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**DAGESTAN'S APPROACH**  
**TO THE ISLAMIC MEGA-AREA?**  
**THE POTENTIALS AND LIMITS OF JIHADISM<sup>1</sup>**

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Few will doubt that the military conflict in Dagestan in 1999 shook the whole Russian Federation. This incident continues to make us think of the fate of the Slavic Eurasian mega-area. Will its Southern rims be attracted toward and eventually incorporated into the neighboring Islamic mega-area? The attempts made by Arabic countries to introduce Salafism (the so-called Wahhabism) into the territories of the former Soviet Union, Dagestan in particular, and the rise and fall of this Salafi movement during the 1990s and the early 2000s provides us with valuable materials to examine this question.

This does not imply that I premise that the main source of the inspiration and resources of the Salafi movement was foreign agents, although the propaganda arguing this has been vigorously unfolded by the Dagestani religious and secular authorities. Rather, in my view, the Salafi movement was a natural reaction to the deep crises which the Dagestani society underwent during the 1990s. I emphasize the international context of the Salafi movement in order to contribute to the methodological objectives set by this volume. Since the study of Dagestani Islam has displayed visible development recently,<sup>2</sup> the focus on the international factors encouraging the Salafi movement will not give the reader a distorted image of Salafism in Dagestan.

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<sup>1</sup> In this chapter the author relied upon the sources collected with the assistance of the John and Catherine MacArthur Foundation (Grant No. 02-73288-000-GSS).

<sup>2</sup> Hilary Pilkington and Galina Yemelianova, eds., *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Public and Private Faces* (London, New York, 2003); D.V. Makarov, *Ofitsial'nyi i neofitsial'nyi Islam v Dagestane* (Moscow, 2000); Aleksei Malashenko, *Islamskie orientiry Severnogo Kavkaza* (Moscow, 2001); Kimitaka Matsuzato and Magomed-Rasul Ibragimov, "Islamic Politics at the Subregional Level of Dagestan: *Tariqa* Brotherhoods, Ethnicities, Localism and the Spiritual Board," paper presented at the 9th Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, 15-17 April 2004, Columbia University, New York.

For the same reason, this chapter will compose a tandem study with the following chapter written by Magomed-Rasul Ibragimov and Kimitaka Matsuzato. I will analyze the non-traditional, "foreign" Islam in Dagestan, while Ibragimov and Matsuzato will examine the traditional fundamentals of the Dagestani society, namely, ethnicities and Sufism, which, at least temporarily, overcame the Salafis' challenges during the 1990s.

### **THE EMERGENCE OF RADICAL ISLAMIC GROUPS: LOCAL ROOTS**

The first radical Islamic movements in Dagestan began to emerge as early as the late 1980s and the early 1990s. From the historical point of view, Dagestan played the role of bridgehead to expand Islam to the whole North Caucasus. It was here where, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the deepest tradition of religious science and education, the most numerous strata of religious activists, and the strong and stable organizational structures of unofficial, "popular" Islam in the form of Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqa*), guided by teachers-sheikhs, took shape. All of these factors enabled Dagestani Islam to survive the merciless atheist repressions and confinements during the Soviet period, although with significant sacrifices. The beginning of the liberalization of social and political life in the USSR under M. Gorbachov created the conditions for a "renaissance" of Dagestani Islam. Since the end of the 1980s, and in particular after the collapse of the CPSU regime in 1991, the vigorous process of construction and restoration of mosques, the registration of local religious communities, the creation of institutions for religious education, and the publication of religious literature began in Dagestan. Moreover, Muslims became free to contact their co-believers in other countries, to make pilgrimages to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and to receive religious education abroad. In Dagestan, various religious and social organizations, movements and parties began to operate.

Organizational consolidation of the radical Islamic movement did not take place quickly. At the beginning, the movement displayed the form of various communities (*jamaat*), composed of mainly young people

who oriented themselves to Bagauddin Kebedov (who later renamed himself Bagauddin Muhammad), a charismatic preacher whose family comes from a mountain village called Santlada. Bagauddin was characterized by his uncompromising attitudes toward the official clergy, strictly criticizing them for their collaboration with the authorities and their deviation from the real norms of Islam. The theological basis of Bagauddin's ideology was Salafism – the idea that Islam should be purified from unallowable innovations (*bid'a*) and the renewal of the religion of the "pious ancestors", namely Muslims of the first generations (*salaf*). This doctrine, which emerged repeatedly in the world history of Islam, witnessed its most complete realization in Saudi Arabia where this doctrine has become an official ideology. The spiritual father and founder of Saudi Arabian Salafism was a theologian of the eighteenth century, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhab, and for this reason contemporary Salafism is often called Wahhabism. The main enemy and object of criticism of Salafism was always Sufism. The Salafis found the most dangerous violation of the main principle of Islam, namely monotheism (*tawhid*), in substantial characteristics of Sufism, i.e. the cult of saints and extreme honoring of the Prophet Muhammad and sheikhs-teachers. The Salafis have been also offended by many elements of Sufi ritual practice.

Bagauddin, who had received traditional education from local Dagestani scholars (*ulama*), got acquainted with Salafism mainly through literature and also through rare contacts with Arab students studying in the USSR. He became a follower of the strict version of Salafism, emphasizing the provocative and conflicting aspects of the doctrine - *takfir* (the accusation of infidels) and widely using this doctrine against those Muslims who did not fit the strict Salafi criteria of "true belief." One may attribute the extreme, near pathological hatred of Sufism by Bagauddin to his personal ambitions and anger. The problem was that at the end of the 1980s, Bagauddin and his followers, unifying with the supporters of several *tariqa* sheikhs, strove to reshuffle the existing leadership of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims in the North Caucasus, which was accused by them of connections with the KGB and violations of moral and ethic norms. However, when the mufti Mahmud Gekkiev was eventually released from the post in May 1989, the control over the new muftiate was passed to the traditionalist Sufis, while Bagauddin was left without

any influence. After this event his anti-Sufi rhetoric became especially strident. Another basic element of Bagauddin's ideology was the unacceptability of any mutual cooperation, except for the most inevitable one, with state structures, which Bagauddin regarded as "those of unbelievers (*kafir*)."<sup>3</sup> It is well-known, for example, that Bagauddin even rejected to raise a law suite against a newspaper which published insulting accusations of Wahhabis, justifying this decision by the unacceptability for Muslims to address the court of "unbelievers."<sup>3</sup> At that time, the beginning of the 1990s, Bagauddin had not begun to preach armed *jihad* against the existing authorities to establish Islamic order, nevertheless his views facilitated the conversion of the communities of his supporters into fanatic groups antagonistic to the rest of the society; their overt conflict with that society was only a matter of time and conditions.

After the creation of the Islamic Revival Party (*Islamskaia Partiia Vozrozhdeniia*: IPV) unifying the main Islamic movements and organizations in the territory of the USSR, Bagauddin and his brother Abas became the leaders of its Dagestan branch. As the leader of the whole IPV, a famous Dagestani religious activist, Ahmad-Qadi Akhtaev, was elected. Akhtaev also had Salafi convictions but with a softer version and argued for dialogue with Sufis to unify Muslims and for their active participation in the social and political life of Russia. In 1992, he even became a deputy of the Supreme Soviet (parliament) of Dagestan. By that time, disagreement between the supporters of Akhtaev and Bagauddin had become so acute that the IPV declared self-dissolution in August 1992. After that, Akhtaev founded and led the cultural and educational organization "Al-Islamiya," while Bagauddin became the leader of the radical wing of the Dagestani Salafis, which would later be named the "Islamic Community of Dagestan" (*Islamskii Dzhamaat Dagestana*: hereafter abbreviated simply to "Jamaat"). Before long, Bagauddin's former student Anguta Omarov (who adopted an 'Islamic' name of Aiub) forsook Bagauddin and began to hold even more extreme views with regard to *takfir* and attitudes toward the secular authorities. Meanwhile, the community of Aiub's supporters in Dagestan remained marginal and did not display noticeable political activities.

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<sup>3</sup> Abdurashid Saidov, *Taina vtorzheniia: Glava "Rokovaia oshibka uchenogo islamista"* (<http://lib.baikal.net/koi.cgi/POLITOLOG/saidov.txt>).

Steadily, Bagauddin's Jamaat became the most numerous and influential Salafi group in Dagestan. Even though more or less exact data on the number of its members do not exist, it seems fairly realistic to suppose that it actually had several thousand members.<sup>4</sup> Bagauddin's Jamaat had the most stable positions in lowland Kiziliurtovskii and Khasaviurtovskii, highland Tsumadinskii and Botlikhskii Raions, and in Makhachkala City, while not insignificant communities of his supporters operated in practically the whole republic, with the exception of several raions in southern Dagestan. In its ethnic composition the Jamaat was mainly Avar: Avars were dominant not only among its leaders but also lay believers. Purely Dargin Salafi communities took shape only in the villages of Karamakhi, Kadar, and Chabanmakhi of Buinakskii Raion (the so-called Kadar zone) and the village of Gubden in Karabudakhkentskii Raion. By the end of the 1990s, the influx of the representatives of other Dagestani ethnic groups – Laks, Lezgins, Kumyks – became stronger to an extent. The most salient characteristic of the social appearance of the Jamaat was the predominance of the youth therein. Salafi communities in villages were, as a rule, stronger and more numerous than in the cities. Each community was guided by an emir and usually had a consultative council (*shura*) as well. Moreover, the Jamaat had a judicial organ which resolved problems among the members of the community on the basis of the divine law (*sharia*). As a whole, the Salafi religious communities had a fairly well organized and mobilized structure. Though sharing general ideal settings of the Jamaat and recognizing the spiritual authority of emir Bagauddin, several communities (above all Karamakhi) preserved a certain level of organizational and operational autonomy.

In the course of the 1990s, Bagauddin's Jamaat actively propagated its ideas and built its organizational infrastructure. As early as 1991, in Kiziliurt Town, Bagauddin officially registered a *medresse* called "Hikma," in which nearly 700 people were being educated. Small *medresse* operated in all relatively large Salafi communities. The Jamaat propagated its ideas through the mosques under its control, through

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<sup>4</sup> Z.M. Zalimkhanov and K.M. Khanbabaev, *Politizatsiia islama na Severnom Kavkaze* (Makhachkala, 2000), p. 72; V.O. Bobrovnikov, "Islam na postsovetskom Severnom Kavkaze (Dagestan): mify i realii," Alexei Malashenko and Martha Brill Olcott, eds., *Islam na postsovetskom prostranstve: vzgliad iznutri* (Moscow, 2001), p. 91.

missionary expeditions of its members to the raions of Dagestan, through religious literature with foreign origins as well as printed by the publishing house "Santlada" (later renamed "Badr") belonging to the Jamaat, and through leaflets, audio and video cassettes containing Bagauddin's preachings and lectures by radical Islamic ideologues. The legal façade of the Community was the "Caucasus Center" (*Tsentr Kavkaz*), which was officially registered in 1996 and had branches in Makhachkala and Kiziliurt.

Bagauddin's influence steadily expanded beyond the borders of Dagestan to the other North Caucasian republics, above all Chechnia and Ingushetiia, Karachaevo-Cherkesiia, Kabardino-Balkariia, Stavropol'skii Krai (particularly raions with a predominant Nogai population). In these territories also emerged communities translating the ideology and copying the methods of the activities of the radical Dagestani Salafis.

There were legitimate reasons for the tangible success of the Salafi propaganda in Dagestan and other North Caucasian territories. Under the conditions of the worsening economy, the Salafis' call for the rejection of the wasteful practice of extravagant implementation of funerals and memorial rituals had great appeal. Many people were attracted by the simplicity and accessibility of the ideas proclaimed, the healthy outlook of Salafi communities, and the spirit of fraternity and mutual help ruling in these communities.<sup>5</sup> The Salafis' request of strict worship only of Allah was perceived to have the effect to emancipate individuals from patriarchal traditions since this request provided religious sanction for the yearning for emancipation from the control of the older generation, which was significant for the youth. Lastly, the Salafi ideology, with its call for social justice and equality and its rigorous criticism of the existing secular regime, proved to be an excellent channel to express a mood of protest caused by the ruin of a significant part of the population, the increasing unemployment, criminality, corruption, and the general moral decline of the society. Only to an insignificant extent was the attraction toward Salafism motivated by ethnic problems though, as a background, these problems unarguably played a certain role. Here I mean, above all, the Balkars who regarded themselves as a discriminated

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<sup>5</sup> A. Iarlykapov, *Problema vakhkhabizma na Severnom Kavkaze* (Moscow, 2000), p. 5.

minority in their own republic as well as the Nogais of Stavropol'skii Krai who were discontent with the nationality policy conducted by the Krai administration. Remarkably, the supporters of Salafism among these Nogais were significantly more numerous than among the Nogais in neighboring Dagestan, where they have their ethnic "home," namely Nogaiskii Raion.<sup>6</sup>

Why did the most radical, extremist forces aiming at armed jihad against the state become dominant among the Salafi movement in Dagestan in the second half of the 1990s? To answer this question, it is necessary to pay attention to two important factors, which influenced the dynamism of the Salafi movement: foreign (above all Arab) assistance and the war in Chechnia.

#### **RADICALIZATION FROM OUTSIDE: RELIGIOUS MESSIANISM AND GEOPOLITICS**

The Islamic revival in Dagestan began against the background of the explosion of Islamic radicalism in the Middle East. This explosion was facilitated by numerous factors, such as the victory of the Islamic resistance in Afghanistan, which achieved the retreat of Soviet troops in 1989, and the eventual decline of the former pro-Soviet regime in 1992; painful perceptions of the majority of Muslims toward the stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia during the Persian Gulf crisis of 1990-1991; the active role played by Islamic groups in the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) which began in 1989 in the occupied territories of the West Bank of the River Jordan and the Gaza strip; the civil war in Algeria which began at the beginning of 1992 after the military's intervention prevented Islamists from exploiting their victory in the parliamentary elections; and the factual declaration of war against the government by radical Islamic groups in Egypt. All these events consolidated the moral atmosphere among the Dagestani Islamist hardliners and reinforced their arguments.

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<sup>6</sup> Idem., "Natsional'noe i religioznoe v Nogaiskoi stepi," *Etnopoliticheskaia situatsiia na Severnom Kavkaze. Biulleten' "Konflikt-dialog-sotrudnichestvo"* 1 (September-November 1999), p. 63.

Soon after the borders of the USSR were opened, many foreign Islamic organizations began to unfold their activities in its territories, including in the Caucasus. They were mainly non-governmental, charity organizations based in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Jordan. They gave financial help to construct mosques and *medresse*, publish and distribute Islamic literature, and offered humanitarian help and conducted missionary activities, inviting young Russian Muslims to study abroad.

What were the purposes and motives of all this assistance? Here existed a sincere yearning to help co-believers in need and messianism, in particular characteristic of Saudi Arabia, and mercenary interests of the bureaucracy of charity funds, for which programs of help were always a good source of income. No doubt, however, there was a political element in the activities of the foreign organizations. They offered significant financial assistance not to official Spiritual Boards but to parallel Islamic structures opposing the authorities. As justification the Arabs referred to cases of corruption and ineffective management in Spiritual Boards, but actually they were also interested in the creation of independent channels transmitting their ideas, and afterwards political influence in the post-Soviet space.

It would be misleading to regard this foreign influence as something monolithic. In Russia, the representatives of various, often mutually conflicting, trends and orientations of foreign Islam tried to operate. Among them, the most noticeable were Salafis, "Muslim Brothers," and Tablighis (the international movement "Tablighi Jamaat" based in Pakistan). It was often the case that they transplanted their rivalry to Russia, thus confusing and splitting the Russian Muslims even more.

The majority of international Islamic charity organizations, more or less connected with Saudi Arabia and other Arabic countries, preferred to operate with the Salafis who were ideologically closer to them. Gradually, Bagauddin became the main receiver and distributor of foreign financial aid in Dagestan. His name became something like a password opening the door into many Saudi charity organizations. In particular, it was through Bagauddin that Ramazan Borlakov, director of a *medresse* in the village of Uchkeken (Karachaevo-Cherkesiia), received access to foreign financial aid. This *medresse* was transformed



into one of the main centers for the expansion of radical Islamic ideology in the northwestern Caucasus.<sup>7</sup>

Why did Arabs wager on Bagauddin? On the one hand, his strict, dogmatic Salafism possibly impressed them more than the excessively "liberal" views of A. Akhtaev. Moreover, the Arabs, poorly understanding the reality of Russian Islam and Russia's situation in general, often did not comprehend that the introduction of such a version of Islam would generate more harm than good by provoking conflicts, panic, and splits among Russian Muslims. However, the most plausible reason seems to be that the ambitious and imposing Bagauddin was a much more suitable partner to realize the radical Islamic project which intended the removal of Russia from the North Caucasus to create an independent Islamic state there. Akhtaev always tried to defend the right of the Russian Islamic movement to follow its own strategy, key principles of which were, in his view, to maintain sound relations with the secular authorities and to reject coercive methods of Islamization. Despite the ideological closeness of the IPV with the "Muslim Brothers," Akhtaev rebuffed the proposal made by their emissaries to unify the IPV to this international association, though this proposal was very attractive from the financial point of view. The "Muslim Brothers" did not forget this rejection. A high-ranking representative of the Egyptian branch of the "Muslim Brothers" supported Bagauddin's position when he was invited to speak as an arbitrator in a debate between Akhtaev and Bagauddin's group in the summer of 1992.<sup>8</sup> It was this incident that served as the last blow to destroy the IPV.

Bagauddin was much less punctilious in regard to proposals of assistance. It is possible to argue about the scale of the funds he received, but the very fact of enormous and steady financial aid given to his Jamaat by international Islamic organizations leaves no room for doubt. These organizations included the Al-Haramain Foundation, the International Islamic Relief Commission ("Al-Ighassa al-Islamiya"), the Taibah International Aid Organization, and the World Assembly of Islamic Youth. Recently the Saudi authorities at last admitted that foreign

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<sup>7</sup> Author's interview with Muhammad Bidzhiulu (Muhammad Karachai), Moscow, 13 October 2003. He founded the Uchkeken *medresse* and was its director until 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Muhammad Karachai (see fn. 7), the secretary of the IVP and a close associate of A. Akhtaev at that time.

branches of these organizations often offered support to extremist Islamic groups. In March 2002, the Saudi government blocked the account of the branches of the Al-Haramain Foundation in Bosnia and Somalia after the fact that these branches assisted terrorist activities and terrorist organizations including Al-Qaeda was confirmed. In May 2003, Saudi Arabia requested the Al-Haramain Foundation and all Saudi Arabian charity funds to cease their activities beyond the borders of Saudi Arabia until adequate mechanisms for monitoring and control of the money to prevent it from being used for illegal purposes were devised.<sup>9</sup>

The middle-range aims of the supporters of the radical Islamic project in the North Caucasus – to destabilize the situation and weaken the position of Russia in this region – paradoxically corresponded to certain interests of their sworn enemies in the West and the Middle East. These interests were as follows:

(1) To exploit radical Islamism as an instrument for geopolitical competition with Russia (based on the proven success of the example of Afghanistan).

(2) To prevent the emergence of the northern, Russian pipeline route for the transportation of Caspian oil to the West.

(3) To shift the rising wave of radical Islamism from the West, Israel, and the Middle Eastern regimes toward other areas of the world, including the North Caucasus.

The described constellation of external forces and interests, combined together, accelerated the radicalization of Dagestani Salafism and escalated its conflict with the state. The destructive, destabilizing influence of the external factors had intensified since the beginning of the conflict in Chechnia.

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<sup>9</sup> "Initiatives and Actions Taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Combat Terrorism, September 2003," p. 12 ([www.saudiembassy.net](http://www.saudiembassy.net)).

**THE FIRST CHECHEN WAR (1994-1996): PRECONDITIONS  
FOR THE JIHADIZATION OF DAGESTANI ISLAMISM**

Chechen separatism at the beginning of the 1990s developed, in principle, under nationalist slogans. No sooner than the beginning of the war in 1994 did it gain a distinct Islamic tinge, which nevertheless did not become dominant in the separatist movement. The main reason for the reorientation of Chechen separatists toward Islam was a purely pragmatic desire to attract the Islamic world, with its enormous financial, political and human resources, to their side. Recognizing the complete absence of the religious cause in the Chechen resistance at the beginning of the war, Bagauddin rejected to qualify it as jihad. He even said that it was a war of infidels against other infidels and those who participated in the war would be burnt in hell. However, under the influence of Arabic religious authorities, including Islamic activists visiting Chechnia to support co-believers, Bagauddin changed his position as early as January 1995 and appealed to his supporters to participate in the "Chechen jihad."<sup>10</sup> From that moment, many members of the Jamaat visited Chechnia.<sup>11</sup>

The first Chechen war, which ended in 1996 with the retreat of Russian armies out of the republic and the emergence of a quasi-independent Chechnia, produced a powerful impulse to develop radical Islamism in Dagestan and the whole North Caucasus toward the cause of militarization and jihadization. For this change, a series of new prerequisites appeared:

(1) *Moral and psychological.* The retreat of Russia from Chechnia was evaluated as a sign of the weakness of the Russian state and its incapability to maintain control over the Caucasus. As a result, radical Islamists were encouraged, their ambitions were greatly expanded, and now they were not only unafraid of the Russian military machine but also believed that they were able to beat it. Intoxication with violence

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<sup>10</sup> Author's interview with Anzor Astemirov, a leader of the Islamic jamaat of Kabardino-Balkaria, Nalchik, 6 February 2003, and Zagir Arukhov, Deputy Minister (now - Minister) of Nationality Affairs, Dagestan, Makhachkala, 8 August 2003.

<sup>11</sup> However, the participation of the Caucasus youth in the Chechen War was not limited to Salafis. The supporters of Sufism also went to Chechnia. In particular, a detachment of tariqaist Ahmad Kadyrov actively fought against federal forces there.

and the false sense of their own superiority implacably pushed the Islamists toward a new, decisive fight with Russia.

(2) *Political*. Radical Salafi groups obtained allies among "Islamizing" radical Chechen nationalists (Sh. Basaev, M. Udugov, Z. Iandarbiev and others), for whom Salafism was not only the key to foreign support but also a convenient instrument for the "export of the Chechen revolution" to other regions of the Caucasus. This alliance added to the Dagestan radical Islamists' political weight in their confrontation with the authorities. Besides, a wide campaign which unfolded in Islamic countries aimed at solidarity with the Chechen people convinced Dagestani radicals that they would always be able to count on political, financial and human support from the world Islamic community in their future activities.

(3) *Geopolitical and military*. Radical Islamists in Dagestan and the whole North Caucasus received a long-awaited strategic outpost uncontrolled by Russia, namely Chechnia. They built military training camps in Chechnia, and also guided ideological and propagandist preparation for the new stage of jihad from there. By the end of the war, radical Islamists had sufficiently large, armed formations well-supplied with arms and technology. Many Islamists received practical experience in using weapons and conducting partisan battles.

(4) *Personnel*. The war facilitated the staffing of religious communities of various kinds with marginalized elements who regarded the war as a way to subsistence and employment. For these people the nihilistic attitude of Salafism toward a number of traditional norms of morality and behavior served as an excellent justification for any of their activities, beginning from elementary disrespect and violence toward their surroundings and ending with such kinds of criminal activities as kidnapping and commerce in hostages. As a result, quantitative growth of radical Salafi communities was accompanied by tangible deterioration in their "quality." In these communities, religious and ideological aspects were given only a secondary, subsidiary role in the realization of their main task, namely the preparation of the warriors of jihad.

(5) *Organizational*. The most important consequence of the war was the emergence in the region of a whole network of jihadist groups, the backbone of which was composed of veterans of the Chechen war as

well as those who underwent military and ideological preparation in the camps in Chechnia. These groups were not strictly centralized but, all the same, served as a valuable mobilizational resource of radical Islamism.

To sum up, in many points Chechnia became such a nursery of jihadism for Dagestan and the whole North Caucasus, as Afghanistan had been for the Middle East, northern Africa and other regions of the Islamic world. The first Chechen war transferred the idea of the radical Islamic project for the North Caucasus into practical dimensions. From this moment it became impossible to understand the dynamism of the radicalization of Dagestani Islamism separately from events within Chechnia.

**ATTEMPTS TO REALIZE THE RADICAL ISLAMIC PROJECT  
IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS: CHECHNIA AND DAGESTAN  
(1997-1999)**

What was the radical Islamic project? It was a project of *alternative stabilization*: the establishment of Islamic order was requested to stabilize the society and salvage it from social, economic, political, and spiritual-moral crises. It was a *unifying* project: its eventual purpose was to create a united Islamic state in the Caucasus. Unsurprisingly, it was a *separatist and anti-Russian* project, aimed at dividing the North Caucasus from Russia. Lastly, it was an *expansionist* project since the independent Islamic North Caucasus was regarded as a bridgehead for the further expansion of Islam, above all toward the north, deeper into Russia with the perspective of reaching the Muslim republics of the Volga basin and creating a united Islamic space from the Black Sea to the Urals.

The geopolitical nucleus of this project was Chechnia, while the first candidate to be unified to it was Dagestan. The initiative to realize this project unarguably belonged to radical Chechen leaders and the Arabic emissaries close to them – Sh. Basaev, M. Udugov, Z. Iandarbiev, I. Halimov, Omar ben Ismail, Amir Khattab, Abu Omar as-Seif, and others. The role and influence of Arabs tangibly rose because of their military contributions (detachments of Arab commanders were one of

the most militant and efficient sub-divisions of the Chechen resistance), religious authority (many Arabs had religious educations and actually served as spiritual leaders of local religious communities), and mainly because of their financial resources, since it was through Arabic emissaries that the assistance from international Islamic organizations and funds arrived. Arabs did not intervene overtly in internal political struggles within Chechnia, appealing to Chechens to unify for the fight over Russia's presence in the Caucasus. Nevertheless, several Arab Islamic organizations ("Muslim Brothers") helped President A. Maskhadov more than others, while other (mainly those with a radical Salafi orientation) helped his political rivals, such as Basaev, V. Arsanov (vice-president of Chechnia), and others. As a result, the Arab factor provided another source of the intensification of internal conflict in Chechnia.

Bagauddin found himself as a junior partner in the geopolitical game played by Chechen and Arab extremists. The dependent position of Bagauddin became even more obvious after he and many of his supporters shifted their base to the territory of Chechnia at the beginning of 1998 for the purpose of escaping repression by the Dagestani authorities.

After the end of the war, the radical Salafis in Chechnia successfully occupied a solid position in such state structures as Sharia Guards, sharia courts, and the system of sharia security. Having been consolidated politically, they began to enforce their order on Chechen society. A significant part of the population was disturbed by the unjust punishments given by ignorant judges in sharia courts, attempts by Islamists to enforce Chechen women to wear Islamic clothes, the fight developed by them against the sale and consumption of alcohol, and thefts of petrol products. These measures were accompanied by violence toward the people, elimination of wine, and plunders of petrol wagons and small oil distillation factories.<sup>12</sup>

Trying to limit the influence of radical Islamists, Chechen president A. Maskhadov issued a law on the prohibition of Wahhabism in August 1997. Accumulating tension between Maskhadov's supporters and

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<sup>12</sup> V. Akaev, "Religiozno-politicheskii konflikt v Chechenskoi respublike Ichkeriia," *Tsentral'naiia Aziia i Kavkaz* 4:5 (1999), p. 102.

Islamists resulted in a large-scale armed conflict in Gudermes in July 1998. Only the intervention of Sh. Basaev, Z. Iandarbiev, V. Arsanov and other prominent radical figures could save the Islamists from a serious defeat.<sup>13</sup> After these events the Islamists were cast out from state structures, while the armed Salafi communities transformed into a military appendage of the radical Chechen opposition headed by Basaev. In the eyes of the population they became progressively associated with semi-criminal activities and kidnapping of people. In this way, the anticipation that radical Islamism would become a stabilizing factor in Chechnia was betrayed. On the contrary, it only facilitated the further split of the political elite and the instability of Chechnia's statehood, which had been weak even without that. In substance, radical Islamism was a banner of marginal forces counter-posing themselves against the overwhelming part of the society.

As the Islamic project suffered danger in Chechnia, its supporters progressively shifted the accent to the task to unify with Dagestan and fight against the Russian presence. The establishment of Islamic control over Dagestan with its economic, demographic, and geo-strategic resources, including the exit to the Caspian Sea, would have meant the most serious damage to Russia's position in the Caucasus, and, at the same time, would substantially have raised the geopolitical and economic status of Chechnia in international relations. Moreover, such a project would have secured the continuance of financial influx from Islamic organizations and, lastly, would have helped to dress up somehow the growing tension in Chechnia's internal politics.

In Dagestan itself, radical Salafi communities, even after the end of the Chechen war, did not hurry to enter the overt confrontation with the authorities, limiting themselves to verbal criticism of the situation in the republic. On December 23, 1997, in order to push Dagestanis toward more radical steps, Chechen warriors headed by Amir Khattab carried out an audacious raid deep into Dagestan and attacked a Russian military unit stationed in Buinaksk. At the same time, it was made public

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<sup>13</sup> A. Kudriavtsev, "Vakhkhabizm: problema religioznogo ekstremizma na Severnom Kavkaze," *Tsentrāl'naia Aziia i Kavkaz* 3:9 (2000), p. 120; V. Akaev, *Sufizm i vakhkhabizm na Severnom Kavkaze. Konfrontatsiia ili kompromiss?* (Makhachkala, 1999), pp. 30-31; M. Iusupov, "Islam v sotsial'no-politicheskoj zhizni Chechni," *Tsentrāl'naia Aziia i Kavkaz* 2:8 (2000), p. 169.

that an agreement between the representatives of the Jamaat and S. Raduev<sup>14</sup> had been signed on December 20, 1997. Not limited by the provision on mutual military aid "in cases of aggression by third parties," this agreement, in practice, recognized Bagauddin's Jamaat as the only legitimate representative of the Dagestani people.<sup>15</sup> This statement gave the agreement an extremely provocative characteristic. The wave of repressions, which followed the raid on Buinaksk, forced Bagauddin to move to Chechnia, where, as early as January 1998, he made a statement declaring, in practice, a war against the Dagestan government.<sup>16</sup> This event marked the fundamental turn in the development of Dagestani radical Islamism. From that moment the Jamaat began to transform quickly into a military-political organization overtly proposing coercive overthrow of the ruling regime. Akhtaev's sudden death in March 1998 deprived Dagestani and North Caucasian Islam of the only leader that could somehow prevent this tendency by his personal authority.

In April 1998, the "Congress of Peoples of Ichkeria (Chechnia) and Dagestan" (*Kongress narodov Ichkerii (Chechni) i Dagestana*; KNID), headed by Basaev, was created as a political instrument for mutual assistance between Dagestani and Chechen radicals. The task of this Congress was to prepare a kind of "fifth column" within Dagestan to support the Islamic project. The so-called "Islamic Peacekeeping Battalion" under Khattab's command was created to offer military support to KNID's activities.

The important step on the way to realize the Islamic project was to establish the complete control by the Salafis over villages of the Kadar

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<sup>14</sup> Chechnia's famous field commander, who at that time commanded the so-called "the Army of General Dudaev."

<sup>15</sup> "... Today we concluded an Agreement on mutual assistance between Dagestan and Ichkeria. This is a fact since today the Islamic Jamaat of Dagestan represents the interests of Dagestani people, aimed at serving Allah. And at the same time the 'Army of General Dudaev' legitimately represents the whole Chechen people because the Army firmly keeps the way of Allah, the way towards the freedom and independence of Caucasus ...," I. Rotar', "Raduev otmetilsia v Buinakskoe?," *Nezavisimaja gazeta*, 3 February 1998.

<sup>16</sup> "... The relations between the Jamaat and the pro-Russian authorities of Dagestan should be regarded as a war situation with the whole consequences deriving from this fact ... At the full scale Islamic call activated ... to carry out Jihad against infidelity and those who incarnate it ..." (*Al'-Kaf*, Grozny, May 1998, p. 4).



zone. If the removal of the militia (police) staff from there in May 1998 took place almost spontaneously as a result of a routine round of the long-repeated conflicts between the militia and local religious communities,<sup>17</sup> the factual proclamation in August 1998 that the Kadar zone was an independent Islamic territory, in which only *sharia* operated,<sup>18</sup> already appeared as an overt political challenge against the state. This perception was amplified by the actions of KNID leaders who were threatened by their armed intervention in the case that the Dagestan authorities attempted to liquidate the emerged Islamic enclave by force. The Kadar zone became a desirable base for conducting Islamic propaganda (before long, a TV transmitter was built there), while the *medresse* operating in Karamakhi became the center of military-sport preparation and jihadist indoctrination of the Dagestani Salafis.

On March 23, 1999 the leaders of Salafi communities of Dagestan and Chechnia declared the beginning of jihad and appealed to the Caucasian youth to join the "Islamic army of the Caucasus" and come to the places where Islamic military forces were stationed, carrying with them all the necessary things for living in the field.<sup>19</sup> The main theme of Bagaududin's speeches during this period was the removal of the Russian army from Dagestan. One of the ideologues of Caucasian *jihad*, Magomed Tagaev, in one of his interviews in the spring of 1999, asserted: "We will emancipate Dagestan at any price ... and without any delay, even parallel with the emancipation of Dagestan, we should emancipate the Caucasus... The summer of 1999 should become the beginning of decisive battles against the empire."<sup>20</sup> Actually, in the spring and summer of 1999 the number of provocations on the Chechen-Dagestan border and attacks on Russian military sub-units significantly increased, testifying to the intensification of the process to prepare jihad.

In August 1999, detachments of Bagaududin and Basaev invaded the mountain raions of Dagestan (Tsumadinskii and Botlikhskii), while in September they made an attempt to cross deeper into Dagestan

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<sup>17</sup> Z. Arukhov, *Ekstremizm v sovremennom islame* (Makhachkala, 1999), p. 130; *Molodezh' Dagestana*, 29 May 1998.

<sup>18</sup> V. Il'in, "Ochag separatizma v Dagestane," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 18 August 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Bagaududin published in the newspaper *Molodezh' Dagestana*, 18 June 1999.

<sup>20</sup> *Russkaia mysl'* (Paris), No. 4269, 13 May 1999.

through Novolakskii Raion. However, at all points they were pushed back by the joint efforts of the Russian army, Dagestani militia and local self-defense detachments. Moreover, the Russian army liquidated the Kadar enclave after a two-week storm.

It is necessary to remark that the militant strategy of Bagaudin and representatives of the "external Jamaat" (i.e. Jamaat located in Chechen territory) was not shared by all the members of the "internal Jamaat," namely Salafi communities in Dagestan. Bagaudin enjoyed the largest support in the raions of mountain Dagestan, while in the foothills and plains (the circum-Caspian lowlands) many Islamists regarded that the chances to expand the Jamaat's influence steadily and peacefully had not been exhausted and that overt confrontation with the authorities would be ruinous, considering the real balance of power. Many members of the internal Jamaat looked at the increasing intervention by Chechens in the affairs of Dagestani Islam with suspicion. Understandably, the activists of the internal Jamaat had fairly strong separatist and anti-Russian feelings and some of them joined the invading warriors of Basaev. However, the religious communities within Dagestan did not try to make any organized anti-Russian protests.

In other regions of North Caucasus jihad also did not occur. On the contrary, in 1999, many members of jihadist groups moved into Chechnia and joined Chechen armed formations to realize jihad in their localities according to the desire of Basaev and Khattab. Many of them were guided not so much by idealistic considerations as by their desire to hide from prosecution from the authorities or just to earn money. Eventually, all the Chechen territory was occupied by Russian troops again and Chechen separatists returned to the tactics of partisan war, as they did in 1994-1996. The radical Islamic project in North Caucasus misfired because of several fundamental reasons:

(1) The inability of Islamists to create an attractive model of Islamic order in Chechnia. Formal steps toward Islamization of social and political life in Chechnia, including the declaration of Chechnia as an Islamic republic at the beginning of 1999, were only followed by deepening social and political chaos, lack of security, and economic catastrophe. The Chechen experience of sovereignization and Islamization was becoming progressively astonishing and repulsive for Dagestan and other Caucasian republics. Despite the difficulties of

marketization and Europeanization, the experience of East European and Baltic countries during the last decade continues to be an attractive model for a certain part of the Belarus, Ukrainian, and Moldova populations. In contrast, the Chechen model only pushed Dagestan and the whole North Caucasus back into Eurasia.

(2) Underestimation of the ethnic factor. Dagestanis perceived the march into Dagestan in August and September 1999, above all, as Chechen aggression. Accordingly, in the eyes of the Dagestan population the local Islamists immediately became the collaborators of these aggressors and national traitors. Here, Muslim solidarity did not work. The integrating potential of Islam proved to be much weaker than radical Islamists counted on.

(3) Overestimation by Islamic leaders of their potential and resources, and also underestimation of the potential and political will of the Russian leadership not to allow the separation of Dagestan from Russia and to renew control over rebellious Chechnia.

#### **THE REACTION OF THE STATE: CONTRADICTIONARY CONSEQUENCES**

During the several years before the invasion in 1999, however paradoxical it seems, it was the policies conducted by the Dagestan authorities in regard to the Jamaat that facilitated its radicalization. Until the end of the first Chechen war, the Dagestan government did not pay special attention to radical Salafi movements. Bagauddin and his people did not intervene in politics and the problem of his conflicts with the representatives of the official clergy did not appear a priority against the background of acute social-economic and ethno-political problems which literally tore the republic during the first half of the 1990s. When the Salafi movement began to activate and politicized tangibly after 1997, the state's lack of a consistent and complex strategy to counteract religious and political extremism resulted in the situation that the reactions of the authorities were limited to punitive actions against one or another step made by the Jamaat. Moreover, the hatred toward "Wahhabism" imposed by the official, pro-Sufi Spiritual Board had not

only produced a popular stereotype but also become an element of state policy. This was often expressed by the provocative behavior of militia in its relations with the members of religious communities, and illegal violation of their elementary civil rights and dignity. Such "small nagging" tactics only embittered and consolidated the Jamaat, making its position progressively anti-government. Accusations motivated only by one or another's belonging to the Jamaat motivated many young Islamists to visit Chechnia, where they quickly became convinced jihadists.

On the other hand, Islamic activists saw that the regime was incapable of giving a decisive answer to real and serious challenges to its dignity, such as the emergence of an autonomous enclave in the Kadar zone. On September 1, 1998, by signing an agreement on the principles to regulate the crises with the religious community of this zone, the Dagestan government actually consoled itself to the new state of affairs. Such a "soft" approach to the problem of the Kadar zone, as well as inconsistent and contradictory government policies which sometimes bordered on permissiveness towards the radical Salafis, were caused by a series of tactical considerations. The presence of the "Wahhabi threat" helped the Dagestan authorities to lobby their interests in the federal government more successfully. Another reason was that the Dagestan government did not receive any clear command from Moscow in regard to the Karamakhi question. The Dagestan leadership interpreted the visit of the Minister of Internal Affairs, S. Stepashin, to Karamakhi in September 1998 as a signal not to strain the situation. No less important was that the Karamakhi Salafis had strong allies such as Sh. Basaev and Khattab, who in the midst of crisis declared their readiness to offer active military help to the Karamakhi activists. Last but not least, the Karamakhi Islamists were Dargins, as were the core members of the ruling elites of Dagestan, for whom the Karamakhi activists remained, despite everything, "their own people" in the context of the rivalry between Dargins and Avars. Although strange from hindsight, it seemed completely reasonable to regard the Karamakhi activists as a counterweight against the strengthening Avar pressure, including the pressure exerted through the Spiritual Board of Dagestan, which began to politicize tangibly under mufti S.-M. Abubakarov (1996-98).<sup>21</sup> In any

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<sup>21</sup> Makarov, *Ofitsial'nyi i neofitsial'nyi islam*, pp. 19-22, 44-46.

case, however, the Jamaat interpreted the Dagestan authorities' behavior as a sign of weakness, with which the group of Islamists that proposed the most prompt shift to armed struggle for power speculated quite tactfully.

During the 1990s, other republican authorities of the North Caucasus largely shared this appeasement policy towards the radical Islamists. Astonished by the invasion of 1999, the authorities in Dagestan and other North Caucasian republics decided to demonstrate their force, running a total war against radical Islamic groups. The targets of this campaign of persecution were not only actual extremists and participants of the terrorist networks, but also many usual believers characterized by strict piety and social activeness. It was these people that composed a significant part of the so-called "lists of Wahhabis" which were compiled by the organs of the Dagestani Ministry of Internal Affairs during recent years. It was often the case that in these lists those who had no relation with religion were included. According to many local officials, politicians, and religious activists, even including the principal antagonists of Islamism, the hunting of "Wahhabis" became widely used as an instrument to explore personal and political information and also to enrich corrupt militiamen. Widespread adoption of coercive, punitive methods including methods of collective threatening of Islamic activists proved only partially effective. These methods affected some of them in just the opposite way, provoking their revenge on the representatives of the authorities in the localities, or their departure for Chechnia to fight.

Nevertheless, one should admit that wide-ranging repression against radical Islamists, such as the deportation of foreign missionaries, the closure of the representative offices of international charity funds, and the continuance of strict monitoring of the situation, helped, at least temporarily, to soften the acuteness of the problem of radical Islamism in Dagestan, particularly 1999-2000, however costly these measures were. However, it is also clear that the task to prevent a new upsurge of religious-political extremism requires reliance upon more diversified instruments. We need a more differentiated approach to the phenomenon of the Islamic movement, recognizing its heterogeneousness and the presence of the various vectors of its further evolution.

**RADICAL ISLAMISM AT THE CROSSROADS:  
BETWEEN TERRORISM AND PRAGMATIC ADAPTATION**

The military-political defeat in 1999 and the coercive liquidation of the majority of Salafi communities by law enforcement organs resulted in a deep organizational and ideological crisis of radical Islamism in Dagestan. The Salafi movement was deprived of its "head"; the previous leaders were killed in military operations or escaped from the republic to hide themselves in Chechnia, other regions of Russia, or even Middle East countries. The Jamaat ceased to exist as a single organization, splitting into many individual groups. Because of the strict control by militia and intelligence, many previous activists practically ceased to be involved in the movement. They have not found new charismatic leaders capable of consolidating and mobilizing the remnants of previous religious communities and the new generation of young believers, attracted toward Salafi ideas. One of the pretenders for this role was the former chairman of the Union of Muslims of Russia and the former deputy of the Russian State Duma, Nadir Khachilaev, who was killed in August 2003.<sup>22</sup> The direction of further transformation of the movement will be mainly determined by the factor of who will lead the present unstructured and ideologically disoriented masses of Salafi supporters.

In reality, two poles of gravitation are taking shape. On the one hand, there is a small but fanatically inclined group of jihadists who have gone underground. For these people, the incident of 1999 only confirmed the anti-Islamic substance of the Russian state and thus they are destined

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<sup>22</sup> Nadir Khachilaev was a former sportsman, who made huge money in the first half of the 1990s through semi-criminal business activities (mostly caviar production). Then he turned to politics, and in 1996 he became the head of the Union of Muslims of Russia and the deputy of the Russian State Duma. After the events of May 1998, when a crowd led by Khachilaev stormed the House of the Government in Makhachkala, he had to flee to Chechnia, but following disagreement with radical Chechen leaders he returned to Dagestan and was arrested there (or, as some claim, he handed himself over to the authorities). After several months of imprisonment and investigation he got a conditional sentence and was released in 2000. According to some testimonies, after all these trials he became a much more devoted Muslim. He tried to come back to politics, but on August 11, 2003 he was assassinated by unknown gunmen at the doorstep of his house in Makhachkala.

to continue their fight against it at any cost. They are urged on by a heated desire to obtain revenge for their comrades who were killed in battles with Russian armies and for the harassment and torture often conducted by the staff of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on suspects in connection with extremists. It was these jihadist groups that performed a number of terrorist acts and kidnappings of the representatives of the authorities, military, and militiamen during 2000-2004.

One should not overestimate the number and military and political potential of these groups. However, under the conditions of contemporary Dagestan, in particular as long as the war in Chechnia is continuing, the tendency toward jihadism will inevitably find a certain support among the population. Moreover, an analogical tendency is developing vigorously in the world Islamic movement as well. From the tactical point of view, the jihadist groups shifted from methods of uprising to sabotage-terrorist partisan actions. A new element in their activities was the use of suicide bombers, including women, though this is more characteristic for Chechen than Dagestani extremists.

For the members of these groups, armed jihad is becoming the supreme meaning of their existence and the main factor attracting them toward Islam. They were hardly interested in the idea to instill Islam into the society and to build Islamic states. In other words, concrete national and local Islamic projects, by which "traditional" Islamic movements had been guided, do not interest them. This is practically a new type of radical Islamism deprived of concrete territorial or national attachment and indulging only in total war with the enemies of Islam. One may find examples of similar mutations of Islamism in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, and other "hot points" or periodically "blazing up points" of the Islamic world. Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden incarnate this type of Islamism. A French Islamic specialist, Olivier Roy, figuratively called Al-Qaeda an "apocalyptic sect, having split out of political Islam." He characterizes this neo-fundamentalist radicalism in the following way: "Bin Laden's movement ... is never connected with real social problems; [this tendency is connected more with problems of existentialism and self-identification than with the logic of class struggle and conflicts of interests]; Bin Laden does not have any strategy to seize power in any concrete country. He gives desperate people the chance of vengeance but does not give them either hope or an alternative ... he

calls the Muslim 'people' to their conscience with the help of examples of martyrdom and moral influence of attack directed to the heart of the Babylon of our days. However, he does not have any concrete political project and promises of a bright future."<sup>23</sup> Jihadist groups in Dagestan largely correspond to these social-psychological characteristics. At the same time, they are not independent at all and, as before, have remained an object of manipulation from various sides chasing their own interests in the framework of Caucasian geopolitical rivalry.

The alternative to this destructive radicalism is pragmatic adaptation of the Salafi movement to the existing realities, its "nationalization" or steady integration into the national social-political process, as happened with many leading radical Islamist movements and organizations in the Middle East.<sup>24</sup> One may observe a similar, though yet weakly formulated, tendency in Dagestan. Here, a stratum of young, educated Islamic activists is taking shape. They are inclined to critically rethink the experience of the Jamaat in the 1990s, understand the reasons for the bankruptcy of the previous Islamic project, and work out new, more realistic guidelines for the Islamic movement in Dagestan.<sup>25</sup> For this purpose, they address the ideological heritage of A. Akhtaev and also seek answers in writings by a relatively "liberal" contemporary Islamic ideologue from Egypt, Yousef al-Qaradawi. This attitude marks a visible tendency to overcome the strict limits of conservative Salafism in Bagaudin's interpretation. They seek possibilities of legal Islamic educational, social, and, eventually, political activities in the framework of the existing secular state.

Individual Salafi communities surviving from the 1990s in several rural raions of Dagestan were located between these two poles. They did not participate in the events of 1999 and, today, not rejecting their religious views, nevertheless completely peacefully coexist in their villages with the supporters of tariqa Islam. As examples, one may list

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<sup>23</sup> O. Roy, "Ben Laden: apokalipticheskaia sekta, otklovshaiasia ot politicheskogo islama," *Konstitutsionnoe pravo: Vostochnoevropeiskoe obozrenie* 4:37 (2004), p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>25</sup> One may find the results of these attempts in an interesting dissertation by a young Dagestani political scientist, A.A. Mantaev, titled "'Vakhkhabizm' i politicheskaiia situatsiia v Dagestane" (Dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata polichicheskikh nauk, Moscow, 2002) ([http://www.yaseen.ru/files/wahabizm\\_Mantaev.doc](http://www.yaseen.ru/files/wahabizm_Mantaev.doc)).



villages of Kirovaul of Kiziliurtovskii Raion, Kvanada of Tsumadinskii Raion, and others. Members of these communities, sometimes called "Peaceful Salafis," are placed under constant control by militia, but, as a matter of fact, any illegal activities performed by them have not been recorded.<sup>26</sup> Today, it is difficult to estimate to what extent one may talk about the emergence of the solid model of peaceful integration of Salafism into Dagestani society. Several observers regard that the Salafis only changed tactics and hide themselves, and are only waiting for an advantageous situation to take up arms again. Nevertheless, the description above testifies to at least the diversity of the further development of the radical Islamist movement in Dagestan.

#### CONCLUSIONS

By all accounts the peak of activities of radical Islamism in Dagestan has passed. Despite its visible activeness, jihadism is progressively transformed into a marginal, peripheral trend, which will remain a more or less relevant background factor for a long time but will not have strategic, human and other resources for a qualitative breakthrough. This is not to say that there will be no episodic outbreak of radicalism, but obviously the possible outbreak will hardly achieve the level of 1999. Simultaneously, a tendency toward the integration of the Islamic movement into the social-political life of the republic is growing. This contradictory tendency promises to soften the problem of extremism on the one hand, but on the other, may transform into a complete change of the whole political-ideological landscape of Dagestan. As for the mobilizing potential of radical Islamism, already today we are observing its obvious limits. The radical Islamic project is not able, today or in the future, to become a unifying and stabilizing factor in the mosaic of Dagestani society, in which ethnicities and clans have remained the most important determinants of political behavior. The factor of radical Islamism by itself is not able to undermine the

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<sup>26</sup> The author's talks with Kirovaul residents at the village's "traditionalist" mosque and with the officials of the Kiziliurt raion administration, Kirovaul Village, Kiziliurt Raion, 12-13 November 2002, 12 and 20 August 2003.

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stability of the present political regime in Dagestan. However, in case of critical exacerbation and/or accumulation of social, economic, and ethno-political contradictions, the Islamic factor may possibly play a role as the last straw in causing instability.