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A strip of land situated between the Mediterranean and the Black Seas, the post-Soviet Caucasus embarked on a painful identity quest at the turn of the third millennium. This – still ongoing – quest involves several daunting choices: between Moscow, Washington and Brussels, between oil and democratic values, and between feudal realities and revolutionary ideals. Throughout the last decade, the Yerevan-based Caucasus Institute has been conducting in-depth research of the conflicting and often subtle trends in the regions' politics. This volume contains a selection of research papers published by the Caucasus Institute since 2001 in Armenian, Russian and English, which best represent the challenges faced by this varied region at this crucial stage of development.

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THE ISLAMIC FAITH IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS: A NEW TREND OR A FLASHBACK?[1]

By Alexander Iskandaryan[2]

The Northern Caucasus is a region where almost every social, political and ideological issue has an Islamic aspect. The Muslim faith has become part of the identity of ethnic groups living in the Northern Caucasus, and is deeply rooted in their behaviour patterns. Moreover, social and political dimensions are intrinsic to the Islamic faith, which, unlike Christianity, does not prescribe a clear distinction between the mundane and the religious. Consequently, it is only logical that the ongoing Islamic revival, or "re-Islamisation," involves the emergence, among other things, of political Islamic trends.

The Muslim faith was persecuted in the Soviet Union along with other religions. Opportunities for receiving an Islamic education, opening a mosque or performing the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) were severely restricted. As a result, by the late 1980s, the Muslim faith was preserved almost uniquely at the level of household traditions and ethnic identity; it functioned as a part of ethnic culture rather than as a system of religious views. Even in Dagestan, the most Islamised part of the Northern Caucasus, there were only 27 mosques in the republic's twelve regions and four cities. By late 1994, Dagestan already had 720 mosques, eight Islamic universities and 111 madrasahs. In 2000, Dagestan's mosques numbered 1,594.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, pilgrims to Mecca and Medina from the Northern Caucasus numbered in the hundreds of thousands. The re-emergence of Islamic religion was, thus, part of the general tendency for religious revival within the former Soviet Union.

Alongside conservative growth, there is also a tendency for the emergence of those types of Islam which are absolutely new to the Northern Caucasus, some of which are the so-called radical or political Islamic trends. Put into perspective, the influence of Islamic trends on Northern Caucasus politics is so considerable that one can speak of serious distortions of secular statehood.

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1 This paper was published in Russian as: Iskandaryan, Alexander. "Islam na Severnom Kavkaze: re- ili doislamizatsiya?" *Religiya i politika na Kavkaze* ("Islamic Faith in the Northern Caucasus: Renewed Islamisation or an Old Trend?" *Religion and Politics in the Caucasus)*. Ed. Alexander Iskandaryan. – Yerevan: Caucasus Media Institute, 2004 (in Russian). – Pp. 96-110.

2 The author has been the director of the Yerevan-based Caucasus Institute since 2005.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF ISLAMIC TRENDS

The prominence of Islamic trends in the Northern Caucasus apparently decreases from east to west. The most Islamised societies in the Northern Caucasus are Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, and the least Islamized are the Circassians who populate the western parts of the Northern Caucasus: Adygeya, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria. In Chechnya and Dagestan, Sufism, a mystic Islamic trend, maintains a strong hold over traditional Islam. Sufis in these regions typically belong to one of several Sufi orders, or *tariqas* (Arabic for "way"): *Naqshbandi*, *Kadyriyya* and, to a lesser extent, *Shadhiliya*. The Sufi orders are not popular in the western parts of the in the Northern Caucasus; on the whole, traditional Islamic culture, including unofficial (sometimes undercover) teaching of the Arabic language, was preserved to some extent in the eastern parts of the Northern Caucasus, but almost dissolved in its western parts.

Currently, religious activity is on the rise in the west of the region, and there are more contacts between ethnic sub-regions. Islamic studies Professor Aleksey Malashenko describes these developments as "resumed Islamisation": he argues that the Islamisation of the Northern Caucasus is an old trend which was interrupted by the Communist revolution and has now resumed.

TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC TRENDS

It can be said that two types of Islamic trends are now popular in the Northern Caucasus. One is what is perceived as 'traditional,' or 'dogmatic' Islamic faith; the other is popularly known as *Wahhabism*, a term used to designate the 'new,' largely politicised Islamic trends.

Traditional Islamic religion in the Northern Caucasus, represented by the Sufi orders in the region's east, is no longer based on the Islamic scholarly tradition and profound mystic learning, both of which were thoroughly and purposefully eradicated by the Soviet authorities back in the 1920s. Restoring the scholarly basis of the religion would take a long time; even if the necessary number of teachers were available, it would take adherents decades to acquire the knowledge and skills required for practicing the traditional Islamic faith.

So far, traditional Islam in the Northern Caucasus is in the stage of conservative growth: its infrastructure is expanding, and the number of religious teachers (sheikhs) and students is increasing. Leading sheikhs have thousands of followers; among the sheikhs who have risen to prominence, one can name Sayd of Chirkey

and Bagrutdin of Botlikh; Tajuddin of Khasavyurt (Ramazanov) who died in 2001, leaving several successors including Adam of Gudermes; Mahomed-Mukhtar Babatov, Arspanali Gamzatov and Serajjudin Israfilov. Any deficiency of education or *baraka* (grace) that some of the sheikhs may have is compensated for by their social activity. Through religious rituals and mystic rites, a new believer can adopt the Muslim faith and join a particular local *tariqa* (Sufi order). Since it is Sufism that has become institutionalized in the Northern Caucasus as the traditional Islamic faith, all "official" clergy belong to *tariqas*. Meanwhile, no outstanding *alims* (Muslim scholars) are active in the region, and no fundamental Islamic studies are conducted. The tension that arises once in a while between adherents of the two prevailing Sufi orders, *Naqshbandi* and *Kadiriyya*, chiefly concern rituals, not dogmatic issues.

Official Islamic faith in the Northern Caucasus is no longer centralised; the Soviet-era *Religious Office of the Northern Caucasus Muslims* dissolved in 1989 along the borders of autonomous republics. In turn, republic-level religious offices broke down and split according to the ethnicity of adherents; this was one of the many manifestations of an ongoing separation of ethnic groups living in the Caucasus. By now, even in Dagestan, almost every ethnic group in the Northern Caucasus has an official Religious Office of its own.

However, in terms of political orientation, all the Religious Offices are rather traditional, and so are all three local *tariqas* (the two prevailing ones plus *Shadhiliya,* which in the Northern Caucasus is endemic to Dagestan). They usually support the political authorities, and members of the Muslim clergy are incorporated into the political elite. In this sense, Sufi, or *tariqa,* Islam is not an independent political player in the Northern Caucasus. The guiding principle of *tariqa* leaders is something like, "rulers guide the people, and *alims* guide the rulers."

This said, one must note that in many parts of the Northern Caucasus, and especially in highland areas, it is the local Imams, not the heads of local administrations, who lead communities. A candidate for a political post will often make a large donation to a mosque in the hope that the Imam will encourage his community to vote for him. There have been cases when an Imam rejected the donation of a candidate of whom he disapproved.

WAHHABISM

The trend known as *Wahhabism* is quite special. A more accurate name for the groups known as *Wahhabi* in the Northern Caucasus would be *Salafi* (from the Arabic *as-salaf,* ancestors), a term used in the Moslem world to refer to revivalists, i.e.

advocates of the revival of ethical standards that supposedly existed in early Islamic history. The Salafites' declared aim is to purify the Islamic faith from subsequent additions, including those originating in ethnic cultures and common law.

In fact, the term usually applied to revivalists in the Northern Caucasus is *Wahhabi* – originally the designation of a particular trend in Salafism. Wahhabis get their name from the 18th century Arabian preacher Muhammad-ibn-Abdul Wahhab, the founder of a puritanical Muslim sect. Revived by ibn-Saud in the 20th century, this sect became the basis of official Islam in Saudi Arabia and has very little relevance to the Northern Caucasus.

However, it is already common practice to refer to Islamic puritans in the Northern Caucasus as Wahhabis; one must bear in mind, though, that they have little in common with the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia.[3]

Moreover, revivalism in the Northern Caucasus is not a unified movement, in either the institutional or dogmatic aspect. Varying from region to region, it is quite heterogeneous and only perceived as a homogenous body by outside observers, mostly by hostile ones.

The emergence of political Islamic groups in modern Russia dates back to June 1990, when the first Islamic Revival Party was established in the city of Astrakhan. It was officially registered in Dagestan; its founders included almost all the individuals who later became leaders of political Islamic groups in the Northern Caucasus: Ahmadkadi Ahtaev, Bagauddin Kebedov (who later changed his name to Bagauddin Muhammad) and his brother Abbas. By 1994, the Islamic Revival Party disintegrated; its moderate leaders (such as Valiahmed Sadur) left the political scene, whereas the less moderate ones gradually evolved into undercover activists and eventually founded the Northern Caucasus Wahhabi movement.

The movement originated in Dagestan, and only later gained popularity in Chechnya and other parts of the Northern Caucasus. In Chechnya, puritan religious trends inevitably grew and radicalized as a result of the Chechen War; in the meantime, these trends persisted in Dagestan and expanded towards the west. Wahhabis are frequently accused of getting support from abroad. Without going into detail, it is worth noting that in all probability, the Wahhabis do get some financial support from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries (and so, by the way, do Muslim groups in other parts of Russia where Islam is the traditionally prevail-

3 It is also important to note that *Wahhabi* is a derogatory term for Muslim revivalists in the Northern Caucasus. They never refer to themselves by that name and, naturally, neither do the Saudi Arabian Wahhabis apply this term to revivalists in the Northern Caucasus. Yet, this term has become part of the political discourse and found its way into political dictionaries.

ing religion). The support itself, however, does not provide sufficient grounds to regard Wahhabism as an imported trend. There is no doubt that its emergence in the Northern Caucasus has its profound societal causes.

SOCIETAL ROOTS OF WAHHABISM IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

The Northern Caucasus, more than any other region in Russia, provides the perfect societal environment for the emergence of radical egalitarian ideologies based on the Islamic faith. Similar to the Middle East, the social foundation of radical Islamic trends is the impoverished youth.

At the time of its emergence, revivalist Islamic trends had little chance of gaining wide popularity; their only supporters were marginalized Muslim intellectuals. As the local population, especially in the poor highlands, began to fall into poverty following the collapse of the Soviet economic system, Wahhabism became increasingly popular in the Northern Caucasus. In the highlands, with high birth rates and an acute shortage of arable land, young people have almost no future. In some regions, youth unemployment surpasses 85 percent. The quality of life is extremely low in those areas even by Russian standards; in addition, local elites are extremely corrupt and the economy is criminalised throughout. Against this background, ideologies of social equality become increasingly popular, especially where they criticised the corrupt political authorities and the hypocrisy of “official” Mullahs.

The Northern Caucasus form of Wahhabism belongs to one of several types:

1. The Wahhabism of intellectuals. This group comprises the founders and leaders of the revivalist movement, plus those young people who received their Muslim education in post-Soviet times at Middle Eastern universities and are now returning home. By virtue of their education, they can not integrate into the traditional Islamic structures with their present-day leaders.
2. The Wahhabism of the poor. To poverty-stricken farmers and impoverished, unemployed urban dwellers, Wahhabism offers a simple social doctrine and a clear set of strict ethical standards. The ethics of brotherhood and unity advocated by revivalist Muslims helps their followers fight despair while also filling them with aggression towards “others.”
3. The Wahhabism of the rich. Its adherents are successful players in the new economy who do not wish to integrate into the Soviet-legacy corrupt power structures. While strongly success-driven, these businesspeople have preserved tradi-

tional religious standards that set them apart from their surroundings (this type of Wahhabi was practically eradicated by police measures taken after the 1999 events in Dagestan).

Starting in the early 1990s, the adherents of "new Islam" began to form Islamic communities (called "Jamaat") in Dagestan, and then in the rest of the Northern Caucasus. The communities soon found themselves in opposition to the political authorities and the Sufi clergy. .

Dozens of Jamaats were formed; in two of them, in the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi, the communities proclaimed independence from the political authorities. Regardless of their proclamations, most revivalist Islamic communities were de-facto independent, because their members (as well as most villagers in these parts) were usually armed, and authorities could not risk interference with their activities. Sometimes Jamaat members experienced tension and even confrontations, including armed ones, with people from neighbouring villages. In some cases, Dagestani Wahhabis were involved in clashes with Russian army soldiers. Local authorities made clumsy attempts to check the radicals' activities by imposing restrictive laws or police actions. Neither could do any good, however, since the Wahhabis were often better armed than the police. Harassment and the overall negative attitude of the society made many Wahhabis migrate to Chechnya, which was beyond the control of either the Dagestani or Moscow authorities. There they continued to live in Jamaats, of which the most well-known was based in Serzhen'-Yurt village and led by combatant leader Hattab who came to Chechnya from Jordan. In fact, the community functioned as a military training base located in the highland parts of Chechnya. Young men from Chechnya and Dagestan received military training at the base and were simultaneously taught the basics of Muslim faith at an institute which was established there.

Drastic changes were brought to these parts of the Northern Caucasus by the events of 1999 when Chechen rebels led by Basaev raided Dagestan. After that, the Dagestani Wahhabis were forced to go undercover, and some migrated, this time to the Georgian Pankisi Gorge, which was beyond the control of any government. This migration wave was smaller simply because the gorge itself is quite small.

It should be emphasized that what the majority of revivalist Wahhabi groups adhere to is more of a political ideology than a religion proper. In revivalist Islamic ideology, there are two types of binary oppositions: "the West" vs. "the Islamic world" and "true Muslims" vs. "bad Muslims." Differences between various Islamic trends thus provide just as much ground for confrontation as differences between

Muslims and adherents of other religions. The ideology places great emphasis on *Jihad* (from the Arabic "struggle," or fight for faith) and stresses the importance of political or even armed struggle against infidels, making it look more like a political ideology dressed up as a religious trend. The ideology has a social component (fighting against the corruption of state officials, combating social inequality, questioning the authority of traditional clergy, etc.) and a political component (rebelling against non-Islamic authorities and fighting for the establishment of an Islamic state outside Russian borders). According to revivalist extremists, the traditional Islamic trends that prevail in the Northern Caucasus contradict the dogmatic foundations of true Islam. Revivalists criticise ethnic nationalism and refer to the concept of *Al-umma Al-Islamiya,* "Nation of Islam." When revivalist Muslims confront Russian authorities, they perceive this as an inter-religious conflict between Muslims and Christians. Religious phraseology is used as the basis for a primitive confrontational political ideology which is used to justify a Resistance movement.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE WAHHABITE MOVEMENT

In the Northern Caucasus, most revivalist Muslim groups exist as enclaves. Several groups are active in Dagestan.[4] These include the *Islamic Jammaat,* led by Bagauddin Muhammad who was based in Chechnya until 1999; his whereabouts have been unknown since then and it is not clear if he is still living. *Al Islamiyya* is a group led by the followers of Ahmadkadi Akhtaev who died in 1998. There is also a group led by Ayub Omarov in the village Tsumadi in Southern Dagestan, a group centred around the *Al Hikma* ("wisdom") Mosque in Kizilyurt, and a few others.

In Karachay-Cherkessia, there is *Al Islamiyya* and the *Islamic Jamagat* (the Karachay spelling of Jamaat, "Islamic community"), and the *Imamat* (from the Arabic verb *amma* – to lead). In Kabardino-Balkaria, there is a group called *Muslim Brothers,* and one called *Jamaat.* There is also a *Jamaat* group in Adygeya.

It is generally believed that the founder of the "Wahhabi project" was Bagauddin Muhammad who preached revivalist Islam since the late 1980s. Although Wahhabi groups in different republics frequently bear the same or very similar names, they have very few political or ideological ties. Their ideology does not usually go beyond a primitive opposition to "Western pagans." Chechnya is perhaps the only region where "Wahhabism" became really widespread.

It is extremely difficult to estimate the numbers of religious extremists in the re-

4 The names listed below are approximate: some of the groups may have ceased to exist, some leaders are in hiding or fleeing from authorities.

publics of the Northern Caucasus, and not merely because most Wahhabis operate underground. The revivalist groups in the Northern Caucasus have an exceptionally flexible structure. Quite naturally, there is no individual membership in either the political or the quasi-religious organisations. Numerous communities, or Jamaats, are in fact amorphous structures which use a very flexible procedure to recruit and accept new members. If we try to make a very rough estimate of the number of people who adhere to Wahhabism in the Northern Caucasus, we can surmise that in every republic, the radical trends have **dozens** of activists or adepts willing to pick up arms (many of these activists, irrespective of ethnicity, already do or did fight in Chechnya). Then, there are **hundreds** of people in every republic (although figures will vary significantly from one republic to another) who permanently keep in touch with one another and "learn Islam." [5]

And finally, there is no doubt that there are **thousands** of people in every republic who are not direct supporters or even less activists of Wahhabism, but who have good feelings towards its adherents and sometimes give financial support to communities or mosques.

On the whole, it can be said that Wahhabis form a very small minority of the population throughout the Northern Caucasus with the exception of the regions which are in a state of total economical collapse, such as highland Dagestan or Tyrnyauz Region in Kabardino-Balkaria. However, there is also some "frozen activity," meaning that a change of the political situation, such as increased pressure from the federal centre, can lead to a dramatic upsurge of religious extremism, the way it happened in Chechnya.

In Chechnya, the war was certainly a trigger. During and immediately after the first Chechen campaign, Chechen political leaders felt the need for an ideology that could be used to organise resistance and eventually to structure the Chechen state. They chose Muslim identity and the idea of a "Muslim state" ruled by "Muslim laws"; after a while, political leaders – in Chechnya those were the military commanders – started to publicly proclaim themselves adherents of "true Islam." An "Islamic guard" was formed among revivalists. A number of political/military leaders – Mavlady Udugov, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, Shamil Basaev – became associated in the eyes of the public with the Wahhabi movement.

In this context, Shamil Basaev's raid against Dagestan in 1999 can be seen as a logical development. The Wahhabi project was by its very nature directed outward and had to expand beyond Chechen borders. Dagestani Wahhabite ideologists, in-

5 Of course, in most cases, learning Islam will simply mean learning the most primitive formulas used to justify Jihad; the teachers are usually quite ignorant.

cluding Bagauddin Muhammad and Ahmadkadi Ahtaev, used to spend a lot of their time in Chechnya organising propaganda, while also recruiting armed groups in Dagestan. However, Dagestan had not experience a revolution as Chechnya did, nor did it engage in armed hostilities with federal Russian authorities; in fact, Dagestan preserved most of its elite structures intact since Soviet times. Consequently, the Wahhabi project was doomed to failure in Dagestan because social upheaval could disrupt the fragile ethnic balance in this multiethnic republic. Still, as doomed as the project was to failure, it was also doomed to happen.

After 1999, Wahhabism became the main ideological tool used to recruit new combatants to the guerrilla war in Chechnya. As a result, being a Wahhabi in Chechnya became a sign of being a combatant.

Moreover, in Chechnya, in contrast to other regions of the Northern Caucasus, Wahhabism started to grow younger. According to anecdotal evidence, about a third of the Chechen combatants are now teenagers between 15-17 years of age. Children are easier to recruit; they do not have families to support and are more willing to fight than adults. Moreover, this is a generation of children many of whom never went to school and that can barely read and write. Raised in an environment of permanent war and total criminal license, this generation is extremely hostile to Russia and everything Russian. For the older generation of combatants, the war is a struggle for independence led by the Chechen nation against Russian authorities, rather than a religious war. Many of the older combatants adhere to traditional Islam (Sufi orders), or even place little value on religious beliefs (to the extent that this is possible in Chechnya). For the teenagers, a Russian is just an enemy, bearing no individual traits. Their justification of the war is entirely different: they see it as a struggle between the Muslim and the Judeo-Christian world. Revivalism, the mythology of Middle Eastern radicals, is becoming increasingly popular and almost universally accepted among young Chechen combatants. Wahhabism is purposefully propagated by the commanders as an extremely instrumental ideology. It is taught as a subject called *The Basics of Islamic Faith* which is on the curriculum of all military training courses for young men. Moreover, the conduct of Russian soldiers, the practice of kidnapping and unmotivated murders, all fit into the simple picture of a religious conflict where the Christians are simply trying "to kill all the Muslims."

Given the social flexibility of guerrilla structures and the existence of an inflammable mass of illiterate radically-minded young people, a very special sub-culture is emerging. In Chechnya, the people who were brought up on Jihadist ideology are so far rank-and-file guerrilla fighters, whereas their leaders are apparently using Wah-

habism as a convenient instrument for recruiting and managing their armed forces. However, there is no reason to expect the fighting to stop in the near future, which means that today's young people have few prospects for an education and integration into peaceful life, which means that within 5-7 years, today's teenagers will become the majority of the rebel fighters and produce the next generation of guerrilla leaders. The new type of commander will be very different from the present one in that negotiations or peace with Russia will be out of the question; the new leaders will be an almost exact replica of the Middle Eastern Islamic radicals.[6]

One of the consequences of the 1999 events was the final determination of both local and federal Russian authorities to persecute the Wahhabis by police measures and impose a ban on Wahhabism both inside and outside Chechen borders. The Wahhabi communities in the Northern Caucasus which openly defied public authorities were attacked and destroyed. All Islamic groups were subdivided into "official" Sufi ones which are under state control and illegal "Wahhabite" groups. The latter are actively persecuted; since the overall number of groups is quite small, the authorities do not single out any particular groups. Police is the main tool used against revivalists, which usually makes sense because most adherents of radical Islam do commit crimes and break the law by possessing illegal weapons, etc. Sometimes, the persecution is clearly aimed against Wahhabi ideology, especially in Dagestan where it is more widespread.

The harassment of Wahhabis and the general hostility of societies compels the revivalists to migrate to Chechnya or to the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, which is currently beyond the controlled of any country or authority.

The authorities of the Northern Caucasus republics fear that the revivalist Islamic movement may jeopardise their entire clan system. In some of the republics, redistributing financial subsidies from the federal centre is in fact the main industry of the economy: Dagestan, for instance, relies on federal subsidies for around 90 percent of its budget. In these regions, the political, economic and criminal elites and the leaders of ethnic clans are in fact the same people. So far, the authorities are

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6 One must, of course, note that most information on the development of Wahhabi movements and groups in the Northern Caucasus is contradictory. With the exception of Chechnya, Wahhabism was not recognised in any of the regions; both the political authorities and traditional Muslim clergy are extremely hostile to it, so that it unfolded half-secretly even before 1999, and absolutely illegally afterwards. Even key facts are often unknown, for example, whether Bagauddin Muhammad is dead or alive, or in which direction particular groups are developing. One can, however, observe the general development trend: revivalist Islam in the Northern Caucasus is clearly evolving into a secret sect, decentralised, yet constantly expanding.

still able to consolidate most of the societies against "imported Islamic trends," but they can do nothing to address their causes.

Wahhabism is certainly not on the decline; to the contrary, political revivalist trends are becoming increasingly popular and are actively making their way into the Western parts of the Northern Caucasus. The Wahhabi subculture is becoming part of ethnic and social identity, especially among young people. This phenomenon has not been well researched. Although political Islam in the Northern Caucasus is heterogeneous, still, as the situation changes, it can easily fill the "gap" of identity that has opened in recent years.

Islamic revivalism is a complex phenomenon which has various aspects: social, economic, ethnic, cultural, ideological, legal and political. A complex problem of this kind cannot be dealt with by direct bans. Although police measures should probably be part of an effort to resolve this problem, they can hardly be the main or only type of activity. Of course, there is no such thing as a strategy for combating radicalism with any 100-percent guarantee. Experience in dealing with problems of this kind in other parts of the world is more often negative than positive. But, on the whole, it should be admitted that harassment and attempts to regard religious followers as individual criminals who have no roots in society yield the opposite result: they strengthen the social basis of the radicals and make them act in a more clandestine fashion. The strategy is clearly counterproductive. Judging from the experience of the Middle East, religious extremists do not normally come to power but can act as a destabilising factor for decades. In a situation where traditional Islam has been destroyed and Wahhabism has nothing to oppose it except social conservatism, the consequences may be especially grave.

Although the Wahhabis themselves, initially in small closed communities, but now as a growing force, pose a serious risk to stability in the Northern Caucasus, no less serious threats come from marginal political leaders who use them as instruments and from the public authorities due to their inconsistent attempts to combat a phenomenon which they do not even understand. Since all of these risks are objective in nature, one can expect the Wahhabis to continue their existence as a criminalised illegal community. Of course, the chances that they will unite and launch a Jihad throughout the Northern Caucasus are clearly not realistic. Still, dozens of non-Chechen young men will join Chechen rebel forces and add to the perception of a "pan-Islamic Jihad" in Russia.