Islam, Islamism and Politics in Eurasia
Report
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* IIPER is written and edited by Dr. Gordon M. Hahn unless otherwise noted. Research assistance is provided by Leonid Naboishchikov, Daniel Painter, and Daria Ushakova.

MORE ON THE CE SCHISM

On September 19th the website of the Ingushetia regional media, CheGag’s site in Ingushetia, saw the first to carry a video made during that month near the end of Ramadan by CE elite Abu Usman Dokka Usman.

04/22-04/24, 1.45PM-6.00PM, 6K and "Shelley Abus - Transitions - Rocking Slow"
3 "Shelley Abus - Transitions - Rocking Slow" con/disponibile a.
4 Kneeling, 1/2, 9 September 2010, 01:16:53, www.kneeling.com
5 Kneeling, 2 September 2010, 15:02:27, www.kneeling.com
6 "Shelley Abus - Transitions - Rocking Slow" con/disponibile a.
7 www.kneeling.com/news/09/01/01/14:17:56
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RIYADUS SALIKHIN MARTYRTS’ BRIGADE PROMISES ATTACKS ACROSS RUSSIA

The CE-affiliated Riyadh Salikhin Martyrs’ Brigade has claimed responsibility for an August explosion outside the Russian state natural gas and oil company GazProm’s headquarters in southeastern Moscow. In its message posted on the CE site Kavkaz tsentr, the RSMB states that the attack was ordered by CE amir ‘Abu Usman’ Dokku Umarov as part of its “spring-summer operations.” The RSMB warned that it “showed that we can carry out terrorist operations against well-guarded objects and it is in our power to strike blows practically at any place in Russia (Rusnya – perjorative word for Russia). All central Russia from now on is declared our zone of counter-terrorist operations.”

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PRISONERS OF AN APPROACH TO THE NORTH CAUCASUS (Response to Charles King and Rajan Menon, “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Russia’s Invisible Civil War,” Foreign Affairs, Fall 2010)

By Gordon M. Hahn

What appears below was submitted to Foreign Affairs as a response to Charles King’s and Rajan Menon’s “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Russia’s Invisible Civil War” (Foreign Affairs, Summer 2010):

In Charles King’s and Rajan Menon’s “Prisoners of the Caucasus: Russia’s Invisible Civil War” there is an enormous red herring that demands refutation. The article also suffers from adhering to the same tired and unbalanced approach – albeit in a well-informed reincarnation – seen in most writing on the Caucasus jihad. That approach identifies Russian policy and only Russian policy as the cause of the jihadi-related violence plaguing the North Caucasus. The fact is that if Russia were to recognize the North Caucasus as fully independent tomorrow, the Caucasus Emirate mujahedin would continue waging a daily campaign of violence and murder in Russia and would stand a very good chance of seizing power in most of the titular Muslim republics of the North Caucasus.

Let’s start with the red herring. The authors argue correctly for a multicausal approach in explaining the conflict. I argued the same in explaining the rise of jihadism in the North Caucasus in *Russia’s Islamic Threat* (Yale University Press, 2007). However, the authors make the untenable claim that the most frequently cited factor in the “single-factor fallacy” is the rise of radical Islam: “Explanations for the upheaval and violence in the North Caucasus tend to seize on a single root cause. The rise of radical Islam is often cited first.” A perusal of the U.S. mainstream print media’s coverage of the Caucasus jihad and a close reading of writings produced by academic and analytical circles will reveal to even the casual researcher the lack of veracity of this aspect of the fallacy. The jihadists are rarely, if ever focused on and never to the exclusion of other factors. The standard approach is to blame Russia entirely for the rise of Islamism in the region, as if the internet did not exist, Islam was not a conductor of radical Islamism, foreign mujahedin had never fought in the region, and Caucasus mujahedin have never been trained, financed, or otherwise supported by Al Qa’ida and other global jihadi elements.

The article inadvertently reveals its red herring by being in large part an exemplary representative of this jihadi-blind approach. One does not run across once in the article any of the following words: jihad, jihadism, jihadis, jihadists, mujahedin, mujahed, Caucasus Emirate, amir, amirs, etc. The words ‘Islamism’, ‘Islamist’, and ‘Islamists’ appear in total a handful of times and are used largely in passing and only in the discussion that claims the Islamist factor is the “single factor” most often cited in explaining the conflict. Neither the Caucasus Emirate (CE), the jihadists’ umbrella organization, nor its amir ‘Abu Usman’ Dokku Umarov (who is now on the U.S. State Department’s list of international terrorists), nor the CE jihadists’ Islamist theology, ideology, goals, strategy and tactics are ever mentioned by the authors. The CE jihadists’ ties and similarity to, and support for other jihadi groups fighting on other fronts in the global jihadi revolutionary movement are never mentioned. The term ‘civil war’ used in the article’s title, rather than ‘jihad’ or ‘Islamic insurgency’, says it all.

This, in fact, is the typical approach extant in the U.S. today towards this issue. The abovementioned were totally absent from the mainstream media, academia, and Russian studies communities for almost the entire first two years of the CE’s existence, despite the thousands of killed and injured it produced during that period. Scanty mention is now the norm. Only some among terrorism scholars have taken the phenomenon of Caucasus jihadism seriously. One piece of evidence that the Caucasus jihadists have been largely ignored rather than played up is *Foreign Affairs* own index of articles published.
For all the authors’ ostensible aversion to monicausal explanations when it comes to the jihadi factor, a ‘songle factor’ becomes all the rage when they offer their own explanations of things like the first post-Soviet Russo-Chechen war: “The first Chechen war was not about the Chechens suddenly deciding to rise up and slaughter their Russian neighbors because of ancient grievances. Instead, violence erupted in 1994 because then Russian President Boris Yeltsin, however justifiably, moved to prevent Chechen secession with military force. The results were ghastly. Indiscriminate Russian bombing exacted a heavy human toll, and ill-prepared Russian conscripts were mowed down as they tried to take Grozny, the Chechen capital.”

Despite the authors’ insertion of the phrase ‘however justifiable’ in reference to Yeltsin’s decision to use force to quell Chechen nationalist separatism, they do not reference the facts that would render such a decision justifiable. Before the first war even began Chechen leader Jokhar Dudaev and his radically nationalistic and atavist supporters seized power illegally, seceded illegally, began ethnic cleansing of Russians in Grozny and other parts of Chechnya, threatened Russia with attacks on nuclear power stations and the raising of “one million mujahedins,” built an illegal Chechnya armed force, committed atrocities against Russian soldiers and civilians, and began to use radical Islam as a pillar of his power. Also, before the outset of the first war, leading field commander and hero of the Chechen people, Shamil Basaev, along with 30-40 of his ‘Abkhaz battalion’ fighters, visited Al Qa’ida training camps in Khost, Afghanistan. In lieu of all this ghastliness, there is the standard, focused reference to the “ghastly” Russians’ indiscriminate bombing. To be sure, reference to the Russians’ illegal conduct of the war is requisite, but reference to it alone provides a very incomplete picture.

Moreover, the authors also contradict their own arguments against the importance of Chechen/Caucasus atavism and nationalist revenge. The ethnic Avar, imam Shamil, to whom the authors spend significant space and describe as a fighter for his version of pure Islam and pan-Caucasus independence, happens to be an idol of most Caucasians, especially Avars and Chechens. Their description of Jokhar Dudaev also suggests the motive of revenge against the Russians that the authors downplay: “Although the Jokhar Dudaev, who led the rebels in the first Chechen war, in the mid-1990s, was born just as his parents and neighbors were being crammed into cattle cars for their exile to Kazakhstan. His political motivations were largely shaped by this experience of deportation and return, as were those of other leaders from the Caucasus in his generation. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Dudaev emerged as the head of a group calling for Chechnya's independence from Russia. The result was similar to the political movements that had taken hold in the Baltic states and Ukraine prior to their independence: a secessionist cause infused with the
narrative of historical oppression.”

The last claim contained in the above quote also displays an inappropriate willingness to write-off another important cause of the conflict: the native North Caucasus culture of martial violence and blood revenge, particularly well-pronounced among the Chechens. The national independence movements in the Baltics and Ukraine never armed themselves or threatened violence. One finds it hard to imaging the Chechens taking the civil disobedience approach. A better but not perfect model for comparison would be the violent, late Soviet Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri nationalist movements in the geographically and culturally proximate south Caucasus which for some reason go unmentioned by the authors.

A rather one-sided approach seems to drive the authors’ unsubstantiated claim that Russia’s North Caucasus policy is focused “on insulating the rest of Russia from the ills of the North Caucasus.” This claim suggests that Moscow is doing nothing to solve problems in the region and is letting the Caucasus Emirate mujahedin run around freely. Nothing could be further from the truth. The North Caucasus’s regional administrations carry out aggressive counter-insurgency operations in the region, often overly aggressive ones especially in Chechnya. They also employ serious reconciliation efforts, especially in Ingushetia. Moscow in recent years has been making huge investments in reconstruction in Chechnya and the development of the entire North Caucasus economy, especially that in Ingushetia. These policies are hardly a reflection of a policy centered on insulating the rest of Russia to let the North Caucasus burn.

While there certainly have been more one-sided renderings of the North Caucasus conflict in U.S. journalistic or academic print, “Prisoners of the Caucasus” sticks to the pattern set by previous, less informed renderings. It is incomplete, one-sided, and politically correct in its refusal to examine the Caucasus Emirate’s jihadism, the main driver of today’s violence in the region. One still waits for a truly balanced analysis of the Caucasus jihad from a major U.S. elite or mass media print outlet.

The Islamist Tracks in the Interethnic Conflict in Kyrgyzstan
by Erkinbek Kamalov

This year’s June 10-13 events will remain in the minds of Kyrgyz citizens for years, even decades to come. The June days’ bloody conflict featured the harshest violence between ethnic groups – in this case between the ethnic Kyrgyz majority and the ethnic Uzbek minority that has occurred in the
southern part of Kyrgyzstan since the collapse of Soviet Union. Each party to the conflict is blaming on the other the thousands of victims and thousands more refugees and missing that resulted from those interethnic clashes.

Thus, officials of the local branch of the Kyrgyzstan security services in Jalalabad explained the outbreak of the June conflict in terms of the intensification of Uzbek separatism after the April regime change with the overthrow of the regime of Kurmanbek Bakiev. These local officials point to the speeches of the ethnic Uzbek businessman, deputy head of the officially registered Uzbek Cultural Center, and former parliamentarian Kadyrjan Batyrlov. On the eve of the June events Batyrlov, speaking on local Uzbek TV channel ‘Mezon TV’, called for an autonomous government in Uzbek-dominated territories in southern Kyrgyzstan. This reportedly sparked an angry reaction among Kyrgyz youth leading to the bloodshed of June.

But one perhaps more central participant in these tragic events has received little attention in most analyses: the region’s Islamists. Islamist groups around the world often use, ally with, or evolve from ethno-national separatist movements as, for example, the Southern Malays in Thailand, the Palestinians in Lebanon, the Moro in the Philippines, the Chechens and other Caucasus peoples in Russia, and the Uighurs in China.

Evidence of the Role of the Jihadist ‘Third Party’

Most observers here are reluctant to deny or assert the hand of so-called “third party” in this conflict, and few have tried to understand and analyze the jihadist trace in this inter-ethnic conflict, especially during its early stages. Keneshbek Dushebaev, Head of Kyrgyzstan’s State Committee for National Security, has offered such an explanation. He stated that the June conflict was organized by the Union of Islamic Jihad (UIJ), active in Central Asia, Afghanistan and the Middle East but financially supported by Kyrgyzstan ex-president Kurmanbek Bakiev’s clan. As proof he offered the following:

“As a result of April 7, 2010 events ex-President Bakiev and his clan lost their great sources of illegal profit and influence in the country. But his son Maxim Bakiev was determined to bring back all this lost influence and power. Accordingly, by the end of April he contacted with some leaders of the IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) in the United Arab Emirates. Later on, at the beginning of May in the town of Bakhorak in Badakshan, Afghanistan two members of Bakiev's clan met with representatives of the Taliban, the IMU and the United Tajik Opposition along with Mullah Abdullo, ethnic Tajik Islamicist field commander linked to Taliban Movement. At that meeting, the participants reached agreement on destabilizing the situation in Kyrgyzstan. To support the operation, the Bakiev clan promised funding in the amount of 30 million US dollar. After this meeting, in May the UIJ formed and illegally transferred a group of 15
experienced Islamic fighters of Uzbek nationality to Kyrgyzstan from Pakistan through Tajikistan territory. That group consisted of experts in IED explosions and snipers. Falsified ID cards for that group of Islamic fighters were prepared by a local citizen in a southern province of Kyrgyzstan. All the above occurred before the interethnic clash in June.⁹

Moreover, there is some evidence from Osh that things were not as they should be and that jihadis may have played the vanguard role in sparking the violence. According to eyewitnesses, including the local reporter of RFE/RL and as Kyrgyz law enforcement bodies interviewed on television, at midnight on 10 June 2010 the call to prayer or azan that issued forth from two mosques located in Osh city, Kyrgyzstan’s southern capital, were pronounced at an improper and unusual time, and ordinary people were surprised that these mosques were issuing azans. Immediately after these azans sounded, people appeared shouting “Allah Akbar” and sounds of gunfire could be heard.¹⁰ This gunfire killed people both ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks and thereby was intended to spark mass violence. It turns out that all of the imams of the two Osh two mosques where the azans were pronounced improperly had been dismissed recently by the newly appointed head of the Kyrgyzstan’s official Muslim Spiritual Board or the chief mufti of Kyrgyzstan, Chubak Hajii.¹¹

In addition, shortly after the Kyrgyz-Uzbek clashes, Tajikistan security services arrested two members of “Union of Islamic Jihad” near border with Kyrgyzstan, who were then transferred to their Kyrgyzstan counterparts. All of the detained were Kyrgyz citizens who trained in terrorist camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹²

Thus, it appears there may have been a significant role played by foreign and domestic jihadi groups in June’s violence. Although the strategic aims of jihadists and criminal clans certainly can be differ, this case may illustrate that they are still cooperating with each other in the region by employing common tactics and strategies.

The Reasons Behind the Intensification of Jihadist Activity in the Region

Intensification of Islamist groups in the territory of Kyrgyzstan can be explained by several internal and external factors.

(1) Taliban groups failed and lost many members in the war with the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan and so moved to the country’s northern provinces of the country and Tajikistan, which they have used as a springboard

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¹⁰ Interview in Kyrgyz language at www.azattyk.org/content/Kyrgyzstan_Religion_Jalilov/2110082.html
¹¹ Ibid.
for returning to the Ferghana Valley area and carrying out military operations from there deep into post-Soviet Central Asia. During his recent visit to Kyrgyzstan, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Robert O. Blake Jr., warned the Kyrgyz government that the main threat may come from Afghanistan, and therefore Kyrgyzstan needs the most robust security cooperation possible.

(2) Regime change and continuing political, social and economic dysfunction is prolonging, even exacerbating instability in Central Asia, especially in Kyrgyzstan. Changing power by way of mass demonstrations against the Bakiev regime and family clan could facilitate greater jihadist recruitment and an escalation in terrorist activity civil in Kyrgyzstan and across the region.

(3) Kyrgyzstan’s official Muslim Spiritual Board of Kyrgyzstan (MSBK) is an ineffective institution. There have been several cases of corruption involving the Muftiate over the last few years, including with mismanaged trips to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj pilgrimage. In addition, frequent internal disputes followed leadership changes within MSBK have further damaged its overall reputation among common Muslims in Kyrgyzstan.

(4) Ferghana Valley as the Central Asian Balkans. The Ferghana Valley, located on the across the borders between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is the center of radical Islam in Central Asia and a key transit route for drug traffickers and jihadists. Al Qaeda, the IDU, UIJ, the Caucasus Emirate, and even the Islamist Hisb ut-Tahrir Islami and other Islamist groups see Central Asia as a key building block in the creation of a global Islamist Caliphate. This future Central Asian Islamic state will cover four areas in Ferghan; each located in different countries, the so-called FANO - Ferghana, Andijan, Namangan and Osh.

(5) The U.S. led International Transit Center at Manas Airport in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan can be a focal point for anti-Western sentiment that accompanies and to some extent helps drive jihadism.

The threat of an expanding jihadism in Central Asia requires a coordinated international counter-terrorism response.

**Partnership Against Jihadism**

Until recently many in Kyrgyzstan thought naively and mistakenly that jihadists do not try to instigate conflict between Muslim communities or cooperate with corrupt politicians and regimes. But we must certainly know now that they are not above conspiring to provoke intra-Islamic violence and that they are not so unlike and are perfectly comfortable with, and suitable for cooperation with not only corrupt but also criminal elements to achieve their aims. Since Islamists will use any opportunity, including criminal activity and ethnic separatism, Kyrgyzstan’s government, national security services, law enforcement bodies and civilians must be equipped to combat three problems simultaneously – organized crime and drug trafficking, extremist ethno-
nationalism, and Islamism and jihadism – through deeper cooperation with their counterparts from other countries, IGOs and NGOs across the globe facing or working similar problems.

Kyrgyzstan needs and will benefit greatly from international collaborating with the above-mentioned countries and others in its fight against jihadi terrorism. Partnerships in these areas should occur both on the strategic and tactical levels and in a timely, indeed urgent, and effective manner. This should exceed the high level of cooperation extant between various jihadist groups across the region and the globe. Just as they train together in terrorist camps across the Middle East and Asia, share a common interest and goals, and are united in their battle against not only Western countries, but the entire civilized world, so should the entire civilized world joint together in battling the jihad.

More cooperation is vital in such areas as the exchange of intelligence among security services, counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency joint training and cooperation, and academic exchanges and joint research between Kyrgyzstan and other states plagued by jihadism and related threats. Specifically, the Kyrgyz Government should intensify its cooperation with the international community, especially organizations like UN, OSCE and USAID institutions in the field of security.

Bishkek must monitor the travels of young people and students who go to work and study in Middle Eastern and South Asian states, especially in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Iran and Saudi Arabia. It also must thoroughly vet and monitor the activities of Islamic humanitarian and educational agencies and NGOs working in Kyrgyzstan. All such monitoring should be carried out in accordance with Kyrgyzstan law and Bishkek’s international commitments to respect human rights. Preventive operations by security services and law enforcement bodies must not turn into witch hunts, the exclusion of opposition groups from power, or the marginalization of civil society from politics.

At the same time, society must come to realize that Islamists and jihadists, like organized crime and ultranationalism, are not only the enemy of secular government and the security services, but also of Kyrgyzstan’s entire society, its mainstream Islam, its culture, and its developing democracy. Kyrgyzstan needs a united and strong society to counter successfully the multifarious threats it and the rest of Central Asia now face and that we can no longer deny.

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on issues related to security, inter-ethnic conflicts, inter- and intra-confessional relations, and border disputes between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan at the track II and III levels.

ANNOUNCEMENT: NEW NON-PROLIFERATION/ TERRORISM STUDIES MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE AND TERRORISM STUDIES CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

The Monterey Institute for International Studies has recently opted to combine its very popular and highly regarded M.A. International Policy Studies degree specializations in Terrorism Studies and Nonproliferation Studies into a combined new M.A. Program in Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies, a program that will now have an even higher profile and greater institutional autonomy. Apart from combining two of the Institute’s strongest academic programs, this will ensure that students take the introductory courses in both subjects but will also allow them to concentrate primarily on either terrorism or nonproliferation (or, if they prefer, to focus on both subjects equally, e.g., on CBRN terrorism). As you may already know, our students have an exceptionally high success rate getting jobs in these specialized fields.

The Institute is also introducing a new one-semester (or one-year) Certificate in Terrorism Studies for professionals or students who wish to obtain specialized academic training in this subject without spending an entire two years in residence. Prospective students can be admitted into this Certificate Program without meeting the somewhat stringent language requirements that regular students must meet.

If you know of any students or professionals who might find this new program of particular interest, or who wish to obtain outstanding preparation for careers in these fields, or who wish to obtain further specialized training before going on to obtain a doctorate, it would be very much appreciated if let them know about our new program.

ABOUT IIPER

Islam, Islamism and politics in Eurasia report (IIPER) is a project of the Monterey Terrorism and Research and Education Program (MonTREP) at the
Monterey Institute for International Studies (MIIS), Monterey, California. It focuses on all politically-relevant issues involving or bearing on Islam and ethnic Muslim communities in Russia and Eurasia writ large. All issues of IIPER can be found at http://www.miis.edu/academics/faculty/ghahn/report.

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IIPER welcomes submissions of 1,500-6,000 words on any aspect of Islamic politics in Eurasia and financial contributions to support the project. For related inquiries or to request to be included on IIPER’s mailing list, please contact gordon.hahn@miis.edu or gordon-hahn@sbcglobal.net.

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