mafia clans divided by ethnic principle. Moreover, the civil war in Syria that started in spring 2011 has resulted in a number of Chechess refugees (who are highly disapproval of certain decisions of the Russian government in terms of its ethnic policies), which might add additional explosive potential to this area.⁵¹

Therefore, one could argue that these republics have superseded Chechnya in a capacity of a tinderbox on the territory of the Russian Federation and post-Soviet area. The hidden potential they contain is however by far more dangerous for the regional security than any element taken alone (radical Islamism, banditry or separatist movements). Similarly, possible destabilization might take various shapes and forms: from religious, ethnic and gang clashes to an outbreak of an open military conflict between certain republics, falling pray for growing regional leaders mounting ambitions.

However, the fact that Islamic extremists are unable to undertake massive military operations and are being driven out of Chechnya signifies new tendencies and evolution of underground militant movement. It would be safe to suggest that it were two Chechen wars that over time became the basis for the conflict to develop and encroach upon the borders of adjacent republics (especially Dagestan) generating regional instability and increasing security concerns.

This state of affairs has emerged primarily due to several important reasons. First, the Russian side has not been able to find the «happy medium» between forceful tactics and implementation of peaceful development strategies. Active phase of military operations conducted by the Federal troops incurred tremendous damage was

50. In this context, it would be adequate to mention the tragic events of October 2005 and the Islamic Militants attack on Nalchik.

51. W Aдыгее более 90 детей сирийских черкесов пошли в школу (В Адыгее более 90 детей сирийских черкесов пошли в школу), Kavkaz-uzel, 6.09.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/229626>.

subsequently replaced by A. Kadyrov's regime and growing financial stimuli. This however, does not mean that crude force has been rejected. On the contrary, in addition to the state security services (who are empowered to turn entire regions into a big operation scene), R. Kadyrov and his associated have installed brute tyranny much more cruel and all encompassing than the Russians ever did.

Moreover, the Kremlin does not seem to have a clear programme of development for the Northern Caucasus. So-called «Strategy of Social and Economic Development of the North Caucasus Federal District until 2025»⁵² that has an aim to achieve peace and stability by the means of additional funding and large infrastructural projects gives a broad (not specifically oriented) sense of reforms, with a loose programme of actions.

Secondly, an attempt to break the back of radical underground movement has caused a wholly different outcome: many young disgruntled Muslims find the only solace and ability to influence local corrupt elites by joining the extremist wing of Islamic movement.⁵³ So far, there seems to be no clearly identified solution for this issue.

Thirdly, numerous internal problems that North Caucasus has been experiencing for decades are yet to be solved.⁵⁴ One of the most important of them may be identified as a lack of personnel fit for this complicated task: majority of locals do not have necessary level of education and expertise, while Russians are either unable or unwilling to settle down on North Caucasus territory.

Fourthly, ideas of radical Islam are gaining popularity because there are very few alternative concepts that could attract youth who do not comply with existing political, social and economic systems. Above all, Russia has no values to offer for young Muslims alternative to radical Islamism, which attracts one's attention with radical (and some-

52. For more information see: <http://www.rb.ru/inform/148307.html>

53. Mariusz Marszewski, Maciej Falkowski, Nalchik: Rebel attack or successful provocation?, CES: Eastweek, 20 October 2005, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/pub/ekoment/2005/10/051020.htm>. And Yulia Latynina, Militseiskoe gosudarstvo v otdelno vyatoy respublike, Novaya Gazeta, 3 November 2005.

54. Alexander Khinshtein, Prodayom Kavkaz. Torg umesten, Moskovskiy Komsomolets, 16 June 2005.

what revolutionary) agendas and oversimplified answers to complicated questions.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that various radical forces representing different regions use Islamic fundamentalism as a unifying force that is gradually leading to rapprochement between Chechen and other radical forces, resulting in intensification of military cooperation between parties against the common enemy.

3.2. THE RUSSIAN «MUJAHIDIN»: NEW JANISSARIES OR SOCIAL OUTCASTS?

The Ottoman Empire had a policy that practiced using Slavic boys (usually from the Balkans) converted to Islam as a guard to the Sultan and his power, whereby representing the elite of military and an important internal force. This was done deliberately in such a way as to attract ethnically non-Muslims, whereby creating a steady link between Muslim and non-Muslim population of the Empire and to balance ethnic Muslim military formations.

Nowadays, in their war against Moscow the «Caucasus Emirate» has come to appreciate ethnic Russians converted to Islam as an important part of military underground. These are generally young men and women that are joining Islamic radicals for various reasons such as confusion, dissatisfaction with their lives, visible contrast between official propaganda and real state of affairs in Russia (including economic, political and social development) as well as other important domains of public life. On the other hand, many are seeking to understand the reasons that have led to the crumbling of moral standards within Russian society, degrading public spirits and widening social gap, where less lucky have very few chances to succeed in their lives. Significant number of converts are puzzled and vexed with inability of ruling elites to come up with something resembling national idea (the one that would differ from distorted version of reappearing Soviet Union) and guidelines for further development. Taking into account that the Russian society is still very patriarchic in nature and craving for the «strong hand» to guide the nation, for certain groups

ideas put forth by Islam may be considered as rather appealing and desirable.

These issues coincide with the fact that the total bulk of Islamic population in Russia is growing by extraordinary rates: approximately by 0.6 % per year, and now comprises more or less 22 millions out of 145 millions overall population.⁵⁵ This goes contrary to what is happening to ethnic Russians with disastrous fertility indicators coupled with very high mortality rates as well as various social problems (alcoholism, prostitution, social inequality, suicides, and child homelessness). In this regard, Islam seems appealing by its strict rules, clearly identified moral norms and sense of community, which was always integral part of the Russian ethno-cultural and spiritual character.

It would be difficult not to acknowledge that Russian norms and values are very different from European – this found its reflection in the course of political development accepted by President V. Putin (after several attempts to somehow mix Eurasionism with Liberal Institutionalism). Yet, since the national idea/identity has not been formulated clearly, this void is still pending to be filled. Moreover, it is still unclear what would be the final result of evident foreign policy shifts that the Russian Federation has already made: within recent couple of years (even months and weeks) focus on Eurasia appears to be even more conspicuous than previously. Should Central Asia, with strong Islamic traditions and a status of the «soft underbelly» of Russia become closer and more integrated with the Russian Federation, would it incur cultural and civilization shifts that might change the entire course of Russian history and usher in process of establishment of the new, Islamic identity? This, as well as many other questions, are still pending to be resolved.

First conversions of ethnic Russians into Islam on the large scale were accompanied by two Chechen conflicts, which included both willing and violent methods. Some scientists went as far as to call this

55. It would be extremely difficult to provide this research with accurate figures in this regard due to the fact that in the year 2002 the question of religious affiliation was deleted from the popular census.

process as emergence of the «new Janissaries» at service of Islamic movement. Many Russians have also indicated growing interest in Islam due to their engagement into mixed marriages (for instance, *Dmitry Sokolov* who would later become Abdul Dzhabar, was a husband of Naida Asiyalova who committed a terrorist attack in Volgograd in October 2013). On the other hand, many marginalized elements within Russian society are converting to Islam seeking to undo their status⁵⁶ (by very similar reasons that are guiding young Muslims into radical fundamentalism). Sociological surveys show that approximately 100.000 ethnic Russians have converted to Islam within recent years (though official statistics does not exist).⁵⁷ In the end, I would quote *Ruslan Gereyev*, the director of the Center for the Study of Islam in the North Caucasus: «the Islamization of [ethnic] Russians to a large extent is the result of poor work by the Russian Orthodox Church and by officials who do not devote to ethnic Russian youth the necessary attention... The spiritual defense of the ethnic Russian population in Russia does not exist... As a result of this, Russians are the first to fall victim to alcoholism, drug abuse, and totalitarian sects and are subject to infection by the virus of radical Islamism».⁵⁸

The reasons of success of Islamic thought for Russian converts also stems from the fact that experienced recruiters provide simple and clear answers to questions that confused young people pose to Russian intellectual elites that prefer turning a blind eye to these appeals. Islamic propagandists also treat them with solicitude rather than contempt and dismissive tone, which is frequently the case when it comes to the Orthodox clergy submerged into immoral lifestyle and corruption.

It seems however rather doubtful that conversion of ethnic Russians into traditional Islam will take place at a large scale within several forthcoming decades. The reasons may be summed up as following:

56. For more information see: <http://www.newsru.com/russia/13jan2005/kosolapov.html>.

57. Goble P. Ever More Ethnic Russians are Becoming Islamist Militants, October 29, 2013. Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nc/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=41546&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=687&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/nc/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41546&tx_ttnews[backPid]=687&no_cache=1).

58. For more information see: <http://www.sp-analytic.ru/popularity/2044-ekspert-vryadli-mozhno-nazvat-russkih-musulman-russkimi-lyudmi.html>.

- Ethnic Russians learn languages spoken by traditionally Muslim nationalities on very rare occasions.
- Slavic appearance leads to suspicion and ethnic Russians are regularly driven out of Muslim community as potential spies or provocateurs.
- Russian Orthodox Church will passionately fight for their «sphere of influence» (which is clearly seen regarding other congregations), whereby hindering Islam to spread on Russian territory.

Nonetheless, for radical underground Islamist movement ethnic Russians will remain a very much sought for commodity primarily due to the fact that the converts are not to be spotted easily, which make them difficultly identifiable goal for Russian special and security forces.

3.3. VOLGOGRAD EVENTS 2013: CONTINUATION OF THE OLD WAR OR THE NEW BEGINNING?

Tragic events that occurred in the city of Volgograd in southern part of the Russian Federation in the fall – winter of 2013, have opened up a new chapter in history of Islamic terrorism on Russian soil. These horrible acts have given answer to two main questions: whether Islamic radical movement does have capabilities to conduct major terrorist attacks outside North Caucasus and if Russian security services did in fact manage to master terrorist underground movement (which FSB and security apparatus chiefs claimed to have achieved). Abominable events that took place in Volgograd would give explicit answer to these questions. Moreover, it would be safe to suggest that these attacks revealed new and quite shocking issues that Russian side did not use to pay attention to previously.

When on 21 October 2013, suicide bomber Naida Asijalova enacted her explosive device claiming lives of 6 and seriously injuring 32 more persons⁵⁹ with a help of her Muslim (although ethnic Russian by ori-

59. For more information see: www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1144564&tid=104994.

gin) husband, it became clear that the terrorist threat and insecurity did not cease to be a part and parcel of the Russian lifestyle. On the other hand, it proved that D. Umarov's words were not a bravado: after all, radical forces did have necessary capabilities to spread the war beyond North Caucasus upon Big Russia. In addition, this tragedy has revealed unprofessionalism and negligence that Russian special services had committed. D. Sokolov had been sought for within several months interim. He was also known as a specialist in explosive devices and had prepared one of them for Madina Alieva who committed a terrorist attack on 25 May in Dagestan (12 victims), his trace was also found after explosion that was committed in Makhachkala (when 17 people were injured).

Statement regarding unprofessional behavior of FSB and anti-terrorist services have also been supported by the statement of A. Gusak (the former head of the FSB anti terrorist squad), who openly accused FSB of not doing enough in order to prevent above-mentioned terrorist attack. Among other things he mentioned that the Kremlin was primarily concerned with security of strategic goals (such as Moscow, Sochi, nuclear power plants, hydroelectric plants) displaying its disinterest with ordinary peoples security.⁶⁰ Incidentally, Moscow was supposed to become the final destination of the suicide bomber, on the spot was found a ticket Makhachkala-Moscow, yet it may have been due to the fact that Moscow appeared to be a hard target and the decision to commit attack in Volgograd was taken spontaneously.

Shortly after the attacks, the case was closed due to the «death of the main figurants»,⁶¹ and it was reported that the security services had done extensive job regarding casual links, events and circumstances of the attack. Unfortunately, as the subsequent events would show conclusions were not made properly which led to new strategic blunders. December of the same year would once again immerse Volgograd into shock and tears and the rest of Russia in ire and confusion – two terrorist attacks would make many to put aside mockery and

60. The full interview is available at: <http://izvestia.ru/news/559227>.

61. For more on this topic see: <http://izvestia.ru/news/562085>.

sneer regarding Dokku Umarov's ominous predictions made in 2011. What baffled many experts and specialists in terrorism was that the methods chosen by terrorists in the December attacks were exactly the same compared to the October events: suicide bombing on transport. In addition, soon enough video recording made by two Dagestani extremists who took the responsibility for the terrorist attacks, became another evidence of the «Dagestani footprint». Terrorists claimed to be able to destroy security measures and stated that official powers were helpless in the face of new attacks, whereby portraying Russian government as weak and unable to protect its citizens from imminent threats. Moreover, they made a clear appeal to the wide layers of Russian society trying to get across an idea that it is Moscow and its policy that was responsible and the real traitors were in the Kremlin.⁶² This was a very sophisticated way of driving a wedge further between ruling elites and ordinary citizens. The terrorists rightly comprehended the growing level of dissatisfaction within the Russian society with the level of political and socio-economic development.

The extremists claimed that they were operating within the so-called «Wilajjat of Dagestan»⁶³ (terrorist group «Ansar al-Sunna»), an independent unit within the «Caucasus Emirate», which excluded participation of Middle Eastern countries (which was initially spread by the Russian side) in these attacks and lead to Dagestan as a hotbed of terrorism. On the other hand, the style and line of behavior may lead one to suggest that these attacks had been planned and were carried out by «amateur» terrorists who might have been recruited via propaganda and Internet resources.⁶⁴

In any case, terrorists were able to achieve certain strategic goals. *Firstly*, they could disseminate sense of insecurity and threat among ordinary Russians, who are still loosing hope with central govern-

62. Additional and more detailed information to be found here: <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/01/19/102847.shtml>.

63. Available at: <http://vdagestan.com/mudzhaxidy-ne-yavlyayutsya-xavaridzhami.djihad>

64. Falkowski M. Wołgograd: dżihad ideowych amatorów, 2014-01-22. Available at: <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2014-01-22/wolgograd-dzihad-ideowych-amatorow>.

ment's ability and willingness to protect them. *Secondly*, while terrorist attacks in the year 1999 produced public stir and outburst of discontent with Islamists, whereby uniting the nation under Vladimir Putin's leadership, now the situation has turned in absolutely different direction. Public dissatisfaction was started to point against ruling elites and security services (as well as against V. Putin and his inapt leadership, surrounded by useless associates). Thus, even ultra nationalist forces seek other means than presidential participation and support, perhaps, the first time in V. Putin's political career. *Thirdly*, terrorist attacks made a rift within Russian society even greater, dividing the country into «aliens» and «natives», whereby making a decisive step towards shifting the civil war from Northern Caucasus onto ethnic Russian territories.

3.4. ISLAMIC TERRORISM AND RUSSIAN SOCIETY: ETHNO-SOCIAL CONFLICT AND BEYOND

If the goal of Islamic terrorists who committed their atrocities was to divide Russian society, by furthering ethnic conflicts (which have gained particular acuteness after the year 1991), then it would be safe to suggest that those forces who stood behind the attacks did achieve an astounding success. In fact, xenophobia, ethnic discord and openly racist speeches produced by some Russian politicians have become an integral element of events that followed Volgograd tragedies. This has proliferated ethnic tensions and facilitated exaltation of extremist and ultra-right movements (in particular various types of the neo-Nazi)⁶⁵ whose rapid integration into the criminal milieu is rather difficult to overlook. Moreover, these tendencies have led to creation of nationalist formations that resemble political units⁶⁶ appealing to such notions as «Slavic brotherhood», «Russia for the Russians», «Moscow is not

65. W Rossii naschitali bole 150 neonaziskich gruppirovok (В России насчитали более 150 неонацистских группировок), 28.10.2010. Available at: <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/578503>.

66. For instance, «*Russian National Union*» (ROS), «*Russians*», *National Democratic Party* (NDP).

the Caucasus» etc. In this juncture, it would be relevant to mention that such formations have established close contacts with Ukrainian, Polish and Belorussian nationalists, which make them potentially visible force on Russian political scene and might become a stepping-stone to the formation of pan-European right extremist network.

For instance, on 4 November 2013, Russian nationalist organizations celebrated the Day of National Unity with rallies and marches (in Moscow), which followed the Volgograd terrorist attack, where the «Russian March» in Lyublino was organized, assembling under their banners approximately 6,000 people.⁶⁷ This event was accompanied with sound anti-Caucasian sentiments and neo- Nazi mottoes and gestures - it was clearly aimed to assemble ultra radical forces and made special emphasis on ethno- racial hatred and necessity of violence.

Simultaneously the Russian capital witnessed events of very different type masked under the habit of «patriotism» and «ethno-cultural and spiritual unity» leveled at other layers of Russian society. Marches at the metro station «Oktyabrskoe Polye» was organized by the group «Russian Coalition of Action» and attended by: the political party «Liberty» («Volya»), «People's Militia under the names of Minin and Pozharsky» (NOMP), «Great Russia», «Russian Coalition of Action», «Joint Council of Civil Society», «The Kosovo Front», «Russian Renaissance», «Christian Revival», «Russian Stronghold», and «The Shield of Moscow». This rally had an aim to unite «patriotic forces» within Russian society, whereby encompassing educated youth, intellectuals and those who consider themselves to be patriots.

Following the terrorist attacks in Volgograd, in January Moscow and St. Petersburg became the mantels of the racist and xenophobic marches and gatherings that clashed with anti-fascist march (650 people attended an anti-fascist march and rally in Moscow), which produced street fighting.⁶⁸ Resurgence of neo-Nazi movement should

67. «Russian March» - 2013 in Moscow. For more information see: <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/news-releases/2013/11/d28480>.

68. Racism and Xenophobia in January 2014. For more information see: <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/news-releases/2014/02/d28941>.

be seen as an extremely dangerous trend (especially taking into account growing nationalist and far-right extremism in Central and Eastern Europe) – it does have a long lasting tradition and substantial historic background that had been formed when Russia was a monarchy (in fact, there was a steady link between Monarchical circles and xenophobic radicals). On the other hand, terrorist attacks committed by Islamic radicals could create a fertile soil for extremists with anti-Caucasian, Nazi and xenophobic ideologies to grow and unite, especially taking into account rather uncertain economic and political prospective of the Russian Federation within forthcoming 10-15 years.

In this context, it would be appropriate to discern two major events that contributed to the emergence of the Neo-Nazi and ultra nationalist ideologies in the Russian Federation (obviously, the real causes thereof went well beyond indicated two).⁶⁹ Firstly, it was First Chechen conflict that resulted in the outburst of nationalism and *Caucasophobia*.⁷⁰ Secondly, unconstitutional and disproportional application of force that B. Yeltsin had used against his political and ideological opponents (October 1993) created the «cult of force» in the «New Russia» that enables the strongest to act remorselessly – this mode of behavior is promoted by the local leaders in the Northern Caucasus as well as by the Federal Center, which sets an example for the population indicating the «proper» way of behavior.

The terrorist attacks have also contributed to the rise of populist and ultra nationalist ideologies among Russian politicians and intellectual elites. Tragedy experienced by ordinary Russians has become a perfect pretext for certain political forces to pursue their agendas, whereby increasing the level of internal tensions.

For instance, V. Zhirinovskiy, leader of the LDPR and one of the most expressive Russian politicians went as far as to demand to encircle North Caucasus with barbed wire and «artificially» diminish fertility rates among local population simultaneously increasing Russian military presence in the region and putting a ban on non-Russian lan-

69. For more information see: http://scepsis.net/library/id_605.html.

70. Available at: <http://ru.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Caucasophobia>.

guages. Apparently, these radical and adios words should be perceived more critically than the majority does – perhaps, his position is shared (and even promoted) by certain groups within Russian ruling elites and the Kremlin.⁷¹ The fact that nationalist and xenophobic tendencies are not foreign to Moscow may also be corroborated by the figure of Alexander Tkachyov who is a governor of Krasnodar Krai and close associate of V. Putin. Mr. Tkachyov is a well-known xenophobe who does not shy away from displaying it on public. In addition, the current governor is known to be closely related to the local criminal structures⁷² which however does not preclude him from being able to benefit from Vladimir Putin's full support. Perhaps this factor enabled Mr. Tkachyov to pass legislation that encouraged hiring of Cossacks «as an auxiliary police force, urging them to prevent darker-skinned Muslims from North Caucasus from moving there (Krasnodar Krai)».⁷³

Along with experienced politicians and intellectuals, new forces that may be defined as «*popular nationalists*» have emerged and accumulated support from young and educated layers of the Russian society. Figures like Alexei Navalny (popular blogger) and Yegor Prosvyryn (Sputnik and Pogrom – popular internet based information source famous for its nationalist agendas) are nurturing seeds of discontent among younger and more susceptible to unelaborated propaganda and crude populism generation of young Russians, creating extremely precarious situation. These forces have captured the essence of ineffective and distorted policy conducted by Kremlin towards the North Caucasus, which provides Federal budget with no revenue, encouraging Moscow to inject billions of Euros annually to «buy out loyalty» of the local clans in Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria. Their motto «*Stop feeding the Cauca-*

71. In this context, it would be relevant to mention the role of Mr. Zhirinovskiy regarding Ukrainian crisis which follow the line adopted by Moscow.

72. Za ubijstwo w Kushewskoj – w otstawku gubernatora Kubani! (За убийство в Куцевской – в отставку губернатора Кубани!) Available at: <http://u-f.ru/News/krasnodarskiikrai/636278>.

73. Barry E. Russian Governor Signs Up Cossacks to Police Migrants, August 3, 2012. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/04/world/europe/russian-to-use-cossacks-to-repel-muslim-migrants.html?_r=1&.

sus!» is nowadays perhaps the most popular sentiment among youngsters in Russia.

These events have created a very dangerous environment that the Russian society has found itself to be in – Russia is steadily becoming a zone of permanent ethnic conflict, where a patchwork of small ethnic groups are staying against the larger one and vice versa. Existing ethnic conflict is a reflection of a much deeper social, religious and political problems that are being masked by official propaganda, lack of media coverage and Kremlin's unwillingness to admit its systemic strategic blunders in the domain of regional and ethno-cultural policies that are aimed to establish the «Russian nation», whereby committing a strategic mistake by excluding vast layers of Russian society. However, I would state that these events are just an inception of the new lap of violence that has been ushered in by three explosions in the city of Volgograd.

4. GRIM REALITY AND FUTURE CONCERNS

4.1. ISLAMIC TERRORISM IN RUSSIA - A SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS

For the past decade Islamic terrorism has become an integral element of Russian social life, spreading well beyond North Caucasus upon ethnic Russian territories. Spontaneous and frequently haphazard activity as it appeared in the second half of the 1990s, terrorism and related to it activities have become profitable tool of enrichment and a source of power extraction employed by certain segments of Russian society. Terrorist attacks that occurred in Volgograd have exacerbated new trends and developments that Islamic extremism has brought upon Russia.

Siloviki (security officials close to Vladimir Putin) have been able to use tragic events in their own profit by extracting additional privileges and sovereignty justifying it with approaching Sochi Olympic Games and overall grave peril of terrorist attacks. It should be mentioned that even prior to D. Umarov's threats and ensued terrorist attacks Russian security forces (MVD, FSB) had acquired immense powers de-facto turning Russia into a «super police state». In proportional terms, according to many estimates Russian security forces in 2009 were twice bigger then during the Soviet times in 1953, which is generally considered to have been an apex of securitization of the Soviet society.⁷⁴ In April 2013 Vladimir Putin signed a new act that stipulated a new increase in MVD (up to 1.106.127 servants) that is to be financed from the Federal budget,⁷⁵ which suggests that the *Siloviki* would have been able to hammer out new privileges irrespectively of whether two terrorist attacks in Volgograd had or had not been committed.

74. For more information see: http://www.inright.ru/articles/legal/20101029/id_418.

75. V. Putin podpisal ukaz ob uwelichenii shata organov prokuratury i MVD (В.Путин подписал указ об увеличении штата органов прокуратуры и МВД). Available at: <http://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/20130416130510.shtml>.

New terrorist attacks and approaching Winter Olympic Games combined with other major crucial forums that Russia is going to host in the years 2014 – 2018, FSB and MVD received additional enormous powers «temporarily» assigned to them prior and during the Olympic Games, yet they are not likely to renounce them after the events are over.

Moreover, the new package of legislation that was introduced in the States Duma on 12 February 2014⁷⁶ is to extend the FSB power even further, being primarily spearheaded against internal opposition rather than terrorists as such:

- From now on not only terrorists but also members of their families are to be held responsible (which practically legalize collective punishment).⁷⁷
- Penalties for terrorist activities are to be made more severe: life sentence has been legalized as an appropriate punishment (this decision makes no sense, suicide bombers do not expect to survive anyway).
- Destabilization of governmental structures and usurpation of power is to be tantamount to terrorism.
- Russian state security apparatus will have tighter control over the spending by non-governmental organizations, which receive money from foreign sources. An NGO will have to report its expenses if 100,000 rubles or more are transferred to its account (clearly aimed to thwart activities of foreign NGO’).

Moreover, the scope of application of power and the level of responsibility were not specified. In effect, it means vestment of tremendous powers into hands of state security and potential escalation of arbitrariness and impunity of security services, which might enable them to settle scores with internal opponents (as is the case in Chechnya and partly Dagestan).

76. All relevant documents are available at: <http://www.duma.gov.ru/#laws>.

77. Putin: yszerb prichinennyj terroristami, wozmestiat ich rodstwenniki (Путин: Ущерб, причиненный террористами, возместят их родственники), 27.09.2013. Available at: <http://www.pravda.ru/news/society/27-09-2013/1175869-0>.

Another group that sought radicalization and instability on the North Caucasus are middle and upper segments of radical underground movement. As it has been pointed out earlier, forces that used to constitute the backbone of Islamic radical movement have suffered multiple losses in their rank and file due to rather «costly» tactics that involved hostage taking and massive raids on cities and villages. Moreover, the ongoing civil war in Syria has attracted numerous representatives of the «Caucasus Emirate»⁷⁸ and financial means from Salafi theocratic regimes from the Middle East and the Persian Gulf countries, leaving the local underground movement with inexperienced and rather «amateurish» resources. In order for these experienced fighters (that have acquired substantial connections and have integrated into the international terrorist network to a substantial degree) return to Chechnya and use their skills and international connections in this region, the local underground movement has to show that North Caucasus still remains potentially «lucrative» place.

In any case, it will be civilian population that is an object of violence. This segment of Russian society (both ethnically Russian and Muslims) has been allocated a role of a bargaining chip in the conflict, without any opportunity to have their say and a choice.

4.2. THE NORTH CAUCASUS AND RUSSIA: THE APPROACHING ENDGAME?

Needless to say that by its geopolitical, economic and prestigious virtues North Caucasus and adjacent territories are strategically important parts for the Russian Federation. This notion stems from recent political moves produced by the Kremlin in pursuit of securing Northern Caucasus as an integral part of the Russian Federation. Similarly, taking into account clear tilt towards Conservatism (even Traditional-

78. Murad Batal al- Shishani. Islamist North Caucasus Rebels Training a New Generation of Fighters in Syria,- Terrorism Monitor Volume 12, Issue, 3. Available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=41927&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=26&cHash=39495be8a7bd79dee3c1dbc15ded7808#.UxiFmc7Xx2h](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41927&tx_ttnews[backPid]=26&cHash=39495be8a7bd79dee3c1dbc15ded7808#.UxiFmc7Xx2h).

ism with «hard power» and «sphere-of-influence» approach) and shift to the East in Russian foreign policy, Moscow perceives this territory as an essential «crossroad» between East (Central Asia and Kazakhstan) and West (Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova) as well as North (the mainland) and South (Abkhazia, Ossetia, Armenia, Georgia). Moreover, successful ties with Turkey, Iran, Azerbajdzan and Middle East (including Syria) are largely dependent on North Caucasus. Even temporary predicaments and instability with an even miniscule prospect of Russia to loose this region might be a geopolitical tragedy for the Kremlin.

In addition, Krasnodar Krai and newly acquired territories (the Crimean Peninsula) are perceived as a basis of Russian growing influence on the Black Sea as well as an integral part of greater framework that constitute Russian steady presence in Southern region.

Apart from geopolitical profits North Caucasus and Kuban (with its 5.5 million people, third in Russia) is a much-valued economic asset that includes such infrastructural objects as:

- Baku – Novorossiysk oil pipeline.
- Gas pipeline to Armenia.
- Strategic airports.
- Sea ports (Novorossiysk and Makhachkala).
- Resorts and recreation zones that may be used on a whole year round basis (Yessentuki, Kislovodsk, Piatigorsk, Anapa and Sochi).

Nonetheless, due to escalation of violence and growing radical underground movement North Caucasus has turned into something what it used to be in the ninetieth century – a zone of confrontation and a place of exile for criminals and enemies of the regime. This has led many Russians (and international observers) to assume that North Caucasus has turned into a foreign entity within the Russian Federation, its «internal abroad».⁷⁹ The popular opinion is also

79. For more information on this regard see: Halbach U. Russia's Internal Abroad. The North Caucasus as an Emergency Zone at the Edge of Europe,- SWP Research Paper 2010/RP 05, November 2010.

prune towards taking decisive steps regarding Northern Caucasus and its status within Russia. Interestingly enough, but mentioned processes have been accelerated and nurtured equally by terrorist attacks and activities of R. Kadyrov as a president of Chechnya (it is even difficult to establish which of two factors holds precedence). Among other, such ideas as *internal apartheid* and *secession of Northern Caucasus* have entered public conscious as the most suitable and appropriate actions towards the region: since neither «forceful» nor «peaceful» ways have brought about stability and regional security.

Independent sociological surveys have indicated that substantial share of Russians does not consider the North Caucasus as a part of the Russian Federation. For instance, October 2013 sociological poll by Levada Center (it comprised 130 urban centers in 45 regions) revealed that 71 % of respondents supported the motto «Stop feeding the Caucasus!», whereas 63 % concluded that such procedures as obligatory registration of newcomers and severing of internal traffic within the country would be a good idea; 61.5 % revealed their fear and disaffection when contacting with individual representatives of the Northern Caucasus and/or migrants from Central Asia. As a result, citizens of Ukraine and Belarus are associated with Russia to a much greater extent than dwellers of North Caucasus and Muslim population of the Russian Federation.⁸⁰ These ideas may be concluded by the words of D. Furman (Russian philosopher, sociologist and political scientist) who described Russian position on the Northern Caucasus in the following manner: «the only thing we have achieved on the Caucasus is a pure formal presence on this territory. In the lower Russian conscious North Caucasus is not associated with the Russian Federation in any conceivable sense».⁸¹ This led him to a notion that would have been inconceivable earlier, yet nowadays shared by wide circles within Russian intellectual elites: Russia should abandon North Caucasus,

80. Contemporary Russian identity: changes, challenges, responses,- International Discussion Club Valdai. Moscow, September 2013.

81. Markedonov S. Khvatit kormit'kogo? Available at: <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Khvatit-kormit-kogo-16254>.

which hinder modernization of both Russia and the subject in question.⁸²

This may very well be true, yet the resurging Russian Federation (at least so it appears from the surface) with growing international ambitions would not even conceive such thoughts. Nonetheless, reflecting upon this matter one might pose a question whether Russian society would be willing (and more importantly patient enough) to bear costs of Russian imperial geopolitical thinking? What public reaction might ensue should terrorists try to commit new acts of terror connecting them to failures of V. Putin's regime which is losing popularity within Russian society? What forces might appear on Russian political scene should the old ones be incapable of constructive actions?

It is clear that the Russian Socium has undergone major transformation since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russian population has selectively embraced certain European norms and principles. Perhaps, one of them is value of human life (yet, in a somewhat different sense than Western), which coupled with accretion of wealth achieved within the last decade make Russians less prone to reckless heroism (which, by the way was the case during the times of poverty and social instability) and implies doubts if Russians would be willing to brook hardships for the sake of such goals as for instance, territorial integrity. Especially taking into account that the North Caucasus is not perceived by many as an integral part of the Russian Federation.

In the end, it would be adequate to suggest that three terrorist attacks that were committed in Volgograd within October – December 2013 as well as escalation of tensions on the North Caucasus as a whole added to internal issues may be judged as an emergence of the new type of regional conflict that has not been experienced neither by ethnic Russian lands nor by the Caucasus itself. This new round of violence possesses implied potential the full range of which is yet to be experienced.

82. Dr. Dmitry Furman. The most important task for Russia is withdrawal from the North Caucasus, May 20th 2008. Available at: <http://www.watchdog.cz/?show=000000-000004-000002-000042&lang=1>

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER REFLECTIONS

The new lap of conflict that has erupted on the North Caucasus signified by proclamation of «total war» by D. Umarov against Russia in the year 2013, has underscored inadequacy of methods applied by both Central and local authorities in a desperate attempt to eradicate core roots and causes of the conflict that stems from Islamic radical movement. In fact, as the antecedent reflections have shown North Caucasus and its broad array of issues indissolubly connected with this very unique and specific region must not be tackled from a narrow perspective. Being a complex mixture of local customs, tribalism, various forms of Islamic laws and rites as well as very specific code of behavioral patterns explain why the North Caucasus has not become fully integrated into Russian legal, cultural, political or economic frameworks that are being imposed from above. It should be understood that historical experience of Russian presence on North Caucasus (since the end of the 18th century) reveals that neither direct use of force nor any other approach tested so far has led to subordination of this region to the Russian unconditional sway. The only sizable result of this approach was intensification and proliferation of underground movement that has always been committed to continue the strive. On the other hand, attempts to elevate certain groups loyal to the Federal Center over the others in order to attain regional stability have produced even more dissatisfying outcomes: the region has become even more divided and submerged in a civil war that is waged under religious habit. Both reckless and ruthless attempts committed by the Chechen president R. Kadyrov (since second half of 2000th) aimed to eliminate Islamic radicalism of Salafi orientation have exacerbated above-mentioned trends adding additional acuteness and introducing the new impulse for religious hatred and violence. Presidency (if such term is appropriate for the form of governance currently existing in Chechnya) of R.Kadyrov whose growing geopolitical ambitions are rather hard to

overlook constitute a new fundament for the conflict to grow and erupt into a «hard war». Taking into account looming geopolitical shifts that the Eurasian Continent might experience within proximate future,⁸³ North Caucasus might become an element in formation of the «arch of instability» that would connect the Baltic and the Black seas.

Attacks in Volgograd (October-December 2013) committed by members of the «Caucasian Emirate» have brought to light growing discontent of wide masses of ethnic Russians over the way the Kremlin «handles» North Caucasus. Consensus and intercultural communication are areas of public life extremely underdeveloped in modern Russia, which has never started developing tradition of dialogue based on the above-mentioned principles. Undoubtedly, these elements deemed essential in democratic societies have been disabled even further with the outbreak of the new lap of violence spurred by actions of the «Caucasus Emirate» within the year 2013. Taking into account the least developments (primarily end of the year 2013 and beginning of 2014) in the domain of state security apparatus of the Russian Federation, this side of the conflict would apply additional vigor and violence in order to break the back of the underground movement, which in turn would lead to the escalation of regional conflict.

In the end, it should be noted that in a more distant prospective the North Caucasus might turn into a graveyard of the current political forces in Russia that currently stand behind vital decision-making processes. Should such scenario materialize, repercussions for the Russian Federation in terms of its geopolitical aspirations could be of enormous gravity. Moreover, further regional destabilization could have a «domino effect»: Eurasian continent still conceals an explosive potential that primarily stems from unsolved ethno-cultural, religious differences and reviving separatist aspirations. From Chinese Uyghurlar, through Central Asia and the Caucasus, submerging Ukraine and the Balkans drag the trace of the above-mentioned issues.

83. In this context, I mean political crisis over Crimea between the Russian Federation and the Ukraine as well as a possibility of re-militarization of Kaliningrad Oblast as the Russian «Baltic Fortress».

Therefore, if a drastically new approach towards the North Caucasus is not to be worked out in a very short period, consequences might by far exceed the entire course of events that have been observed since the breakup of the Soviet Union, whereas terrorist attacks in Volgograd being a screech owl of the upcoming bouleversement.

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