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Islam in the North Caucasus: A People Divided

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collapse of state authority, (2) a lack of faith in state officials, (3) economic adversity, and (4) persistent intervention by Islamic groups from abroad. The violence that came in 1999 to Dagestan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikstan was driven by these factors and the Chechen situation is subject to the same factors.

Connections with Taliban and Other Outside Groups

Recognition of the fact that such an important and dynamic brotherhood can, like other Islamic movements for national liberation, pose a challenge to Western society prompts legitimate questions about their relationship with Islamic organizations outside the region. While Islam did much to provide spiritual comfort to Chechen soldiers during the 1994-96 war, it has undergone dramatic changes during the decade since the collapse of the USSR. Most important, open borders have made it possible for Arab missionaries espousing a more radical form of Islam to find converts in the Caucasus region as well as what was Soviet central Asia. The newly converted Muslims have been increasingly hostile to Chechnya's traditional Sufi orders and have opened the door to outside groups with more violent tendencies.

One such organization that has attracted attention because of these developments is the Taliban movement. While there are important philosophical differences between Chechen religious brotherhoods and the Taliban there are also some similarities. The essential fact, however, is that within Chechnya there is little interest in the Taliban or, for that matter, other such groups located abroad. The primary reason for this disinterest is the fundamental provincialism of most Chechen movements. They see events and actors within Chechnya and the Chechen community as of primary importance and all others of limited relevance to their struggles.

Apparently, the Russians take the Taliban much more seriously. Reportedly, Russian President Vladimir Putin feels Osama bin Laden and the Taliban have supported Chechen efforts to gain their independence from the Russian Republic and has even threatened to bomb Afghanistan if necessary.

Chapter Seven

ISLAM IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS: A PEOPLE DIVIDED

Islam in the North Caucasus: A People Divided

Yavus Akhmadov, Stephen R. Bowers, and Marion T. Doss, Jr.

Executive Summary

Religious diversity has had a dramatic impact on the development of the North Caucasus region. People do not identify primarily with either a national or international Islamic community.The fundamentalist Vakhabite community has become a major regional force during the past decade in spite of numerous efforts to suppress its influence.Official suppression of the Vakhabites has resulted in the emergence of a clandestine Vakhabite network supported from abroad. Islamic radicals throughout the region (mostly Saudi and North African Arabs) have joined with the Khattab group in order to receive military training in camps which are operated to support Arab terrorists. Khattab was born in Saudi Arabia.

The Chechen diaspora that has played a major supporting role in the modern Middle East, especially in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is returning its children to Chechnya. And now, the return of Chechen Jordanians such as Shamil Bassayev and Ipak Fath has helped to radicalize many young Chechens who became active combatants in the Chechen wars. Money, armaments, and soldiers (mujahideen) provided by radical Islamic groups from abroad have played a major role in strengthening the Chechen resistance movement.

After the first Chechen war (1994-1996), religious differences between the Sufi movements and the Vakhabite movement began to have a deleterious political impact in the region. While Sufi Muslims called for creation of a secular state that would preserve traditional social patterns, the Vakhabites have demanded a purification of Islam and the eradication of local customs that have tainted and undermined pure Islam.

Preface

While ethnic animosities have a long history in the North Caucasus, the religious flavor of those conflicts appeared more recently. With time, Islam became a uniting force that helped many people of the North Caucasus assert their struggle against the oppression of those whom they viewed as "men without faith." However, while Islam served as a rallying point for disparate groups within the region, Islam itself did not assume a unified organizational model. Local customs and paganism had a profound impact on Islam as it developed throughout the North Caucasus. Almost no expression of faith could be characterized as "pure Islam."

When the religious element emerged as a significant one in this part of the former Soviet Union, it varied greatly whether one encountered it in Daghestan, Inghusetia, Chechnya, North Ossetia, Kabardin-Balkaria, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, or Adygeiya. With the appearance of perestroika, religious diversity has a dramatic impact on the traditional Islamic community. It may be that the only common element in the Islamic community was the religious fervor that gripped so many people. New mosques appeared by the score and Daghestan combined with Chechnya produced more pilgrims for the annual hadj than the rest of the USSR combined.

Islamic diversity was driven by a variety of factors. One of those was the influx of foreign money from Middle Eastern Islamic states. The persistence of local traditions was another but the most important was the increased prominence of the Vakhabite movement within the Islamic community. The central theme of this movement was that Islam in the North Caucasus had been distorted by misunderstandings as well as by the "impure" influences.

Along with some other North Caucasian peoples, the Chechens converted to Islam on the eve of Russian expansion into their ancestral lands. For a variety of reasons they largely adopted the Sufi forms of worship and followed Shamil, the third Imam of Daghestan, in his efforts to impose the Sharia (Islamic Law) on the faithful while defending their homeland from the encroachments of the Russian Empire in early 19th century by waging a holy war (Ghazivat). Our first Chechen paper (*Religious Brotherhoods in Chechnya: Their Relevance for the Chechen Conflict)* explained how the Chechens were bled during these wars and then left the Naqshbandiya tradition in droves to follow a later Sufi tradition, the Qadiri, under the leadership of the nonviolent "Chechen Gandhi," Kunta Hadji of Kishiev.

When Kunta Hadji was captured by the Russians and died in captivity, his followers eschewed non-violence and joined with the Naqshbandis in periodic uprisings against the Tsarist regime and its Soviet successor. Each effort to regain some vestige of independence was cruelly suppressed. Between 1944 and 1957, the Chechen people were removed from their indigenous lands and deported to central Asia in order to be punished for alleged collaboration with the German Nazi regime. Only the death of Stalin allowed people to return to Chechnya and attempt to rebuild the nation.

The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 allowed independence-minded Chechens to seize the opportunity and declare Chechnya an independent nation for the Russian Federation. Fearing that other North Caucasian peoples might want to follow the Chechen example, the Russian Federation under President Boris Yeltsin decided to make an example of the Chechens and defeat them utterly as a warning to other indigenous peoples from the Black Sea to the Caspian. After two desultory wars the Russians seem in control but the Chechens continue to resist aided by volunteers from other Islamic

lands who want to impose a more militant, fundamentalist Islam on the Muslims of the Caucasus.

Background

In 1877, the people of Chechnya and Daghestan launched a major rebellion against the Russians who enjoyed control over their region. Although the rebellion was a failure that served primarily to produce new tactics on the part of the Sufi brotherhoods of the North Caucasus, the victorious Russian authorities responded not with oppression but rather with tolerance toward the Islamic religion in Chechnya. The religious tolerance of the post-rebellion years of 1877 to 1917 has led Chechens to speak of Tsarist colonialism with nostalgia. One Chechen rebel commander, Shirvani Bassayev, brother of the well-known Chechen guerilla commander Shamil Bassayev, recently noted that had the Romanov dynasty retained power, Russia would have been a very different nation. The key, Bassayev noted, is that men without faith, such as the Communists, "are more dangerous than those who accept God as a higher power." [1]

The spirit of rebellion, coupled with religious fervor, continues to give the politics of the North Caucasus a turbulent, violent flavor. Local people who have cooperated with "men without faith," most significantly the Russian authorities who occupy much of this region, increasingly find themselves the targets of rebels for whom this struggle has assumed a spiritual as well as a political relevance. A typical incident was reported in the summer of 2000 when Ruslan Khamidov, the mayor of Alkhan-Yurt, a small town near Grozny, was approached by "unidentified assailants" at his home early one morning. When he stepped outside his house, Khamidov was shot eleven times, an action generally viewed as another warning for those who cooperated with the "Godless invaders." This killing coincided with an attack on a Russian troop train on the rail line near Grozny. The bombing, which was carried out by remote controlled mines, was followed by a small arms attack which lasted for forty minutes. The incident left seven Russian military casualties and more than a hundred yards of destroyed track. [2]

While outside observers might view such events as little more than another expression of the terrorism that has plagued so much of the former Soviet Union, many participants in this struggle have an entirely different perception. For them, the murder of Ruslan Khamidov was actually another episode in the continuing struggle between "men of faith" and the infidels determined to destroy their way of life.

To better understand the logic of conflicts in the North Caucasus, a brief description of the patterns of the region's religious and social life is necessary. The most important characteristic of this society is its strict division along tribal and religious lines. This is best illustrated in Chechnya. Although the Chechens are a separate ethnic group clearly distinct from their neighbors, they seldom identify themselves with that group. In everyday life, their identity is defined by two most meaningful concepts: *teip* - a union of households tracing their descent from a common ancestor, or clan, and *tuhkum*—a union of teips which do not claim a common ancestor but historically have preserved their military and economic ties and spoken one of the dialects of the Chechen language. Traditional kinship ties are of paramount importance to the Chechens, and their loyalty

[1] John B. Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya: Roots of a Separatist Conflict*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 33

[2] Associated Press, 16 July, 2000.

belongs first and foremost to their clan and then to their tuhkum, which leaves the nation itself the least relevant notion on their list of priorities.

The same pattern, although perhaps not as strongly expressed, can be observed in Chechnya's religious life. Islam not only unites the Chechens but also brings about significant divisions in the society. Again, the Chechens and other people of the North Caucaus identify themselves with smaller religious groups rather than a nationwide Muslim community. They belong to *virds* – autonomous religious sects headed by *ustaz* - religious teachers. Every vird has its specific rules, principles and canons which may differ considerably from dogmas accepted elsewhere. The members of virds – *murids* - pledge allegiance to their sects and are obliged to obey the orders of their religious teachers. Thus, Chechen sects are in essence religious orders or brotherhoods held together by common principles, discipline and subordination. Virds are united into two major religious unions - *tarikats* - each headed by a sheikh: "naqshbandiya" and "qadiriya" (one of the most famous sheiks of the latter was Kunta-Hadji Kishiev). Both of them represent currents of Sufi Islam.

Sufi Islam in the North Caucasus has a number of peculiarities which distinguish it from the Islam accepted in Asia and the Middle East. The traditional kinship values, ancient customs and norms and pagan beliefs that regulated the highlanders' lives for centuries were so deeply entrenched in the mentality of the people of the North Caucaus that Islam had to adapt and transform in order to be accepted. Consequently, the so-called "traditional" Islam that developed here was characterized by a strong influence of local customs and paganism. It is different in many ways from "pure" Islam as it exists in some other countries, and its influence on social life has always been severely limited by values and norms that had formed before the adoption of Islam.

Religion In the North Caucasus

The "men of faith" praised by Bassayev and others had a dramatic impact on the development of the North Caucasus in previous centuries as well as contemporary times. The first of these men were Christians but, by the 8th century, Arabs began to convert many of the Caucasians to Islam. In the first part of this study we will focus on the role of religion in Daghestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya. We will also examine the situation in some of the less frequently studied parts of the North Caucasus.

Daghestan

The Republic of Daghestan spreads over 50 thousand square kilometers and has a population of approximately two million people. The overwhelming majority of them are Muslims - 85%, while 4% are Shiites, primarily Azerbaijanis, and 8.5% are Orthodox Christians. There are also small communities of Catholics and Baptists. Daghestan once had a Jewish community of over 30,000, but most of them moved to Israel. As a result, the Jewish population now numbers only 1,000 people.

Thus, Islam is the overwhelmingly dominant religious group in contemporary Daghestan. Spiritual leadership and governance in Daghestan began to change with the appearance of perestroika and the subsequent social disintegration. Up to that time, there had traditionally been a single dominant Muslim leader for Daghestan. During this disruptive transitional period, numerous independent Muslim leaders appeared and gained local followings and cultivated their own acolytes. Consequently, one may identify the following communities as those having independent spiritual governance

(muftiyas): Avartses with a population of 600,000; Dargintses with a 320,000 population; Kumyks with 260, 000; Lezghins with 240,000; and Laktsts with 100,000. This diversity reflects the national composition of Daghestan. There are 95,000 Chechens-Akkins in the region, 30,000 Naghaitses, and an assortment of about forty additional national groups. Most of Daghestan's Sunni Muslim population belongs to the *shafiit mazhab* organization. During the last decade, the Sufi brotherhoods, which had lost importance during the Soviet era, have been restored.

Currently there are over 40 Sufi brotherhoods in Daghestan. The major representatives of modern Sufism in Daghestan are theologists Said Chirkeisk and Tadjuin Hasavyurt. Together, these men hold the allegiance of many devout Muslims who are adherents of a strict interpretation of the Koran. Historians will record that in this region of the Northern Caucasus there are other people, individuals such as Maghomed Djeranskyi, who are less concerned about theology and, through their violent actions, bear much responsibility for the violence in the Caucasus. Djeranskyi, of course, is not alone as there are many others who share his militant attitude.

In Daghestan there are approximately 1700 large and as many as 6000 small "district mosques." There are nine Islamic spiritual educational institutes and 600 mosque schools throughout the republic. In addition, a significant number of Daghestani students study in Muslim schools abroad. Of the 17,000 –18,000 Russian citizens participating in annual hadj, no less than 13,000 to 14,000 of them are citizens of Daghestan. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that the Daghestanis are more active in Muslim affairs that the entire populations of Tatars, Bashkirs, and other Muslim nationalities.

A group that has attracted great attention in recent years is the Vakhabites or Vakhabists. They are referred to as fundamentalists in much of the Western literature on Islam. They first appeared in the North Caucasus in the 1980's and emerged as a serious force in the next decade. Most recently, their main communities were in Mahachkala and Hasav-Yurt.

Today Vakhabite activity is prohibited in Daghestan. As a result, their schools and organizations operate secretly and they are involved in a variety of clandestine activities. There are three main Vakhab factions in Daghestan. The first faction is under the leadership of Ahmed Ahtayev, an activist with a long history of clandestine work. The second faction is led by Baghaudin Muhhamad Daghestani. Because of official pressure against his activities, he left Daghestan and is now based in Chechnya. The third faction is based in communities in the Astrakhan region, a stronghold of Vakhabite support, but has not prominent individual leader.

In August 1999, many Daghestani radicals began training in the camps run by a Saudi Arabian calling himself Khattab. Khattab's group had joined Chechen extremists and numerous Arab terrorists who invaded Daghestan. The goal of this union of Islamic radicals is to bring about the secession of Daghestan from the Russian Federation. While this association failed to achieve its immediate goal, it did bring about the introduction of Russian forces into Chechnya, a situation that has greatly increased hardships throughout the region. Many feel that this was probably one of the objectives of those who organized the attacks in Daghestan.

One of the main reasons for the growth of Vakhabism in Daghestan and Chechnya is the difficult social and economic situation in the North Caucasus as well as the generous financing of the Vakhabites from abroad. Thus, it is not surprising that the joint attacks by the Daghestani and Chechen militants coincided with the aggravation of

tensions in the Middle East and the renewed international confrontations over oil and gas routes.

Chechnya

Before the military clashes of 1994-1996, Chechnya covered a territory of 17,300 square kilometers with the population of 1,200,000 people. Of this group, 800-850,000 were Chechens, 200-250,000 were Russians, 20,000 were Inghush and about 15,000 Armenian.

As a result of the conflict, Chechnya's population has been reduced to 500,000 people, with a Slavic population of only 10,000 people. The physical destruction of the region is widespread and capital Grozny itself is now gradually being covered by new forests as few people are willing to invest the resources required for rebuilding the devastated city.

The Chechens and the Ingush are Muslims-Sunnits. Approximately 90% of the Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians of the Chechen Republic belonged to the Christian Orthodox church, while the others belonged to the Evangelical and the Baptist Churches. During the late 1990's, several Christian priests in Chechnya were kidnapped and murdered.

The intensity of religiosity in Chechnya can be measured by two important indicators. First, several thousand mosques, both regional and district ones, were built during the last 15 years to serve the spiritual needs of this community. Second, in the Russian Federation, only Daghestan exceeds Chechnya in terms of the number of pilgrims who journey to Mecca. One to two thousand Chechens participate in the hadj each year.

Spiritual governance of Checnhya since the early 1990s was in the hands of a body known as the *Council of Ulems* and of an individual known as the *Muftiya*. The former is a group of theological scholars and the latter is the head of Muslims. From 1995 until early 2000, the *Muftiya* was Ahmad Hadji Kadyrov, who has recently been appointed as the head of Administration of the Chechen Republic. In the summer of 2000, a new *Muftiya* was elected by the Council of Ulems. That individual is the former Iman of the Shatoi, region Ahmed Adji Shaman.

For already several centuries Chechnya's traditional Islam has been represented by two Sufi trends: the *Naqshbandi* and the *Qadiri*. The best known of the naqshbandi are the brotherhoods of Yusup-Hadji and Tashu-Hadji. The most numerous quadiri brotherhood is the Kunta-Hadji Kishiev order. The relations between these two Sufi brotherhoods have traditionally been very positive. Their representatives never engaged in conflicts with each other, and never criticized the shaykhs of the other communities. While there was an element of competition inherent during election of the imam of the village mosque or Quadiri of the community, that competition never evolved into dogmatic disputes.

There is no exact information on the emergence of Vakhabism in Chechnya, nor about their first preachers. Many scholars associate its appearance with the establishment of the Islamic Party in 1991. Yet, Beslan Ghentaimirov, the first head of that party had nothing to do with Vakhabism. Furthermore, according to reliable accounts, leaders of the Islamic Party, have been known to indulge in the excessive use of alcohol. Given the hostility of the Vakhabites toward any use of alcohol, such behavior would indicate that the Islamic Party leadership would not meet the standards for a Vakhabite organization.

Others suggest that the appearance of Vakhabism is more correctly associated with an individual known as Adam Deniev or, by many people, simply as "One-legged Ahmed." Deniev has been a candidate member of the shaykh of Quadiri since 1995.

The first group in Chechnya to be openly associated with the Vakhabites and to actually receive money from them consisted of Islam Khalimov, Isa Umarov, and Movladi Udugov. Udugov, who was the Minister of Information in the Dudayev government, arranged for the regular broadcasts the sermons of Vakhabite preachers on Chechen television. This small circle of Vakhabites build an organization based on kinship principles while avoiding any direct challenges to the established Islamic community in Chechnya. In this early period, its operational principals were based on absolute secrecy and the avoidance of open conflicts with the Islamic community.

The first Chechen war radicalized much of the population and eventually resulted in the legalization of fundamentalist youth groups represented by the "Djamaat" battalion. This move was facilitated by foreign involvement in the person of a Chechen-Jordanian Ipak Fath. He was an elderly man who came from Jordan to assist in the development of fundamentalist groups in Chechnya. Fath had been a participant in the Afghan war during which he helped organize suicide detachments of idealists motivated by the honor of dying in a holy war against the infidels. Eventually, Ipak Fath succumbed to disease but not before making a great contribution to the fundamentalist cause in Chechnya. As a result of Fath's influence, Khattab and other veterans of the Afghanistan war were enlisted for combat service in Chechnya.

The Jordanian connection was established approximately a century ago and continues to have an impact on develops in the North Caucasus region. In the latter part of the 19th century, thousands of Chechens as well as some Ingush traveled through Turkey into the Middle East where they made their homes in Iraq and Jordan. Two Chechen-Ingush villages still exist in Iraq today. In Jordan, the Chechens founded four towns, one of which evolved into what is now the kingdom's second largest city, Zarqa. As a result of this migration, the Jordanian diplomatic and military community today reflects strong Chechen influences. In fact, during the 1948 war with the Palestine Liberation Army, Jordan's foremost tank officer, Abdul-Latif Benno, was a Chechen and, in 1978, became Jordan's first military attaché in Moscow. [201]

Vakhabite influence increased significantly during the first Chechen war because Dudayev refused to provide alternate financing. In the face of the severe funding crisis, Ipak Fath and his colleagues played a major role in purchasing armaments and providing food and clothing for the Chechen forces. The foreign Vakhabite money was channeled through Maskhadov's organization. Consequently, he was forced to make promises to introduce Shariat governance following the war.

As a result of the radicalization of society and the effective use of foreign funds, by 1996 the Vakhabites not only had a military organization in Chechnya, but also their own courts, mullas, and scholars. To take advantage of this environment, Baghaudin Khebedov left Daghestan to join his radical brethren in Chechnya. Other fundamentalists such as Shamsudin from Prigorodnoye established reputations for themselves as Shariat judges and numerous Chechen preachers who had taken refuge in Jordan were able to return to their homeland.

[201] Karny, pp. 273-285.

After creation of the main state institutions of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria at the beginning of 1997, the Vakhabites were rewarded by being able to legalize some of their military formations and to establish a base for training their military personnel led by commander Khattab. Their representatives were placed in numerous official government positions, especially those relating to the courts and public security bodies. The growing Vakhabite influence in the Maskhadov government eventually resulted in a very serious political crisis brought about by demand for curbing the Vakhabite influence. The Muftiat headed by Khadyrov demanded that President Maskhadov take decisive steps against those whom he denounced as "enemies of Islam and the Chechen nation."

In June 1998, the crisis led to armed clashes with the Vakhabite detachments near Gudermes. In those battles, a group of government field commanders defeated the Vakhab forces and it was only the intervention of President Maskhadov and Vice President A. Arsanov that saved them from a devastating, final defeat. After these battles, two Vakhabite generals who had demonstrated crass incompetence were reduced to enlisted ranks. Khattab was ordered to close his training camps and to leave Chechnya.

For the government the victory was not complete. While the order to disband his camps was published, Khattab ignored it. The Vakhab forces regrouped in the town of Urus-Martan and Khattab formed an alliance with Shamil Bassayev. The financial support from abroad enabled the Vakhabites to function without any financial support from the state bodies of Ichkeria. A fortified outpost was set up in Urus-Martan. At this stage of their evolution, the Vakhabites utilized more mundane tactics, such as theft and kidnapping, various actions against the young Chechen state, and personal attacks against president Maskhadov. Several assassination attempts were made against Maskhadov and Khadyrov. Thus, they concentrated on political and criminal activities as a means of opposing the Islamic establishment of Chechnya while avoiding open, large-scale military clashes.

In the fall of 1999, Bassayev's detachments joined Daghestani Vakhabites and, with the help of Arab mudjahadins, made military strikes against Daghestan authorities. While the attacks were a military failure, they did bring about concessions from Maskhadov. In an effort to appease his opponents, Maskhadov included Bassayev in the State Defense Committee and appointed him as a military commander.

Today Vakhabites are excluded from the religious life of Chechnya and Khadyrov now prohibits all forms of Vakhabite propaganda. This is part of an effort to restore the prestige of the traditional Muslim faith. Unfortunately, during this period, the social role of religion in general has declined; thus, even if the traditional Islamic community regains its lost prestige, Islam will not enjoy the prominent position its once held.

The presence of over 100,000 Russian troops on the territory of the Republic and the endless Russian military activities are a major source of discontent among the population. Many Chechens, however, are stoic in the face of such adversities and regard them as divine punishment for their arrogance and their willingness to admit the Vakhabites, whom they denounce as "servants of Devil" into their country.

At present, Muslim clergy in Chechnya are mullas and imams. Muslim clergy in Chechnya are highly educated people who were trained in Islamic institutions of Chechnya, Daghestan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Egypt. In addition, Chechnya has its own theological institutions and schools. There are Sunday Arab Koran schools in every village. In other wordsm, the prestige of Islamic clergy has increased in Chechnya as they

have withdrawn from politics. The important point is that Islam is not being politicized as the Vakhabites wished. In this new environment, the Islamic clergy can express themselves freely on major issues without fearing for official persecution.

Inghushetia

The small Republic of Ingushetia covers an area of 3600 square kilometers. It has a native population of 300,000 and about as many Chechen refugees. In ethnic and linguist terms, the Ingush are very close to their Chechen neighbors. Their religious cultures, however, are different since the Ingush were converted to Islam later and embraced it with less intensity. Moreover, there has been no tradition of militant Islam in Inghushetia, a factor which has had a major and positive impact on their relations with Russians. [3]

Like most of the Chechens, the Ingush people are Muslim-Suniits. Currently Ingushetia is experiencing a revival of religiosity and boasts a total of over 400 mosques, most of which were constructed in recent years. Over 1,000 Ingush receive a religious education each year, either in Ingushetia or abroad. Spiritual leadership is directed by the Muftia Albogachiev who maintains good relations with the neighboring republics. But unlike Chechnya, the spiritual leaders of Ingushetia do not claim to direct participation in the state governance and have not demanded the introduction of the Shariat law.

For the most part, the Ingush are associated with one of the two traditional orders of Islam. The Naqshbandi order is represented in Ingushetia by the brotherhood of Deni Arsanov, a highly respected figure whose descendants are held in equally high regard. The son of the Shaykh, Ilias Arsanov, left Chechnya in 1996 because of the conflict with Ichkeria authorities and is currently residing in Ingushetia.

The Qadiri order in Ingushetia is primarily associated with Kunta-Hadji Kishiev and has close relations with their coreligionists in Chechnya. In the 19th century the brotherhood of Batal-Hadji appeared in the Ingush village of Surhahi. Members of this brotherhood strictly observe their Charter. They are very well disciplined and united under the leadership of the descendants of Batal-Hadji.

Learning from the tragic example of Chechnya, which suffered so much as a result of religious disputes, the Ingush Muslims have managed to resist ideological and dogmatic extremism. In 1998 Vakhabism was formally banned in Ingushetia. Vakhab emissaries were expelled and theological schools allied with them were closed. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ingushetia was given responsibility for the suppression of Vakhabism.

While some of the young Ingush citizens, motivated by a sense of religious obligation, participated in military activities during the first Chechen war, they avoided involvement during the second conflict. Their opposition to the second war was a result of their rejection of Vakhabism as well as the slave-trade often associated with it. Many Ingush families suffered as a result of that slave-trade.

Northern Ossetia, Kabardin-Balkaria, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, and Adygeiya

Northern Ossetia, Kabardin-Balkaria, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, and Adygeiya are located in the central and northern-west regions of the North Caucasus. The population

[3]Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 100

adheres to ethical norms of mountaineers, rather than to religious values. Unofficial Sufi brotherhoods never played a significant role in this region. By the 1970s religious traditions such as circumcision, having a mulla's blessing for all marriages, and others had been eliminated.

In the 1990's new phenomena of spiritual life related to the interest in the Muslim values and "the great past" started to appear in the national republics of the Central and Northern-West Caucasus. Religious governance headed by muftias was introduced throughout the region. Islamic educational institutions, including higher educational facilities, were opened. Most were created with encouragement and funding from abroad. Mosques were restored in practically all communities of Balkaria, Cherkessia, and Ossetia. Eight mosques were opened in Karachayevo-Cherkessia, even though Muslim population amounts for only half of the population there. The other half of the local population embraces Orthodox Christianity.

The completion of the Islamization process in these republics has been associated with at least one constant theme. The radical Islamic organizations have worked to fill in the vacuum that appeared after the disappearance of the communist ideology. The "Daavat" groups have popularized Vakhabism and recruited youth from the mountain regions into military groups. During the period from 1996 to 1999 dozens of young people from Balkaria and Karachay were trained in the camps of Khattab near Sejen-Yurt. They were active participants in military activities during the 1st Chechen war.

Traditional Islam is regaining its lost status primarily among the peoples who suffered from deportation during World War II, especially among Balkars and Karachayevos. Many elements of Sufi practice have been restored in the communities populated by those who have returned from internal exile.

The hostility of traditional believers towards the Vakhabites has grown stronger because the Vakhabites, who view only Vakhab traditions as legitimate, do not recognize the customs and traditions of the mountaineers as valid. In Kabardin-Balkaria fight against Vakhabism has been especially determined and often bitter. Authorities have eliminated the most ardent armed extremists and have expelled or disbanded a number of suspicious organizations financed from abroad.

There are up to 2000 Vakhabites in Karachay, but their ranks often include common Muslim radicals who have not formally embraced the Vakhab faith. While it is a tribute of dubious merit, one must note that it was the Karachay Vakhabites who were recruited to commit acts of terrorism in Moscow and Volgodonsk.

The heads of both Christian Orthodox and Muslim communities deny that there has been a religious intrusion into the territory of the North Caucasus. That is why the Russian Orthodox Church has not given any special blessing for the war in Chechnya either during the 1st or the 2nd Chechen Wars. It disapproves of the cruel treatment of local civilians by the army but takes no public position on any of these concerns.

Vakhabism and the Chechen Conflict

While the focus of this study has been the North Caucasus region, the impact of religion on the region's conflict has been most dramatic in Chechnya. In contemporary Chechnya, as noted above, traditional Islam is challenged by a new phenomenon called *vakhabism*. Originally, this movement emerged in the 18th century and was named after its founder Al-Vakhab. He claimed that Islam was distorted and called his followers to "purify" it and return to Islam's fundamentals. Nowadays vakhabism is spread across the

Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, where it is accepted as an official ideology of the royal family. Vakhabism in Chechnya (as well as Tadjikistan), however, does not relate directly to vakhabism as it is understood by Sunni Muslims in the Middle East countries. Although the main idea is the same—the purification of Islam from both "pagan" and modern influences—Chechen vakhabism has a set of characteristics that distinguish it from religious values and practices in Saudi Arabia.

The Vakhabite movement has deep implications for Chechnya's religious, social and political life. Its call to purify Islam challenges Chechnya's traditional Islam , something which is heavily influenced by the local system of beliefs and norms, as well as an elaborate structure of religious communities and brotherhoods. In fact, Vakhabism attempts to "return" the population to what it views as "original" Islam, rejecting Chechnya's unique historical experience. The key to this transformation is the application of rules, norms and practices accepted among the radicals in the Middle East to the Chechen social and political life. Hence, traditionalists (who constitute the overwhelming majority of the population) associate Vakhabism with foreign influence, which poses a threat to their religious customs and identity. For their part, the Vakhabites view the supporters of traditional Islam as backward sectarians who distort Islam. The conflict between fundamentalists and traditionalists, along with less sharp but nevertheless significant divisions among Sufi sects, since the early 1990s has had a profound impact on Chechen politics, including the ongoing Russian military operation in the region.

During the 1994-1996 military operation, the Russian federal troops were a common enemy for most Sufi brotherhoods and Vakhabites. Both were mobilizing the population against the federal government (most Chechen leaders identified themselves with Sufi brotherhoods to secure the support of their members; for example, President Dudayev declared that he belonged to the Kunta-Hadji brotherhood). Therefore, their differences were temporarily put aside. Moreover, the Vakhabites managed to strengthen their position in Chechnya. Money, armament and fighters provided by their radical counterparts from abroad were crucial to the Chechen resistance against the federal forces and enabled Vakhabites to become an influential group in the republic. The relations between Sufi brotherhoods and Vakhabites deteriorated dramatically after the end of the 1994-1996 campaign. Their religious differences spilled over into politics.

In the political realm, traditionalists and fundamentalists disagreed over how the Chechen state ought to be organized and what its policy towards Russia should look like. Sufi Muslims advocated a secular state that would preserve Chechnya's traditional social structure and its unique Islamic culture. Their position on the future of Russian-Chechen relations was not uniform and ranged from calls for independence to the development of a "special status" within the Russian Federation. There is no evidence that Sufi brotherhoods had any interest in protracting the conflict or extending it beyond Chechnya's borders. Vakhabites were determined to build a "pure" Muslim society which would be organized and regulated according to the Shariat law (as opposed to *adat* – traditional norms developed in Chechnya before the adoption of Islam). "Just Islamic order" as they believe it had existed in the times of the Arabic khalifat became the goal of Chechnya's religious extremists. Furthermore, they embraced the idea of creating a larger Islamic state in the Northern Caucasus which would include Daghestan, Ingushetia and possibly other Russian regions. Since those regions chose to stay in the Federation and their predominantly Muslim population did not sympathize with fundamentalism, the only means of achieving this objective was aggression against Russia and then *gazavat* (or jihad) – holy war against non-believers (in Daghestan, since the early 1990s the population rejected the ideas of vakhabism and the leadership declared them "undesirable" in the republic. In June, 2000 all Vakhabite organizations were prohibited in Daghestan by an act of its parliament).

Thus, Vakhabites challenged the official Chechen leadership (President Maskhadov and its supporters) and posed a serious threat to the foundations of the Chechen society. As a result, official Grozny was becoming more and more critical of vakhabism in its statements and declarations. However, Maskhadov took no decisive action, as he feared that would exacerbate the situation in the republic. Confrontation between traditionalists and radicals resulted in violence several times; for instance, as noted above, Vakhabites clashed with Sufi Muslims in May, 1998 in Gudermes and Urus-Martan and then again in Gudermes in July, 1998 (approximately 50 people were killed that day). Fearing that fundamentalists will destabilize the situation in the republic and attempt to rebel against Grozny, Maskhadov declared the state of emergency, dissolved and disarmed the Shariat Guards and Islamic regiment, and ordered to exile the well-known warlord Khattab, a mercenary from Jordan who allegedly cooperated with radicals. On July 23, 1998 there was an attempt in Grozny to assassinate Maskhadov, an attempt probably organized by Vakhabites. Observers from Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Chechnya itself agreed that at that point the republic was on the brink of civil war.

Despite their relatively strong positions, Vakhabites were not able to assert their influence throughout the republic, much less impose their ideology in its entire territory. However, they went ahead with their plans to occupy neighboring Russian regions and invaded Daghestan in August, 1999. Although members of Sufi brotherhoods may have participated in the invasion as well, the idea and its implementation are blamed by the Russian government and the local population primarily on Vakhabites. Subsequent investigations and the fact that the officials Grozny from the very beginning announced that they did not have anything to do with the events in Daghestan and condemned the aggression further convinced Moscow that fundamentalists had started their jihad and the situation in Chechnya was out of control. Vakhabites were perceived as a major threat to peace and stability in the Northern Caucasus and the territorial integrity of the Federation. The invasion of Daghestan and the Vakhabites' plans to wage a holy war against Russia until the creation of a "purely" Islamic state in its southern territories were the top reasons that prompted the federal government to start a military operation in Chechnya immediately after the defeat of those who attacked Daghestan.

As the federal troops advanced into Chechnya, however, they had to fight not only Islamic extremists but also the members of Sufi brotherhoods who, like in 1994-1996, Russian control for various reasons opposed. Unlike fundamentalists, Sufi Muslims do not fight for a religious cause and tend to have more reasonable positions on issues. Moreover, their dissatisfaction with the situation in the republic in the 1996-1999 period encouraged them to cooperate in a number of cases with the Russians. As a result, many of the Sufi communities engaged in negotiations with the federal representatives and avoided armed conflict. Some of them openly supported the military operation and organized volunteer troops to fight against both Sufi and Vakhabite rebels on the Russian side.

In brief, a certain Sufi community may or may not fight the Russians or Vakhabites depending on their traditions, history, kinship ties, religious idiosyncrasies and even geographic position (the population in the mountains is generally perceived as

very militant and hostile even to fellow Chechens from the flatland, whereas the northern part of the republic has been loyal to Moscow). On the other hand, Vakhabites are, almost by definition, inclined to resist the Russian military operation and subsequent restoration of peaceful life and order. Therefore, the Russian government, the military and the population at large view Vakhabites or any other radical Islamic movement as the biggest obstacle to the stabilization of the situation in Chechnya. Traditional Sufi groups are Moscow's most valuable partners in the struggle against extremism when they choose to cooperate, and therefore the federal government makes efforts to support traditional Chechen institutions mentioned above - teips, tukhums, virds and tarikats. There is a belief that they will help prevent the spread of extremism and facilitate the return to normal life.

The Vakhabite Perspective

We first need to emphasize a number of important points. First, Chechen society has a very complicated structure and is fragmented along the lines of kinship and religious identification. All politics is local and driven by narrowly defined interests of clans or brotherhoods. A nationwide movement, whether pro-Russian or anti-Russian, is not likely to emerge as long as the present tendencies persist. The roots of and the solutions for the Chechen crisis are in interactions among different factions of the society, not in national interests or aspirations of an ethnic group asserting itself. Second, Sufi brotherhoods play an important role in mobilizing public support either for or against the central government or any other authority; their decisions and actions are best explained individually on the case-by-case basis. Third, religious extremism does exist in Chechnya and for various reasons is accepted among a certain portion of the population. It calls for the redesign of the Chechen society in accordance with the principles of fundamentalist Islam and the conquest of neighboring lands, thus antagonizing traditionalists within Chechnya and the federal government. The confrontation between them and Sufi Muslims has been one of the most dramatic aspects of the Chechen crisis. Fourth, Vakhabites triggered the next round of violence, and the events in Daghestan became the reason why the federal government responded with a military operation. Fifth, since Vakhabites are currently the biggest threat to Moscow's interests, the federal government has supported traditional Chechen institutions, including religious brotherhoods in the assumption that they will effectively resist foreign radical ideas, although they also often deny Russian authority.

In order to better understand the perspective of the Vakhabites, Mr. Albert Avduev, a member of the Chechen disaspora who works as an oil engineer, has presented his view of this phenomenon. While he privately describes himself as a "secret Vakhabite" he is very open in his efforts to promote a better understanding of the principals of those people who wish to cleanse Islam of its alien characteristics.

Avduev prefers not to use the term Vakhabite, insisting that this term itself is a result of Russian propaganda. He maintains that Russian historians have distorted not only Islam but the movement that seeks to reform Islamic practice. For Avduev, Russian colonization led to a situation in which both the Islamic faith as well as Islamic society were corrupted. The flight of Russian serfs from the oppressive Czarist administrators was a significant factor that enabled Russians to penetrate the Caucasus as well as other portions of southern Russia.

Avduev explains this process as one which was driven by an extreme Russian prejudice against all people of the North Caucasus in general but against Chechens in particular. The Russian mass media, he argues, have long presented the Caucasus people are being "more like orangutans than humans". Russia's aversion to the people of Chechnya and Daghestan led to a deliberate policy of genocide as early as the 19th century. "Religious traitors" and Russians, he maintains, worked to distort the true Islamic faith. According to Avduev, a "holy war against non-believers" was the only option for devout Muslims. With the weakening of communist rule, the true believers of the North Caucasus were able to work to restore their legitimate rights. Russian authorities, Avduev insists, have undertaken a renewed genocidal campaign to prevent the restoration of a true Islamic society in the North Caucasus.

Conclusion

While Islam has been very important in the development of the North Caucasus region, the peoples living there do not identify with any single sect or doctrine. Historically, the Islam of this region was suffused with many pre-Islamic customs and traditions. The North Caucasian federation forged by Shamil, Imam of Daghestan, waged a holy war (ghazavat) against the old ways in order to impose Islamic law throughout the Imanate and against the Russian Empire in order to preserve its independence. Shamil, a Sufi of the Naqshbandi order, demanded great sacrifices from his peoples but was eventually conquered by the Russians .

In the second half of the 19th century another Sufi order took root in the North Caucasus. This was the more pacifistic Qadiri order founded by Kunta-Hadj Kishinev. The Qadiri participated along with the Naqshbandi in various insurrections and revolts during the twilight of the Russian Empire and throughout the Soviet period. By the time Chechnya unilaterally declared its independence in 1991, the Qadiri rite had evolved to become the dominant form of Sufism in Chechenya

During the 1990s and based on its support of Chechen independence, the fundamentalist Vakhabite movement has become a major regional force despite of numerous efforts by the Qadiri Chechens to suppress its influence. This official suppression has resulted in the emergence of a clandestine Vakhabite network supported from abroad, particularly the Middle East and Afghanistan.

The Chechen diaspora, which has played a major supporting role in the modern Middle East, especially the former Ottoman Empire and successor states such as Iraq and Jordan, has provided aid and soldiers to support their Chechen cousins. The money, armaments, and soldiers (mujahideen) provided by various radical Islamic groups from abroad have also played a major role in strengthening Chechen resistance.

After the first Chechen war (1994-1996), religious differences between the Sufi movements, and the Vakhabites began to have a deleterious political impact in the region. While Sufi Muslims called for the creation of a secular state that would preserve traditional social patterns, the Vakhabites have demanded a purification of Islam and the eradication of local customs that have tainted and undermined pure Islam.

The Russian Federation was greatly humiliated by its loss of the first Chechen war through the peace brokered by General Lebed in 1996. Many important politicians and military officers longed for an opportunity to avenge this loss and regain national honor. The Vakhabite effort to spread a pan-Islamic fundamentalist revival by invading Daghestan in 1999 gave Russia the opportunity it sought to redeem itself.

Within Chechnya, a divided people are confronted by two polar choices: either to work within the Russian Federation and survive physically or to sacrifice the nation upon the altar of jihad. Other Caucasian peoples (Circassians, Balkars, Ingush, Avars and Kumyks among others have opted to stay within the Russian Federation. Only the Chechens seem unable to moderate in the name of coexistence.

Chapter Eight

FRAUD AND CORRUPTION IN THE FORMER USSR: FALSE IDENTITIES IN MOLDOVA