



Russia's Islamic Diplomacy

ed. Marlene Laruelle

CAP paper no. 220, June 2019

"Islam in Russia, Russia in the Islamic World" Initiative



**CENTRAL ASIA
PROGRAM**

Institute for
European, Russian,
and Eurasian Studies

[THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY](http://www.gwu.edu/~iasias)

Institute for
European, Russian,
and Eurasian Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



CENTRAL ASIA
PROGRAM

Russia's Islamic Diplomacy

Ed. Marlene Laruelle



*The Initiative "Islam in Russia, Russia in the Islamic World"
is generously funded by the Henry Luce Foundation*

Cover photo: Talgat Tadjuddin, Chief Mufti of Russia and head of the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Russia, meeting with the Armenian Catholicos Karekin II and Mufti Ismail Berdiyev, President of the Karachay-Cherkessia Spiritual Board, Moscow, December 1, 2016.
Credit : Artyom Korotayev, TASS/Alamy Live News HAGFW9.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Russia and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation: Conflicting Interactions

Grigory Kosach.....5

Chapter 2. Always Looming: The Russian Muslim Factor in Moscow's Relations with Gulf Arab States

Mark N. Katz..... 21

Chapter 3. Russia and the Islamic Worlds: The Case of Shia Islam

Clément Therme25

Chapter 4. A Kadyrovization of Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Autocrats in Track II Diplomacy and Other Humanitarian Activities

Jean-Francois Ratelle.....31

Chapter 5. Tatarstan's Paradiplomacy with the Islamic World

Guzel Yusupova.....37

Chapter 6. Russian Islamic Religious Authorities and Their Activities at the Regional, National, and International Levels

Denis Sokolov.....41

Chapter 7. The Economics of the Hajj: The Case of Tatarstan

Azat Akhunov.....47

Chapter 8. The Effect of the Pilgrimage to Mecca on the Socio-Political Views of Muslims in Russia's North Caucasus

Mikhail Alexseev..... 53

Authors' Biographies.....59

Chapter 1.

Russia and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation: Conflicting Interactions

Grigory Kosach, Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow

In its fledging period, the Russian state doubled down on the Soviet-era trend of increasing its number of partners in the Middle East. One of these partners was Saudi Arabia. Reflecting this policy, foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev and prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin paid visits to the Saudi capital in April 1992 and November 1994, respectively. In 1993, the first Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation stressed that “the terrorist threat” for Russia and southern post-Soviet states came from West Asian countries (Iran and Afghanistan) and declared the goal of “establishing diversified mutually beneficial cooperation” with the Middle Eastern countries. It implied paying “special attention” to “cooperation with Arab countries of the Persian Gulf.”¹

Russia needed to find a common language with Riyadh regarding Chechen separatism and to rule out any foreign intervention in the Northern Caucasus. After Kozyrev’s visit, which secured a “positive Saudi approach” toward Russia’s policy, Moscow—yielding to the Saudi desire to promote Islamic rebirth in the post-Soviet republics—declared its intention to create the conditions for “millions of Russian Muslims to communicate with their brothers in faith.” The Russian leadership expressed hope that Saudi Arabia’s “balanced domestic and foreign policies” would help Russian followers of Islam “to realize that the true prosperity of the [Russian] state would be possible only with the rejection of extremism” and the “non-interference of Islam in politics.”² Chernomyrdin’s visit demonstrated “political trust” between the two nations and created an environment for economic cooperation (including “preferences” for Saudis in Russia’s Muslim regions.)³

As Russia’s relations with Riyadh and the new foreign and domestic Muslim policies were developing, Moscow could not ignore the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), created and funded by Saudi Arabia, which was built on the foundation of Muslim civilization and “guided by noble Islamic values.”⁴ A crucial factor that Russian politicians took into account was that the OIC had significant educational, cultural, informational, and economic resources. In 1994, the Secretary General of the OIC, Hamid Algabid, visited Moscow for the first time. At the top of his agenda was the

¹ *Konferentsiia vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Ytverzhdena 23 apreliia 1993 g. – Vneshniaia politiki i bezopasnost’ sovremennoi Rossii. 1991-2002. Khrestomatiiia. Volume 4.* (Moscow: MGIMO, 2002), 40, 44.

² “O poezdke A.V. Kozyreva po stranam Zaliva,” *Diplomaticheskii vestnik* 9/10, May 15-31, 1992, 36-38.

³ “Vizit V.S. Chernomyrdina v Saudovskuiu Arabiiu, Kuveit, OAE, Oman,” *Diplomaticheskii vestnik* 23/24, December 1994, 9-10.

⁴ Charter of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, accessed June 20, 2019, https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/documents/charter/en/oic_charter_2018_en.pdf, 2.

“Chechen problem.”¹ The hostilities that began in Chechnya in December 1994 precipitated a crisis in both Russian-Saudi and Russian-OIC relations.

As “Russia’s own Muslim battlefield,”² as one Russian expert called it, emerged, it brought to life an Islamist threat that posed a danger to Russia’s security and territorial integrity. These fears were exacerbated by religious radicals’ activities in Central Asia and the efforts of the Afghan Taliban. The “Islamic Crescent” emerged, with emissaries in the Muslim regions of Russia—the North Caucasus and the Volga-Urals—funded by multiple philanthropic foundations. According to Moscow, they impacted the political activity of Russian Muslims by encouraging the emergence of religious groups seeking support from foreign fellow Muslims, and were trying to receive support from OIC (though without any significant success).³

Russian experts, quoting the Federal Security Service (FSB), reported “personal contacts” between Al Qaeda leaders (chiefly Osama bin Laden) and “dishonest Islamic activists,” namely the heads of some regional Muftiates, who facilitated the education of Russian Muslims in foreign schools, thus creating “a channel of penetration in Russia of alien forms of Islam.”⁴ The blame for this situation was unequivocally placed on Saudi Arabia and the other countries of the Persian Gulf. The term “dishonest Islamic activists” was a euphemistic attempt to hide the emerging differentiations within the Russian Muslim community.

New regional Muftiates in Russia were increasingly moving beyond the control of the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims (CSAM), based in Ufa, and charting an independent course. This opened the way for non-Hanafi schools of jurisprudence to penetrate the world of Russian Muslims.⁵ Though these Muftiates would ultimately join the Russian Council of Muftis (COM), based in Moscow, their leaders preserved a high level of autonomy. Thus, a new generation of religious leaders emerged who challenged those they called “the heirs of the communist past” and accused them of “servility to the authorities.” The government, guided by the recommendations of the CSAM, labeled these new leaders “followers of Wahhabism.”

Russia and the OIC: Establishment of Direct Contacts

The situation changed after Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. In 2001, Moscow began to realize that its domestic and foreign challenges should be addressed by enhancing its relationship with the OIC. Resuming the foreign Muslim policy, the goals of which could not be achieved without securing the loyalty of the domestic Islamic community, appeared to be a tool for reinforcing Russian influence in the countries on its southern borders (by that time, the countries of Central Asia and Azerbaijan

¹ *Rossiiia i Organizatsiia Islamskaia Konferentsiia. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Kazan: RAN Institute of Eastern Studies and the Council of Muftis of Russia, 2008), 15.

² A.V. Malashenko, *Rossiiia i musul'manskii mir. Rabochie materialy no. 3* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow, 2008), 6.

³ K. Poliakov and A. Khasianov, *Arabskii Vostok i Rossiia: problema islamskogo fundamentalizma* (Moscow: Editorial USSR, 2001), 120-135.

⁴ K.I. Poliakov, *Islamskaia sostavliaiushchaia protsessia formirovaniia rossiisko-saudovskikh otnoshenii v 90-e gody XX veka—Korol'-reformator. Videnie rossiiskoi intelligentsii* (Moscow: Progress, 2002), 58-60.

⁵ See, in particular, G.G. Kosach, “Muftiati rossiiskogo postsovetskogo regiona: stanovlenie i evoliutsiia,” *Vestnik Evraziia/Acta Eurasica* 2 (2000): 59-85.

had already joined the OIC) and proving Russia's return in this period to the countries of the Islamic "far abroad."¹

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, adopted in July 2000, argued for these new foreign policy priorities, stressing that the existing "integrated associations" in Africa and Asia were acquiring "ever greater importance in the world economy," becoming a means of countering "ethnic-national and religious extremism" and "international terrorism." Stating that "Russia's interests are directly related" to this vector of "world development," as opposed to being aligned with efforts to establish a unipolar world dominated by the United States, the Concept declared the intention to "achieve a multipolar system of international relations." Moscow singled out the Middle East, and specifically the Persian Gulf, as a priority region for Russia to "restore and strengthen its positions."²

While seeking to establish contacts with the OIC, Russia took Riyadh's position on the Chechen issue into account. Despite occasional powerful spikes in anti-Russian sentiment fostered by the media, private philanthropic foundations' support for the Ichkerian *mujahedeens*, and Saudi citizens' involvement in the hostilities in Chechnya, the Saudi government refused to recognize "independent Ichkeria" or assist in its accession to the OIC. However, the Chechen issue was on the OIC agenda from the 7th Summit (December 1994), when it was raised by Saudi Arabia and Azerbaijan, until the end of the conflict, as reflected in the documents of every Summit and Conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers.³ The official Saudi position (in line with that of the OIC) was that both parties to the conflict should look for a peaceful solution: upon completion of the 7th Summit, Hamid Algabid called upon both Boris Yeltsin and Dzhokhar Dudayev to seek a resolution. This position remained consistent even as Saudi Arabia faced challenges from its own religious opposition in the early 2000s.

In mid-January 2000, a team of senior OIC officials visited Moscow. Following their visit, they released a statement reiterating the OIC's "unchanged position" on "preserving the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation" and "condemning terrorism."⁴ In late January 2003, OIC Secretary General Abdelouahed Belkeziz visited Moscow on the invitation of Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov. The latter, commenting on the visit, noted his guest's "understanding" of the "Russian leadership's efforts to stabilize the situation" in Chechnya and stressed the importance of OIC assistance with rebuilding the region's "economic, health care, and educational facilities." At the same time, the position of deputy minister "for relations with international Islamic organizations"

¹ In his interview to *Al Jazeera* of October 16, 2003, Russian President Vladimir Putin said: "During the Soviet period, our country, and later Russia, had very warm, friendly, and long-standing relations with the vast majority of Islamic countries in the world. We were the main allies for a large number of Muslim and Arab countries. I am certain that both the Islamic world and Russia are interested in restoring these relations. And not just restoring them, but developing a new situation in the world." See "Interview to Al Jazeera Television Channel," President of Russia, October 16, 2003, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22162>. See also *Rossiia i Organizatsiia Islamskaia Konferentsiia*, 40.

² The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, accessed May 31, 2019, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>.

³ See M.Z. Razhbadinov, "Nekotorye aspekty rossiisko-saudovskikh otnoshenii" in *Rossiisko-saudovskie otnosheniia: problemy i perspektivy* (Moscow: Institute for the Study of Israel and the Near East, 2003), 8-14.

⁴ "Rossiia-OIK. Delegatsiia OIK v Rossii," *Diplomaticheskii vestnik* 2, February 2000, 4.

was established in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹ Career diplomat Veniamin Popov was appointed to this position.

In early March of that year, Russian Minister of Nationalities Ramazan Abdulatipov visited the Saudi capital as a special representative of President Putin. The official communiqué about his visit said that one of his goals was to outline the Russian position on Chechnya, where “legality and the rule of law were being restored.” This goal was achieved: Abdulatipov was assured that Saudi Arabia “respects Russia’s territorial integrity and the principle of non-interference in its internal affairs.” Riyadh also declared that it would “coordinate its efforts” to provide “humanitarian assistance to the people of Northern Caucasus” with the Russian authorities.²

The future King of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, visited Moscow in early September 2003. At the meeting with de facto head of state, the Russian leadership sought to settle the issue of the North Caucasus for good and eliminate religious radicalism as a threat to the Russian political situation. This was part of Putin’s broader effort to solidify the “power vertical” and limit ethnic autonomy. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz’s schedule in Moscow included meetings with the CSAM, the COM, and the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which was seen as proof of the “peaceful coexistence between Islam and Orthodoxy” and of the “uniqueness of the Russian civilization” defined by this coexistence.

The outcome of the Crown Prince’s visit was his statement that “the Chechen issue is a Russian domestic problem” that “should be settled peacefully, via constitutional procedures within the framework of the Russian Federation.”³ Another, no less significant result of his visit was conveying Saudi support for Russia’s accession to the OIC. The Joint Saudi-Russian statement expressed “respect and understanding of Russia’s initiative” for cooperating with the OIC. This provision of the Joint Statement followed a paragraph that stressed the importance of “collective efforts” as an “effective means of countering and eradicating terrorism.”⁴ Later, during a visit to Riyadh in February 2007, President Putin admitted that Russia would not have been able to join the OIC “without King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz’s assistance.”⁵

In April 2003, while meeting the Grand Mufti of Tajikistan during his official visit to Dushanbe, the Russian president not only reiterated his view of Russia’s uniqueness “as a multi-faith state in which good relations have evolved between Orthodox Christians and Muslims,” but also made a slight amendment to the idea of the “state-forming” role of Orthodoxy. “Millions of Muslims live in Russia who consider it their homeland,” said Putin, which “to a certain extent allows us to call” it “a

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Stenogramma vystupleniia ministra inostrannykh del I.S. Ivanova na sovместnoi press-konferentsii po itogam peregovorov s general’nym sekretarem Organizatsii Islamskaia Konferentsiia Abdel’ Vakhidom Bel’kazimom,” January 28, 2003, <http://www.mid.ru/bdcomp/ns-rasia.nsf/dde54dd22f01755c43256a65004daaee/af8ebe3a95e9ed3843256dd500405aba!OpenDocument>.

² “Poseshchenie R.G. Abdulatipovym Saudovskoi Arabii i Ob’edinennykh Arabskikh Emiratov,” *Diplomaticheskii vestnik* 4, April 2000, 6.

³ “Prints Abdalla: Chechenskii vopros—vnutrennee delo Rossii,” *Izvestiia*, September 4, 2003, <http://izvestia.ru/news/280837>.

⁴ “Sovместnoe rossiisko-saudovskoe zaiavlenie,” Kremlin, September 2, 2003, http://www.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/1712.

⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Vystuplenie na vstreche s predstaviteliami delovykh krugov Saudovskoi Arabii. Er-Riiaid,” Kremlin, February 12, 2007, <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/24037>.

part of the Muslim world.”¹ In August 2003, Putin presented his main argument justifying Russia’s accession to observer status in the OIC: “Almost 20 million Muslims living in Russia have every right to consider themselves a part of the Muslim world.”²

In October 2003, Putin, accompanied by federal officials of Muslim origin and the heads of some “Muslim” regions, chief among them Akhmat Kadyrov, the leader of a “stabilized” Chechnya, arrived at the 10th OIC Summit in Putrajaya, Malaysia. Speaking to participants, the Russian president claimed that Russia did not identify terrorism with any given religion, repeatedly stressing that “Islamophobia” was unacceptable. He went on to declare that Russia needed to join the OIC because the country was “interwoven with the Islamic world.”³ In late June 2005, at the 32nd Conference of the OIC Foreign Ministers in Sana’a, Russia joined the group as an observer. A year later, Russia participated in the 33rd Conference of the OIC Foreign Ministers in Baku in its newly acquired role.

Moscow believed that once the possibility of “foreign intervention” in the Northern Caucasus was ruled out, the “Chechen question” would finally be closed. Meanwhile, Russian officials transformed the idea of the uniqueness of the Russian state into the joint Russia-OIC task of preserving the “multifaceted unity” of global civilization. At the 31st Conference of the OIC Foreign Ministers in Istanbul in June 2004, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov pointed out that Russia and the OIC had “mutual pulling power,” indicating that together they “can do a great deal to prevent a split of humanity on religious or civilizational grounds.”⁴ During his official visit to Saudi Arabia on February 11, 2007, Putin went one step further. Speaking in Riyadh, he pointed out the “unique” Russian experience of “mutual enrichment of cultures and traditions” (which was aligned with King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz’ “dialogue of religions and civilizations”) and stated that the “dialogue of civilizations” was the way to “create a more just international device system.” He said that Russia intended to implement this policy in “the vast space of the Muslim world.”⁵

Joining the OIC: Russian Domestic Context

Putin’s reasons for wanting to join the OIC went beyond those he gave to his international interlocutors. In March 2004, Russia would hold a presidential election, and Putin was trying to secure the support of a significant part of the Russian population by showing the Russian public how significant a role adherents of the country’s second-largest denominational community play. The Russian President was unconditionally supported by both Muftiates. The head of COM, Ravil

¹ “President Vladimir Putin Met with Amonulla Nematzade, Mufti of the Tajik Muslims,” Kremlin, April 27, 2003, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/28551>.

² “Sostoialas’ vstrecha Vladimira Putina s poslom Rossii po sviaziam s OIK i drugimi mezhhdunarodnymi islamskimi organizatsiiami Veniaminom Popovym,” Kremlin, August 14, 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/29197>.

³ Vladimir Putin, “Speech at the 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference Summit,” Kremlin, October 16, 2003, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22160>.

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Transcript of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov Interview to Russian Media on Outcome of Participation in OIC Foreign Ministers Conference, Istanbul, June 16, 2004,” http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/467906; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Speech by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at the 31st Session of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Istanbul, June 16, 2004,” http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/467850.

⁵ Putin, “Vystuplenie na vstreche.”

Gaynutdinov, noted that “Russia's entry” into the OIC would allow Russian Muslims to “expand existing spiritual ties,” describing it as “a real step for the development of one of the country's traditional religions—Islam.”¹ CSAM Grand Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin was no less eloquent: “Russia's accession to the OIC would be a historic step towards the establishment of our country as the leading world power in the modern world.”² Both Muftiates were willing to implement the Presidential policy and become an additional channel of Russian diplomacy in the Islamic world.

The ROC also supported Putin's initiative. Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations secretary for church-society relations Mikhail Dudko voiced the Patriarchate's position: “We consider it possible for Russia to take part in the activities of international Islamic organizations, including the Islamic Conference.” He added, “Our country is not only Christian Orthodox; it has a significant Muslim population.” However, this support came with a caveat. “A very significant part of the population considers Russia a mono-confessional nation,” noted Dudko, arguing that “the overwhelming majority identify themselves as Christian Orthodox,” compared to “5-10 percent” who considered themselves Muslims.³ While the Russian leadership could count on the wholehearted support of Muslim spiritual centers, the ROC's position raised doubts.

In mid-October 2003 (before his trip to Putrajaya), the Russian President met with Patriarch Alexy II. Putin repeatedly expressed his gratitude for the Patriarchate's “support for the initiative to deepen relations” with the OIC. He called the Church's position the manifestation of “a good Russian tradition” of mutual support for “traditional confessions” that helps support “interfaith peace” in Russia.⁴ This meeting, however, did not prevent the Russian conservative nationalists, the *pochvenniki*, from opposing joining the OIC; they argued that the “Orthodox Russian people” are the backbone of Russia.

Russia's accession to the OIC was welcomed in the country's Muslim regions. The Russian establishment purposefully incorporated Russia's Muslim leaders into the process of establishing and developing relations with the OIC and Riyadh. Akhmat Kadyrov accompanied Putin to Putrajaya and took part in negotiations in Moscow with King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. President of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev was part of the official delegation that accompanied the Russian President on his visit to Saudi Arabia in February 2007. This was a whole new situation: the “Muslim” regions became actors in “foreign” Muslim policy.

In 2004, the “legislators-patriots” created an inter-factional association, “Russia and the Islamic World: A Strategic Dialogue,” in the State Duma. Shamil Sultanov formulated its goals as follows: legislative support for the development of Russia's relations with Muslim countries and the OIC; the development and promotion of initiatives directed toward Russian participation in the Islamic world's integration processes; cooperation with Muslim countries to address economic problems and international security issues; and fostering a constructive dialogue between the

¹ E. Mirzoev, “Islamskaia uvertiura Putina,” *Vestnik*, September 3, 2003, <http://www.vestnik.com/issues/2003/0903/win/mirzoev.htm>.

² “TsDUM Talgata Tadzhutdina odobriaet predlozhenie prezidenta o vstupenii Rossii v Organizatsiiu Islamskaia Konferentsiia,” *Credo.ru*, August 5, 2003, <http://www.portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=12375>.

³ “RPTs—za sotrudnichestvo Rossii s mezhdunarodnymi islamskimi organizatsiiami,” *Vesti*, August 7, 2003, <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=31258>.

⁴ “Vstrecha Prezidenta Rossii s Patriarkhom Moskovskim i Vseia Rusi Aleksiem II, October 15, 2003” in *Rossii i Organizatsiia Islamskaia Konferentsiia. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Kazan: RAN Institute of Eastern Studies and the Council of Muftis of Russia, 2008), 27-29.

political and economic elites of Russia and the Islamic world.¹ Commenting on his initiative, Sultanov said, “The main problem for the Islamic world and for Russia is the problem of survival” in the face of “a full-fledged offensive against them” aimed at “creating a new world order.” In his opinion, by strengthening the “world Ummah,” Russian Muslims would strengthen Russia, an appealing proposition for the Islamic world.²

Sovetskaya Rossiya (Soviet Russia), a newspaper that describes itself as “actively working with the left patriotic opposition, Communist MPs, and patriots on every level of legislative power” and claims to represent the views of Russian “patriots,” demanded that the Russian government “immediately establish friendly contacts between our country and the populous and dynamically developing Islamic world [and] ignore the hysterical cries of the Zionist lobby” about the “green Islamic plague.”³ One of the most colorful representatives of the “patriotic” camp, Leonid Ivashov, a committed Eurasianist who formerly served in the army and is now the President of the small Academy of Geopolitical Sciences, noted in his comment to the Saudi media on Abdullah bin Abdulaziz’ visit to Moscow and Russia’s effort to join the OIC that “U.S. monopolistic regional influence” is the source of “dangerous catastrophes” for the Middle East and for Russia. As such, he considered it necessary to “make every effort” to “determine the direction of the caravan of cooperation between Moscow and Riyadh.”⁴

Evgeni Primakov, a member of the Academy of Sciences who formerly served as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister, created and led a “nationally oriented” entrepreneurial effort known as the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI). A Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the CCI and the Saudi Council of Chambers of Commerce and Industry during Abdullah bin Abdulaziz’ visit to Moscow. Back in the mid-1990s, Primakov was an active supporter of “Russia’s accession to the OIC.”⁵ The CCI positioned itself as an opponent of “non-Russian oligarchs’ domination” of the Russian business community and saw accession to the OIC as an opportunity to broaden interactions with the Islamic world. When Russia joined the OIC, the CCI created new “business councils” covering most of the Islamic nations.

By that time, the Russian leadership—on the pretext of responding to the September 1, 2004, terrorist attack in the North Ossetian town of Beslan—had completed a set of measures aimed at building a “vertical of executive power,” which reduced the power of regional elites and the opposition and achieved control over large business activities justified by purposes of the “national construction.” Some of these measures included the forceful suppression of the anti-government underground in Chechnya and Dagestan. The Russian state developed a sense of its own intrinsic value and strived for a foreign policy justified by the “thousand-year history of Russia,”⁶ rejecting the

¹ “Rossiia i islamskii mir: strategicheskii dialog,” *Zavtra (blog)*, May 5, 2004, <http://zavtra.ru/blogs/2004-05-0552>.

² “Sultanov Shamil’: ‘Mir islama zaintersovan v sil’noi Rossii,’” *Islamnews.ru*, April 17, 2006, <https://www.islamnews.ru/news-5632.html>.

³ B. Belokhvostov, “Moskva idet na Vostok,” *Sovetskaiia Rossiia*, September 4, 2003, http://www.sovross.ru/old/2003/098/098_7_1.htm.

⁴ Cited by G.G. Kosach, “Rossiisko-saudovskie otnosheniia: vizit printsa Abdally” in *Rossiisko-saudovskie otnosheniia: problemy i perspektivy* (Moscow: Institute for the Study of Israel and the Near East, 2003), 45.

⁵ Malashenko, *Rossiia i musul'manskii mir*, 9.

⁶ P. Pchelkin, “Prezident Putin trebuiet zashchitit’ istoriiu Gosudarstva rossiiskogo ot perepisivaniia,” *Pervyi kanal*, November 9, 2014, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-11-09/28707-prezident_vladimir_putin_trebuuet_zaschitit_istoriyu_gosudarstva_rossiyskogo_ot_perepisyvaniya.

system of “unipolar” international relations built on “American hegemony.”¹ This state could ignore liberal claims about the authoritarian nature of the member-states of the OIC.

In March 2006, on the initiative of Primakov and Shaimiev, “The Group of Strategic Vision: Russia—the Islamic World” was established in Moscow, with representation for Muslim states, the COM, and the ROC. The Russian Foreign Ministry defined its tasks by stressing that this was a “platform for dialogue” where “ideas of strategic depth” would be developed. The “opposition to terrorists and radicals” and addressing the “issues of humanitarian rapprochement” were declared the main topics for its debates.² In his address to the first meeting of the Group, Putin noted that, “Expanding multidimensional ties with the Islamic world is one of the top priorities for Russia’s foreign policy.”³ OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, in his letter to the Group, indicated a “proximity of positions” between the two sides “on many issues of international relations,” including their mutual opposition to “attempts to drag the world into a clash between different civilizations and cultures.”⁴

The second meeting of the Group took place the same year in Kazan. Tatarstan became a showcase of Islamic-Christian Orthodox coexistence⁵ and of Russian Islam. Shaimiev said that Tatarstan should be considered the “northernmost outpost of the Islamic world,” adding that the Russian Islamic community “cannot be separated from the global one.”⁶ In June 2008, an International Investment Conference was organized in Kazan by the Islamic Development Bank, part of the OIC. That same year, the OIC held a Youth Forum “For Dialogue and Cooperation” in Kazan. Since 2007, the KazanSummit, an annual International Economic Summit “Russia—Islamic World” has been held in Kazan under the patronage of the President of Tatarstan and the Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament.⁷

The idea of Russian-Islamic relations was reinforced in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation adopted by then-president of Russia Dmitry Medvedev in July 2008. It repeated the importance of integration associations in Africa and Asia, and stressed that Russia “as a multinational and multiconfessional state facilitates dialogue and partnership between cultures, religions and civilizations, [...] including in the context of cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference.” The OIC should become the channel to “enhance” Russia’s “interaction with the

¹ Vladimir Putin, “Vystuplenie i diskussii na Munkhenskoj koferentsii po voprosam politiki besopasnosti,” Kremlin, February 10, 2007, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

² “V MID RF ozvuchili ključevye zadachi gruppy ‘Rossiia—islamskii mir,’” *Regnum*, June 5, 2015, <https://regnum.ru/news/1930995.html>.

³ “Mezhdunarodnoe sotrudnichestvo: Rossiia—islamskii mir,” World Center Moscow, March 27, 2006, <https://wtcmoscow.ru/news/pervaya-vstrecha-gruppy-strategicheskoe-videnie-rossiya-islamskiy-mir->

⁴ Malashenko, *Rossiia i musul'manskii mir*, 11.

⁵ Veniamin Popov wrote: “There are plenty of events confirming good cooperation in Russia between representatives of Christianity and Islam, both throughout history and in modern life. Perhaps the most striking example is Tatarstan, which is an embodiment of the Orthodox-Muslim unity. The residence of the President of the Republic, and the Orthodox Cathedral, and the newly built Muslim mosque are all located in the Kazan Kremlin.” See Veniamin Popov, *K piatiletii Organizatsii Islamskaiia Konferentsiia*, http://www.idmedina.ru/books/history_culture/minaret/23-24/venPopov.htm?

⁶ Mintimer Shaimiev, “Prezident Tatarstana M. Shaimiev: Rossiia stala prognoziruemym partnerom islamskogo mira,” Official Website of Mintimer Shaimier, November 1, 2008, <http://shaimiev.tatarstan.ru/pub/view/4681>.

⁷ R.R. Suleimenov, “Kul’turnye sviazi Respubliki Tatarstan i Saudovskoi Arabii,” June 14, 2007, <http://www.iimes.ru/?p=5865>.

States of the Islamic world” and to further develop its relations with the “leading regional States,” including Saudi Arabia. (This marked the first time that the latter was mentioned in the Foreign Policy Concept by name.)¹

In 2007, Russia joined the OIC’s Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) as an observer. In July 2008, the former mayor of Kazan and Plenipotentiary Representative of the President in the Russian Far East, Kamil Iskhakov, was appointed permanent Russian representative to the OIC headquarters in Jeddah.²

Russia and the OIC after the Arab Spring

However, Moscow did not concede the monopoly on development contacts with the OIC to the “domestic” Muslim institutions. It continued to perceive Islamic education abroad and pilgrimage as means by which extremist ideas and practices could enter Russia. At a meeting with muftis and the leaders of the North Caucasus regions, President Medvedev unequivocally pointed out the importance of domestic Russian Islamic education and expressed a preference for developing joint “educational projects” with educational institutions in Syria, Egypt, and Libya. He added that “contacts with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” should be limited to “Hajj issues,” which would be subject to coordination with the “federal and regional authorities.”³

The “Arab Spring,” which Moscow quickly recharacterized as a “Time of Troubles,” radically changed Russia’s official narrative on Saudi Arabia and the OIC. Medvedev perceived the developments of 2011-2012 as a recurrence of the “color revolutions” of the early 2000s. In his view, these events were planned by the West and executed by the Persian Gulf monarchies, with the effect of undermining Russian interests. He stated, “The Arab spring will end with a cold Arab fall” because “radicals are coming to power.”⁴ After being re-elected as president in May 2012, Putin described the developments in the Middle East as “regression, barbarity and extensive bloodshed.”⁵ Russian experts referred to a “Wahhabi tandem” (Saudi Arabia and Qatar) that was “tightly linked with Islamist parties and movements” striving to “reformat the Middle East.”⁶

The decision to suspend Syrian membership of the OIC, made on the initiative of Riyadh at the Extraordinary OIC Summit in mid-August 2012, created an additional source of tension between Russia and the OIC. The Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry stated that “The Russian Federation does not recognize the anti-Syrian sanctions imposed unilaterally by a number of states and inter-state associations and considers them a serious obstacle to the final eradication of the terrorist threat in

¹ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2008, accessed June 20, 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>.

² “Eks-mer Kazani stal predstavitelem Rossii v OIK,” *TatarInform*, July 17, 2008, <https://www.tatarinform.ru/news/2008/07/17/124086>.

³ “Vstupitel’noe slovo na vstreche s muftiami i rukovoditeliami regionov Severnogo Kavkaza,” Kremlin, August 28, 2008, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/5296/audios>.

⁴ Dmitry Medvedev, “Interview to Russian TV networks,” Kremlin, April 26, 2012, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15149>.

⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly,” Kremlin, December 12, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825>.

⁶ D.B. Malysheva, “Monarkhii Persidskogo zaliva i ‘arabskaia vesna,’” *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn’* 8 (July 2012): 24-25.

Syria.”¹ The OIC decision was condemned by both Russian Muftiates, which expressed their solidarity with the “position of the nation’s political leadership.”² The ROC made a similar statement, arguing that Syria was “the place of a long, peaceful, and productive interaction between Islam and Christianity.”³

In 2012, the activities of the “Group of Strategic Vision: Russia—the Islamic World” were frozen. In September 2011, President Medvedev relieved Iskhakov of his duties as Russia’s permanent representative to the OIC and assigned them to the ambassador in Riyadh;⁴ the planned OIC mission in Moscow was never established. Russian-Saudi interaction stagnated after 2011 as a result of Russia’s policy of deepening contacts with Saudi Arabia’s “strategic enemy” Iran (particularly in Syria), Russia’s refusal to be actively involved in Israeli-Palestinian confrontations, and Russian attempts to use occasional Saudi-U.S. tensions to its own ends. Though the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation mentioned the OIC in the context of further enhancing Russia’s “interaction with the Islamic states,” Saudi Arabia was not mentioned among them; Russia’s stated priority was to “balance the policy in favor of a comprehensive political and diplomatic settlement of the Iranian nuclear program situation.”⁵

In early October 2013, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu signed a Framework Agreement on Cooperation between the Russian Foreign Ministry and the General Secretariat of the OIC. Lavrov said that this document “provides a solid legal basis for the further strengthening” of relations between both sides.⁶ During his visit to Jeddah in June 2014, Lavrov visited the OIC headquarters and met its new Secretary General, Iyad bin Amin Madani. The Russian Foreign Minister pointed out that the OIC and Russia are linked by “common interests of promoting peace [...] and dialogue between civilizations and religions.”⁷ In September 2014, Lavrov and Madani met again, this time on the sidelines of the 69th meeting of the

¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Statement by the Foreign Ministry,” July 5, 2018, http://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/sy/-/asset_publisher/9fcjSOWMERcf/content/id/3288522?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_9fcjSOWMERcf&_101_INSTANCE_9fcjSOWMERcf_languageId=en_GB.

² “Konflikt v Sirii sozdaiut tret’i sily, schitaet islamskoe dukhovenstvo RF,” *RIA Novosti*, August 16, 2012, <https://ria.ru/20120816/725096464.html>.

³ “Iskliuchenie Sirii iz OIS ne vycherknet ee iz tsivilizovannogo mira—RPTs,” *RIA Novosti*, August 16, 2012, <https://ria.ru/20120816/724787271.html>.

⁴ “Kamil’ Iskhakov osvobozhden ot obiazannosti postpreda RF pri OIK,” *Business Gazeta*, September 7, 2011, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/news/46122>.

⁵ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, Approved by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin on 12 February 2013, accessed June 20, 2019, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCk6BZ29/content/id/122186.

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Speech and Answers to the Media’s Questions by the Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov after the Signing of the Framework Agreement on Cooperation between the Russian Foreign Ministry and the General Secretariat of the OIC, in Moscow on the 1 October 2013,” October 1, 2013, http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/organizacia-islamskogo-sotrudnicestva-ois/-/asset_publisher/km9HkaXMTium/content/id/94298.

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “O vstreche Ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V. Lavrova s General’nym sekretarem Organizatsii islamskogo sotrudnichestva I. Madani,” accessed June 20, 2019, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newslines/3FBD0CB07498416844257CFE005C22DA.

UN General Assembly, where they discussed the agenda of forthcoming “bilateral political consultations.”¹

In 2014, relations between Moscow and the OIC became more active. The reason for this was quite significant: the OIC did not condemn the incorporation of Crimea into Russia, focusing solely on the situation of the Crimean-Tatar minority. Speaking at the June 2014 Conference of Foreign Affairs, Madani indicated that “the OIC is closely watching the developments in Crimea and hopes that they will not impact the political, cultural, religious rights of Tatar-Muslims [nor] bring the sad experience of the past persecutions and forced deportation back to life.” However, “the Crimean Tatar issue” was a pretext for raising a more important issue: as the Secretary General of the OIC put it, “Russia’s support for the rights of Russians in Crimea should induce Moscow to revise its position regarding Kosovo’s independence,” which would allow Kosovo to become an OIC member.² However, Russia’s position remained unchanged.

The Russian establishment continued to have reservations about the OIC. In October 2013, at the meeting with the Muftis in Ufa, President Putin once again raised the issue of “radical tendencies (which, incidentally, are historically foreign to Russian Muslims).” Some political parties, he indicated, were using these tendencies “in order to weaken our state, to create zones of so-called externally driven conflicts in Russian territory.” Putin called for such attempts to be countered “using Russian Muslims’ faith in their historical traditions and partnerships with other religions, particularly the Russian Orthodox Church.” He also stressed that “the voice of Russian Muslim leaders should resonate louder in the international arena, among the global Islamic community.” Russian Muslims should not be guided by the outer Islamic world but lead this world. Putin therefore concluded that “one of our most important tasks is to reconstruct our own Islamic theological school, which will ensure the sovereignty of Russia’s spiritual space.”³

In late September 2015, after the Russian military operation in Syria was launched, Moscow’s position toward Riyadh and the OIC changed once again. This change was mostly determined by the deterioration of Russia’s position as a result of the Western sanctions and its conflict with the leading actors in the Middle East. Moscow had to adjust itself to these new circumstances, balancing between regional powers and maintaining a dialogue with them that was not always based on common positions. Saudi Arabia was one of these regional powers; the latter supported the Syrian opposition against Bashir al-Assad and his Iranian ally.

The Russian military operation in Syria was supported by the ROC, the COM, and the CSAM, though the Muftiates’ positions differed: while the CSAM “decisively supported” Putin and called upon believers “to unite in the fight against the terrorist plague,”⁴ the COM called on them “not to politicize the complex issue of countering terrorist threats.”⁵ At any rate, their function as a channel

¹ OIC, “General’nyi sekretar’ OIS vstrechaetsia s General’nym sekretarem OON i ministrom inostrannykh del Rossii,” September 28, 2014, http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/topic/?t_ref=3743&lan=ar.

² OIC, “Vystuplenie liada Madani, General’nogo sekretaria Organizatsii islamskogo sotrudnichestva, na 41-oi sessii Soveshchaniia ministrov inostrannykh del,” June 18, 2014, http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/topic/?t_id=9148&ref=3666&lan=ar.

³ Vladimir Putin, “Speech at a Meeting with Muftis from Russia’s Muslim Spiritual Administrations,” Kremlin, October 22, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19474>.

⁴ CDUM, “Zaiavlenie TsDUM Rossii,” September 30, 2015, <http://cdum.ru/news/44/6264>.

⁵ DUM RF, “Obrashchenie muftiia sheikha Ravilia Gainutdina v sviazi s prisoedineniem rossiiskikh Vozdushno-territorii Sirii,” October 1, 2015, <http://dumrf.ru/upravlenie/documents/9777>.

of cooperation with “outer” Islam has been dramatically reduced. Under the new circumstances, the Russian leadership purposefully pursued the idea that the main task of the Muslim community should be to “interdict attempts to impose alien worldviews.” Putin repeated again the idea of a Russian sovereign school of Islamic theology, constructed almost exclusively with government assistance, whose task would be to create “its own system of religious education.”¹

However, Moscow did not give up on the OIC as a channel for settling differences with Riyadh and continued to build up the Muslim image of Russia. The Russian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia argued that the presence of “15 to 20 million Muslims” in Russia makes it “almost a Muslim state; the biggest mosque in Europe is in Russia, not in Paris or London.”² Following talks with Madani, who visited Russia and took part in the Kazan Summit session with the OIC delegation, which included a team from the Islamic Development Bank, Lavrov spoke at a joint press conference in June 2015, saying that he and the Secretary General had discussed “issues that are assuming special urgency in the Middle East and North Africa.” He pointed out that Russia and the OIC Secretary General “discussed the need to stimulate nationwide dialogue” in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. Both sides agreed that “there should be a truly international system in place” to combat threats of terrorism.³ These were common points in the Russian and Saudi positions.

In June 2015, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman came to the St. Petersburg Economic Forum and was received by the President of Russia. This meeting signaled warmth in Russian-Saudi relations. Moscow felt that this warmth should be reinforced: the Prince’s schedule included meetings with COM head Gaynetdin, President of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov, and the leader of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov. While the meeting with Gaynetdin was focused on religious issues concerning Russian Muslims,⁴ the conversations with the leaders of two Muslim regions were about the economic ties of both republics with Saudi Arabia (chiefly due to Saudi Arabian investment in the regions).⁵ Kadyrov’s press service reported Riyadh’s willingness to “send experts to the Chechen Republic in order to select projects where Saudi business could be involved.”⁶

The new period of Russian-Saudi relations was evidenced by provisions of the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, approved in November 2016. The document prioritized “preventing fault lines from emerging in relations between civilizations and promoting partnerships across cultures, religions and civilizations... for the harmonious development of humankind.” At blame for these fault lines, which generated terrorism, the document said, were “attempts to impose

¹ “Moskovskaia Sobornaia mechet’ otkryta posle rekonstruktsii,” Kremlin, September 23, 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50351>.

² “Rossiiskii posol v interv’iu ‘Al-Hayat’: my ne planiruem kakoi-libo nazemnye operatsii v Sirii,” *Al-Hayat*, October 8, 2015, <http://www.alhayat.com/article/697914>.

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s Statement and Answers to Media Questions at a Joint News Conference Following Talks with Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Iyad Ameen Madani,” June 11, 2015, http://www.mid.ru/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/70vQR5KJWVmR/content/id/1441237

⁴ “Vstrecha s naslednym printsem Saudovskoi Arabii,” *Muslim.ru*, June 18, 2015, <https://www.muslim.ru/articles/287/13424>.

⁵ “Rustam Minnikhanov vstretilsia s vitse-prem’erom-ministrom oborony Saudovskoi Arabii Mukhammedom ben Sal’man Al’ Saudom,” Government of the Republic of Tatarstan, June 18, 2015, <http://prav.tatarstan.ru/rus/index.htm/news/444467.htm>.

⁶ “Glava Chechenskoi Respubliki v ramkakh PMEF vstretilsia s ministrom oborony Saudovskoi Arabii,” *Chechnya Today*, June 20, 2015, <https://chechnyatoday.com/news/285741>.

values on others.” “Interaction” and “partnership” between Moscow and the OIC were declared as partial means of eradicating this phenomenon.¹

Russia and the OIC: Current Reality

The warming in Russian-Saudi relations, which hit its apex with King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud’s official visit to Moscow in early October 2017, changed the nature of Russia’s ties with the OIC. In December 2018, President Putin appointed Ramzan Abdulatipov (who had by that time resigned as head of Dagestan) as Russia’s permanent representative to the OIC,² thus restoring Russia’s diplomatic mission to the OIC headquarters in Jeddah.

The restoration of the “Group of Strategic Vision: Russia and the Islamic World” likewise reflected the new mood. Though the resumption of its work was announced back in 2014, when Putin appointed Minnikhanov as its chairman, its plenary meeting—involving the leaders of three Muslim regions (Kadyrov, Minnikhanov, and Abdulatipov)—took place only in May 2017 in Grozny. In his welcome cable to the participants, Putin stressed that Russia was ready “to increase its cooperation” with the OIC “in confronting the forces of terror, as well as in finding ways to resolve regional crises peacefully,”³ by which he referred to the events in Syria.

The next meeting of the Group took place in November 2018 in Makhachkala. Its agenda was focused on how to confront “radical trends” among young people. Minnikhanov suggested “the project of a joint Russian-Muslim academy for future leaders, created on the basis of the Bulgar Islamic Academy.”⁴ He was referring to the center of “complete Muslim religious education,” officially opened in September 2018 in the town of Bulgar, the historical capital of Volga Bulgaria, and sponsored by the Government. Its task was to create a “sovereign theological school” of Islam.⁵ In his greetings to the participants, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov repeated traditional tropes of Russian political rhetoric: both sides are committed to the “fundamental principles of international life,” advocating for “respect for the distinctiveness of peoples of the world,” and independent choice of “models of socio-economic development.”⁶

A crucial element of Group activities is its growing link with entrepreneurship in the Muslim regions. Tatarstan plays the leading role in this arena. In December 2018, in order to revive the Group’s activity, the Joint Stock Company Svyazinvestneftekhim established the “Foundation for Strategic Dialogue and Partnership with the Islamic World” in Kazan as a “technical structure for the ‘Group of Strategic Vision: Russia and the Islamic World.’” The Foundation’s activities would occur

¹ The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, Approved by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin on November 30, 2016, accessed June 20, 2019, https://www.rusemb.org.uk/rp_insight/.

² “Abdulatipov stal postpredom RF pri Organizatsii islamskogo sotrudnichestva,” *RIA Novosti*, December 21, 2018, <https://ria.ru/20181221/1548393633.html>.

³ “V Groznom proshlo zasedanie Gruppy strategicheskogo videniia ‘Rossiia–islamskii mir,’” *Lezgi Gazet*, May 17, 2017, <https://lezgigazet.ru/archives/1845>.

⁴ “Glavy Dagestan i Tatarstana priniali uchastie v zasedanii Gruppy strategicheskogo videniia ‘Rossiia–islamskii mir,’” November 12, 2018, *RGVK TV*, <http://www.rgvktv.ru/obshchestvo/55435>.

⁵ “V Tatarstane sostoialas’ tseremoniia otkrytiia Bulgarskoi islamskoi akademii,” *TatarInform*, September 4, 2017, <https://www.tatar-inform.ru/news/2017/09/04/570596>.

⁶ “Lavrov dal vysokuiu otsenku rabote gruppy strategicheskogo videniia ‘Rossiia–islamskii mir,’” *TASS*, November 12, 2018, <https://tass.ru/politika/5781879>.

along three main vectors: culture, economics, and information rapprochement with Eastern countries.¹

The annual meetings in the KazanSummit format also encouraged the trend of deepening relations with the OIC. However, economic ties between Russia and the OIC have not reached any significant level. Speaking at the forum in May 2018, a Russian official pointed out that bilateral trade amounted to only about \$75 billion, of which Russian exports comprised \$58 billion and imports from the OIC countries were \$17 billion. The troika of leaders of economic cooperation was Turkey, Indonesia, and Kazakhstan.² Russian-Saudi economic ties looked quite modest: in 2016, the volume of bilateral trade amounted to \$491.7 million. Saudi Arabia represented just 0.105% of Russia's foreign trade in 2016, putting it in 75th place.³

One of the main obstacles to Russia's integration with the OIC is the requirement that OIC states' financial institutions adopt Islamic principles. According to Iskhakov, Russia's former Ambassador to the OIC, who is currently the President of the Bulgar Islamic Academy, "the Russian banking system is not fit for an alternative system."⁴ The results of the KazanSummit 2018 indicate that this problem remains unchanged. Attempts to create Islamic banking institutions in Russia or to expand the activities of foreign Islamic banking institutions (including the OIC's Islamic Bank of Development) to Russia failed. Though the elites of Muslim regions claim that Muslim entrepreneurship is not feasible without Islamic banking and demand legislative amendments, the existing Islamic banking system could potentially provide a channel of funding for an anti-system underground.

Conclusion

Contacts between Russia and the OIC began as a way to address one of Russia's domestic issues and grew into a discussion of global issues. This interaction has not been conflict-free—rather, it has been controversial and has been impacted by many factors of both domestic and international nature.

The Russian Muslim community—represented by the two centers of Islamic spiritual life, CSAM and COM, on the one hand, and by Muslim regional elites, on the other—tried to serve as a channel for Russian-Islamic cooperation but was not entirely successful. Similarly, international realities have constrained Russian-Islamic cooperation: Russia failed to overcome the divide between Saudi Arabia and Iran in its dealings with the Islamic world. In addition, the two sides differed in their understanding of the OIC's role and its place in the contemporary world. While Riyadh, the financial sponsor of the OIC, does not consider this Organization to be opposed to its "strategic partner," the United States, and its allies, stressing that the OIC strives to achieve global "coexistence of religions and civilizations," Moscow would like to see the Organization as an unconditional ally in the fight against values and models of development imposed from outside. This

¹ "Finansirovanie budet po mere neobkhodimosti: Minnikhanov sozdal fond dlia islamskogo mira," *Business Gazeta*, December 14, 2018, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/406228>.

² "Na sammite v Kazan' obsudili razvite islamskoho bankinga i tovarooborota," *TASS*, May 11, 2018, <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/5193971>.

³ "Otnosheniia Rossi ii Saudovskoi Arabii," *TASS*, October 4, 2017, <http://tass.ru/info/2475421>.

⁴ "Kamil' Iskhakov: Ideia sozdaniia predstavitel'stva Rossii pri OIK u Putina vznikla v nachale 2006 g.," June 19, 2011, <http://www.muslimeco.ru/opubl/134>.

divergence of views will continue to present a challenge to bilateral interactions between Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Another indication of the controversial nature of Russian-Islamic relations is that Russia has never become a full-fledged (or, in the case of ISESCO, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, active) participant in the multiple non-political (economic, cultural, and informational) entities within the OIC. The primary reason for this has been the Russian establishment's apprehension toward these entities and its concern that they might influence the Russian Muslim community and—Moscow feared—serve as an additional channel for its politicization. This circumstance raises a crucial question about the establishment's ambivalent approach toward its Muslim citizens. On the one hand, Russia has a significant native Islamic population, which makes it a truly multicultural country; on the other hand, this population remains rather marginal at the national level, as the ROC's comments might suggest.

However, the aforementioned circumstances do not rule out the need for interaction between Moscow and the OIC. This need is stipulated by the fact that both the OIC and its members are key actors in international politics. This interaction is also based on mutual interests because the member-states of the OIC perceive Russia as a world power that to a large extent determines both the international situation and the situation in the Middle East, the region for which the OIC claims to be the voice. This perception of Russia is an additional incentive to enhance Russia's contacts with this organization and with its member countries. However, in order to move in this direction, Russia should revise the status of its Muslim community and expand the rights of Federation subjects.

Chapter 2.

Always Looming: The Russian Muslim Factor in Moscow's Relations with Arab Gulf States

Mark N. Katz, George Mason University

Russian President Vladimir Putin has long sought good relations with the Arab Gulf states—especially the three richest ones: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. The pursuit of Russian economic interests has been an important motivation for this effort. Putin and the Russian enterprises closely linked with him have seen the Arab Gulf states as export markets and investment opportunities; sources of investment into Russia; and, more recently, partners in bolstering petroleum prices, on which both the Russian and Arab Gulf governments are dependent as their main source of revenue. Good Russian relations with the Arab Gulf states have also fostered Putin's geopolitical ambitions in the Middle East and worldwide. It is especially important for the Russian president that the Arab Gulf states have become increasingly willing to cooperate with Moscow despite their differences not just with America and the West, but also with the Arab Gulf states themselves over Iran and Syria. Yet another reason why Putin has sought good relations with the Arab Gulf states is rooted in Moscow's concerns over its own fractious Muslim regions—especially Chechnya. It is this dimension of Russia's relations with the Arab Gulf that will be discussed here.

One of Moscow's overriding concerns since the 1990s has been to make sure that wealthy Arab Gulf states do not support Muslim opposition to Moscow's rule in Chechnya and other Muslim regions like they did in Afghanistan during the 1980s. For many years now, Moscow has had reason to be satisfied with the Arab Gulf states. None of them is challenging the continued inclusion of Moscow's autonomous republics in the Russian Federation. Instead, the Arab Gulf states have generally friendly relations with these republics' Moscow-backed governments. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) both have especially friendly ties with the controversial Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov. Moreover, economic ties between Arab Gulf states and Russia's autonomous Muslim republics serve to supplement Moscow's economic support for these republics.¹

This, however, was not always the case. During the 1990s and early 2000s, Russian officials and observers frequently claimed that Chechen and other Muslim rebels inside Russia were receiving support from Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states. Some Russian sources claimed not only that Al Qaeda was operating in Chechnya, but also that the Saudi government itself supported Al Qaeda, thus "proving" that Saudi Arabia was backing Chechen rebels. For their part, Saudi officials said that they were supporting not Chechen rebels but Chechen refugees. Refugees, though, sometimes became rebels.

Moscow's fears that the Saudis were trying to make the Chechens a *cause célèbre* in the Muslim world, as they had done with the Afghan *mujahideen* in the 1980s, were stoked by Saudi expressions of concern for the Chechens. Before 9/11, though, Riyadh's publicization of the plight of

¹ Neil Hauer, "Princely Ties: The Growing Chechnya-Gulf Security Relationship," *The Defense Post*, December 27, 2018, <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/12/27/russia-chechnya-gulf-security-relationship/>.

the Chechens (as with the Afghans before them) was important to Saudi public diplomacy. For Riyadh, long criticized by many Muslims for being allied with America, the principal supporter of Israel, the Afghans and then the Chechens were useful in that they were groups of oppressed Muslims whose plight was due not to either the U.S. or Israel, but to either the Soviet Union or Russia. Saudi publicity about the Chechen cause (which also received some sympathy in the West before 9/11) was partly designed to distract Muslim opinion from Riyadh's relationship with the US.¹

Putin's initial reaction to 9/11 was to seize upon it as an opportunity to cooperate with the US against what he portrayed as a common Saudi threat to both countries, due to the Saudis' alleged support for Al Qaeda actions against the US and Russia. Saudi Arabia, though, was not the only Arab Gulf country to experience friction with Russia over Chechnya. Russian security service personnel reportedly assassinated former Chechen rebel president Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev in Qatar in 2004, while Kadyrov allies were linked to the assassination of former General Sulim Yamadayev, one of his rivals, in the UAE in 2009—events which led to friction in Moscow's relations with both.²

Several factors, though, would lead the Chechen and Russian Muslim causes to become less of an irritant to Russian relations with the Arab Gulf under Putin. Even before 9/11, some Saudi officials observed that Riyadh would not benefit from a series of poor, unstable Muslim republics becoming independent from Russia.³ And in the aftermath of 9/11, Riyadh came under pressure not just from Moscow but also from Washington to downplay the Chechen issue. As Russian-American relations turned sour over the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty as well as its intervention in Iraq, Putin switched from seeking to cooperate with the US against what he had portrayed as a common Saudi threat to seeking to cooperate with Saudi Arabia against what he now portrayed as a common American threat. With the visit of then-Crown Prince Abdullah to Moscow in 2003, a Saudi-Russian rapprochement began.

While Russian cooperation with Iran, especially in Syria, has served to irritate Russian ties with some Arab Gulf states, their relations have generally improved since the mid-2000s. This has been due in part to the Arab Gulf states' increasing familiarity with Russia and how to work with it: while they may not be able to get Moscow to stop cooperating with Iran in Syria and elsewhere, they have seen how enmeshing Moscow in profitable economic relations with them has enabled Arab Gulf states to build a strong constituency in Moscow advocating that Russia pursue "balanced" relations in the region and not just side with Iran. They have also learned that expressing any kind of support for Chechen or other Russian Muslim separatists is counterproductive to the goal of fostering good relations with Moscow. By contrast, having good relations with the Moscow-backed leaders of Chechnya, Tatarstan, and Russia's other Muslim republics has generally served to strengthen Arab Gulf ties to Moscow.⁴

¹ Mark N. Katz, "Saudi-Russian Relations in the Putin Era," *Middle East Journal* 55, no. 4 (Autumn 2001): 612-17.

² Steven Lee Myers, "Qatar Court Convicts Two Russians in Top Chechen's Death," *New York Times*, July 1, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/01/world/qatar-court-convicts-2-russians-in-top-chechen-s-death.html>; Michael Schwartz, "Another Foe of Chechen Leader Shot Dead Abroad," *New York Times*, March 30, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/31/world/europe/31chechnya.html>.

³ Katz, "Saudi-Russian Relations in the Putin Era," 614.

⁴ Li-Chen Sim, "Russia's Return to the Gulf," in *External Powers and the Gulf Monarchies*, ed. Jonathan Fulton and Li-Chen Sim (London: Routledge, 2019), 26-55; Hassan Hassan, "Moscow's Little-Noticed Islamic-Outreach Effort," *The Atlantic*, January 5, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/01/russia-promotes-politically-pacifist->

Still, the Russian Muslim factor has not disappeared as a source of friction in Russia's relations with the Arab Gulf states. When terrorist incidents involving Russian Muslims do occur, some Russian observers always seem quick to blame "Wahhabist" jihadists inspired, or even supported, by Saudi Arabia.¹ The underlying Russian fear about this never seems to go away. In an effort to mitigate it, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular have gone out of their way to show their support for Putin's man in Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, but even this may cause Moscow some concern, as Kadyrov's agenda is not quite the same as Putin's. While Putin cooperates closely with Tehran and seeks to balance between Iran, on the one hand, and Israel and the Gulf Arabs, on the other, Kadyrov is both anti-Iranian and anti-Shi'a—something that endears him to Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular. Similarly, while Putin has pursued an even-handed approach to (as well as sought economic benefits from) Qatar and its regional rivals, Kadyrov has sided with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain against Qatar.² In mid-summer 2019, a special forces training school is set to open in Chechnya in which Chechen, not Russian, instructors will train security personnel from Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.³

It is possible, of course, that Putin prefers that more blatant support for Saudi Arabia and the UAE be expressed by Kadyrov in order to distance Moscow from them and thereby preserve Russia's relations with Qatar and Iran. On the other hand, many see Kadyrov as pursuing an increasingly independent policy without reference to Moscow: annexing territory from Ingushetia to the west, demanding territory from Dagestan to the east, and improving ties with Georgia (with which Moscow's relations have been especially strained since the 2008 war) as well as with Azerbaijan to the south. As Neil Hauer has observed, Putin's unwillingness so far to stop Kadyrov's independent initiatives may encourage others in the North Caucasus to advance theirs.⁴

The Arab Gulf states do not appear to have encouraged Kadyrov to undertake any of these actions toward his immediate neighbors. But the fact that Putin has not put a stop to them may contribute to an impression in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and elsewhere that cooperating with Kadyrov is an effective method for pushing Putin's foreign policy in directions they prefer. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, after all, do not want Moscow to be "even-handed" between them and Iran or Qatar, but to side with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi against the latter two.

Especially at a time when Putin may have limited capacity to support Kadyrov, Kadyrov's willingness to turn to other countries for support must be unsettling for Moscow. The problem for Putin is that Russia needs both economic ties to the Arab Gulf countries, on the one hand, and Kadyrov's ability to keep Chechnya under control, on the other. This may compel Moscow to overlook some Saudi/UAE support for Kadyrov's freelancing policies even though they complicate Moscow's

islam/579394/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=1cd05758e7-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_10_03_23&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-1cd05758e7-400098637.

¹ See, for example, "Wahhabism 'Spreading Through Siberia,' Claims Chechen Mufti," *The Moscow Times*, October 5, 2016, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/10/05/wahhabism-spreading-through-siberia-says-chechen-mufti-a55595>.

² Paul Goble, "Qatar Crisis Exacerbating Sunni-Shiia Differences in Russia and Post-Soviet Space," *Window on Eurasia (blog)*, June 28, 2017, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2017/06/qatar-crisis-exacerbating-sunni-shiia.html>.

³ Neil Hauer, "Send Chechens, Guns, and Money," *Foreign Affairs*, February 4, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/chechnya/2019-02-04/send-chechens-guns-and-money>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

pursuit of its own goals. If Putin does not wish to risk moving directly against Kadyrov, one way to counterbalance him might be to encourage Qatar and Turkey (both rivals of Saudi Arabia and the UAE) to support Chechnya's neighbors, Ingushetia and Dagestan, where public opinion is increasingly anti-Kadyrov. Considering that balancing among adversaries both abroad and at home is an approach that Putin has not only long pursued but also perfected,¹ it is not inconceivable that he would be able to simultaneously balance between rival Muslim republics at home and between rival Middle Eastern actors abroad. But having to do so would hardly enhance Putin's image as the leader of a rising great power.

When Putin first rose to power at the turn of the century, Moscow worried about Saudi and other Arab Gulf states' support for jihadist opposition forces in Chechnya and Russia's other Muslim republics. Now, Moscow may have more reason to be concerned about their support not for the jihadist opposition but for Putin's own allies in the region, especially in Chechnya. The basic problem that has dogged Putin since he first came to power is that despite all the progress he has made in reasserting Russia's role in the world, he has been unable to fully control the country's Muslim republics. It is ironic that Kadyrov's cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in particular, may allow Chechnya's ruler greater independence from Moscow than any previous support from the Arab Gulf to the Chechen opposition did.

¹ Mark N. Katz, "Support Opposing Sides Simultaneously: Russia's Approach to the Gulf and the Middle East," Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, August 23, 2018, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2018/08/support-opposing-sides-simultaneously-russias-approach-gulf-middle-east-180823104054250.html>.

Chapter 3.

Russia and the Islamic Worlds: The Case of Shia Islam

Clément Therme, International Institute for Strategic Studies

In the 1990s, Moscow and Tehran decided to establish an institutional dialogue on cultural and religious issues. The official objective of this dialogue is to challenge the perceived “hegemonic Western cultural model” on the international scene. In its stead, both countries insist on the need to defend cultural diversity and to promote cultural and religious dialogues. In 1997, Tehran and Moscow established an interreligious dialogue and a joint commission between the official Shiite clergy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. Bilateral meetings are now taking place on a rotating basis every two years in Tehran and Moscow. Although the two parties have many differences, they both agree that the rights and freedoms of all human beings must come second to moral and religious standards.

Russia chose to pursue interreligious dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Iran as part of its strategy for improving its negative image in the Muslim world, an image occasioned by the Chechen wars.¹ This strategy also includes Moscow’s participation in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which Russia joined as an observer in 2005. In 2008, for the first time, the Russian foreign policy doctrine mentioned that international competition has a “civilizational dimension.”² According to Patriarch Kirill, it is important to promote national identity while opening dialogue with other civilizations, especially those represented in Russia:

While upholding its identity, the Russian world should be open to dialogue and cooperation with other civilizations of the world, above all with those whose religious and cultural traditions are represented in Russia. One objective here could be the establishment of “docking points” between our civilizations and other civilizations.³

There is also a joint working group between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴ To further its civilizational policy, Moscow has chosen to open a religious dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Shiite clergy. According to the former Russian Patriarch, Alexey II, the main objective of the commission is to define areas of agreement, such as opposition to “values of secularization imposed from the outside in contradiction to religious values.”⁵ As in the case of Russia’s observer status in the OIC, the bilateral religious commission is also a means for Moscow to show its openness to dialogue with the Muslim world, with which its relations have been complicated by the Chechen wars. From the Islamic Republic of Iran’s point of view, these dialogues allow its diplomacy to go beyond its traditional Islamic sphere of influence and show that Shiite clerics are theologically open to other monotheistic religions. The representative of the Shiite clerics

¹ Alexey Malashenko, “The Islam Factor in Russia Foreign Policy,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 5, no. 3 (July–September 2007): 157–170.

² Marlène Laruelle, “Russie: en quête de l’âme slave,” *Alternatives internationales* no. 6 (2011).

³ Patriarch Kirill, “Russia’s Spiritual Mission,” *International Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2011): 11.

⁴ Alicja Curanovic, *The Religious Factor in Russia’s Foreign Policy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁵ Declaration of Alexey II in the course of a December 2005 visit to Moscow by the president of the Iranian parliament, Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel; the last meeting of the committee was from February 27 to March 4, 2006, in Tehran, on the theme “Eschatology from the Point of View of Orthodoxy and Islam.”

and the representative of the Russian orthodox clergy both defend the superiority of moral values over the rights and freedoms of human beings.

The Iranian theocracy believes that there is a need to defend an Islamic definition of human rights. One of the main promoters of this Islamist approach to human rights is Ayatollah Taskhiri.¹ According to him, the realization of human rights is possible only for Muslim believers due to the link between the exercise of these rights and the religious fulfillment of human dignity. He sees a distinction between the “potential dignity” and “real dignity” of human beings, which depends on the realization or non-realization of religious duties. From the Western point of view, this reference to the foundation of human dignity contradicts Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Indeed, the West sees the divine dimension of the dignity defended by Ayatollah Taskhiri as introducing inequality between human beings.²

The Russian Orthodox Church sees human rights only in the context of the relationship between man and God. Their theological conception dictates that “if the right is in accordance with the divine truth, manifested by the Lord Jesus Christ, he is the guarantor of human freedom.”³ This divine dimension of the nature of the human being must also be understood in the framework of the concept of dignity according to the theological vision of Orthodoxy. Indeed, following similar reasoning to Ayatollah Taskhiri, the Orthodox Church suggests that the “dignity of a human being can only be found in his spiritual dimension.”⁴

As important as these theological debates might be to their proponents, cultural dialogue itself is not enough to solve political problems on an international stage. Indeed, even if dialogue is the least bad option for resolving international quarrels, many of these “dialogue discourses” are irrelevant when it comes to addressing political issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Hezbollah question, the terrorist activities of al-Qaeda or Daesh, and the Iranian nuclear issue.

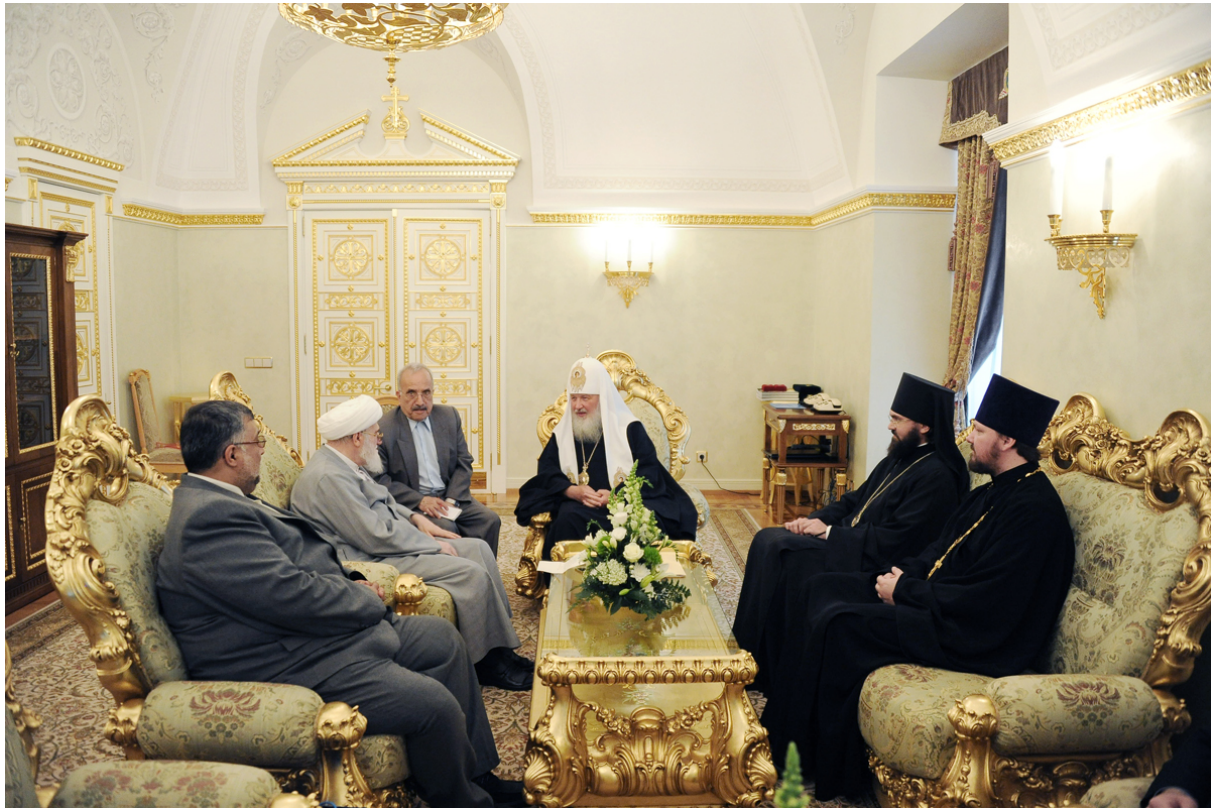
¹ In the dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church, the main institution active on the Iranian side is the Organization for Culture and Islamic Relations, led by Ayatollah Taskhiri (1994-2001), and, in particular, the Center for Interfaith Dialogue, which is part of the Organization. Taskhiri is also the Secretary General of the World Forum for the Proximity of Schools of Islamic Thought. As such, he has been a perennial participant in the Joint Commission for the Dialogue between Islam and Orthodoxy. He is of Iraqi origin and before becoming one of the Islamic Republic’s official representatives for interreligious dialogues, he was Iran’s representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) during the 1980s. Since 1999, he has also been a member of the Assembly of Experts (Province of Gilan). See Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kourosh Rahimkhani, *Postrevolutionary Iran: A Political Handbook* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2018), 769.

² Heiner Bielefeldt, “‘Western’ versus ‘Islamic’ Human Rights Conceptions?: A Critique of Cultural Essentialism in the Discussion on Human Rights,” *Political Theory* 28, no. 1 (February 2000): 104.

³ Eglise orthodoxe russe, *Les fondements de la doctrine sociale. Introduction par le Métropolitain Cyrille de Smolensk et de Kaliningrad* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf – Istina, 2007), 60.

⁴ Discourse of metropolitan Kyril of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, 7th Assembly of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Geneva, March 18, 2008. Printed in “Eglise et société. Les droits de l’homme et la foi,” *Messenger de l’Eglise orthodoxe russe. Revue orthodoxe d’information et de spiritualité* 8 (March-April 2008): 31.

Figure 1. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, Secretary General of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought. June 28, 2012



Source: The Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations, "His Holiness Patriarch Kirill Meets with Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, Secretary General of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought," June 28, 2012, <https://mospat.ru/en/2012/06/28/news66928>.

Iran has been engaging in dialogue between cultures and/or religions since 1979. During that time, dialogue has been one of the key instruments of Islamic foreign policy. After 1991, dialogue among civilizations became instrumental not only to integrate the Islamic Republic into the post-Cold War international context but also to defuse Western pressures against the Islamic Republic. The idea of religious dialogue in Iran dates back more than sixty years, to Ayatollah Hoseyn Borujerdi's initiative to establish a dialogue between Shiite clerics and Sunnis, on the one hand, and between Shiite clerics and Christian churches, on the other. Currently, Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, the head of the Islamic Culture and Communications Organization (*Sazman-e farhang va ertebat-e eslami*), is one of the main figures in charge of religious dialogue in the Islamic Republic.

Iran and Russia have decided to discuss cultural and religious issues in a bilateral way within the framework of diplomatic cultural cooperation and have advocated for cultural diversity as well as cultural and religious dialogue. They insist on shared cultural values such as the importance of family, ethics, and education. They consider their dialogue to be a joint cultural response to globalization and a means of confronting globalized Western cultural hegemony. They also underline

the necessity for dialogue among civilizations in a post-modern world. This view is criticized by the French philosopher Régis Debray, who strongly condemns the academic interpretation of dialogue among civilizations that sees it as a political necessity “to oppose the monologue of empire” and as an alternative paradigm for international relations.¹

Debray perceives European governments’ dialogue of civilizations discourse as a means to “label religious problems that are political [and] which have to be treated through political means.”² In their meetings, the political elites of the Islamic Republic and Russia indicated their disaffection with the hegemony of Western culture and unilateralism, going so far as to express their mutual belief in conspiracy theories. In one meeting, the Iranian vice-minister for cultural affairs explained that September 11, 2001, was a cinematographic construction in which there were no airplanes but rather bombs. From his point of view, the Americans used these events to launch a new crusade in the form of war between religions.³ The objective of countering Western cultural hegemony and plots against non-Western nations has been anchored in the Islamist political psyche; this has also been the case in Russia, although to a lesser degree. The ideological dimension of the diplomatic relationship is used with more flexibility in Moscow than in Tehran, with the result that the Islamic Republic’s authorities are more constrained by their ideological commitments to support an entente with Moscow than Russian decision-makers are vis-à-vis Tehran. The latter also appear far more pragmatic in the implementation of their foreign policy objectives than do Khomeini’s successors.

This interreligious dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Shia clergy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is also a tool for disseminating an alternative view of international relations than the one that dominates Western media. Here, religion is a tool for building alternative narratives.

Since 1997, the following meetings of the Orthodoxy-Islam Joint Commission have taken place:

- Tehran, 1997: religion and peace
- Moscow, 1999: peace and justice from the point of view of Muslim and Orthodox scholars
- Tehran, 2001: interreligious dialogue and international relations
- Moscow, 2004: Orthodoxy, Islam, and globalization from the point of view of religious ethics, culture, and religious beliefs
- Tehran, 2006: eschatology in Islam and Orthodoxy
- Moscow, 2008: divine teaching and human beings in Orthodoxy and Islam
- Tehran, 2010: religion and societies in the modern world, with a focus on dialogue among civilizations, globalization, terrorism and extremism, and moral and spiritual crisis in our societies
- Moscow, 2012: religion and human rights

¹ Régis Debray, *Un mythe contemporain: le dialogue des civilisations* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2007), 14.

² Ibid.

³ “Neshast-e goruh-e goft-o-gu-ye rahbordi Rusieh-jahan-e eslam,” *Faslnameh-ye motale’at-e asiya’i-ye Qafqaz* 54, no. 1385 (Summer 2006): 1.

- Tehran, 2014: “Importance and Strengthening of Cooperation and Mutual Understanding between Islam and Orthodoxy”
- Moscow, 2016: “Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation as Instruments for Achieving a Lasting and Just Peace”¹
- Tehran, 2018: religion and environment²

Despite their shared objective of offering an ideological alternative to the so-called Western view of international relations, Tehran and Moscow have not yet been able to establish a “Strategic Partnership,” even nearly 30 years after the fall of the Soviet Union.³ Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic’s political elite’s goal of overcoming historical enmity between Iran and Russia has been partially achieved due to the need to develop a foreign policy more oriented toward the East than toward the West.⁴

Iranian-Russian relations are based not on shared ideological values but rather on short-term geopolitical interests. Even the small institutional success they have achieved through the Orthodoxy-Islam Interreligious Dialogue remains incomplete given the importance of land to the construction of Iranian nationalism; anti-Russian feelings are still present in Iran (notably in the northern provinces). The interreligious dialogue and cultural convergence are not for Russian and Iranian public opinion; instead, they are a tool for the public diplomacy of Iran and Russia that allows the two states to build a narrative challenging what they consider a Western-dominated international order that has persisted since the end of the Cold War.

¹ See Russian Orthodox Church Department for External Church Relations “Communiqué of the 10th Meeting of Joint Russian-Iranian Commission for Orthodoxy-Islam Dialogue,” September 28, 2016, <https://mospat.ru/en/2016/09/28/news136265/>.

² See Russian Orthodox Church. Department for External Church Relations, “11th Meeting of Joint Commission for Orthodoxy-Islam Dialogue Takes Place in Tehran,” May 10, 2018, <https://mospat.ru/en/2018/05/10/news159773/>.

³ See Vladimir Sazhin, “Strategic Partnership between Russia and Iran at a New Phase: What Can the Two Countries Offer Each Other?” The Institute for Iran-Eurasia Studies (IRAS), Tehran, January 12, 2018, <http://www.iras.ir/en/doc/article/3522/strategic-partnership-between-russia-and-iran-at-a-new-phase-what-can-the-two-countries-offer-each-other>.

⁴ See “Iran’s Eastern Strategy,” *Strategic Comments* 36, no. 24 (November 2018), <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2018/irans-eastern-strategy>.

Chapter 4.

A Kadyrovization of Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Autocrats in Track II Diplomacy and Other Humanitarian Activities

Jean-Francois Ratelle, University of Ottawa

In August 2018, Ramzan Kadyrov—the brutal Chechen dictator—was received in Saudi Arabia for Eid al-Adha with all the diplomatic honors accorded to the representative of a major international partner. Kadyrov's status as a de facto representative of the Russian Federation has given rise to an array of questions in the international press, which has sought to better understand his role. Described as Russia's "cultural ambassador to the Islamic world,"¹ Moscow's "point man in Middle East,"² and even Russia's "top diplomat"³ in the region, Kadyrov—and his role in Russian foreign policy—remains understudied. Paradiplomacy is usually the prerogative of former diplomats or political leaders like Jimmy Carter, based on their stellar track record or their diplomatic experience.

Using a known autocrat with a horrendous human rights record represents a unique Track II diplomacy model requiring further analysis.⁴ Used to describe unofficial conflict resolution methods targeting protracted conflicts or other political issues that are not ready for official diplomacy, Track II diplomacy can also explain Moscow's new foreign policy model, which incorporates an array of unconventional methods. This policy memo focuses on recent Russian foreign policy in the Middle East, analyzing how a dictator can be used as a tool of informal diplomacy. In order to do so, I look at Kadyrov's role in Syria, his diplomatic activities with Arab countries, and what can be defined as Kadyrov's approach to multi-track diplomacy.

Ramzan Kadyrov: Moscow's Ambassador to the Middle East?

Since the official ending of counter-terrorist operations in Chechnya in 2009, Ramzan Kadyrov has increasingly been involved in what Suchkov calls a "silent diplomacy in the Middle East."⁵ In order to understand Kadyrov's unique role in the Middle East and Moscow's overall strategy in the region,

¹ "Exorting the Kadyrov Model Part II: Cultural Diplomacy," *Leksika*, February 17, 2018, <http://www.leksika.org/tacticalanalysis/2018/2/17/exporting-the-kadyrov-model-part-ii-cultural-diplomacy>.

² "World Cup Offers Chechnya Opportunity to Play Middle Eastern Politics," *Raamoprusland*, May 29, 2018, <https://www.raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/voetbal-2018/976-world-cup-offers-chechnya-opportunity-to-play-middle-eastern-politics>.

³ Pavel Luzin, "Ramzan Kadyrov: Russia's Top Diplomat," *Riddle*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.ridl.io/en/ramzan-kadyrov-russias-top-diplomat/>.

⁴ The Kadyrov administration conducted several purges against the LGBTQ community in Chechnya and even outside of the Republic. It was involved in the murder and illegal imprisonment of local journalists, as well as other human rights violations against the local population.

⁵ Maksim Suchkov, "Chechen Silent Diplomacy in the Middle East," *Foreign Policy*, January 14, 2014, <http://www.foreignpolicy.ru/en/analyses/chechnya-silent-diplomacy-in-the-middle-east/>.

one must first look at how Chechen foreign policy in the Middle East has evolved over the past 25 years.

Historically, Chechen political leaders and insurgents have sought to build political ties with Middle Eastern countries in order to challenge the asymmetric balance of power with Moscow. For example, during the de facto Chechen independence of the 1990s, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev actively promoted the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria abroad, focusing on Afghanistan, Turkey, and other Gulf countries. His active Chechen foreign policy created a dilemma for many Middle Eastern governments. On the one hand, they sought to support Islamic revival in the post-Soviet world and by extension the Chechen government, but on the other hand, they always had to be careful to preserve their strategic relationship with Moscow.

This dilemma began to change with the Second Chechen War and the Chechenization process. The first pro-Russian Chechen government, led by Akhmat-Haji Kadyrov, once again reached out to Middle Eastern countries, but this time with Moscow's tacit support. Moscow's objective was mainly to challenge the insurgent narrative that depicted Chechnya as akin to Kashmir, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan, and Iraq—that is, a foreign front for jihad where Muslims require protection against foreign invaders. This Chechen foreign policy model remained mainly symbolic and mainly controlled by Moscow; Akhmat Kadyrov was treated as a pawn in a broader political game.

Following Kadyrov's death and Ramzan Kadyrov's nomination as the head of the Chechen republic, the latter incrementally became a key political actor in Moscow's resurgence in the Middle East. The Russian government permitted him a substantial degree of freedom in conducting foreign policy activities. Kadyrov enjoyed comparatively strong support from the federal center for his quest to diplomatically connect Chechnya with Arab countries. The Chechen dictator was encouraged to cement his position as Moscow's conduit to the Muslim world. Strategically designed by Moscow, this approach aimed at advertising Russia in the Middle East as a pro-Muslim country, using the Chechen government and its political Islamist model as proof of Russia's openness to Islam. Furthermore, Kadyrov has been used to rebrand Chechnya as a subject of the Russian Federation where Muslims are protected against repression and where Islam flourishes. For Grozny, Moscow's latitude in foreign policy has provided the regime with an opportunity to increase its relative autonomy from the federal center without challenging Kadyrov's unique relationship with Vladimir Putin.

Kadyrov's activities go far beyond traditional diplomacy to include raising Chechnya's religious profile in the Muslim world. Kadyrov uses Islam to reform his international image as a brutal dictator repressing local insurgents through death squads and collective retaliation. In 2014, Kadyrov hosted King Abdullah II of Jordan in Grozny, seeking to build extensive partnerships with the Kingdom. In August 2018, Kadyrov went on the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and was subsequently invited to Jeddah, where he met with King Salman bin Abdulaziz. According to Kadyrov, the official goal of the visit was to "strengthen traditional friendly ties" with Saudi Arabia. During his visit, Kadyrov had access to the Prophet Mohammed's room and was allowed to perform Sufi rituals in the sacred place.¹ In November 2017, Kadyrov travelled to Bahrain in order to meet Prince Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa and cultivate bilateral relationships. Furthermore, Kadyrov attended King Salman's official visit to the Kremlin in 2017, once again underlining his importance to Russian foreign policy.

¹ Hassan Hassan, "Moscow's Little-Noticed Islamic-Outreach Effort," *The Atlantic*, January 5, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/01/russia-promotes-politically-pacifist-islam/579394/>.

Kadyrov was extended similar invitations when other foreign representatives of Middle Eastern countries visited Moscow.

Paradiplomacy in the Middle East is not limited to Kadyrov himself but extends to his inner circle. Recently, Ziad Sabsabi was named Kadyrov's representative to Syria and Iraq in charge of the program for repatriating women and children from the Islamic State. Alongside Sabsabi, Kadyrov has spearheaded the repatriation of women and children arrested in Syria and Iraq following the collapse of the Islamic State. Moscow has agreed to delegate full power over the Russian repatriation program to Kadyrov. Children from Moscow, Dagestan, Tver, and other regions in Russia, as well as Central Asian countries, have transited through the Chechen program independently of Moscow. Furthermore, through another of his allies, Lev Dengov, Kadyrov has also been directly involved in the effort to free Russian sailors in Libya. Dengov is now serving as Russian envoy to Libya, increasing Kadyrov's influence over the Libyan foreign policy file.¹

At the same time, Kadyrov's limited experience in paradiplomacy has caused minor setbacks for Moscow and its Middle Eastern partners. In 2016, Grozny co-organized, with Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, a conference of religious scholars held in Chechnya. The conference's main objective was to agree on an anti-extremism program that would establish a moderate approach to political Islamism, a program in which the Kadyrov regime would play a preponderant role. At the end of the conference, local scholars introduced a fatwa condemning Salafism as a "dangerous and erroneous contemporary sect," creating significant backlash in Saudi Arabia and other conservative Muslim countries.² According to certain journalists, Kadyrov was forced to personally apologize to Mohamed Ben Salam and refute the fatwa itself. Even with this setback, Moscow remains convinced of Kadyrov's central role in the Middle East and delegated part of the Syrian foreign policy file to him.

Ramzan Kadyrov: A Tool of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation in Syria?

Given his experience in the Middle East, Kadyrov came in very handy for the Russian regime as it sought to manage the fallout of its military campaign supporting the Assad regime in Syria. When Vladimir Putin launched his military intervention in Syria in September 2015, many countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United States, criticized Moscow for targeting "moderate" anti-regime forces. Although the Russian military intervention ensured the survival of the Assad regime, the effort antagonized many other Arab countries and Sunni Muslims around the world. This backlash has limited Moscow's ability to pursue a successful foreign policy campaign in the Middle East even as it has sought to fill the void left by the United States' disengagement from the region.

In consequence, Ramzan Kadyrov became Moscow's main asset in Syria. Moscow's "return to the Middle East" has banked on Kadyrov's image in the Middle East to win the hearts and minds of the local Syrian population. Starting in 2016, the Akhmat Kadyrov Foundation—a charitable organization managed by Ramzan Kadyrov's inner circle and named after his father—has provided humanitarian aid to the Syrian people as well as funding the reconstruction of the Umayyad Mosque

¹ Neil Hauer, "Princely Ties: The Growing Chechnya-Gulf Security Relationship," *The Defense Post*, December 27, 2018, <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/12/27/russia-chechnya-gulf-security-relationship/>; Alla Hurska and Lev Dengov, 'Ramzan Kadyrov's Middleman in Libya,' *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 15 (153), October 29, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/lev-dengov-ramzan-kadyrovs-middleman-in-libya/>

² Liz Fuller, "Analysis: Grozny Fatwa On 'True Believers' Triggers Major Controversy," *Radio Free Europe*, September 16, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus-report-grozny-fatwa-controversy/27987472.html>.

in Aleppo and other mosques around Syria.¹ Kadyrov's influence has also been growing in Syria through the use of Chechen military police battalions.

The Chechen regime has provided Vladimir Putin with a way to redress the grievances of the local population and seek to increase Moscow's influence over Syria. Had Russian forces attempted to rebuild mosques or deliver humanitarian aid in Syria and Iraq following their bloody air campaigns against moderate forces in the region, it would have provoked a strong backlash by the local population, potentially feeding a cycle of revenge and grievances directed toward Moscow. By using the Chechen leader, Moscow has been able to maintain and improve diplomatic ties with the Middle Eastern countries and counter the international view that Moscow is opposed to Sunni Islam in the Middle East and represses non-traditional Islam at home. Kadyrov is used to bridge the sectarian divide in Syria: by demonstrating that a Sunni leader can work with Moscow and the al-Assad regime, he is a living challenge to the narrative that Iran, Syria, and Russia are waging a war against Sunni Islam. In line with Kadyrov's pivotal role in Syria, Chechen officials like Grand Mufti Salakh Mezhiev and Federation Council representative Adam Delimkhanov have recently visited Chechen military police forces in Aleppo and mosques across the country. Blending soft and hard power, Kadyrov has demonstrated how important a role he can play in the grand scheme of Russian foreign policy in Syria.

Chechen Multi-Track Diplomacy in the Middle East: Economic Cooperation, Security Governance, and Sports

The Kadyrov approach to paradiplomacy reflects a complex understanding of multi-track diplomacy as defined by Louise Diamond and John McDonald.² According to the two scholars, interconnected diplomatic activities such as business relationships, religious links, and even sports, when taken together, can sustain diplomatic activities and peace-building efforts. For example, alongside his diplomatic activities in the Middle East, Kadyrov has recently launched a program to build new infrastructure to train Special Forces in Gudermes, aiming to create future partnerships with Gulf countries. Based on those ambitions, Daniil Martynov, head trainer of the Chechen *spetsnaz*, is increasingly involved in diplomatic activities in the Middle East.³ Chechnya's new *spetsnaz* university has attracted growing interest in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and even Libya.⁴ This might be just another of Kadyrov's megalomaniac projects, like the empty skyscrapers in Grozny and his future project for a ski resort in Southern Chechnya, but it also underlines his interest in raising his own profile in the Middle East.

¹ Human rights workers have reported that the majority of the funding supporting the charitable foundation was obtained through informal taxes imposed on the local population and businesses. Nataliya Vasilyeva, "Chechnya Becoming Major Player in Rebuilding War-Torn Syria," *NBC Los Angeles*, July 18, 2017, <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/national-international/Chechnya-Major-Player-Rebuilding-Syria-435187393.html>.

² Louise Diamond and John McDonald, *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1993).

³ Sabsabi was first appointed as Akhmat Kadyrov's special advisor on foreign affairs and increased his responsibilities under Ramzan Kadyrov, representing Chechnya in the Federation Council, where he held the position of deputy chairman of the foreign affairs committee.

⁴ Hauer, "Princely Ties"; "Kadyrov priglasit instruktorov iz SShA dlia podgotovki spetsnaza," *RBK*, November 23, 2016, <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/583535669a794772a453a1d7>.

With this in mind, the Chechen leader has attracted foreign investment to Chechnya. In 2015, Kadyrov's ties to Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan contributed to the establishment of the Zayed Fund to support local businesses in Chechnya, including women-only taxis.¹ Furthermore, since the end of the counter-terrorism operation in Chechnya in 2009, Grozny airport has transformed into a hub of international flights to the Middle East in a bid to expand direct economic ties with Arabic monarchies. Arab regimes might not have a favorable view of Kadyrov and his regime—particularly as the latter are followers of Sufism—but they understand very well how Kadyrov has created a way for them to provide friendly funding to support Islamic activities in Russia without creating political tensions with Moscow. In recent months, Riyadh has agreed to stop its proselytizing activities in Russia and cease supporting underground movements in the country, as Kadyrov has provided Saudi Arabia with a viable alternative.

Finally, Kadyrov has engaged in sports diplomacy. In 2014, he used the FIFA World Cup as a tool of foreign diplomacy by hosting Egypt's national soccer team and their star, Mohamed Salah. Kadyrov drew on Salah's international prestige to bolster his own image in the Middle East, just as he had previously tried to do with Western international stars such as Mike Tyson, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and Steven Seagal. Sports diplomacy is nothing new in Chechnya: Kadyrov previously used soccer as well as combat sports such as mixed martial arts and boxing to raise his regime's profile in Russia and abroad.

A Kadyrovization of Russian Foreign Policy in the Middle East?

Like the Chechenization model of the early 2000s, the arrangement between Ramzan Kadyrov and Moscow can be seen as a win-win situation. Because Moscow does not have the resources, ability, or prestige to sustain its foreign policy in the Middle East, the Putin regime has agreed to delegate part of its foreign policy to Kadyrov. This has allowed Kadyrov to improve his reputation in the Islamic circles of the Middle East and reinforce Chechen autonomy within the Russian Federation. In recent years, his foreign policy has extended to soft methods, including economic and religious partnerships as well as humanitarian assistance and military training. At the same time, the Chechen dictator has actively pursued repressive methods at international level, including the deployment of military police battalions in Syria and covert operations involving criminal groups and military personnel in Ukraine and in Western Europe.

Using Kadyrov as an asset of Track II diplomacy and foreign interference has created a conundrum for Moscow. Although contributing to Russia's resurgence in the Middle East, Kadyrov's diplomatic activities continue to support Grozny's growing autonomy from Moscow. Just as with Chechenization in the early 2000s, Moscow requires a combination of reward and punishment to ensure that Kadyrov respects the boundaries of his agreement with Moscow. In other words, Kadyrov's role remains limited to Moscow's blind spot in the Middle East and cannot extend to any other activities that might threaten Moscow's geopolitical goals. As Pavel Luzin explains, Moscow's approach is based on a "pragmatic dependence" framework where the Putin administration requires

¹ Amie Ferris-Rotman, "Chechnya's Leader Uses World Cup to Extend His Outreach to Middle East," *Washington Post*, May 27, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/chechnyas-leader-uses-world-cup-to-extend-his-outreach-to-middle-east/2018/05/25/2050d7b6-5cfb-11e8-b656-236c6214ef01_story.html?utm_term=.13b0cc76b028.

Kadyrov for plausible deniability with regard to military activities abroad¹ or when they lack credibility in certain diplomatic circles.² Yet this is not to say that Moscow relies solely on Kadyrov for its dealings with the Middle East. Russia continues to export vast amounts of weapons to Egypt and Algeria, as well as maintaining independent diplomatic activities outside of Kadyrov's initiatives, particularly in Syria and North Africa. The Russian government also uses other unconventional foreign policy tools, such as Yevgeny Prigozhin's infamous Wagner Group, which is increasingly active in Africa.³ Moscow's approach in the Middle East remains multi-pronged, seeking to balance multiple strategies involving an array of actors. Relying strictly on Kadyrov would only increase Moscow's vulnerability in the Arab world and further increase Grozny's autonomy within the Russian Federation.

¹ Kadyrov's military activities abroad also involved the deployment of Chechen forces to Georgia and in Eastern Ukraine, as well as criminal groups across Western Europe.

² Luzin, "Ramzan Kadyrov."

³ Kimberly Marten, "Into Africa: Prigozhin, Wagner, and the Russian Military," *PONARS Policy Memo* 561 (January 2019), <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/africa-prigozhin-wagner-and-russian-military>.

Chapter 5.

Tatarstan's Paradiplomacy with the Islamic World

Guzel Yusupova, Durham University

One of the Russian Federation's main ethnic republics, Tatarstan has the image of a northern outpost of Islam for the whole of the Russian Federation. Islamic culture is widespread in public spaces and Tatarstan has a well-developed Islamic infrastructure. Although most of the population does not practice Islam, surveys show that the number of "genuine" believers is growing.¹ The symbolic representation of Tatarstan as an Islamic region within Russia allows the republic to lay claim to more political resources than other ethnic republics enjoy, for instance to serve as a platform for the development of Islamic banking on the federal level or to host international events associated with Islam. This, in turn, has made Tatarstan distinctive in terms of its paradiplomacy with the Islamic world—although this historically-rooted distinctiveness has become limited to symbolic politics under Putin. Following Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, this paper defines paradiplomacy as the international activities of sub-national governments, including purely symbolic activities.² In order to understand current developments, it is important to trace the origin of Tatarstan's relations with Islamic countries from the early 1990s, when the republic had much more autonomy from the federal center than it has now.

Tatarstan's Paradiplomacy in the 1990s and Early 2000s

In her 2003 paper, Gulnaz Sharafutdinova argued that during the 1990s and early 2000s, Tatarstan's paradiplomacy represented the incorporation of elements of statehood into the republic's identity: through its international activities, Tatarstan was "acting like a state" in order to gain the recognition of international actors and exercise sovereignty, albeit with certain limitations. Her analysis of most of the diplomatic efforts made by Tatarstani leaders reveals the significance of the Islamic factor in developing foreign relations. She especially highlighted the emerging representational role of Tatarstan's President as a symbolic actor.³ She wrote that during the 1990s, "Tatarstan [...] developed special relations with Turkey, Egypt, the UAE and Jordan. It was in Egypt that President Shaimiev was received as a head of a sovereign nation-state. In Jordan the Prime Minister of Tatarstan met King Hussein in November 1997 and was awarded the prestigious order dedicated to friendship among the two peoples. In Turkey, during his vacations, the President of Tatarstan never missed a chance to meet the then President, Suleiman Demirel."⁴

¹ G. Guzelbaeva, *Religioznye identichnosti i praktiki pravoslavnykh i musulman v modernizirueshemsia soobshestve. Etnichnost', religioznost' i migratsii v sovremennom Tatarstane* (Kazan: Kazanskii Universitet, 2013), 55–74.

² Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, "Paradiplomacy in the Russian Regions: Tatarstan's Search for Statehood," *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 4 (2003): 613–629, 614.

³ *Ibid.*, 634.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 618.

Sharafutdinova highlights that the prevailing Islamic direction of Tatarstan's diplomatic activities cannot be understood as purely economic. Instead, she argues, cultural, religious, and political factors were driving forces behind these contacts: "Owing to cultural and religious links, Tatarstan gets distinct attention and recognition from these [Islamic] states, which consider Tatarstan's 'statehood' more seriously than the countries of the West. This is clearly revealed in the formalities surrounding the visits of official delegations. To the extent that the sovereignty of the republic depends on recognition by other states, it is not surprising that the republican leaders would pursue wider contacts with states that recognize Tatarstan as a sovereign state (at least through protocol) and are willing to bypass Moscow in their relations with Tatarstan."¹ Common religion was essential at that time, when other states recognized Tatarstan's autonomy and its right to pursue its own international diplomacy. Islam, however, placed no fundamental importance on establishing economic cooperation.

Tatarstan's role in establishing cooperation with Muslim countries during the 1990s is also well described in Katherine Graney's book *Of Khans and Kremllins*: "Besides twice receiving official delegations from Iran and Turkey and visiting those countries as the personal guest of their presidents, signing several business and other agreements with these and other Islamic states such as Sudan, Iraq, and Libya, Shaimiyev has offered himself as a mediator for both the Chechen and Afghan crises."²

After the transformation of relations between the federal center and the regions in the 2000s, the relative autonomy of the national republics within the Russian Federation was abolished, theoretically leaving them on a par with other regions of the country. However, I argue here that regional leaders used a variety of methods, including distinctive symbolic (often religious) representation, to maintain their differences from other regions, as did Tatarstan with Islam.³ Tatarstan also became widely recognized for its success in attracting federal subsidies and federal support for regional industrial, technological, and infrastructural projects, in turn leading to the development of tourism in the region,⁴ with implications for present-day relations with the UAE that will be discussed below.

Overall, in the 2000s, the federal center took away Tatarstan's autonomy in paradiplomatic activities. However, the federal authorities began to acknowledge the importance of involving Tatarstan's leaders, as persons representing a Muslim region, in negotiations between Russia and the Muslim world.⁵ Discursive representation of Tatar Islam and Tatarstan as its traditional land serves the following functions for Russia: (1) as a bridge between the Muslim world and Russia (diplomatic function); (2) as a linchpin between Muslim and European civilizations and a panacea for conflicts on religious grounds (tolerance function); and (3) as the face of Russian Islam (representative function).⁶

¹ Ibid., 618.

² Katherine Graney, *Of Khans and Kremllins: Tatarstan and the Future of Ethno-Federalism in Russia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009), 76.

³ Guzel Yusupova, "The Islamic Representation of Tatarstan as an Answer to the Equalization of the Russian Regions," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 1 (2016): 38-54.

⁴ Gulnaz Sharafutdinova and Rostislav Turovsky, "The Politics of Federal Transfers in Putin's Russia: Regional Competition, Lobbying, and Federal Priorities," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2017): 161-175.

⁵ Graney, *Of Khans and Kremllins*, 77-78.

⁶ Yusupova, "The Islamic Representation of Tatarstan."

What Changed after the Early 2000s?

Despite the significant change in relations with the federal center, international activities and domestic developments in the republic during the 1990s had a significant impact on Tatarstan's current affairs with Islamic countries.

From the 2000s, participation in diplomatic meetings and other events attended by representatives of the Muslim world became a privilege of the Tatarstani elite not enjoyed by representatives of other regions of the Russian Federation with a significant Muslim population. For instance, in August 2004, one year before Russia obtained observer status in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), President of Tatarstan Mintimier Shaimiev met with Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the incoming OIC Secretary General, in the Kazan Kremlin. The following extract from the regional media is a telling example of the mediating role played by Tatarstan in establishing good relations between Russia and the Muslim world:

“I hope Russia obtains observer status in the OIC,” said Mr. İhsanoğlu, “and I know that many countries in the Islamic world would also welcome Russia being granted such a status. Vladimir Putin said that Russia is a multiconfessional state, where the Christians and the Muslims live in peace. This important notion was satisfyingly accepted by the Islamic world. The perfect example of such co-existence is the Republic of Tatarstan. I believe that Russia will be able to obtain observer status very soon.”¹

President Shaimiev (who was at the time an atheist) was awarded the King Faisal International Prize in the Service to Islam category in 2008. This trend was continued by Tatarstan's next president, Rustam Minnikhanov, who was in 2014 appointed by Vladimir Putin as Coordinator of the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group.

The promotion of Tatarstan as a symbol of Russia's Islam extends beyond the region. The most significant sources of this portrayal are the current president's Twitter and Instagram accounts, where he posts pictures of the republic's sights—Muslim ones prevail. Since the 2000s, the republic's organization of religious events associated with Islamic culture (holidays, festivals, forums, etc.) has served to increase the prominence of Tatarstan even beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. One such important event is the annual Muslim film festival “The Golden Minbar,” an international festival that was started in 2005. (In 2010, the festival changed its name to “The Kazan International Festival of Muslim Cinema.”) As the official website of the festival relates, it was founded by the Council of Russia Muftiate, the Tatarstan television company *Islamskii Mir*, and the Islamic Cultural Center of Russia. Originally, the festival was conceived as rotating among different regions of Russia and the world. However, after a personal request by President Mintimer Shaimiev, the founders agreed to hold it annually in Kazan.

Since 2009, Tatarstan has also hosted an international Islamic finance summit, known as KAZANSUMMIT, with support from the regional government. In 2016, an additional three words were added to the name Kazansummit: “Russia-Islamic World.” One of the initial aims of this event was to develop Islamic banking. At the end of the 2000s, there were several grassroots efforts to implement Islamic banking in Tatarstan; the most famous of these was a nonprofit partnership of Muslim entrepreneurs called *Tarkhan*. Currently, six financial institutions in Tatarstan offer Islamic

¹ <http://shaimiev.tatar.ru/news/view/10033>, accessed June 14, 2013, no more available.

finance products: the Islamic business and finance development (IBFD) fund, Financial House “Amal,” TatAgroProm Bank, the Tatarstan International Investment Company, the Center for Islamic Economics and Finance Development, and the Russian Center of Islamic Economics and Finance. However, quantitative research by Muhamad Abduh shows that only 5.4 percent of people in Tatarstan are aware of the existence of Islamic financial services, on a par with the 5.8 percent aware of such services in Dagestan.¹ Yet although residents of Tatarstan may not be interested in it, the development of Islamic banking has been attracting significant attention from the regional and federal elite since the Russian turn to Islamic countries for investment in light of the current economic confrontations with the West. The latter has turned KAZANSUMMIT into an event for soliciting investment. The republic has also managed to attract a few investments from Turkey; the UAE development company Al Habtoor Group is currently in discussions to build hotels in Kazan.

As a result of both Russia’s recent turn to the East and Tatarstan’s diplomatic and economic activities during the 1990s, the republic continues to increase its trade with Islamic countries. According to Associate Professor of Kazan Federal University Azat Akhunov, diplomatic missions of Tatarstan to Islamic countries, opened in the 1990s, have been renamed to trade unions and currently support Tatarstan’s economic activities abroad. In 2018, Tatarstan’s largest trading partners among the Arab Gulf countries were the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Tatarstan exports various vehicles and aircraft duplicates, rubber products, and petroleum products to the Gulf countries. Tatarstan’s share of Russian commodity turnover with these countries has been growing slowly over the past five years, but it has not yet reached more than two percent of total Russian-Gulf turnover.² At KAZANSUMMIT 2019, Minnikhanov announced a new, agricultural direction for export to Islamic countries, namely halal products. Interviews suggest that a wave of religious migration by Tatars to Gulf Muslim countries during the 1990s resulted in the establishment there of formal and informal Tatar diaspora communities that serve as a source of soft power for Tatarstan.

Another relatively new project that consolidates Tatarstan’s symbolic status and its paradiplomacy with Islamic states is the Bulgar Islamic Academy, which was opened in 2017 and positions itself as a leading Russian Islamic educational institution. The Academy aims to develop international educational programs and attract foreign students and academic staff.

Conclusion

Tatarstan’s intense symbolic paradiplomacy with Islamic countries in the 1990s was limited under the presidency of Vladimir Putin and has not resulted in any significantly distinctive relations between Tatarstan and Islamic world in comparison to other regions of Russia. Instead, the symbolic importance of Tatarstan’s president as an ambassador for Russia has grown. Despite the Kremlin’s strict control, economic and symbolic ties made in the 1990s not only have not disappeared but have even become better institutionalized for future collaborations. With Russia’s turn to the Islamic world as a result of Western sanctions, Tatarstan’s interactions with Islamic countries are once again slowly growing in intensity and effectiveness.

¹ Mohamed Abduh, “Factors Influencing Russians to Patronize Islamic Financial Products and Services: Case Study in Dagestan and Tatarstan,” *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2018): 169.

² Platforma XXI, accessed April 21, 2019, https://vk.com/wall-59737330_7274.

Chapter 6.

Russian Islamic Religious Authorities and Their Activities at the Regional, National, and International Levels

Denis Sokolov, CSIS

Islamic religious authorities in Russia are divided into several political groups. Russian Islamic leaders failed to create a united Muftiate, a Muslim version of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church that would cover the whole of the Russian Federation. In the early 1990s a split occurred on the national level between the Central Muslim Religious Directorate of Russia of the Grand Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin and another Tatar group, which was composed of the last Soviet generation of alumni of the Bukhara Mir-i-Arab Madrasah, including Nafigullah Ashirov, Mukaddas Bikbarsov, and Ravil Gaynetdin. But even before this split among Tatar religious leaders, the Muftiates of the Caucasus were practically all autonomous: there was one in Daghestan, one in Chechnya, one in Ingushetia, one in Kabardino-Balkariya and Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, and one in North Ossetia.

These different groups vie for control of or influence over the Russian Islamic community, “federal” Muftiates, regional Muftiates and individual mosques, financial flows involved in setting up Hajj trips, mixed communities in Russian regions, and migration networks of ethnic Muslims from Russia abroad. For example, in recent years, Dagestani Muslims have managed to “insert” several dozen of their imams into the Muftiate of Moscow and the Moscow region.

These political groups try to build their own foreign policy—that is, their own independent relations with foreign religious organizations, communities, and even states. These informal diplomatic contacts with the outside world can be used as an important argument in the competition to secure the support of Moscow’s federal authorities. The Russian Islamic religious leaders also conduct international activities via both official religious organizations and informal business and religious networks. The emergence of competing groups within Russia’s Islamic religious elites has therefore shaped Russia’s Islamic diplomacy in various ways that still remain to be studied in depth and the broad features of which I will present here, with a focus on CIS countries such as Ukraine.

Classmates Politics and Growing Ideological Divides

The time and place of religious education largely define the ways in which several cohorts of Russian Islamic religious leaders were formed. Back in the Soviet era, the older generation, born before the 1960s, graduated from the Bukhara Mir-I Arab madrasah and later went to the Islamic University in Tashkent. Those who graduated from the Bukhara Madrasah in the final years of the USSR (the mid- and late 1980s), can, due to their age and espousal of dissident ideas trendy at the time, be distinguished from the older generation in both their organizational practices and their willingness to adopt modern trends in the wider Islamic world. Religious leaders of this generation, including

Nafigullah Ashirov, Mukaddas Bikbarsov, Mukhammad Karachay, and Khajimurad Gatsalov, are proactive in terms of managing Muslim activities both domestically and abroad. They regularly frequent Istanbul and work closely with Russian Muslims in Turkey, Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The activities and contacts they have established have turned them into an informal channel of international negotiations, an instrument of para-diplomacy, and an element of Russia's soft power.

The junior generation of Russia's Muslim elite, born after 1960, studied in international Islamic schools in Medina, Damascus, Cairo, and other foreign cities from the 1990s to 2000s, and to a lesser extent up to the 2010s. The majority of them acquired Salafi *aqidah*. Whether they did or not, they were perceived at home as agents of global political Islam. As a result, their engagement in domestic politics has been more limited.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Islamic activists of the time attempted and failed to create an Islamic Renaissance Party. A Dagestani Duma deputy, Nadir Khachilaev, also tried and failed to cooperate with Viktor Chernomyrdin's political project "Russia is Our Home" in 1998, stressing this generation's distance from politics, perceived as the domain of secularized politicians. In the mid-2000s, Vladislav Surkov, the head of the Domestic Policy Directorate of the Presidential Administration, suddenly brought an end to his own project of creating a Muslim version of the pro-presidential youth political movement "Nashi."

During the 2000s, in order to interdict any politicization of Islam, the Russian government worked with the official "traditionalist" Islamic religious leadership to label the majority of international Islamic movements (Tablighi Jamaat, Hizmet Hareketi, and particularly the politicized groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Muslim Brotherhood) as extremist and terrorist. It also forced the Turkish lyceums (Gülen movement schools) in the Volga region and the North Caucasus to either close down or restructure according to Ministry of Education requirements. As late as 2010, the Russian government removed all foreign professors (as well as Russian graduates of foreign Islamic universities) from Russian state institutions, starting with the Kazan Islamic University.

This does not mean that there is not potentially room for Muslims to engage in collective action on the Russian political scene. In the early 2010, several mass protests in Tatarstan and Dagestan against discrimination against Muslims were conducted in response to the government policy of squeezing out successful Islamic preachers from open public fora. In 2017, the Muslims' Religious Directorate of Dagestan tried to take part in the Russian Duma elections. Its representatives ran as candidates for the People Against Corruption Party. They had massive support from the people of Dagestan, which scared Moscow, the secret services, and probably the religious functionaries themselves. Even though the party dropped out of the elections, it succeeded in revealing the significant political potential of Islam in the region.

By 2010, the official religious authorities had successfully convinced the government and the secret services that the graduates of foreign Islamic universities were dangerous: young, educated, and popular preachers were completely squeezed out of the Muftiates of Dagestan, Tatarstan, Northwestern Siberia (in the city of Tiumen, the central mosque's imam, an Uzbek with Salafi convictions, was forced to emigrate and now resides in Istanbul), and other regions of Russia. Some of them left for Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, or the European Union.

However, even if marginalized from official positions, several dozen of the most influential Russian-speaking graduates of international Islamic universities (out of the 2,000 to 3,000 Russian-speaking alumni of these institutions) remain important religious and cultural agenda-setters for millions of Muslims in Russia. For instance, one of the most influential Russian-language Islamic educational projects is the “Medina” Online Islamic Academy, established and led by former North Ossetia Mufti Ali Yevteyev, a graduate of the Islamic University of Medina, who resides in Istanbul. The site “Golos Islama” (The Voice of Islam), one of the most popular Islamic resources online, is led by a Russian Muslim, Hamza (Dmitry) Chernomorchenko, who was deported from Turkey to Finland in 2018 after being pressured by Russian secret services.

While there are no Islamic political parties in Russia, one can identify several confessional groups with political worldviews within the Islamic community. Their vivid internal debates serve to divide regional and local communities along ideological lines. Only political clans of classmates or associations of fellow countrymen dare to operate in open public fora, often to accuse each other of supporting religious extremists. Among the hundreds of thousands of Russian-speaking Muslims living in Europe, Turkey, Ukraine, and the Middle East, similar confessional political divisions are visible: supporters and opponents of Al-Qaeda, followers of ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Nur Movement, Takfir wal-Hijra, Hizb ut-Tahrir, etc.

Dagestani and Chechen Ethnic Networks at Home and Abroad

A second mechanism for creating political groups among the Russian Islamic religious leadership is ethnic or regional solidarity. Obviously, the Tatar Islamic religious leadership maintains its influence in the Volga region, Moscow, and some cities in Northwestern Siberia. It controls all the federal Islamic organizations: the Central Muslim Religious Directorate of Russia, the Russian Council of Muftis, and the Muslim Religious Directorate of the Asian Part of Russia. Tatars are divided into different groups: natives of the Sredniaia Eliuzan village, those from the Penzenskaia oblast, and those who belong to the humongous Kazan clan. Tatar groups interact, compete, and overlap with each other. As Guzel Yusupova’s paper in this volume discusses, Tatarstan itself maintains extensive business ties with Turkey in particular: symptomatically, it openly refused to join Russian sanctions against Ankara after a Turkish aircraft shot down a Russian bomber in Syria in 2015. But religious elements are not very significant in Tatar-Turkish ties and the Tatar-Muslim world relationship more globally: priority is given to economic projects and symbolic recognition.

The case is different for the North Caucasian republics, where the religious element directly influences strategies at home and abroad. The Dagestani (mostly Avar) group has increasingly gained control over communities in the Russian Far East, the Irkutsk region, and some cities of Northwestern Siberia. Due to the large presence of migrants from Dagestan in the Stavropol region and Rostov oblast, the majority of rural and city imams (including those of central mosques) are natives of that North Caucasian republic. The influence of the Dagestani Muftiate is particularly strong in the Astrakhan and Volgograd regions. There were cases when religious functionaries from Makhachkala were directly involved in the appointment or removal of rural imams in the Astrakhan region.

As for the mosques in Northwestern Siberia and the Russian Far East, the Muslims’ Religious Directorate of Dagestan created a special Hanafi Department at the Islamic University of Makhachkala in order to prevent the spread of Salafi preachers, who were often natives of Uzbekistan or Dagestani alumni of Middle Eastern Islamic universities. There were cases, however, when the

Muslims' Religious Directorate sent its own loyal graduates of Medina and Damascus Islamic universities to these regions, as in the case of the new Imam of the Juma Mosque in Magadan.

As for the international influence of the Dagestani religious leadership, two examples should be mentioned. The first is that of Ukraine. The Dnipro Sufi mosque community is one of the most respected in the city and is linked to the Muslim Religious Directorate of Dagestan. Its head is a former advisor on religious issues to the Dagestani President, Ramazan Abdulatipov. Dagestani followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir who fled from persecutions in the North Caucasus and the Volga region to Kyiv, Lviv, Odessa, and other Ukrainian cities have become an important political factor in Ukraine.

For example, Young Sheikh Abdullah Kosteksky (Rabadanov), an ethnic Darghin and a grandson of one of the most influential Sufi Sheikhs, Magomed Kosteksky (Rabadanov), is the leader of a Jihadi Islamist movement made up of Dagestanis and ethnic Russian converts who are veterans of the armed struggle in Dagestan, where they fought as Caucasus Emirate fighters, and of the war in Syria, where they fought on the side of the Free Syrian Army against (among others) ISIS. Abdullah wields a great deal of moral authority among many Russian-speaking Muslims in Turkey and Ukraine, as well as in Russia.

An entire community of followers of the Ukrainian Mufti of Lebanese origin, Ahbashi Sheikh Akhmad Tamim, emerged in Southern Dagestan, in yet another example of the extraordinary influence of foreign Islamic groups in Russia. The Muslim Religious Directorate of Dagestan had no other option than to use administrative power to fight the followers of the Ukrainian-Lebanese sheikh. Curiously, a large group of Chechens who moved to Ukraine in the 1990s and early 2000s at his suggestion have remained loyal to Ahbashi teaching. After migrating to Germany, some of them became followers of Ramzan Kadyrov, enhancing the split within the Chechen diaspora.

The second example of the international influence of the Dagestani religious leadership is Georgia. The Muslims' Religious Directorate of Dagestan controls the Islamic communities of the three Avar villages in northeastern Georgia. For instance, in the Avar village of Tivi (populated by people originating from the Tliaratinskii Municipal District of Dagestan), half of those attending Friday prayers at the local mosque are followers of the official Dagestani Islam. Under pressure from the Muslims' Religious Directorate of Dagestan, the local imam, who represents the Georgian Muftiate, has lost his influence over local Muslims.

Chechen communities, too, play a critical role in building political networks at home as well as abroad. The old conflict between the Mufti of the Muslims' Religious Directorate of Ukraine, Akhmad Tamim (who is an Ahbashi follower), with Dagestani sheikhs who are followers of the Naqshbandi and Shadhili *tariqas* resulted in empowering the Chechens, who enjoy the greatest influence over the communities of the Muslims' Religious Directorate of Ukraine (competing with the MRDU Ummah of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb ut-Tahrir of Ukraine, and the Pan-Ukrainian Salafi religious organization). Among the Ukrainian Chechens there are many Ahbashi followers, and the main MRDU Islamic newspaper was founded by a Chechen businessman who is allegedly an unofficial representative of Ramzan Kadyrov in Kyiv. All the Chechen networks in Ukraine (particularly these in Kyiv, Odessa, and Kharkiv), whether religious, criminal, or business, are a tool of Kadyrov's direct influence in the country.

Beyond Chechnya's borders, Chechens rarely hold positions as imams and chairmen of Councils of Muftis. However, thanks to the special status of their leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, the centralized system of Chechen ethnic organizations in Russian regions, and an extensive and

consolidated ethnic crime network, Chechens wield significant economic, political, and even criminal influence in many Islamic communities and Muftiates in Central Russia, Eastern and Western Siberia, and some former Soviet republics and EU countries. (Very often, Kadyrov's emissaries in Turkey and the Middle East are Chechen Muftis.) This is true in Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and even in Israel, where a mosque and a road named after Ramzan Kadyrov were built with the money of a Chechen leader in the village of Abu-Gosh. According to the village head, many Abu-Gosh denizens became aware of the "Chechen cultural code." The efforts of Kadyrov, the Muftiate, and activists loyal to Kadyrov earned Russia a reputation as a country that efficiently works to repatriate the wives and children of their ISIS fighters.

In the spring of 2019, Kadyrov's men launched a campaign to spread the modern official interpretation of Sheikf Kunta-haji (Kishiev), the de-facto state religion in Chechnya, among Chechens in the diaspora, who are mostly Salafis of the Qadiriyya *tariqa*. Noisy Qadiriyya dhikrs were conducted in Hamburg and Berlin. But the Chechen leader also uses more shadowy measures of influence, such as spreading influence over young Chechens in the European diaspora through wrestling clubs.

In some regions, including Sakha-Yakutia and Magadan oblast, the Muftiates are led by ethnic Ingush. Since Ingushetia itself is divided between different religious groups, Ingush imams in different Russian regions represent different Ingush groups: in Yakutsk the local Imam is a Sufi of the Qadiriyya *tariqa* of the Kunta-haji wird, while the local Imam in Magadan is a Salafi, a follower of Isa Tsechoev, an influential Ingush preacher and renowned expert on Islam. However, contrary to its Chechen counterpart, the Ingush religious leadership is almost never involved in international political projects.

In-depth research remains to be conducted on how Russia's ethnic Muslim communities act abroad, not only in the Middle East, but also—and especially—in Europe, where they now constitute important diasporas. For sake of fairness, it should be noted that Russian Islamic religious leadership is a two-way channel for moving across people, ideas, and interests, and serves not only as a tool of Russian influence in the Islamic World, but also as an instrument of influence for Islamic nations and political actors on Russia's domestic and foreign policies.

Chapter 7.

The Economics of the Hajj: The Case of Tatarstan

Azat Akhunov, Kazan Federal University

While the Hajj is often studied in terms of its religious aspect, it also offers insights into Islamic political economy, an aspect of Russia's Islam that remains understudied. In this paper, I discuss the economics of the Hajj in the case of Tatarstan as a way to explore how Islamic practices have changed in the republic. Over the course of almost three decades, the Republic of Tatarstan has made a major economic transition, going from being a minor autonomous republic within the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) to becoming one of the leading donor regions in today's Russian Federation. In the course of this transition, Tatarstan has passed through four broad stages of political development, which can be broadly broken out as follows:

1. Political priorities at the forefront: sovereignty, orientation toward autonomy and independence, contractual relationship with the federal government (1990-1994)
2. Development: establishment and consolidation of the three branches of government independent from the central government, independent economic policy, horizontal international relations (1994-2006)
3. Decline: bringing legislation into line with federal law, full integration into the Russian power vertical (2006-2017)
4. Loss of sovereignty: termination of contractual relations with the federal center, inability to protect national priorities (August 2017-present)

Tatarstan's religious life since the late Soviet period, too, can be divided into multiple stages, according to the Tatar Islamologist Rafik M. Mukhametshin: legalization (1988-1992), institutionalization of Islam (1992-1998), structuring (1998-2002), internal mobilization (2002-2006), and determination of ideological and theological reference points (2006-present).¹ One way of looking at these transformations is to delve into the political economy of Tatar Islam.

By the time of the Soviet Union's collapse, the Tatar Autonomous Republic (TASSR) had no independent Islamic administrative institutions. Its 230 parishes² were directly subordinated to the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia (DUMES), headquartered in Ufa, in Bashkiria. At that time, DUMES was quite financially stable. As the mufti Talgat Tadjuddin himself noted in an interview with the newspaper *Sotsialistik Tatarstan* in 1998, in the Soviet era DUMES donated 25-30 percent of the money it collected on an annual basis (approximately 250,000 rubles, or US\$416,000) to the Fund for Peace. In addition, it made donations to several funds, among them the Chernobyl Fund (40,000 rubles), the All-Union *subbotnik* (35-40,000 rubles), and the Victory Monument in Moscow.³

¹ R. Mukhametshin, "Islam in the Social and Political Life of Modern Tatarstan," in *History of Tatars since Ancient Times, volume 7: Tatars and Tatarstan in XX – Early XXI Century* (Kazan, 2013), 681-683. (In Russ.)

² "Mufti Talgat Tajutdin Gathered the Expanded Plenary Session of DUMES in Ufa," *Izvestiia Tatarstana*, August 28, 1992 (In Russ.)

³ Sh. Malikov, "The Reality Exposes Fictions," *Sotsialistik Tatarstan*, October 16, 1988 (In Russ.)

Table 1. Income and expenses of the registered religious associations in the Tatar ASSR for the years 1967, 1972, and 1973 (in thousands of rubles)

Denominations, sources of income and expenditures	Years		
	1967	1972	1973
Orthodox Christianity			
Total revenue	1,161.2	1,613.1	1,704.5
Selling candles	598.7	857.5	915.8
Voluntary donations	135.6	141.5	143.0
Performing rites	184.4	340.9	363.5
Total expenses	1,160.3	1,548.8	1,574.5
Of which donations to the Fund for Peace	390.0	476.0	493.5
Of which donations to the Society for the Preservation of Monuments (VOOPIK)	-	23.0	25.5
Islam			
Total revenue	120.5	203.0	231.2
Voluntary donations	72.7	108.3	102.5
Total expenses	78.0	168.3	221.9
Of which donations to the Fund for Peace	11.4	46.6	51.9
Of which donations to the Society for the Preservation of Monuments (VOOPIK)	-	3.0	6.5
Of which donations to the Department of External Relations with Foreign Muslim Communities	6.2	17.0	28.9

Source: R.R. Ibrahimov, *Vlast' i religiia v Tatarstane v 1940-1980kh godakh* (Kazan, 2005), 177.

This rare data—we do not have it for all years, and especially not for the 1980s—shows that the income of the Tatar ASSR's Muslim religious associations doubled between the 1960s and the 1970s. We also know, thanks to Tadjuddin's interview, that it then doubled again in the early 1990s. People's interest in religion increased during perestroika, bringing about a sharp increase in the revenue of Muslim spiritual authorities. In the late 1980 and early 1990s, Tadjuddin managed to import into the USSR a million copies of the Arabic Koran, received as a gift from Saudi Arabia. They were put on sale for 33 rubles per book. In Kazan's Marjani mosque alone, book sales reached 214,995 rubles in the period from April 17 to May 31, 1990.¹

In addition, there were direct currency transfers from Arab funds, organizations, and individuals that were intended for the construction of mosques and madrasahs, Islamic camps,

¹ V. Yakupov, *Islam v Tatarstane v nachale 1990kh godakh* (Kazan, 2005), 57.

sending Muslims on the Hajj, and other purposes. Most of this money went to Ufa, to the DUMES headquarters. In fairness, however, it must be said that Tadjuddin used to leave some of the money in the place where it was brought in. Thus, revenues from Korans sold in Ufa were used to fund a madrasa in Zakabannaia mosque; students received scholarships and paid for their accommodation thanks to this money.¹

Religious figures, especially young and ambitious ones like the future first mufti of sovereign Tatarstan, Gabdulla Galyullin, wanted to take the power into their own hands—at least on their own territory. Nationalist organizations added fuel to the fire by demanding that DUMES be relocated from Ufa to Kazan. As a result, a split of DUMES became inevitable, and in 1992 two independent Spiritual Boards were established for Bashkortostan and Tatarstan.

The Hajj was one of the tools for manipulating the flow of revenues using the traditional distribution system. It was a business for those organizing it, one that initially generated small but stable profit. In addition, until the mid-1990s Saudi Arabia offered the post-Soviet region thousands of free trips on the Hajj, up to 13,000 per year. All this looked very attractive to the new Muslim leaders.

During the Soviet period, Hajj travel was an exceptional event. Only a few faithful, the most trustworthy and reliable, had the chance to perform the ritual obligatory for all Muslims. During those years, the Hajj costs were largely borne by pilgrims themselves; some pilgrims received financial support from spiritual authorities and ordinary believers. Archival data published by V. A. Akhmadullin provide some insight into the costs associated with going on the Hajj during that period. For example, in 1955 the Muslims of Chistopol in the TASSR collected 16,000 rubles to send their imam, M. R. Rakhimov, to the holy sites.² For comparison, the average salary in 1955 was 711 rubles per month.³ In 1991, the cost of the Hajj remained 16,000 rubles, even though the average salary in the USSR had fallen to 248 rubles per month.⁴

With the onset of perestroika and the collapse of the Iron Curtain, many Muslims wanted to go on the Hajj, but financial shortages and difficulties with the Soviet ruble exchange prevented them from doing so. Only in 1990 was the first large group of Muslims from the Soviet Union (1,500 people)⁵ able to visit the holy sites, funded by the king of Saudi Arabia. The first officially authorized massive Hajj from Tatarstan was also organized in 1990—a year in which a number of events that radically changed the course of the Republic's history took place.

If in the first years of independence the Muslims of Tatarstan would have paid any price for the opportunity to go on the Hajj, by the end of the 1990s the situation had changed dramatically. On the one hand, there were many financially attractive ways to go on the Hajj, but on the other, the

¹ V. Rahimova, *Iskhaq Hazrat Lutfullin* (Kazan, 2014), 113.

² V. Ah. Akhmadullin, *Deiatel'nost' Sovetskogo gosudarstva i dukhovnykh upravlenii musul'man po organizatsii palomnichestva (1944-1965 gg.): analiz istoricheskogo opyta i znachenie dlia sovremennosti* (Moscow, 2016), 52.

³ Statistical table of the CSO of the USSR "Average Monthly Salary of Workers and Employees by Industry of the National Economy of the USSR in 1940, 1945, 1950-1955," <http://istmat.info/node/18454>.

⁴ V. Akhmadullin, "Khadzh spetsial'nogo naznacheniiia," *NG-religiia*, November 21, 2012, http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2012-11-21/7_hadj.html.

⁵ R.M. Mukhametzyanova-Duggal and Z.R. Khabibullina, "Rossiia i Indiiia: gosudarstvennoe regulirovanie Khadzha," *Aziia i Afrika segodniia* 1 (2011): 53.

financial crisis of 1998 had seen the value of the ruble drop four-fold. This reality forced Hajj organizers from Tatarstan to develop new, cheaper, and more differentiated tour packages. Whereas before the August 1998 crisis a Hajj trip had cost an average of \$1,500-1,600, in the 1999 season, operators had to reduce the price to a minimum of \$900, with service quality “below the lowest.”¹

Famous Tatar writer Fauziya Bayramova made a pilgrimage in 1998. In her book dedicated to the Hajj, she relates several stories about how people collected money to achieve their goal:

Two of my interlocutors are old women about 70 years old from Kazan. One of them worked as a nanny for a Vietnamese family for a year to save money for the Hajj: “I watched their young children, ran headlong through the city to the dairy kitchen, went grocery shopping, cleaned up after them, washed and tidied everything. Thus, penny by penny, I collected the required amount for the Hajj.” The other sold her dacha and used those funds to go on the Hajj. Talking to these elderly women, I realized one thing: if a person has set such a goal, he will certainly achieve it.²

This example shows that the majority of members of Hajj groups were pensioners who funded the trip themselves or (far less often) had their children or relatives pay for it.

Until recently, in Tatarstan, as in the other traditionally Muslim regions, it was believed that religion was primarily the sphere of elderly people. People become religious after retirement because “the time has come.” When people were asked about their compliance with ritual norms—praying (*namaz*) five times a day, fasting (*uraza*), etc.—they would typically respond that they would follow these norms in their old age. But things changed in the 1990s and even more the 2000s. The rejuvenation of the republic’s Muslim population, epitomized by the election of 28-year-old Kamil Samigullin as mufti in 2013, profoundly modified the understanding of this issue. Yet despite greater religiosity, many young people still believe that their time to go on the Hajj has not yet come.

The crisis of 1998 resulted in new approaches to the organization of the Hajj. As a result, in 2001, the Hajj organization assistance program, known as Idel'-Hajj, began to operate under the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (DUM RT). It provided funding, training, and education at the Russian Islamic University (Kazan) for groups of pilgrims, as well as comprehensive organization of pilgrimages (visa, air travel, accommodations, medical insurance, etc.). As explained by the organizers, this program was designed as a counterbalance to Hajj funding by foreign charities and foundations.

The savings-based Hajj funding system developed to its final shape in 2008. A program was proposed under which anyone interested in going on the Hajj was required to save 1,000 RUB every month for a five-year period. Idel'-Hajj would independently choose an investment company that invested in halal investment projects (real estate, securities of enterprises in permitted sectors of the economy) and then paid for the pilgrim's participation in the Hajj. In total, 114 people went on the Hajj under the Idel'-Hajj program in 2002, 178 in 2004, 583 in 2006, 1,538 in 2007, 2,192 in 2008, and 3,477 in 2009. In 2011, the price of one Hajj travel package ranged from 75,000 to 150,000 rubles

¹ E. Suponina, “Vziatka za palomnichestvo,” *Vremia MN*, March 23, 1999.

² F. Bayramova, *Hajj kondalege* (Challi, 1999), 23. Translation is the author's.

(US\$2,500 to \$5,000), depending on the program (there were five programs in total).¹ Judging by the figures above, the global economic crisis of 2008 did not affect people's willingness to go on the Hajj. Indeed, the number of Hajj participants under the Idel'-Hajj program increased significantly in 2008-2009.²

According to the President of the Association of Travel Agencies of Tatarstan, Ramil Miftakhov, Idel'-Hajj occupied a very profitable niche at that time. He calculated that the entity made a 10-15 percent profit on every traveler. Along similar lines, the newspaper *Kommersant* estimated in 2008 that Idel'-Hajj would earn 30 million rubles (about \$1 million) from the expected 3,000 pilgrims that year.³

In 2011, after the DUM RT got a new mufti, Idel'-Hajj lost its institutional status: the Muftiate created its own operator, which took all the quotas intended for Tatarstan's Muslims. The final blow to Idel'-Hajj came in July 2012, following an assassination attempt against the DUM RT mufti, Ildus Faizov, and the murder of the head of the education department, Valillula Yakupov. Listed among the motives for the crime was the goal of redistributing the market for Hajj services. The president of the Board of Directors of Idel'-Hajj, Rustem Gataullin, was one of the suspects; he was detained by law enforcement officers but was later released.⁴

Since 2012, all issues related to Hajj organization have passed to a subsidiary of DUM RT, DUM RT Hajj, which has become the exclusive Hajj operator in the Republic of Tatarstan. But the financial success of the Hajj operator is not guaranteed by its monopoly position in the market and its use of administrative resources. Much depends on the number of pilgrims. Tatarstan has always been underrepresented in the quota system: it receives an average of 1,500 Hajj places per year, compared to around 6,000 per year for Dagestan. This is due to the facts that there are a smaller number of ethnic Muslims in Tatarstan and that the population as a whole is less religious. Thus, despite the small number of Hajj places, the Republic is sometimes unable to find as many interested pilgrims as it has places.

No official statistics have been reported on the number of *hajjis* from Tatarstan in recent years, likely due to the reluctance of the official operator to disclose the real figures, which appear to have declined significantly due to the economic crisis and the sharp waning in the population's purchasing power.⁵ Unused quotas are usually transferred to other regions of the Russian Federation where they are more in demand. Table 2 provides statistics for pilgrim quotas for the last seven years.⁶

¹ Ibid., 89.

² "USD Exchange Rate in 2008," Ratestats.com, <https://ratestats.com/dollar/2008/>, accessed May 1, 2018 (In Russ.)

³ L. Mirgazieva, "Putevka k sviatym mestam," *Kommersant*, May 15, 2008, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/891781>, accessed April 30, 2018.

⁴ A. Akhunov, "Khadzh u tatar: ot proshlogo—k nastoiashchemu," in *Rossiiskii islam v transformatsionnykh protsessakh sovremennosti: novye vyzovy i tendentsii razvitiia v XXI veke. Sbornik nauchnykh statei* (Ufa, 2017), 22.

⁵ The data in the table below is compiled based on the media reports of people traveling to Tatarstan.

⁶ Ibid.; A. Zamaleeva, "Glavnoe puteshestvie musul'manina: kak gotovit'sia k khadzhu, skol'ko stoit i est' li esche mesta," *Sobytiia*, April 17, 2018, <https://sntat.ru/religiya/glavnoe-puteshestvie-musulmanina-kak-gotovitsya-k-khadzhu-skolko-stoit>.

Table 2. Hajj quota and actual pilgrims in the Republic of Tatarstan, 2012-18

Year	Quota for Tatarstan (people)	Went on Hajj (people)
2012	1,500	1,021
2013	1,500 (<i>reduced to 1,200</i>)	1,200
2014	1,800	1,500
2015	1,500	750
2016	1,200	635
2017	1,200 (<i>increased to 1,700</i>)	1,453
2018	1,800	1,800

As can be seen from Table 2, 2017 saw a significant increase in the number of pilgrims. In my view, this is attributable to the strengthening of the ruble. Nevertheless, these figures are still not comparable to the period in the 2000s during which Idel'-Hajj activities blossomed: at its peak in 2009, this organization sent up to 3,500 people per year on the Hajj. Admittedly, the maximum number of pilgrims coincided with the peak years of the previous economic crisis (2008-2009), but as mentioned above, this was due primarily to the stable exchange rate of the national currency and secondarily to powerful lobbying by Guzman Iskhakov, who was the mufti at that time.

The activities of DUM RT Hajj cannot be called financially successful, but the organization does turn a profit. According to the published data for 2016, with a gross income of 12.6 million rubles (about \$200,000), net profit amounted to 725,000 rubles (about \$11,000).¹ The organization operates in a virtually non-competitive field and focuses primarily on potential customers from Tatarstan, as well as the Tatar population from neighboring republics and regions.

In conclusion, over the past thirty years, the Muslim Ummah of the Republic of Tatarstan has traveled down a long and winding path toward the formation and strengthening of independent institutions of religious power. Since 1998, religious life in the Republic has been under the close control of the secular authorities. A clear system of administrative management and Muslim education has been built; numerous media outlets and publishing houses are in operation. With the active participation of law enforcement agencies, a tough and defiant struggle is being waged against non-traditional cults, parties, and movements. The system of Hajj organization is now under the full control of DUM RT and the secular authorities. DUM RT Hajj is gradually gaining momentum, improving its work and expanding its customer base. At this stage, as the population's disposable income is declining, it is possible to predict that the volume of Hajj tour packages sold will hover around 1,200-1,500 per year, with the prospect of growth to 2,000 per year.

¹ "DUM RT Hajj OOO—Finansovaia otchetnost'," accessed June 20, 2019, https://zachestnyibiznes.ru/company/ul/1151690107128_1655344220_000-DUM-RT-HADGh/balance.

Chapter 8.

The Effect of the Pilgrimage to Mecca on the Socio-Political Views of Muslims in Russia's North Caucasus

Mikhail Alexseev, San Diego State University

The annual pilgrimage to Mecca known as the Hajj—one of the five pillars of Islamic faith—has become a regular organized mass activity for Russia's Muslims over the past two decades. Filling the Hajj quotas allocated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Russia's Islamic communities have sent between 16,000 and 26,000 pilgrims to Mecca each year since 2007.¹ The Russian state is deeply involved in steering and managing the pilgrimage. In fact, the Russian government has a specially designated Hajj czar, officially known as the Commissioner of the Hajj Affairs of the Government of the Russian Federation, who concurrently holds the post of vice-speaker of Russia's Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Kremlin-controlled legislature. The commissioner, Ilyas Umakhanov, is a native of Dagestan, which has the largest Muslim population in the North Caucasus. He also heads the Russia Hajj Mission, an institutional umbrella for coordinating Hajj issues with the principal regional councils of Muslims endorsed by the Russian state (the Muftiates).

Russian media reports on the Hajj in the North Caucasus demonstrate that the pilgrimage has been routinized, with the overwhelming majority of reports focusing on costs, transportation services, hotel accommodations, tour operators, travel safety, health concerns, documentation requirements, and other organizational and logistical issues.² Standing out in this stream of media are occasional concerns that North Caucasus pilgrims, particularly from Chechnya, have used the Hajj as a pretext, if not a launching pad, for leaving to join the ranks of the Islamic State in Syria.³ These concerns implicitly link the Hajj with Islamic radicalization, which may raise broader, if unspoken, questions among the Russian public about the long-term impacts of the pilgrimage on their state and society. In fact, this linkage is intuitive considering that the Hajj brings together millions of Muslims who perform their religious identity-asserting mass rituals with dedication, passion, and fervor. The iconic images of the Hajj, such as the human ocean of believers swirling around the Ka'aba in Mecca, the holy center of Islam, raise the question of whether the pilgrims, in passionately asserting their faith *en masse*, become more entrenched in their religious identity and therefore less tolerant and accepting of other faiths and social orders, including the secular state.

This chapter shows that the reverse is in fact more likely. It draws on fieldwork in the North Caucasus that Sufian Zhemukhov of the George Washington University and I conducted in 2008-2010

¹ Aleksandr Vasil'ev, "K sviatyniam islama," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, August 31, 2017, <https://rg.ru/2017/08/31/ilias-umahanov-podavliaiushchee-bolshinstvo-musulman-zakonoposlushnye-liudi.html>; "Milliony palomnikov so vsego mira nachali khadzh v Saudovskuiu Arabiiu," *Regnum*, August 19, 2018, <https://regnum.ru/news/2466936.html>.

² Based on searches of Google, LexisNexis Academic, and ProQuest databases with key terms "Hajj AND Caucasus" anywhere in the text, as well as searches of the *Kavkazskii Uzel* news and analysis web depository covering the Caucasus with terms "Hajj," "Mecca," and "pilgrims" conducted April 1-20, 2019.

³ "Did Riyadh, Grozny Fear Chechen Hajj Pilgrims Would Join IS?" *Radio Free Europe*, October 20, 2014; BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Expert Views Islamic State Influence Inside Russia's North Caucasus," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political*, March 25, 2016.

and analysis thereof.¹ Literature searches reveal that ours remains the only systematic empirical analysis of the social impacts of the Hajj in the region thus far. Meanwhile, regional media reports on the organization and conduct of the Hajj indicate that the experiences of Muslim pilgrims from the North Caucasus in Saudi Arabia on the whole differ little from those we highlighted in our study and which Sufian documented as a participant observer performing the Hajj.

The Pilgrims' Paradox: Sacred Center vs. Uniformity

Key insights into the effects of pilgrimage on ordinary Muslims came through content analysis of four focus group conversations held in mid-2010 in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, two of which featured former pilgrims and the other two of which featured non-pilgrims. All participants (12 former pilgrims and 16 non-pilgrims) were devout practicing Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school (*madhab*). All non-pilgrims expressed a strong desire to perform the Hajj. Group selection allowed us to partially control for putative effects of demographics (ethnicity, gender, age, education, and occupation).² We introduced three core themes in each conversation—the importance of the Hajj and Islam; perceptions of other religious and social groups and the state; and participation in public life—and allowed the conversations to flow without setting time constraints. We then estimated the duration of discussion on each theme and its components, which reflected how much the group participants cared about the issues.

The contrast between the groups of pilgrims and those of non-pilgrims was stark. What we called the “pilgrims’ paradox” was clearly on display: express devotion to the core symbols of Islam and profound passionate commemoration of its central rituals in focus group conversations translated into appreciation of greater social diversity among the *Hajjis*. The data succinctly paints this big picture (see Figure 1):

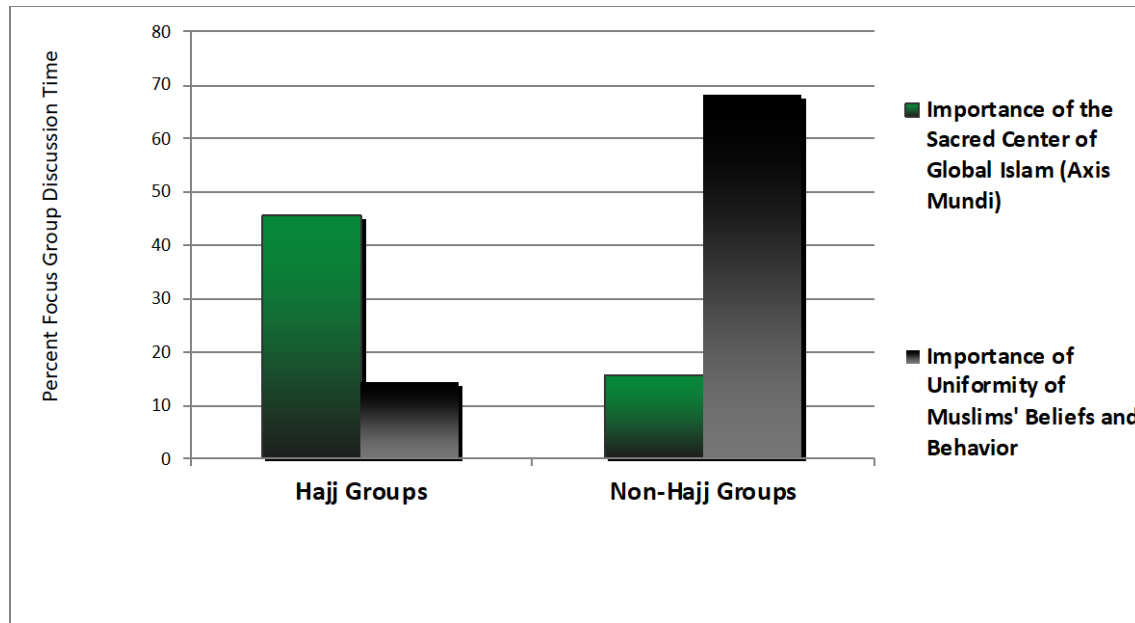
- In the *Hajji* focus groups, the central theme (45 percent of discussion time) was the importance of the holy center, the *Axis Mundi*, of Islam. This was determined based on the duration of discussions featuring sacred entities or the *Axis* of Islamic faith (“Mecca,” “Medina,” “Ka’aba,” “Hajj,” “Allah,” “Prophet,” “sacred,” “blessed”); the global reach, or the *Mundi*, of the Hajj (“diversity,” “nations,” country names, “world,” “global,” “Earth,” “significant”); and names of specific rituals (“Tawaf,” “experience” related to the Hajj, and “walking around” Ka’aba).³ The non-pilgrims devoted about 16 percent of their group discussion time to those topics.
- In the non-*Hajji* focus groups, the central theme (68 percent of discussion time) was the importance of maintaining the uniformity of faith and personal behavior in Islam. This was reflected in the duration of group conversations centering on individuals’ visual appearance (e.g., “hair,” “dress,” “beard,” “shave,” “hat,” “skirt,” “headscarf,” “jewelry,” “amulet”) and on schools within Islam and other religions (including “Shariah,” “Shi’a,” “Madhhab,” “monotheism,” “Bible,” “Christian,” “Jew,” etc.), as well as in the juxtaposition of religious and secular customs (“God-abiding,” “tradition,” “mountain” [people], “ethnic,” “nationality,” “Adyge,” “Kabardian,” “Balkar,” “Circassian,” “Russian,” “Dagestani”). The pilgrims spent only about 14 percent of their time making comparisons and asserting the importance of religious uniformity.

¹ Mikhail A. Alexseev and Sufian Zhemukhov, *Mass Religious Ritual and Intergroup Tolerance: The Muslim Pilgrims’ Paradox* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

² Besides the controls reported later in this memo, we looked at ethnicity. Almost all the participants (25 out of 28) were ethnic Circassians; the remaining three were ethnic Balkars. Looking more closely at their views, we did not find systematic differences based on this distinction.

³ Discussions of travel and logistical issues related to performing the Hajj were excluded from the count.

Figure 1. The Pilgrims' Paradox illustrated with focus group data



Source: Author's own calculations

Tracing the Paradox: The Three R's

These findings could not easily be explained. Exposure to diversity alone was insufficient or even counterintuitive: we recorded many pilgrims voicing complaints and expressing deep disappointment when their expectations of the Holy Land clashed with realities such as differences in ritual observance, deficient services, or predatory cab drivers. Moreover, if one straightforwardly applied the venerable social identity theory, one would expect the assertion of ingroup symbolic identity to harden, not soften, prejudice and biases toward outgroups. Our investigation showed a more complex and perhaps less intuitive process with three main components: repositioning, recategorization, and repersonalization. These allow us to delve deeper into focus group patterns and other observations.

Repositioning

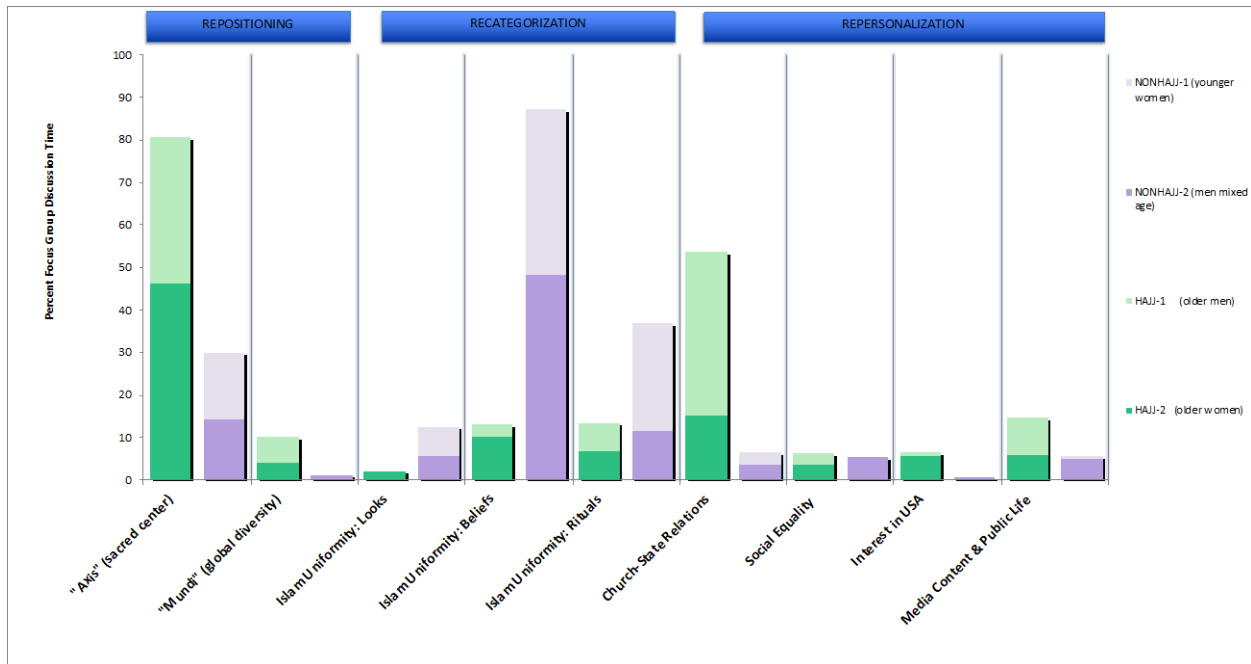
Conversations with the Kabardino-Balkaria Muslims showed that the Hajj experience made a big difference in the way they perceived the foundations of Islamic faith. True, the non-pilgrims spoke with exaltation about the general significance of the Hajj, but their understandings were not steeped in personal experiences—in the sense of having not only believed in, but also lived the holy rituals—the way they were among the *Hajjis*. The depth and tenacity of these experiences, as the pilgrims reported them, came from repositioning into a social context that combined the celebration of common group identity with astounding social diversity within that common group. It was the interaction of these two factors that came through as most memorable and life-changing in the focus groups and interviews.

- The *Hajjis* vividly expressed that fusion between holiness and diversity, in fact telling us that immersion in diversity was inseparable from the sacred heart of Islam, summing up what we called the *Axis Mundi* effect. Khasan, 65, told us how exposure to hundreds of nationalities with their own “etiquette, customs and pride” made it impossible for him to stay the same after the pilgrimage. Through this exposure, he told us, “We came close to God.” To Nokh, 70,

the convergence of Muslims from around the world symbolized God’s will “to bring peace upon the Earth,” and in that sense, “different people coming close to each other” amounted to “the biggest happiness” for him. Many more pilgrims expressed the same feelings. The non-*Hajjis* had no such experiences to share.

- The discussion of the importance of Islam’s sacred center and global diversity was significantly more pronounced among the pilgrims than among the non-pilgrims in focus groups (see Figure 2). Yet the numbers, though indicative, cannot convey the emotional power of the interaction effect between the sense of the sacred and the sense of global diversity as the substantive statements above did.
- Pilgrims’ discussion of the sacred center of Islam focused on personalized experiences, whereas the non-pilgrims more often evoked general symbolic entities of their faith, such as Allah and Qu’ran. Interestingly, even though the pilgrims discussed Islam’s holy symbols and rituals significantly longer than the non-pilgrims, they used general terms symbolizing their faith less frequently (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. How pilgrims and non-pilgrims differed on key focus group themes



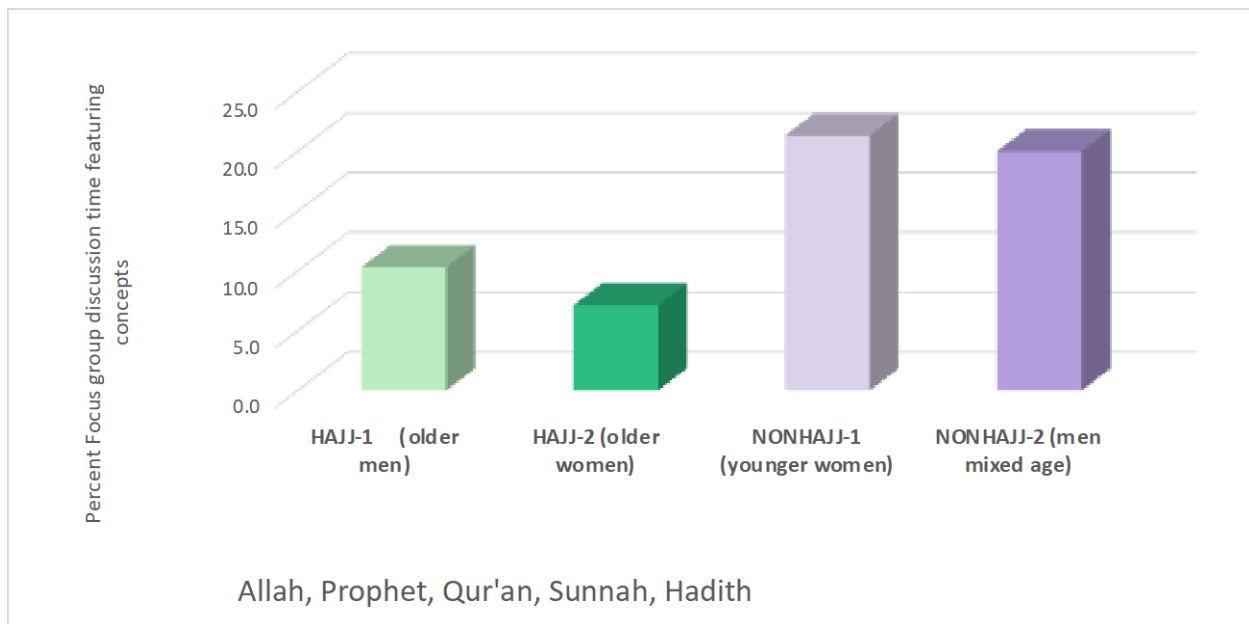
Source: Author’s own calculations

Recategorization

Exposure to diversity during the Hajj is consistent with the asymmetry in focus group discussion times on the importance of uniformity of beliefs, rituals, and appearance between pilgrims and non-pilgrims (see Figure 2). However, the mechanism that explains a decrease in intolerance among the pilgrims is not so straightforward. It was, in fact, painful and sometimes near traumatic for many *Hajjis* because it entailed internal conflict and self-recategorization, a realization of not just being a member of one’s ethnic group, nor even a Muslim in a global sense, but of belonging to humanity writ large. Two particular impacts were critical:

- The pilgrims had to reconcile the diversity around them with the preconceived notion of ideal-type or prototypical Muslim identity. In Mecca, a Muslim from Kabardino-Balkaria would observe a multitude of traditions that others would consider prototypical of Islam, but that he or she would consider deviant. For example, younger men in Sufian’s group who believed a beard was obligatory for Muslim males faced a dilemma when observing large numbers of clean-shaven male Muslims from Turkey—could they regard those men as Muslim? But if not, they wondered, why and how could these clean faces be acceptable in the Holy Land? Sufian documented how multiple instances like this would build up and cause him and other North Caucasian pilgrims to question how genuinely Islamic the Hajj was. They struggled with this. In the end, they decided that if the norms they initially viewed as deviant could be accommodated in Mecca, they were sanctioned by the Almighty, and therefore they, too, could reconcile themselves to and live with those differences. The alternative would be to reject the validity of God, a realization that led them to accept diversity.
- The pilgrims had to interpret and decide how to respond to shocking instances when they encountered other Muslims showing a lack of compassion, stealing, overcharging, or neglecting tradition—instances they might not necessarily have been so agitated about back home but that stood out as totally incompatible with the spirit of the Holy Land. If such acts could take place in the holiest of holies of Islam, they wondered, was it really the holiest of holies?

Figure 3. Non-pilgrims evoke Islam’s core symbolic entities more often than pilgrims



Source: Author’s own calculations

Repersonalization

These experiences also affirmed the *Hajjis’* unique personalities, making them feel that they had grown as individuals rather than become interchangeable representatives of a group. If celebration of common group identity meant acceptance of what used to be perceived as individual “deviances,” then one’s own individual variations could be accepted and celebrated as part of the greater whole. The Hajj rituals reinforced this sense of unity in individuality through the notion that God accepts the

Hajj only on a case-by-case basis and through establishing common bonds by walking around Ka'aba wearing the same white *Ihram* robes and spending the night under the stars in Muzdalifa. The *Hajjis* were, as a result, more confident that their individuality could coexist with common faith. This confidence translated into clear differences between focus groups, with the pilgrims devoting more time to the following themes (see Figure 2):

- Church-state relations (with discussion on “state,” “government,” “law,” “rules,” “police,” and “education”)
- Public self-expression—specifically, acceptance of being photographed, filmed, or interviewed (notably, all the *Hajjis* agreed to have their pictures taken for the project; all the non-*Hajjis* refused)
- Participation in civic/public life (discussion of “media,” “program,” “television,” “Internet,” “conference,” “public speech”)

Also, only the pilgrims listed the United States among desired foreign travel destinations, a question we posed to all groups. Social equality discussions were not prominent among either group (such issues were represented by words like “income,” “rich,” “poor,” “cost,” “price,” and “status”).

Conclusion

Assuming these findings have held up since our fieldwork, it is safe to say that the Russian state has obtained a net benefit from its Muslims' pilgrimages to Mecca. These benefits may not be immediate or readily tangible, but they are important, particularly for a region such as the North Caucasus, where religion, in its common moderate expression, cuts across deep and often explosive fissures between ethnicity, clan, and class. From a practical standpoint, this suggests that providing greater resources and opportunities for North Caucasian Muslims to perform the Hajj—from state grants to encouraging private sponsorships—would be a worthwhile investment. It also suggests that in the negotiations on regional allocation of the Hajj quotas, calibrated preferential treatment for the North Caucasus would be a smart idea.

Furthermore, it is important to separate these broader and predominantly benign effects of the pilgrimage from rare instances when the pilgrimage is abused and when its practitioners threaten Russian and international security. More broadly, the analysis suggests that the integration of Russia's substantial Muslim migrant populations would benefit significantly from facilitating the establishment and operation of civic associations that unite Muslims from different sending states and celebrate their identity as Muslim Russians. Such an approach would de facto recreate the benign *Axis Mundi* effects we documented with respect to the Hajj.

Authors' Biographies

Azat M. Akhunov, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the Department of Religion Studies at Kazan Federal University. He specializes in Oriental studies, Islamic studies, and Turkology. He was previously a senior researcher at the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan and has extensive research, writing, translation, and editing experience, including twelve books and hundreds of articles. He is the author of *The Islamization of the Volga—Kama Region (VII-X centuries)* (Kazan: Otechestvo, 2003), which was funded by the MacArthur Foundation. He is currently working on another historical monograph.

Mikhail Alexseev, Ph.D., is a professor of political science at San Diego State University. He is an internationally recognized authority on migration, ethno-political conflict, and post-Soviet Russia. Alexseev is the author of *Immigration Phobia and the Security Dilemma: Russia, Europe, and the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and *Without Warning: Threat Assessment, Intelligence, and Global Struggle* (St. Martin's Press, 1997) and is the editor of *A Federation Imperiled: Center-Periphery Conflict in Post-Soviet Russia* (St. Martin's Press, 1999). He has been the principal investigator of a multi-year international research project on migration and ethno-religious violence in the Russian Federation funded by the National Science Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research (Title VIII, U.S. Department of State). Alexseev has published articles in *Political Science Quarterly*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Political Behavior*, *Political Communication*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Nationalities Papers*, *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, and *Pacific Focus*. His editorial opinion articles on Soviet and post-Soviet affairs have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, *USA Today*, and *The Seattle Times*.

Mark N. Katz (Ph.D., MIT) is a professor of government and politics at the George Mason University Schar School of Policy and Government. He has written primarily about Moscow's relations with the Middle East (especially the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula) for over 35 years. During 2017, he was a visiting scholar first at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (January-March), and then at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs in Helsinki (April-September). During 2018, he was a Fulbright Scholar at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London (January-March), and then the 2018 Sir William Luce Fellow at Durham University in the UK (April-June). Links to many of his publications can be found at www.marknkatz.com.

Grigory G. Kosach, PhD, is professor at the Department of the Contemporary East, Faculty of History, Political Sciences and Law, Institute for History and Archives at the Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow. He also works as an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and at the Institute of Middle East Studies in Moscow. He has published widely on Russian politics in the Middle East; political processes in Arab countries; Communist movements in the Arab world, and Russia's Muslim communities.

Jean-François Ratelle is an adjunct professor of Conflict Studies and Human Rights at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) at the University of Ottawa, as well as an affiliated researcher at the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at Carleton University. His main research interests include violent extremism, civil wars, and foreign fighters, with a focus on Russia and Eurasia. He recently co-edited a volume dedicated to foreign fighters and violent extremism in Eurasia. He is also currently working on a book dedicated to Salafi militants and religious extremists in Russia. He frequently consults with government agencies and international organizations on security questions such as violent extremism and terrorism, radicalization within Muslim communities, and rehabilitation programs aimed at foreign fighters and other extremists. Professor Ratelle is currently the lead research investigator on the Preventing and Countering Violent

Extremism (P/CVE) Project for the Ottawa Police Service (Canada). The project supports the development of a community resilience program aimed at preventing violent extremism through community engagement and multi-agency frameworks. His most recent publications have appeared in *Critical Studies on Security*, *Caucasus Survey*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and *Terrorism and Political Violence*.

Denis Sokolov, Ph.D., is a Senior Associate (Non-Resident) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies' Russia and Eurasia Program. He is an expert on the North Caucasus, focusing on the informal economy of the region, land disputes, and the institutional foundations of military conflicts. He is also a senior research fellow at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) and research director at the Center for Social and Economic Research of Regions (RAMCOM). Sokolov has conducted field research in the North Caucasus since 2009, primarily in Dagestan, with an emphasis on how globalization has transformed rural communities and led to new urbanization and migration patterns. He researches the impacts of the spread of Salafi Islam on local rural communities, labor migration from Dagestan to western Siberia, and other migration-related issues. His current research focuses on the flow of combatants from Russia and other post-Soviet countries to Syria and the Islamic State, as well as the political emigration of Russian Muslims to Turkey, Egypt, and Western Europe.

Clément Therme is a Research Fellow on Iran at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and a Research Associate at the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) in Paris. He has been a teaching fellow at Sciences Po and at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales). His articles have appeared in *Iranian Studies*, *The Middle East Journal*, *Politique étrangère*, *Maghreb-Machrek* and *Politique américaine*; he is the author of *Les relations entre Téhéran et Moscou depuis 1979* (PUF, 2012) and the co-editor of *Iran and the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century* (Mazda Publishers, 2013).

Guzel Yusupova is COFUND Junior Research Fellow at Durham University, UK. Her research project focuses on minority nationalism, language attitudes, and inter-ethnic solidarity in Russia. Her broader research interests include Russian state and society, nationalism, ethnicity, qualitative methodology, social solidarity, complexity theory, and Islam in Russia. In 2016-2017 she was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society (REMESO) at Linköping University, Sweden. Previously, she was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Austria, and a Research Fellow at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the European University at St. Petersburg and has taught at the Kazan Federal University, Russia. Her papers have been published in *Social Science Quarterly*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *Problems of Post-Communism*, *Nationalities Papers*, and *National Identities*, as well as in some Russian academic journals and edited volumes.