

RELIGIOUS EXTREMISTS IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS: CRIMINAL SET

Abstract

This article is devoted to the actual problem of splicing of organized crime with religious extremism, in particular, with the Islamic organizations. The problem of Wahhabism's growing in criminal environment remains poorly studied. Special attention is paid to Islamic proselytism among Russian prisoners and to the process of penetration of extremist ideas in the criminal environment. The author comes to the conclusion that it is necessary to put the question about creation of the regular prison clergy - both Orthodox and Muslim, which will minimize the spread of various forms of non-traditional Islam.

Key Words: radical Islam, extremism, terrorism, criminal environment, Jamaat

It is well known that in recent years of Russian history organized crime cooperates with the country's religious extremists.

We can't deny the problem of Islamic fundamentalism in prisons and colonies of Russia, when it is becoming obvious. Experts started talking seriously about the fact that in the current criminal system hierarchy (so-called "red" and "black" areas) a third one appeared - the greens.

Some experts even do believe that the spread of Wahhabism in the prison environment threatens to national security¹.

Even the employees of the Federal penitentiary service of Russia had begun to sound the alarm. At the all-Russia conference on the subject: "The measures to combat the spread of radicalism, religious extremism in correctional institutions", held in November 2013, on the initiative of the Federal penitentiary service of Russia, it was stated that the problem is extremely sharp.

The deputy Director of the Federal penitentiary service of Russia, General-major Anatoly Rudyi cited the statistics, according to which today in prisons and colonies there are 1 119 prisoners convicted of religious extremism. Each of them is able in a short time to rise in the ranks of his supporters from five to seven people².

In 2013, the number of adherents of extremism has grown on 40 %, although

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2 Website Information Agency «REGNUM, Spread of Islamist ideology in prisons threaten Russia's security: expert, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd-volga/tatarstan/1600232.html> (accessed: 01.02.2014).

the number of prisoners for such crimes increased by only 5 %³.

In 2013 the Federal service that administer of punishment recorded 279 Muslim communities, and they unite around 10 600 active believers (of course, the number of Muslim prisoners, who are passively believers, is much more than this)⁴.

It appears that this number does not quite objectively reflect the real picture, because not all of the convicted openly display their religious affiliation, or they are simply not everywhere yet registered.

However, FSEP has noticed an increase in the number of Muslims who are in prison in several times, while the total number of prisoners in Russia is steadily declining - from 847 thousand in 2003 to 585 thousand in 2013⁵.

Regardless that there are lots of articles and monographs devoted to combating terrorism, the criminal environment still remains poorly understood. As a rule these topics are considered as separate problems. It would seem this is wrong.

One should agree with Y. M. Antonyan's point of view that the criminal religious extremism should be seen as a complete system of socially dangerous acts, directed on formation and distribution in any way religious ideas (collectively religious ideas), arbitrarily declared true over the secular ideas⁶.

It has long been known that terrorism as a radical and negative manifestation of public life is closely intertwined with organized crime and corruption and cannot effectively exist without them.

In conditions of the North Caucasus this trend is manifested especially clearly - extremism, terrorism, organized crime and corruption are closely interrelated.

Groups of extremists are constantly updated due to new members; they create new unconventional "jamaats"; observations of recent years show that the terrorists find potential terrorists among prisoners in Russian prisons and pretrial detention facilities.

According to experts, the penetration of religious extremist ideas in the criminal environment began after the second Chechen campaign when members of illegal armed groups from the North Caucasus region were in Russian prisons.

"Gamaats" began to appear in the penitentiary institutions. They did not recognize the prison rules, but lived according to Sharia law, and expanded their influence. The number of people sent to prison for incitement of ethnic hatred has increased with the advent of 282-th article and this process began to gain momentum.

3 Alexandrov A., *Novye Vedomosti*, Russian prisons to recruit terrorists. FSIN has found a new breeding ground for extremism, <http://nvdaily.ru/info/14600.html> (accessed: 01.02.2014).

4 Melnikov S. Islam of strict regime, *Ogonyok*, № 33, Moscow, 2013, p. 30.

5 Melnikov S., Islam in Russian prisons: "Jamaat", http://communitarian.ru/novosti/kriminal/islam_v_rossijskih_tyurmah_15092013/ (accessed: 01.02.2014).

6 Antonian Y. Ethno-religious terrorism, *Aspect Press*, Moscow, 2006, p. 237

Leaders of extremist groups immediately realized that the criminal environment has much more potential for future terrorists to acquire transcendental motivation to use force than the ordinary life. The system itself has made a preliminary selection by ranging prisoners in their hierarchy.

It is no secret that some of the extremists were deliberately sent to jail in order to create a group of like-minded people and to get the halo of a "Martyr for the faith".

Once on the "area", they began to actively encourage a religion among the other prisoners, who were far from a religious lifestyle before that.

The Chairman of the Ulema Council of the Russian Association of Islamic Consent Farid Salman noted in one of his speeches that only 1 % of Muslim prisoners are Wahhabs, but they are able to exert a strong influence on other prisoners. This small number of religious extremists is enough, so they set the tone in the criminal environment. "In practice, we get the following picture: one Wahhabi is in prison, he creates around himself a Jamaat of prisoners which are Russians by nationality, and some time later ten terrorists are ready to be released from the prison"⁷.

The prison, as a kind of mirror of the society, reflects the processes taking place in society.

Conversations with individual representatives of the criminal world, who became the followers of Islam in the colonies, show that at the initial stage between extremists and criminal authorities provokes conflicts between the Wahhabi system of values and thieves, "concepts" associated with contradictions concerning certain basic priorities.

Although the criminal environment does not forbid its members to profess any religion, however, it does require the prisoner to put prison morals in the first place and religious beliefs in the second.

Wahhabis do not recognize the hierarchy of the prison community and provide protection to the lowest bar of the prison community, the so-called "omitted", etc.

If criminals of 'higher caste' do not talk or shake hands with someone of low caste, Wahhabis (if the outcast accepts Islamic beliefs, becomes "a brother") are ready to pray together in the same mosque, shake hands or eat together with them, which is absolutely inadmissible for thieves "concepts".

The leaders of the "jamaats" (the so-called "amirs") teach the prisoners that Muslims must always stand up for their coreligionists and assist them in all circumstances.

In the beginning, the social hierarchy of the prison community considered radical Islamists as members of so-called "men" and "suckers" levels. Positions

7 Ordynskiy V., *Russkaya narodnaya liniya*, Russians in prisons and "zonas" embrace Islam and become Wahhabis, http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2012/04/02/russkie_v_tyurmah_i_na_zonah_prinimayut_islam_i_stanovyatsya_vahhabitami/ (accessed 01.02.2014).

as “criminals” and “looking” were always occupied by the representatives of the thieves’ traditions.

However, the situation began to change rapidly in the 2000s, when a large number of physically well prepared people, mainly from the North Caucasian republics, joined the ranks of prisoners.

The number of convicts who were Islamists increased and they started to behave more confidently. Administrative employees of the Federal penitentiary service noted their unwillingness to submit to the internal prison rules.

“Unfortunately, the prisoners professing Islam begin to speculate cultural, religious traditions and are trying to achieve for themselves special privileges. They refuse to work on accomplishment of territories of correctional institutions, they don’t want to follow the daily schedules, require the allocation of additional time for daily prayers and other. And, what is most worrying, they become the initiators of conflict situations”⁸.

In some colonies of Russia there were cases of direct clashes between the Wahhabis with representatives of the “thieves” contingent.

Articles like 208-th (“Organization of illegal armed formation or participation in it) or 222-th (“Unlawful possession of weapons, ammunition, and explosives”) began shortly to be considered by the zone as “respected” so as their owners, in their majority, “prayers”.

Those who were oppressed by the thieves’ authorities now could become the authority themselves. Besides, every prisoner was told that after his release, he will not be forsaken by the brothers; he will be given a job, an apartment and money. People with severe situation in the prison willingly agree to these conditions.

Moreover, unlike the usual gangs, “Islamic brigades” do not oppose each other, they were very united with “brothers in faith” from other groups.

So, according to the interview of one of the founders of the Kabardino-Balkarian Jamaat Ruslan Nakhushev: “Jamaat suppressed all criminal organizations that were in the 90s. like racketeering. Complaining to the police had no sense, because it worked well with racketeers. And the people would go for justice in the community. Believers stood up - not for money, but in the name of justice. And for criminal communities Jamaat was fear number one”⁹.

Also, in a number of settlements of Karachaevo-Cherkessia, in the late 90’s, well-organized and armed, the Wahhabis have already occupied their niche in the criminal world, subordinating the lower level of criminal networks.

There were cases in the colonies when religious extremists had other believ-

8 Islam and society, Working with Muslim prisoners requires special approaches and solutions, http://islamio.ru/news/society/rabota_s_osuzhdennymi_musulmanami_trebuetsya_osobykh_podkhodov_i_resheniy/ (accessed: 01.02.2014).

9 Sukhov I., Political News Agency, Karachaevo-Cherkessia: stormy political life, <http://www.apn.su/publications/article1666.html> (accessed 01.02.2014).

ers beaten for observing the canons of Islam, for belonging to traditional Islam. Extremists claimed to renounce the faith of the ancestors and acknowledge the truth of the Wahhabi ideology.

In particular, one of the prisoners was regularly beaten because he refused to agree with the statement that his ancestors had confessed "wrong" Islam.

In the spring of 2012 the police, perhaps for the first time, faced the situation when the gang (over 30 people) consisted not of immigrants from the Caucasus, but of the "converted" Russians, Chuvash, Mordvins, renounced Orthodoxy in favor of Islam. It was so-called Ulyanovsk "Jamaat".

Ulyanovsk Jamaat was only one cell in the many-celled international terrorist organization called "Caucasus Emirate". The members of it recruited terrorists directly among prisoners of the Ulyanovsk region colony where also a library of extremist literature was found. About 30 suspects have been detained for this case.

The backbone of the "Jamaat" was engaged in racketeering and extortion, and the other members of the society were making regular contributions to the Fund.

The drivers of heavy vehicles became their main target of attacks. Seized equipment was fulfilled through criminal channels, and the drivers themselves became hostages for a "ransom".

At some point, when criminal interests of "Jamaat" had come into conflict with the interests of the other gang, one of the of Ulyanovsk criminal community's leaders was assassinated.

According to head of the Federal security service of Ulyanovsk region Leonid Zubarev, it was sort of a military-religious underground organization, the provision for the deployment of "Jihad" in Russia¹⁰.

Half of the members of the other arrested last year "Novosibirsk Jamaat" were also "Russian" Muslims who converted to Islam in the colonies, where they served punishment together with the North Caucasian militants¹¹.

In December last year, the case against members of "Novosibirsk Jamaat" was sent to court. Altogether they are charged with 16 offences, mainly robbery. According to the investigation, the defendants stole more than 5 million rubles, and more than half of that money was sent to the Caucasus, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria.

The gang was planning a series of attacks on employees of law enforcement agencies.

According to the Deputy Chief of police of the Russian interior Ministry Vyacheslav Pevnev, the plans of the formation's participants were large-scale. "Their intention - first of all, was to enrich themselves. They undertook seven robber-

10 Bolotnikova S., Makspark, UFSIN akbar? (continued on the IR-5 Sukhinichi), <http://maxpark.com/community/5862/content/2146032> (accessed 01.02.2014).

11 "Novosibirsk Jamaat" planned seizure of Police - Ministry of Interior, <http://sib.fm/news/2013/12/06/zakhvat-otdeleniya-policii> (accessed 01.02.2014).

ies and strengthened financially. They acquired weapons with the purpose they called "washing city in the blood"¹².

Special services found similar Wahhabi cells in 12 regions of Russia. Armed underground communities were called to overthrow the existing power and set up the great Islamic Caliphate that would include the Caucasus, the southern regions of Russia and all the Volga region¹³.

In light of the recent bloody terrorist acts in Pyatigorsk, Volgograd and other cities many names of such converted Muslims became known: Said Buryat (Alexander Tikhomirov), chuvash Valery Ilmenev, Jew Alexander Gaivoronsky, Russian Victor Dworakowska, Pavel Kosolapov, Maria Horosheva, Vitaly Razdobudko, Dmitry Sokolov (law husband of suicide bomber Naida Asiyalova who committed suicide bombing in Volgograd).

Today, experts note that provisions of Islamic fundamentalism, representing a kind of symbiosis of thieves' ideology and sub-cultural values of Islam, are taking priority with the help of members of organized criminal groups, which adopted Islam in the colonies.

The adherents of this ideology are not only those who are condemned by religious extremists, they often consist of other prisoners who were under the influence of their cellmates - Wahhabis.

The growing influence of the prison jamaats can be judged by the comments of one of Russian leaders of the Islamic movement, the Muslim named Salman North, who wrote in his LiveJournal: "Any ethnic mafia passes before the Islamist international. It has been proven and re-checked many times. It's easy to understand the horror of the prison guards and cops. The Islamists don't cheat and don't forgive".

Being a Muslim, a true Muslim, means being someone impossible to win. You can't just kill him. You cannot suppress him in the prison. Our best scientists spent years in prison. Imam Malik's hands were broken but he stood it. And he was our Imam, and his life is inseparable from our lives. Muslims poetically call the prison "madrasah Joseph". In the sense that it is the school, which was passed even by prophets, such as the Old Testament Joseph, peace be upon him.

The authors of the forbidden website "Caucasus-Centre", the materials of which can be easily found on the Internet, citing "informed sources", declare that the tendency of unification of prison "jamaats" into a single structure has already begun¹⁴.

Specialists confirm this trend and say "today, the prison jamaats are still fragmented; however, the tendency of unifying them into a single network structure

12 Ibid.

13 Myhometchin R., Russian Archipelago, Islam in the Middle Volga region, <http://www.archipelag.ru/authors/muhametchin/?library=1227> (accessed 10.06.2015).

14 Trifonova E., Nezavisimaya Gazeta, FSIN has attended religious extremism, http://www.ng.ru/politics/2013-12-09/1_fsln.html (accessed 01.02.2014).

is already being seen. That is why the Russian authorities are taking proactive punitive action, trying to prevent the dzamaatization of Russian prisons, areas and camps"¹⁵.

Thus, the recruitment of radical Islamists in Russian prisons today can be considered as one of the main reserves of the Wahhabi's underground. United by a single ideology, well-organized, having criminal experience - the members of organized Salafi criminal groups represent a real threat.

Analysis of criminal cases against individuals convicted of extremism shows that many of them started the thorny path to the "true" faith literally in prison cells.

The researchers associate the reasons for that with the fact that the ideology of religious extremists unexpectedly successfully blended in well-established values and attitudes of criminal environment.

The Chairman of Russia's Islamic Committee Geidar Dzhemal believes that Jamaat is a widespread phenomenon, which naturally occurs in all prisons, including America's. Difficult Islam is not adapted to the prison population, so the prisoners are interested only in the concepts that seem to be related to their situation in life. Issues affecting the seeker's soul inevitably leads him to Islam.

The ideological postulates of Wahhabism do not require the ex-gangster-atheist to abandon gangster lifestyle.

An especially interesting category of criminals are attracted to radical Islamist ideologies because they believe that previous sins (crimes) committed before the adoption of Islam are written off and the opportunity to commit further crimes is justified simply because these crimes (including robbery and murder) are treated as a part of Jihad¹⁶.

The system of values of the criminal world implies contempt not only for law enforcement agencies but to the state in general. The Wahhabis propose a model of the "right" state, where every one's another's friend, comrade and brother (in faith), instead of a state ruled by "chaos" and unbelief, which ultimately boils down to the idea of building the Great Islamic Caliphate.

Here, for example, is what one of the leaders of Kabardino-Balkaria's Muslim community Rasul Kudayev told (full namesake of the former prisoner of Guantanamo from Kabardino-Balkaria Republic): "This government set the believers outside the law, and we disclaim any responsibility before its laws and believe that we are free from the enforcement of this hostile state. The Ministers of this state are the collaborators of the occupation and the violence against Muslims. That's why their property and their blood are not forbidden. Lack of funds for conducting the Jihad cannot be an excuse for a Muslim. He must earn the mon-

15 GolosIslama.RU, Islamic "chanson" or Islamization of Russian areas and camps, <http://golosislama.ru/news.php?id=15503> (accessed 01.02.2014).

16 Suleimanov R., *Russkaya Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Prison caliphate. Radical Islam massively distributed in the penitentiary system, http://www.ng.ru/regions/2013-02-21/3_kartblansh.html (accessed 04.05.2015).

ey in the fight with the enemy"¹⁷.

A special vocabulary created from a cross-breeds "give a damn" and phraseology of the Wahhabis is taking place now.

Hence such metamorphoses: instead of the word "kid" Wahhabis call each other "Ahi" ("brother"), and to the girls "Uhci" ("sister")

Just as criminals say that there is "the law of thieves" and "the law of cops", the radical Islamists have their "dagwat", saying that there "betrayal laws" and "Sharia".

Law enforcement officers called "murtads" (the hypocrites, with which you can do whatever they want).

"Russian chanson" which was popular among prisoners (songs about hard life of thieves) now gave up its place to Wahhabis analogue - Chechen bard Timur Mucuraev, whose songs are dedicated to the hard of "fighters against the regime"¹⁸.

This dangerous trend of merging of a crime with religious extremists led to the increase of the representatives of the criminals among the extremists who have experience of illegal actions and psychologically ready to do violence.

After a series of successful operations of the Russian special services on elimination and neutralization of the leaders of the extremist organizations of the first wave (M Mukozhev, A. Astemirov and others), they were replaced by marginalized recruits, which represent today a relatively massive social-psychological base of extremism.

New Amir of "Vilayat of Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay" Asker Dzhabbaev ("Abdullah") did not just surpass his predecessor in the cruelty of his crimes. His crimes have become more impudent and cruel, defining any motivation, if we talk about motivation here at all. However, if Amir Astemirov's Jihad wore the form of a personal vendetta against specific security forces, now the terror is directed against much wider layers of society. Now they kill not only police officers, but imams of mosques too for being loyal to the authorities. Fortune-tellers, tourists coming to the local resorts, ordinary traders –terrorists now kill pretty much everyone they consider as a legitimate aim for "Jihad".

According to the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, in 2010 in Kabardino-Balkaria the number of terrorist crimes has increased more than 5-fold¹⁹.

Over the last few years the Kabardino-Balkarian underground experienced a rebirth process to reorient the Jihad's economy on to one based domestic resources. Armed groups have filled tribute from local businessmen. In this economy, many experts see endless resources of North-Caucasian terroristic underground.

17 Kabardino-Balkarskaya Pravda, We do not need mosques, we need swords, <http://www.kbpavda.ru/2006/10/14.pdf> (accessed 04.05.2015).

18 Myhometchin R., Russian Archipelago, Islam in the Middle Volga region, <http://www.archipelag.ru/authors/muhametchin/?library=1227> (accessed 10.06.2015).

19 Russian Interior Minister on the situation in Kabardino-Balkaria, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, Moscow, 2010, p. 7.

The mufti of the city of Nalchik Nazir Akhmatov also marks the merging of criminals with the radical movement in Kabardino-Balkaria: "Since 2005 the persons who have previously worked with other things and were considered as criminal authorities now keep doing their illegal activity under the pretext of Islam. However, it is not that simple to announce their names today. You understand me."

According to Akhmatov, these people are already Wahhabis and they continue to engage in ordinary crime in the new status. They are echoes of the old practices, which used to take place in the 1990s - the same methods, only under a different veil.

"Threats to businessmen do not justify Islam. It what was likely derived from crime", - said Nazir Ahmatov²⁰.

There are lots of examples of this in the modern republics of the North Caucasus.

Karachaevo-Cherkessia's amir Ruslan Khubiyev as soon as he was released from jail, created a bandit group, which has set itself the task to attack employees of the law.

According to some data, about 11 % of the members of Karachay-Cherkessia's jamaat are people with a criminal past. A low level of religious culture is characterized by fanatical adherence to external injunctions of Islam. This primitivism, reduced to external attributes and rituals, is particularly attractive because it justifies almost any deviant behavior²¹.

At the end of November 2012 a few members of an organized group that specialized in robbery attacks were arrested - they gave part of the stolen money to the construction of the so-called "jamaat" mosque in Zolsky district of Kabardino-Balkaria²².

According to a well-known specialist I. Dobaev the intertwining with each other (terrorist, financial, criminal, drug trafficking, illegal trade in arms, people and others) generally gives to this emerging network conglomerate new qualities and makes it completely autonomous, more amorphous than previously, and more invulnerable²³.

There is a need to raise the issue about a creation of the regular prison clergy - both Orthodox and Muslim. Creation of Institute of the Muslim clergy in the penitentiary system of the country will allow to minimize the spread of various

20 Makeeva N., Gadjeva N., North Caucasus news agency, Crime idealism of Wahhabis, <http://skfonews.info/article/116> (accessed 01.02.2014).

21 Bogatyrev T., Religion and the media, Muslim "father Gapon", http://www.religare.ru/2_28642.html (accessed 01.02.2014).

22 Main Directorate of the MOI of Russia for the North Caucasus Federal District, Zolskij robbers confessed that some of his loot built a mosque, <http://skfo.mvd.ru/novosti/4579/> (accessed: 01.02.2014).

23 Dobaev I., Institute of Religion and Politics, Evolution of the Islamic movement in southern Russia in the context of social transformation in the late twentieth century - the beginning of the twenty-first century, <http://irp.ru/page/stream-exchange/index-17496.html> (accessed 01.02.2014).

forms of "non-traditional Islam" in this environment. Similarly, the Orthodox clergy working on a permanent basis in places of deprivation of liberty will reduce the process of "wahhabization" of Russian criminals²⁴.

In the summer of 2011, the State Duma adopted a law on the special order of serving the sentence for those convicted of extremism and terrorism. According to that law, former members of extremist organizations should be held separately from the main mass of the prisoners. The creation of separate colonies for extremists with single cameras is also being discussed. However, these innovations are still only on the papers and all prisoners are still serving their sentences together.

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²⁴ Website Information Agency «REGNUM, Spread of Islamist ideology in prisons threaten Russia's security: expert, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd-volga/tatarstan/1600232.html> (accessed 01.02.2014).

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Тембулат Гјатов

ВЕРСКИ ЕКСТРЕМИЗАМ У СЕВЕРНОМ КАВКАЗУ: КРИМИНАЛНИ МИЉЕ

Сажетак

Овај чланак је посвећен актуелном проблему спајања организованог криминала са верским екстремизмом, тачније, са исламским организацијама. Проблем јачања вахабизма у криминалном миљеу је слабо изучаван. Посебна пажња је упућена исламском прозелитизму међу руским затвореницима и процесу продора екстремистичких идеја у криминалном миљеу. Аутор закључује да је неопходно поставити питање формирања регуларних затворских верских службеника – како православних тако и муслиманских, што би минимализовало ширење различитих форми не-традиционалног ислама.

Кључне речи: радикални ислам, екстремизам, тероризам, криминални миље, џемат

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