

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

**RELIGIOUS AND
POLITICAL ELITES
IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS:
FORMATION,
IDEOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS,
AND PRACTICAL OPPOSITION**

Vakhit AKAEV

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor,
Chief Researcher at the Ibragimov Scientific Research Institute,
Russian Academy of Sciences
(Grozny, the Russian Federation)*

ABSTRACT

This article highlights the main factors relating to the formation of the religious and political (Islamic) elites in the Northern Caucasus caused by Gorbachev's perestroika, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reforms conducted in Russia, the creation of an ideological vacuum, and the birth of market relations. The sociocultural context that formed has given rise to an Islamic revival, the penetration of Salafi (Wahhabi)

ideas into the region, and the formation of a neo-clergy that is not only claiming a leading role in the religious life of Muslims, but also active participation in politics, right down to preparing a state coup.

Today, the official and unofficial Muslim elites of the Northern Caucasus are in a state of confrontation; despite this, certain steps are nevertheless being taken to establish relations.

KEYWORDS: *elites, religious and political elites, traditional Islam, the Northern Caucasus, Russia, Islamic revival, Sufism, Salafism, Wahhabism, conflicts, contradictions, formation of the clergy, neo-clergy.*

Introduction

The word “elite” implies the part of society that, possessing real power, has an influence on social processes; it can be official (formal) or unofficial (informal); the representatives of the latter do not possess power, but have sufficient levers of influence on society. The elite is an important and inseparable part of society, often oriented toward resolving the economic, political, and religious-cultural assignments it has to deal with.

This research focuses on the formation of a contemporary religious and political elite in the Northern Caucasus and the conflict between the formal (made up of representatives of traditional Islam), officially supported by the regional power bodies, and informal clergy (Salafi-Wahhabi), examined from the viewpoint of their ideological positions.

The Formation of New Religious Elites

The formation of religious elites in the Northern Caucasus has a long enough history that can be broken down into several stages.

- The first stage is related to the activity of the clergy that headed the national liberation movement of the mountain dwellers against the expansionist czarist policy, whereas after it was repressed, it adapted to the changed political, economic, and social conditions.
- The second stage came during Soviet times; it is characterized by pandering to the traditional Muslim clergy, which was followed by repressions.
- The third stage was generated by Gorbachev’s perestroika, ideological pluralism, and the formation of different parties and movements in the Soviet Union.

During perestroika in the Muslim regions of the Soviet Union, an Islamic revival began, which was manifested in believers being liberated from political and ideological restrictions; religious ideas that paved the way to radical and extremist movements became widespread.

The factors listed below played a decisive role in the Islamic revival in the Northern Caucasus:

- (a) liberation from the communist dictate and formation of conditions for Muslims to freely engage in religious rituals;
- (b) building mosques, opening Islamic educational establishments, publishing religious literature, and so on;
- (c) penetration into the region of politically oriented nontraditional Islam trends;
- (d) opposition between the local religious traditions and ideas of Wahhabism.¹

¹ Different aspects of this problem were analyzed in some of our publications: V. Akaev, “Religious-Political Conflict in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria,” in: *Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia*, Utrikespolitiskainstitutet, Stock-

The following trends can be traced in the spiritual-religious sphere of the Northern Caucasus: dogmatic theology, fiqh of the Shafi‘i and Hanafi madhhabs, Sufism (Tariqa), and the Salafi movement.²

It should be noted that Salafism was not widespread among the believers of Daghestan and Chechnia either in czarist or in Soviet times, and very few people in the region knew about it. As for the Shafi‘i and Hanafi madhhabs, as well as Sufism, they have a long history in the Northern Caucasus.

Since the end of the 1980s, certain religious people have become much more active in the Northern Caucasus. For example, the Islamic activists of Daghestan have often accused the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus (SAMNC) headed by mufti M. Gekkeev (a Balkarian by origin) of corruption and alienation from the spiritual needs of ordinary believers.

This deprived M. Gekkeev of his post and caused the SAMNC to break down into several republican spiritual administrations (muftiates): the Chechen-Ingushetian, Kabardino-Balkarian, Karachaevo-Circassian, Adighe, and North Ossetian. Representing the religious interests of Muslims, they determined the domestic and foreign policy of their communities and their relations with the government.

This structural split had its pluses. The republican muftiates began paying more attention to their republic’s internal religious problems: mosques were built, religious schools opened, the number of Muslim pilgrims increased, and printing of the Quran and other religious literature was established. Ordinary people and all kinds of sponsors, including foreign, began offering financial assistance.

The activity of the supporters of Wahhabism, who remained underground during Soviet times, has been having a significant influence on the formation of a nontraditional Muslim clergy. These supporters became legalized when the All-Russia Nongovernmental Religious-Political Organization (the Islamic Revival Party [IRP]) was established on 9 June, 1990 in Astrakhan. All of its program documents set forth tasks aimed at restoring Islam among the Soviet peoples who traditionally confess this religion, ridding the religious practice of Muslims of everything imposed from the outside, and returning to the original sources—the Quran and Sunnah.³

According to its ideology, the IRP was a Salafi organization that called for rejecting the traditional Islam practiced among Soviet Muslims and returning it to the canons that existed during the time of the Prophet Mohammad and the first righteous caliphs.

Avarians A.-K. Akhtaev, B. Kebedov, and A. Kebedov, Azerbaijani D. Heydar, Tatar V. Sadur, and Russian S. Dunaev, as well as Chechens I. Khalimov and A. Deniev participated in establishing the IRP. As Zelimkhan Yandarbiev notes, the latter was elected as regional leader, but was soon replaced, since he was “unable to cope with the organizational functions required of him and his actions diverged from the party’s goals and tasks.”⁴

Representatives of different ethnicities took part in the IRP congress: Tajiks, Uzbeks, Karachaevs, and so on. As K. Khanbabaev notes, “A.-K. Akhtaev was elected chairman (amir) of the IRP Coordinating Committee, and A. Kebedov and B. Magomedov (Kebedov.—V.A.) became the party coordinators in the Northern Caucasus and Daghestan.”⁵

holm, 1999, pp. 47-58; idem, “Mufti Kadyrov: Person, Religious Figure, Politician,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5, 2000; idem, “Conflicts between Traditional and Non-traditional Islamic Trends: Reasons, Dynamics, and Ways to Overcome Them (based on North Caucasian documents),” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (50), 2008; idem, “The Conflict between Traditional and Non-traditional Islam in the North Caucasus: Origins, Dynamics and the Means for its Resolution,” NUI Working Paper, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo, 2008, 20 pp.; idem, *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. by G. Yemelianova, Routledge, London, New York, 2010, pp. 62-81, etc.

² See: A. Malashenko, *Islamskie orientiry Severnogo Kavkaza*, Moscow Carnegie Center, Gendalf, Moscow, 2001, p. 59.

³ See: I. Ermakov, D. Mukulsky, *Islam v Rossii i Sredney Azii*, Lotos, Moscow, 1993, p. 176.

⁴ Z. Yandarbiev, *Chechnia—bitva za svobodu*, Lvov, 1996, p. 482.

⁵ K.M. Khanbabaev, “Etapy rasprostraneniya vakhkhbizma v Dagestane,” in: A.M. Abdullaev, M.M. Omarov, Z.S. Arukhov, et al., *Alimy i uchenye protiv vakhkhbizma: Sbornik*, Dag Book Publishers State Unitary Enterprise: Makhachkala, 2001, p. 108.

Later some participants of that forum with moderate religious-political views about the spread of the idea of Salafism (fundamental values) began taking specific political steps. While A. Akhtaev continued to support the moderate wing of Wahhabism (Salafism), B. Kebedov and his student A. Angutaev (a member of the IRP and leader of the Daghestani Muslims living in Astrakhan) went the route of religious radicalism and extremism.

The activity of A. Akhtaev, who had both a secular and religious education, was of an enlightening and ideological nature; he called on the Muslims of Daghestan and Chechnia to remain faithful to the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammad. As for B. Kebedov and A. Angutaev, they were aggressive toward their opponents and in favor of the political consolidation of Muslims and of creating an Islamic state (as the only possible organization of the Muslim Ummah).

The members of the IRP who moved to Daghestan, Chechnia, Ingushetia, and Karachaevo-Circassia successfully opposed the corruption of bureaucrats and the official clergy who supported Sufi (or national) Islam; they were able to draw some of the young people to their side.

As well-known researcher of the emergence and spread of Islam in Daghestan K. Khanbabaev noted, "... at the end of the 1980s, illegal formations of a religious-political fundamentalist Islamic trend appeared in several cities and districts of Daghestan and Chechnia, which was subsequently called Wahhabism."⁶

I would like to clarify at this point that underground unions of Wahhabis were not created in Chechnia. However, there were illegal religious schools where the Quran was taught, although their relation to Wahhabism is still unclear.

After the IRP was formed, Wahhabi groups (jamaats) began emerging throughout the Northern Caucasus that created their own educational and, later, terrorist centers. Young people, primarily from poor families, were recruited for studying the "pure" religion and military affairs necessary for building a so-called Islamic state.

This was precisely how the religious-political Wahhabi elite and its social base was formed. Some of the young people from Daghestan, Chechnia, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Circassia fell under its influence. They proved to be particularly perceptible to the social and religious innovations.

Goals of the Salafi-Wahhabi Clergy and Conflict with Traditional Islam

The social changes that occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union destroyed the entire former way of social and personal life and led to the formation of an ideological vacuum. Market relations, democratic values ... and corruption began to develop in the post-Soviet expanse. The Wahhabi leaders expressed acute discontent about the changes going on and called for creating a fair society, which could only be built, as they claimed, within the framework of an Islamic state. They found fertile ground for their propaganda among young people.

In this way, the Wahhabis pursued extremely far-reaching goals: they intended to weaken the influence of traditional Islam on society, push the official clergy to the periphery of religious and public life, overturn secular power, restore Shari'a values, and build an Islamic state by carrying out religious-political propaganda among young people.

⁶ K.M. Khanbabaev, op. cit., p. 105.

As former chairman (mufti) of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (SAM KBR) Sh. Pshikhachev notes, “at the end of the 1990s, several alarming factors prompted me to reflect on the spread of Wahhabism in Kabardino-Balkaria at that time, as well as on the need to fight this essentially anti-Islamic phenomenon.”⁷

He goes on to claim that in those years, most leaders of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic regarded the position of the official clergy as an attempt to disavow the opinion of their opponents (i.e. the Wahhabis) in society’s eyes, or as an internal “showdown” within the republic’s Muslim Ummah.

Sh. Pshikhachev gives the following example: “When in 1996, a certain A. Kazdokhov came to Nalchik with a group of young believers from Baksan with the intention of ‘replacing’ the leaders of the SAM KBR, and then declared for all the world to hear that he was ready to present 600 bayonets capable of ruining the life not only of the SAM leaders, but also of the republican government(!), the power structures failed to make an adequate response.”⁸

He explains the absence of response from the KBR government as follows: “Chaos and ‘democracy’ reigned in the country, amid which the church, separated from the state, was forced to solve government tasks by itself in order to prevent the country from falling apart and its people being destroyed.”⁹

At the beginning of the 1990s, conflict situations between the official and unofficial clergy arose frequently in Daghestan, Checheno-Ingushetia, and Karachaevo-Circassia. This was related to the activity of the Wahhabis, who were opposed to traditional Islam, regarding it as misguided thinking (*bid’a*). They called on Muslims to follow the way of “pure” Islam, considering themselves to be its exclusive vehicle. This is what happened in Tatarstan and the Volga Region where the young clergy (neo-clergy), who had received their education in Egypt and other Muslim countries, were in favor of setting traditional Islam to rights. They felt it should be reformed and brought into correspondence with Salafism, which demands strict adherence to the Quran and Sunnah.

In Daghestan, the mufti of this republic, S. Abubakarov, was actively opposed to the new clergy in the form of Wahhabis, as was the spiritual leader of the Muslims, Sufi Said Afandi al-Chirkawi.¹⁰ Thanks to their joint efforts, supported by the government, the plans of the Wahhabis, who were set on seizing the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Daghestan (SAMD), were undermined. The newspaper *Dagestanskaia pravda* reported on a meeting between members of the SAMD and representatives of the Federal Security Service, during which it was agreed that coordinating joint actions were needed to oppose Wahhabism.¹¹

Mufti of Daghestan S. Abubakarov¹² admitted in an interview in February 1998 that at the beginning of the 1990s, he and the Wahhabis were defending the right to freedom of confession and wanted land to be allotted for building mosques,¹³ but soon understood that “these people were pawns in someone else’s game.” Later he said: “A little more than six years have passed and now we have night fighting, shooting in broad daylight, taking hostages... The situation has gotten out of hand.”¹⁴

⁷ Sh. Pshikhachev, “Osnovnoi prichinoi napadeniia na Nalchik bylo to, chto ... ono dolzhno bylo proizoiti pri liubykh obstoiatelstvakh, v liubom, dazhe samom idealnom obshchestve,” *Severny Kavkaz* (Nalchik), 15 November, 2005.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ This Sufi sheikh, who enjoyed great respect in Daghestan, was killed at the end of August 2012 in his home during a terrorist act organized by Aminat Kurbanova (Saprykina). The criminals were able to organize a double terrorist act, as the result of which 14 people were killed and more than 100 injured in the sheikh’s yard that day.

¹¹ See: *Dagestanskaia pravda*, 16 March, 1994.

¹² He was killed during a terrorist act carried out in August 1998 near the Juma mosque in Makhachkala.

¹³ See: L. Lavrova, *Moe oruzhie—slovo*, Interview with the mufti of Daghestan Sayidmuhammad Abubakarov, *Rodina*, Special Issue, No. 1-2, 2000, p. 192.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

Meanwhile, the conflict between the official clergy and the government (defense and security structures), on the one side, and the Wahhabis, on the other, escalated into a civil war that is still going on in Daghestan to this day.

Wahhabism became legalized in Chechnia when Djokhar Dudaev came to power. In 1992, an Islamic Center was set up at the Promavtomatika NGO in Grozny, which became a place for regular meetings of Wahhabis, at which Daghestanis A. Akhtaev and B. Kebedov, Chechen A. Mataev (one-legged Akhmad from Bachi-Yurt), as well as lecturers invited from Muslim countries spoke; they explained the essence of “pure Islam” (that is, Wahhabism) and jihad to the young people.

I. Khalimov, M. Udugov, I. Umarov, and Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, who all occupied high government posts under Djokhar Dudaev and Aslan Maskhadov, were active participants in the activity of this center. At one time, it was they who raised the issue of introducing Shari‘a rule in Chechnia. The official clergy responded by saying that a transfer to this type of rule should be carried out gradually, keeping in mind how ready the population was for this and the corresponding conditions.

As Zelimkhan Yandarbiev noted, even before the beginning of the Russian-Chechen war of 1994, the “need to build an Islamic Chechen state of Ichkeria” was taken into account.¹⁵ When clarifying his words, he said that the Congress of Chechen People held in November 1994 at the Presidential Palace in Grozny posed the question of changing the name of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria to the Islamic Republic.¹⁶ It should be made clear that it was not the official clergy of Chechnia that pursued this goal, but the supporters of Islamic reforms who espoused the ideology of Wahhabism.

During and after the first Russian-Chechen war (1994-1996), the Wahhabis taking active part in the fight against the federals became much more active in Chechnia; they described it as a jihad aimed at bringing Islam to victory in the Caucasus.

Djokhar Dudaev, who was not receptive to Wahhabism since his relatives adhered to the values of traditional Islam, forced mufti of Chechnia M. Alsabekov, and then his deputy Akhmad Kadyrov (appointed instead of M. Alsabekov), to declare a gazawat against the Russian army before the beginning of the hostilities.

During the hostilities, the following situation developed in Chechnia: newly formed Shari‘a courts functioned in the territory controlled by Djokhar Dudaev and his supporters, while secular ones operated in the territory controlled by the federals.

After 6 August, 1996, when Grozny was liberated from the federal troops, the situation in Chechnia drastically changed. The federal power structures were eliminated; judicial functions were performed by military field courts consisting mainly of Wahhabis. Accusations were primarily made against those who cooperated with the Russian government, that is, carried out “illegal acts.”

The secular courts created in Grozny during 1995-1996 were paralyzed and later, in October 1996, disbanded by a decree of acting President of Ichkeria Zelimkhan Yandarbiev. The same decree established a Supreme and district Shari‘a courts in Ichkeria, the judges mainly being representatives of Wahhabism.

B. Kebedov, who moved to Gudermes in 1997 after he was “exiled” from Daghestan with his followers by the law-enforcement structures of this republic, carried out training of the leaders of the Shari‘a courts. Leader of the Daghestani Wahhabis B. Kebedov called his move to Chechnia “hijra.”

The establishment of Shari‘a courts in Ichkeria carried out under Zelimkhan Yandarbiev’s decree was the legal foundation for the consolidation, religious-legal training, and strengthening

¹⁵ Z. Yandarbiev, *Chei khalifat?* Gabala, 2001, p. 74.

¹⁶ See: *Ibidem*.

of the positions of the supporters of Wahhabism who pushed the Sufi clergy to the periphery of social life.

This aggravated relations between the Wahhabis and representative of the official mufti Akhmad Kadyrov in 1996; at times they became conflictive in nature. In his public statements made at parliament meetings, among other places, Akhmad Kadyrov said that the Wahhabis were extremists who had nothing to do with pure Islam and presented a threat to society and the state.

When analyzing the relations between traditional Islam and Wahhabism in Dagestan, K. Khanbabaev wrote that “from 1995 to 1999, clashes between followers of traditional Islam (Tariqa followers) and the Wahhabis were regular and often ended in bloodshed and death.”¹⁷

It is important to note in this respect that the well-known Dagestani political and religious figures opposed to the Wahhabis, among whom are mufti S. Abubakarov, ministers M. Gusaev and Z. Arukhov, deputy mufti A. Tagaev, institute of theology director M. Sadykov, deputy mufti of the KCR I. Bostonov, and many other, were killed with the participation of Islamic radicals and extremists.

Since the end of the 1990s, trends have been noted in the Northern Caucasus that can be called a “shoot-off” of the educated representatives of traditional Islam who uphold “the religion of their ancestors.” Today this religion in no way fits Russian modernization and world globalization, and is considered the main hindrance to the social and democratic reforms.

At the beginning of 1998, leaflets from a certain “Headquarters of the Central Liberation Front of Dagestan” were spread in Dagestan calling on Muslims to drive the Russian troops from the republic. They also stated that mujahedeen had begun liberating the Caucasus “from the Russian occupants—executioners of the people.”¹⁸

In order to create an Islamic caliphate in the Caucasus, a Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan (CPID) was created in Grozny in April 1998 headed by Shamil Basaev. Its members were Khattab, B. Kebedov, M. Udugov, Adallo, I. Khalimov, M. Tagaev, Z. Yandarbiev, M. Mukozhev, and others.

One of the most important tasks of this organization was to liberate the Muslims of the Caucasus from the Russian yoke. Stating there was no legitimate power in Dagestan, its representatives repeatedly threatened the pro-Russian leadership of this republic, accusing it of repressing the local Muslims. Over time, the activity of the CPID acquired an extremist-terrorist nature.

On 14 July, 1998, a major conflict occurred on the basis of a domestic argument in Gudermes between the Wahhabis of B. Kebedov and the guards of S. Yamadaev. Field commanders A. Baraev and Abdul-Malik Mejidov, who headed military Shari‘a structures made up of Wahhabis, supported B. Kebedov.¹⁹

Representatives of traditional Islam began coming to Gudermes from all over Chechnia to help the guards. Mufti of Ichkeria Akhmad Kadyrov, who criticized the extremist activity of the Wahhabis, also spoke out in support of the traditionalists. In turn, President of Ichkeria Aslan Maskhadov called on the mosque imams and local power bodies “to drive the Wahhabis from their territory.”²⁰

In the meantime, the Wahhabis moved to Urus-Martan, where they established another terrorist center, the most active members of which were the Akhmadov brothers, who committed cruel crimes in Ichkeria and beyond.

¹⁷ See: K.M. Khanbabaev, op. cit., pp. 114-115; E.F. Kisriev, *Islam i vlast v Dagestane*, OGI, Moscow, 2004, pp. 148-149.

¹⁸ Quoted from: I.P. Dobaev, *Islamsky radikalizm v mezhdunarodnoi politike*, Rostov-on-Don, 2000, p. 182.

¹⁹ V.Kh. Akaev, *Islam: sotsiokulturnaia realnost na Severnom Kavkaze*, North Caucasian Scientific Center, Higher School Publishers, Rostov-on-Don, 2004, p. 159.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 160.

In order to eliminate the threat posed by Wahhabism, representatives of the traditional Muslim clergy of the Northern Caucasus created a Coordinating Center in Nazran (Ingushetia); it included the muftis of Daghestan, Chechnia, Ingushetia, North Ossetia-Alania, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachaevo-Circassia. Mufti of Ingushetia M. Albogachiev was elected for a year term as chairman of the center called upon to carry out peacekeeping assignments in the region, achieve stability, and stop Wahhabism from spreading.²¹

On the initiative of mufti of Ichkeria Akhmad Kadyrov, a Congress of Muslims of the Northern Caucasus was convened in Grozny on 25 July, 1998. This forum, which was the first after the collapse of the Soviet Union to unite representatives of the traditional Muslim clergy of the Northern Caucasus, severely criticized the activity of the supporters of Wahhabism, and recognized the trend itself as anti-Islamic and extremist. For example, Akhmad Kadyrov openly stated that many power structures of Ichkeria had been contaminated by Wahhabism.²²

The Daghestani Wahhabis stood for the Shari'a-ization of society; the so-called Kadar Zone, where Darginians lived, became the starting point of this process; it included the villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, Kadar, and Vanashimakhi. As R. Silantiev testifies, "at the beginning of August 1998, the Wahhabis set up armed posts on the road into Karamakhi, and on 15 August declared that a separate Islamic territory, which lived according to the laws of the Shari'a and did not recognize the Russian Constitution, had been created around the villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, and Kadar."²³

This caused a flare-up in the religious-political situation in Daghestan. The republican authorities were faced with the task of returning the Kadar Shari'a enclave to Russian jurisdiction; the solution to the problem proved rather ingenious.

On 3 September, 1998, Sergey Stepashin, who was Russian Minister of Internal Affairs at the time, came to Karamakhi and made several conciliatory statements. Cautioning against pinning "Wahhabi" and "extremist" labels on people, he said: "We have freedom of confession ... we will help you peacefully in every way we can, I give you my word. No one will fight a peaceful population." He was presented with a sheepskin cloak and dagger and seen off with three exclamations of "Allah akbar."²⁴

However, literally a year later (in August-September 1999), the "Islamic republic" in the Kadar Zone was eliminated during combat action between the Wahhabis and troops of the Russian Defense Ministry.

Religious radicals, which the North Caucasian Wahhabis undoubtedly were, posed a threat not only to citizens confessing traditional Islam, but to societies with multicultural traditions in general. They used illegal methods to establish their influence among the Muslims. They regarded anyone who did not accept their ideology and carried out violent acts against them as their enemies.

Wahhabism in the Northern Caucasus evolved not only toward religious, but also political extremism. The Wahhabis acted aggressively toward the representatives of traditional Islam, right down to using physical force. They openly engaged in confrontation with the authorities and the official Muslim clergy. Representatives of the official clergy, in turn, supported the authorities and took steps to oppose Wahhabism.²⁵

²¹ V.Kh. Akaev, "Sufizm i vakhkhabizm na Severnom Kavkaze," Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, *Applied and Urgent Ethnological Research Studies Series*, No. 127, RAS, Moscow, 1999, p. 16.

²² V.Kh. Akaev, *Islam: sotsiokulturnaia realnost na Severnom Kavkaze*, p. 163.

²³ R.A. Silantiev, *Islam v sovremennoi Rossii*, Encyclopedia, Algoritm, Moscow, 2008, p. 296.

²⁴ A. Cherkesov, "Tango nad propastiu," available at [<http://www.polit.ru/article/2004/09/07/1999/>].

²⁵ See: V.Kh. Akaev, *Sufizm v kontekste arabo-musul'manskoi kultury*, Dissertation for a doctor of philosophical science diploma, Rostov-on-Don, 2004, p. 337.

Chechen Wahhabis A. Baraev, M. Tsagaraev, and the Akhmadov brothers were known as murderers and kidnapers, their victims also being foreigners. According to available data, A. Baraev and the Akhmadov brothers kidnapped four foreigners, who were later executed.

The supporters of North Caucasian Wahhabism are also thought to participate in international terrorism.

The terrorist acts in Buynaksk, Moscow, and Volgodonsk (1999), as well as in Kaspiisk (2002), which caused the death of several hundred citizens and significant destruction, are attributed to A. Gachiiiev and several Daghestani Wahhabis. It should be noted that although Chechens did not participate in these acts, some representatives of the official power bodies and media declared that these acts bore a Chechen mark.

A. Gachiiiev is also notorious for the fact that he organized groups of Wahhabis in certain population settlements of the Karachaev Republic and has repeatedly entered into conflicts with representatives of traditional Islam, accusing them of all kinds of sins. This has aggravated the religious and political situation in the republic.²⁶

The extremist and at times criminal activity of the leaders of Wahhabism and their followers has paralyzed political and spiritual-cultural life of the population of Daghestan and Chechnia.

In the summer of 1999, the Chechen field commanders and Wahhabis headed by Shamil Basaev made an attempt to overthrow Aslan Maskhadov. This attempt was prevented thanks to strong opposition by Vice Premier of Ichkeria Khamzat (Ruslan) Gelaev, who was a follower of traditional Islam.

Soon Wahhabis and militants headed by B. Kebedov, Shamil Basaev, and Khattab, striving to create an Islamic caliphate in the Caucasus, moved their field of operation to Daghestan. As K. Khanbabaev notes, "from the beginning of 1998 to August 1999, armed contingents of Wahhabis carried out repeated attacks on checkpoints and border contingents along the entire perimeter of the Daghestani-Chechen border."²⁷

In July 1999, religious extremists headed by M. Kuramagomedov and B. Magomedov (Kebedov) made a forceful attempt to create an independent Islamic territory (similar to Karamakhi) in the population settlements of Echeda, Khvainikalo, Sildi, and Gakko of the mountainous Tsumada district of Daghestan. But their actions were intercepted by the joint efforts of the law-enforcement bodies and Russian Ministry of Defense. Finding themselves surrounded, the Wahhabis turned to Basaev and Khattab for help, who entered the Botlikh district on 7 August with 2,000 fighters.

This incendiary campaign raised a wave of accusation not only in Daghestan, but also in Chechnia. Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, who represented traditional Islam, called on Ichkerian President Aslan Maskhadov to take every possible step to prevent the Wahhabis driven from Daghestan from entering Chechnia, but this was all in vain.

After ousting the Wahhabis from Daghestan, the federal troops began full-scale combat action; the exceptionally brutal and destructive second Russian-Chechen war began. The crimes committed during this war were not assessed properly by the world community. For the second time in four years, the Chechens were subjected to violence and insult; the republic's economy and social sphere were totally destroyed, and the population was deprived of elementary conditions for normal living.

Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, an open opponent of the Wahhabis, played an important role in stopping the hostilities and carrying out rehabilitation of destroyed Ichkeria. On 12 June, 2000, he was appointed as head of the administration of the Chechen Republic by a decree of the Russian president, and on 5 October, 2003, he was elected president.

²⁶ See: *Ibid.*, p. 338.

²⁷ K.M. Khanbabaev, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

Akhmad Kadyrov exerted a great deal of effort to consolidate Chechen society; he achieved amnesty of the fighters, restored the republican power bodies, and strengthened traditional Islam. In his religious and political activity, he relied on the followers of the tariqahs (Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya), particularly the Qadiriyya wurd of sheikh Kunta-haji,²⁸ which was widespread among the Chechens after the end of the Caucasian war.

In addition to the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya trends, representatives of traditional Islam represented by Sufism made up the social foundation of Akhmad Kadyrov's struggle against the Wahhabis' religious extremism and terrorism. This was why the role of the traditional clergy began growing stronger during his presidency.

This policy also continued under Ramzan Kadyrov. As of today, the activity of the so-called Wahhabi jamaats in Chechnia has been entirely intercepted.

The joint efforts of the power bodies and official clergy of Chechnia were able to minimize the influence of Wahhabism on young people. Traditional religious values are being revived, mosques and hafiz schools are being built, and the ziyarats of Chechen sheikhs and ustazes are being restored. It should be noted that in the past, such undertakings were carried out using the modest funds of ordinary believers.

Whereas in the Chechen Republic (CP), the wave of religious radicalism and extremism declined, in neighboring republics it, on the contrary, began to gain momentum. This is explained by the fact that many Muslim radicals and Wahhabis were driven from Chechnia to Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria. Conflicts began emerging with increasing frequency in these republics related to the contradictions between the official clergy and the leaders of "pure" Islam (or Salafism), who accused the first of supporting a corrupt government and not wishing to defend the interests of the Muslims. Moreover, the official clergy was largely blamed for the social injustice that existed.

As I. Tekushev writes, "after A. Pshikhachev headed the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria (SAM KB) in 2002, the republic's Muslim community split into two hostile camps—Muslim traditionalists (or conservatives), on the one said, and Salafis, on the other."²⁹

The Salafis of Kabardino-Balkaria accused mufti A. Pshikhachev of being in cahoots with the special services and demanded his dismissal. In 2003, dozens of mosques were closed down in this republic where young Muslims opposed to the official clergy gathered who upheld the ideology and practice of Salafism. Appeals were made at their meetings not to succumb to the SAM KB, and religious groups were organized similar to Daghestani and Chechen jamaats. As a result, the official clergy in the person of mufti A. Pshikhachev accused the Salafis of radicalism and extremism.

At the beginning of 2005, a conflict came to a head in the KBR between the official clergy (as represented by the muftiate) and the authorities, on the one hand, and the leaders of Wahhabism, on the other. This conflict escalated into the tragic events that occurred in Nalchik; they are described in detail in a book called *Islam in the Northern Caucasus: Past and Present*, published in 2011 in Prague.

In it, I. Tekushev writes: "The conflict between the SAM KBR and the community that confessed revived Islam (Salafism) began way before the time when A. Pshikhachev took the post of head

²⁸ V.Kh. Akaev, *Sheikh Kunta-haji: zhizn i uchenie*, Grozny, 1994, 128 pp. In this book, the author gives a detailed description of the life, activity, arrest, and exile by the czarist authorities of Chechen sufi Kunta-haji Kishiev, follower of the Qadiriyya Tariqa, analyzes his religious and philosophical teaching, and notes his role in the spiritual life of the Chechens.

²⁹ I. Tekushev, "Okhota na religioznykh deiateley, ili Strelba po traditsionnomu islamu," in: *Islam na Severnom Kavkaze: istoria i sovremennost*, ed. by I. Tekushev, K. Shevchenko, Medium Orient, Prague, 2011, p. 143.

of the SAM KBR. But it was when he took this post that the contradictions existing in the community escalated into open opposition.³⁰

The above-mentioned conflict gained momentum after the Salafis began calling for the elimination of destructive funeral customs and rituals, withdrawal of Islam from oblivion, and its transformation into a full-blooded functional system. M. Mukozhev and A. Astemirov, who received an Islamic education in Arab countries, were the leaders of the Salafi community in KBR. It was the SAM KBR that sent them there to study.

The Salafis began being brutally repressed by the defense and security structures. They were arrested, beaten, tortured, kidnapped, and sometimes had crosses shaven on their heads. This situation prompted representatives of the opposition Islamic youth (600 people) to send the federal authorities a written complaint about the tyranny of the defense and security officers, but no steps were taken.

As I. Tekushev notes, “after all the ways to stop the violence were exhausted, the radical wing of the community headed by A. Astemirov joined the ranks of the Chechen fighters and one hundred people attacked the republic’s defense and security structures. On 13 October, 2005, between 9.00 and 10.00 in the morning Moscow time, Islamists attacked several facilities in Nalchik at once. This resulted in 87 of the attackers being killed by defense and security officers, while 112 peaceful residents and 35 policemen were killed and 100 people were injured, 85 of them, law-enforcement officers.”³¹

Executive director of the International Islamic Mission, Deputy Chairman of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the Northern Caucasus Sh. Pshikhachev (the brother of A. Pshikhachev, who was killed in 2010 in a terrorist act) shared with *Severny Kavkaz* readers his opinion about the events that took place in Nalchik on 13-14 October, 2005. He claims that “the main reason for the attack on Nalchik was that ... it had to occur anyway, even in the most ideal society.”³²

The events in Nalchik resulted from the clash between representatives of official (traditional) and unofficial (Salafi-Wahhabi) clergy, whose religious-political contradictions had acquired a hostile nature. The officially clergy was unable to overcome the opposition of the Salafi leaders, but the cruel repression by the authorities of religious radicals gave rise to protest moods that turned into an armed uprising.

According to experts, there is a perceptible rise in the Russian Northwestern Caucasus in the number of communities adhering to Islam, whose members are primarily young people. Very often their activity opposes the traditional Islamic principles, as a result of which they are subjected to repression by the authorities, particularly the law-enforcement bodies.

As E. Kisriev notes, recently in Adigey, not only national movements, but also rejuvenated Islam, have become much more active,³³ which is caused by the statements of several well-known politicians about the republic possibly uniting with the Krasnodar Territory “within the framework of region enlargement.” The cited author means the spread of Islam or, to be more exact, of Salafism among the youth of the Northwestern Caucasus, where rumors are circulating about the Republic of Adigey possibly becoming absorbed by the more economically powerful Krasnodar Territory.

Such rumors often have some substance, so they could well arouse the discontent of the religious and political elites of Adigey, the generator of which is young people oriented toward Islamic values.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 144.

³¹ Ibid., p. 145.

³² *Severny Kavkaz*, 15 November, 2005.

³³ See: E.F. Kisriev, “Islam i natsionalnye otnosheniia na Severnom Kavkaze,” in: *Islam v Rossii: Vzglyad iz regionov*, Aspekt Press, Moscow, 2007, pp. 83-84.

Strike against Inter-Islamic Conciliation

A standoff is still going on in Daghestan between the official clergy supported by the authorities and the radically oriented leaders of Wahhabism who head the jamaat. Despite this, in 2012, talks began between the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Daghestan and the leaders of Salafism (Wahhabism). This dialog seemed to bring the sides closer together with respect to achieving peace and consent in Daghestan.

Sufi sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi took active part in the conciliation process. In 2010, it was he who addressed the Wahhabis who had retreated into the forests with the following words, "Leave the forests to the wild animals! Return to the human environment!" In the spring of 2012, he directly initiated a dialog in the central mosque of Makhachkala between the moderate Salafis and representatives of traditional Islam. On 28 August, 2012, sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi was killed in a terrorist act carried out by Aminat Kurbanova (Alla Saprykina). According to a more frequently expressed version, this murder was committed in order to prevent the reconciliation between the traditional Muslim clergy and supporters of Salafism-Wahhabism.

Now the mouthpiece of religious and political extremism and separatism has been taken up by the Imarat Kavkaz movement headed by D. Umarov, which hopes to create a virtual state formation called the Caucasian caliphate. On 14 May, 2012, an International Caucasian Congress (ICC) was held in Istanbul, which was the first major political campaign of the supporters of Imarat Kavkaz at the international level.

A special declaration adopted at the Congress noted that the ICC does not acknowledge the authority of Russia and its puppet regimes (Kadyrov, Magomedov, Kanokov, Evkurov, and others) and declares them illegal. Only the Imarat Kavkaz was recognized as legal. The Congress participants declared that D. Umarov, as amir of the Imarat Kavkaz, is the successor of the Caucasian military and political leaders, beginning with the times of sheikh Mansur and imam Shamil.

It should be noted that such political games were aimed at destabilizing the political situation in the south of Russia, including in the Northern Caucasus. This pursues the goal of uniting the separatist and religious extremist forces scattered throughout the Caucasus, Turkey, and European countries under Islamic slogans.

With respect to the radicalization of certain Muslims in the Northern Caucasus, experts of the Center of Situational Analysis of the Russian Academy of Sciences state the following: "In Chechnia, the uniqueness of the situation is largely determined by the fact that Ramzan Kadyrov (continuing the policy of his father Akhmat-haji) is acting as an ethnonational leader. He can be regarded as a conductor of the Islamic project that has the potential to overcome the excesses of radicalism by placing the stakes on traditional approaches that oppose Wahhabism and Salafism. But against the background of the general Russian ethnonational crisis (ideology and practice of nation-state formation), this project, unless it is adjusted, has no clear prospects."³⁴

Wahhabism is perceived as a progressive phenomenon only because it is incompatible with traditional Islam, which, incidentally, cannot be regarded as an obstacle to modernization. Traditional Islam is based on the local ethnocultural characteristics of the region and has internal adaptation potential. It is close to Russian sociocultural values, which differ significantly from those of Islamic radicalism manifested in reality as so-called Wahhabism. Without state support of the traditional (of-

³⁴ *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 4 April, 2012.

ficial) clergy, both the Northern Caucasus and the country as a whole would hardly be able to withstand the aggression of the religious radicals.³⁵

This situation has developed in the Northern Caucasus due to the antigovernment activity of the leaders of Wahhabism who are striving to use Islam against the traditional clergy and local authorities. The government-supported official clergy, which conserves the religious ethnocultural values and traditions of its ancestors, recognizes Wahhabism as a real power that threatens its own existence.

Conclusion

The formation of religious and political elites in the Northern Caucasus has been caused by different factors (historical, socioeconomic, military, and so on) related to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the appearance of new Russia.

These drastic changes have determined the spiritual emancipation of the Muslims in the region, their political activity and mobility, as well as the infiltration of nontraditional Salafi (or Wahhabi) ideas. The formation of a new type of clergy has begun that has set itself the goal of replacing traditional Islam with “pure” Islam and also creating an Islamic state in the Caucasus. This idea was embodied in the project of creating a virtual state called Imarat Kavkaz.

The opposition between the official and unofficial clergy (moderate Salafis) in the Northern Caucasus, which still exists, cannot go on for long. Both sides are well aware of this, so they are looking for ways to come together and retain their status quo.

The reconciliation process that began in Dagestan was interrupted by the murder of Sufi sheikh Said al-Chirkawi, but Chechnia, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachaevo-Circassia recognize the need to continue it.

Consent can be reached in the Northern Caucasus by overcoming religious radicalism, extremism, separatism, and, most important, strengthening unity among the Muslims of the region.

The young people living in the forests of Dagestan, Ingushetia, and the KBR must be returned to peaceful life. The matter primarily concerns those who have not committed crimes, but do not accept the corrupted authorities and diverge with the traditional clergy for ideological reasons.

The dialog that began in Dagestan between the official clergy (Tariqa followers) and Salafis has defined the general position, which requires that the sides observe a special agreement based on recognition of the Quran and Sunnah, the four madhhabs, the ban on Muslims disparaging each other, calling each other insulting names, denouncing fellow believers, and so on. It seems expedient to create a joint body for discussing and resolving contradictory issues.

However, due to the above-mentioned circumstances, the dialog has been interrupted. It stands to reason that its revival will play an important role in achieving peace and consent in Dagestani society and in the Northern Caucasus as a whole. It is obvious that there is no point in continuing the conflict.

³⁵ See: V.Kh. Akaev, “Chechensky kapkan dlia vakhkhabitov,” available at [<http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/707172/>].