

The Effect of ‘Religious Extremism’ in Russia on Country’s Foreign Policy in Syria

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Abstract

From the beginning of a civil war in Syria, Russia played one of the key roles in unfolding the crisis. Intensive rhetoric developed over the reasons behind Russian foreign policy in Syria. All that shaped a demand in an in-depth analysis of reasons behind Russian foreign policy decisions. Apart from historically strong ties with Syria, geopolitical and economic interests between two states, Russian foreign policy in Syria tends to be security-oriented in a way that some domestic security implications strongly affect Russian foreign policy decisions. In many ways, domestic factors form operational environment of foreign policy-making of any state. To Russia, Syrian stability is seen as vital to Middle East stability, and consequently to Russia’s national security and integrity. In particular, Russia is worried about the rising strength of ‘Religious Extremism’ in the Middle East, because this development could give impulse to political opposition and bolster insurgencies in Russian Muslim-populated regions.

Keywords: Russia, Islam, Islamism, Syria, Caucasus.

1. Islam in Russia and Forms of ‘Religious Extremism’ Existing in Russia

Russia has the largest Muslim population in Europe, with roughly 10 to 15 percent of Muslims out of Russia’s total population (Cottey, 2012; Miller, 2015). Although percentage is predicted to increase to roughly 13 percent by 2030, and nearly 17 percent by 2050, with about 20 million Muslims in Russia (Pew Research Center, 2011). It is argued (Hunter, 2004) that nowadays Muslim communities exist in all of the Russian Federation’s 89 territorial divisions (‘Federal subjects’), and constitute a majority in seven out of the 89 subjects of the Russian Federation: Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia. However, majority of Russia’s Muslims are still mainly concentrated in two regions: the North Caucasus and the Volga-Ural region.

Islam has deep roots in Russia. As pointed out by Hunter (2004), it is difficult to establish exactly when Islam first appeared in Russia, because the lands that Islam penetrated early in its expansion were not part of Russia at that time, but were later incorporated into the expanding Russian Empire. According to Cohen (2012), Arab invaders introduced Islam into the Caucasus in the 8th century, and shortly after most people in the North Caucasus had converted to Islam, while peoples to the South, including the Georgians and Armenians, remained loyal to the Orthodox Christianity. Yemelianova says (Pikington & Yemelianova, 2003) that despite the Kievan monarch [*kniaz*] Vladimir was lured to adopt Islam as the state religion in 988, he opted in favor of Greek Orthodox Christianity. Until the Mongol invasion of Rus’ in 1223, Muslims and Islam were only distant neighbors and not part of Russia’s religious and political landscape (Hunter, 2004, pp. 4). As argued by Kaarin Aitamurto (Simons & Westerlund, 2015), the first Muslim minorities were incorporated in the Russian Empire when Tsar Ivan IV conquered Kazan and the whole Tatarstan in 1552. In the late 18th century to early 19th century, while the North Caucasus region was under the influence of the Persian and Ottoman Empires, the Russian Empire made major inroads into the region. As Cohen states, despite fierce resistance during the Caucasian War (1817–1864), Russian forces conquered the region and incorporated it into the Russian Empire (Cohen, 2012).

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According to Hunter (2004), historically the mainstream Islam in Russia was dominated by 'Sufi' brotherhoods, notably 'Naqshbanaya', 'Qadiriya', and 'Shaziliya.' As proved by Shikhsaidov (Jonson & Esenov, 1999), it takes its roots in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia in the 10th-11th centuries. At present, the dominant view in Russia is that 'Sufism' represents one of so-called 'traditional forms' of Islam. Under Hunter, 'Sufism' is supposed to be "a mystical current in Islam, which emphasizes the need of a non-rational, mystical discovery of God, as well as the importance of tradition and spiritual leaders, who act as a bridge between man and God" (Hunter, 2004, pp. 88). In modern Russia, 'Sufism' is mainly represented by 'Hanafism', which is considered to be the position of the Russian Muslim official clergy, including the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia and European Countries of the CIS and the Russian Council of Muftis.

In Russian political discourse, as it was discussed during meeting of the Valdai Club in 2013, 'non-traditional' Islam is associated with 'Religious' or 'Islamic Extremism' (Valdai Discussion Club, 2013). Malashenko (Malashenko, Heinrich & Lobova, 2010) uses the term 'Islamic Extremism' uniting such Islamic currents as 'Salafism', 'Wahhabism' and 'Jihadism'. In this article, I use terms 'Religious Extremism' and/or 'Islamism' as umbrella terms for certain extreme Islamist currents, like 'Salafism', 'Wahhabism', 'Jihadism' and 'Shahiddism'. These forms of Islam were not traditionally practiced in the Muslim-habited regions, and were mainly brought into Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union from the Middle Eastern countries; therefore they are associated with 'non-traditional Islam'. The major problem remains in differentiating the 'forms' of Islam in Russian political discourse, although some Russian politicians tend to equate these terms. On 16 September 1999, Dagestan's parliament adopted the Law 'Concerning the Prohibition of 'Wahhabism' and other 'Extremist' activities in the Territory of Dagestan', and similar laws were adopted in other republics in the Northern Caucasus. As argued by Richmond (Gammer, 2008), the documents didn't differentiate between 'Wahhabism' and 'Extremist' activity, it simply equated the two. Rather than attempting to understand the distinct features of 'Extremism' in the Northern Caucasus, the Russian government settled on this equation and even simplified it further: any Islamic movement not specifically indigenous to the region was labeled 'Wahhabi' or 'Salafi', and therefore 'Extremist' (Richmond, 2008). This equation of terms seems to be a critical error, and quite often becomes a very sensitive issue for the Muslim communities in Russia. Therefore, it is crucial to differentiate between 'Wahhabism', 'Salafism', their extremist forms, and 'Jihadism', as the terms has different meanings.

It needs to be said though that differentiating between 'Wahhabism' and 'Salafism' is not an easy task. Some scholars (Durie, 2013; Al-Tijani al Samawi, 2008) believe that 'Wahhabism' is a form of 'Salafism', whereas others (Ronczkowski, 2011; Kabir, 2013) equate them. For example, Yemelianova contends that 'Salafism' has become a post-Soviet reincarnation of 'Wahhabism' "based on a wider doctrinal foundation than the teaching of al-Wahhab" (Pikington & Yemelianova, 2003, pp. 185). Those 'post-Soviet Wahhabis' preferred to call themselves 'Salafi.' As Yemelianova explains (Pikington & Yemelianova, 2003), all that became a result of the reintegration of the post-Soviet Muslim regions into the Muslim world. Some other scholars (Scheafer, 2010) differentiate between 'Salafism' and 'Wahhabism', and I tend to fall into that category. According to Wagemakers (2012), the term 'Salafism' refers to the broad ultra-conservative movement of Sunni Muslims emphasizing close adherence to the model of the 'Salaf' or 'predecessors', who were the first few generations of Muslims. As argued by Stanley (2005), the name 'Salafi' comes from 'al-salaf al-saliheen', the 'pious predecessors' of the early Muslim community.

Islam of the first generations of Muslims — 'the Salaf' — is considered the purest and most prestigious form to follow. Durie (2013) describes that, if a Muslim walks close to 'the Salaf' in how they live, he/she will be rightly guided and will stay on the path to gaining Allah's favor. In Russia, according to Sagramoso and Yarlykapov (Ware, 2013), the first 'Salafi' communities appeared in several mountainous villages of Dagestan in the 1970s. But in the 1990s, 'Salafi' ideas received further impetus with the various contacts and exchanges that developed with the Middle Eastern scholars. It, this form of Islam does not seem to be violent, however, there is a 'sub-division' or a 'militant branch' within 'Salafism', which is labeled as 'Salafi Jihadist.' In accordance with Turner (2014), they aim to return to 'true and pure Islam' through violent 'Jihad'. In Russia 'Salafi Jihadists' are located mainly in North Caucasus, and are the ones that become the matter of concern for Russia, and its security, as they see, how Conant (n.d) contends, violence as a necessary tool for establishing the Islamic rule. Interesting point is suggested by Wagemakers (2012), who contends that contemporary 'Salafism' also should not be confused with the late 19th and early 20th century's movement often referred to as 'Salafism'.

This modern trend was mainly propagated by thinkers, such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1997), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Rida (1865-1935). As Wagemakers notes, they did indeed try to move Islam back into the direction of ‘the Salaf’, but with a completely different objective, whereas contemporary ‘Salafis’ try to emulate the predecessors to purify Islam and revert to its supposedly original and true form. Al-Afghani, Abduh, Rida and others did so in order to rid Islam of the centuries of legal and historical baggage that had, in their view, turned it into a rigid religion unfit for modern times. By going back to the earliest period of their religion, they wanted to strip Islam of this ‘burden’ so it could be rebuilt again from the bottom up (Wagemaker, 2012, pp. 6).

‘Wahhabism’, on the other hand, as it was suggested by Malashenko (Jonson & Esenov, 1999), refers to a specific type of ‘Salafism’ propagated by the 18th century reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1766) from the central Arabian region of Najd. It is suggested by some scholars (Hroub, 2011; Lacroix, 2011; Baraz, 2010) that ‘Wahhabism’ has become ‘the Muslim World’s reaction to modernization forced by the Western world.’ As such, ‘Wahhabism’ is said (Commins, 2009) to be more widely-spread in Saudi Arabia. Bolanos (2016) even claims that Saudi Arabia finances further spread of ‘Wahhabi’ ideology worldwide. In Russia, ‘Wahhabism’ appeared after the fall of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, when the state’s borders were opened, cultural and religious exchange programs were initiated also between Saudi and Russian Muslim communities. As a result, ‘Wahhabism’ quickly gained lots of supporters among the Russian Muslims. ‘Wahhabi’ and ‘Salafi’ in many ways share their strife for Islamic fundamentalism, however, as Wagemakers contends, “they differ ideologically, because of the Wahhabi strict enforcement of their beliefs, their lack of tolerance towards others” (Wagemakers, 2012, pp. 6). Moreover, as argued by Ronczkowski (2011), ‘Wahhabism’ is recognized for its strive toward establishing a government based on Sharia law, therefore ‘Wahhabis’ can hardly accept a secular government as a legitimate government. Just like with ‘Salafism’, ‘Wahhabism’ has its extreme forms, and propagate violent Jihad as a method of promoting ‘Wahhabist’ philosophy.

When it comes to ‘Jihadism’, Hunter (2004) suggests considering it as a branch of ‘Religious Extremism’, which calls for ‘Islamisation’ by violent means or through the waging of holy war (Jihad). ‘Jihadist’ ideas gained credence and a significant number of adherents as a result of the Soviet-Afghan War. Hunter also argues ‘Shahidism’ being “an offshoot of the ‘Jihadism’ movement in the North Caucasus” (Hunter, 2004, pp. 84). The hostage-taking operation in Moscow’s Dubrovka Theater in October 2002 and the suicide bombing of the headquarters of the pro-Moscow Chechen administration of Grozny in December 2002 were examples of translating ‘Shahidist’ ideology into violent acts. It is worth saying that quite recently, Russian political discourse has changed, and key political figures have become more careful in using terms related to Islam. The significant signs of change were seen in 2008, when Vladimir Putin for the first time made a positive assessment of ‘Wahhabi Islam’ in his public speaking. In the interview with French newspaper *Le Monde*, which was reproduced in the Russian press, he stated that, “Wahhabism’ in its original form is a normal tendency within Islam and there is nothing terrible in it” (Putin, 2008). He, however, also added “there are extremist tendencies within the framework of ‘Wahhabism’, which should be condemned” (Putin, 2008). Yevgeny Primakov (2009), the former Foreign Affairs Minister, in his book made a sharp distinction between the Islamic states and the Taliban’s form of Islam, which he described as ‘Islamic Extremism’. ‘Fundamentalists’, who observe traditional Islamic rituals, but not engaging in violence, he regarded as not threatening (Primakov, 2009). In my opinion, the term ‘Islamic Extremism’, ‘Religious Extremism’ or simply ‘Islamism’ should be further used as an umbrella terms for extreme forms of Islam: ‘Extremist Wahhabism’, ‘SalafiJihadism’, ‘Jihadism’ or ‘Shahidism’.

2. Reasons of Islamisation of the Russian Muslims

Muslims in Russia have a long history of continuous oppression from the side of the Russian government. That fact to great extent affected the Muslims’ integration into the Russian society, and most of all, intensified the development of ‘Islamic Extremism’ in Russia, in particular ‘Extremist Wahhabism’, ‘SalafiJihadism’, ‘Shahidism’. As Anishchuk (2013) notices, Moscow blames the spread of ‘Islamists’ throughout the North Caucasus on foreign influences in the region. Gorenburg (2006), on the other hand, sees it much secondary to domestic factors. The main reason for popularity of ‘Islamism’ in Russia is most probably hidden in the history of persistent oppression of the Muslim population in Russia, and most of all, in consequences of the Soviet Union collapse. Firstly, I think it is important to briefly demonstrate the historical continuity in oppression of the Muslim population in Russia.

As it was said before, until the Mongol invasion of Rus' in 1223, Muslims and Islam were only distant neighbors and not part of Russia's religious and political landscape. According to Hunter (2004), Islam's introduction to Russia as a result of the Mongol conquest and the Tatar rule has had significant implications for the development of Russia's perceptions of Islam and the character of its relations with the Muslim peoples and countries. Thus the Muslims were seen by the Russians as aggressors, conquerors and oppressors.

Hunter (2004), in his analysis of Islam in Russia, suggests that the period from the conquest of Tatarstan, in 1552 by Ivan the Terrible to the coming to power of Catherine the Great in 1762 and further rule of Russian Romanovs' dynasty was marked by a policy of systematic repression of the Muslims and the destruction of the Muslim civilization within Russia's borders. The Bolshevik's revolution took place in a country, which had about 10 percent of the population being Muslims. As Fowkes and Gokay (2012) note, 'the Revolution intensified radical mood of the Muslim population who's religious rights were heavily oppressed by the Empire, and in this way Bolshevism was taken by Russian Muslims as an attractive alternative to the Tsarist rule.' Fowkes and Gokay (2012) also stress that despite 'the communists worldview was opposed in principle to all kinds of religious belief, including Islam, Lenin supposed that it was necessary to persuade Islamist movement to join Communists in a joint struggle against the imperial powers.' As argued by Cohen (2012), the North Caucasian Muslims saw the collapse of the Russian Empire and the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 as an opportunity to end a century of occupation, however, it soon turned out that the Soviet oppression of religion affected Islam even more than the Orthodox Church. However after Lenin's death the Bolshevik's Party Muslim-friendly attitude was abandoned.

Perhaps the most severe oppression the Muslims witnessed at the time of the Stalin's rule. His anti-Muslim campaign was mainly concentrated on total closures of mosques, as well as large-scale persecutions of the Muslim clergy (Hunter, 2004). As Akhmetova (n.d.) notices, during the Great Patriotic the Soviet government deported many people of the North Caucasus under the pretext of allegedly helping the German army during its invasion of the Soviet Union. Although Khrushchev's rule is often recognized by the program of de-Stalinization of Soviet society, Khrushchev himself supported antireligious program of his predecessor. At the same time, that period, the Soviets were lured by the idea to increase their presence in the Middle East. Therefore the Muslim-oppression campaign had began to decrease. Such tendency, as stressed by Akhmetova (n.d.), continued with Leonid Brezhnev, who also was a supporter of improving the Soviet Union's positions across the Middle East.

After the official launching of 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost' by Gorbachev, the Soviet policy toward religion, including Islam, began to change (Akhmetova, n.d.). For the first time since the Soviet rule was fully established in Russia, the USSR and the RSFSR Supreme Soviets guaranteed freedom of religion in a series of laws that were adopted in October 1990. Although the major revival of Islam marked the Soviet collapse in 1991. Malashenko (Malashenko, Heinrich & Lobova, 2010) states that during 90s, thousands of mosques were built, a system of religious education was established, and Muslim organizations emerged and relations with believers abroad were established. Also, as Keenan (2013) contends, Muslim students from Russia started going abroad for study, particularly to Saudi Arabia, while many Muslim clerics from Arabia and Turkey arrived in the region. As a result, the 'Wahabi' and 'Salafi' philosophy that previously has been quite unusual for Russia flooded Russia's Muslim populated regions.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 caused another serious problem for the modern Russian state – separatist campaigns in a number of predominantly Russian regions. In 1992, the republic of Tatarstan held a referendum on independence from Russia, and, according to Akhmetova (n.d.), 62 percent of those who participated voted in favor of independence. However perhaps the most violent separatist campaign occurred in Chechnya. In October 1991 Chechnya declared its independence from Russia, which provoked invasion of Russian federal troops into the region. Since that time, for almost 10 years, the region was involved into war against the Russian government. It is, however, very important to notice that the two Chechen wars had different nature. In the first Chechen War (1994-1996), Russian federal forces attempted to seize control over de facto 'independent' Chechnya, which ended in humiliating defeat for the Russian forces in 1996. Whereas the Second Chechen War (1999-2000) was marked with 'Islamisation' of the conflict, which opened up a fierce sectarian fight between Sufism, and 'Religious Extremism'. In other words, Chechen nationalism and separatism was replaced with 'Islamism', which quickly started increasing in numbers across the Russian regions. In later years 'Islamists' placed themselves in open opposition with 'Sufi Islam'.

In 1995, as Akaev argues (Johnson & Esenov, 1999), 'Islamists' accused the representatives of the official 'Sufi' clergy of the North Caucasus, who adhered to moderate religious and political views, of collaborating with the Russian Government and of unwillingness to uphold the national and religious interests of the Muslims in the region. Under Malashenko (Malashenko, Heinrich & Lobova, 2010), in 2001, the President of Chechnya outlawed 'Wahhabism' in the republic, and later in the same year neighboring Kabardino-Balkaria followed suit. Earlier, in 1999, a similar law was adopted in Dagestan.

3. How Does the Threat of 'Religious Extremism' Affect Russian Foreign Policy in relation to Syria

Foreign policy to large extent is the product of a complex process of interaction between domestic and external factors. Quite a few scholars including but not limited to Beasley, Kaarbo, Lantis & Snarr, 2012; Malcolm, Pravda, Allison & Light, 1996) suggest that domestic factors, along with external variables, form the operational environment of foreign policy-making. Among the theories of International Relations (IR), Neoclassic Realism stresses the effect of domestic factors on state's foreign policy, although at the same time shares with Classic Realism and Neorealism the basic assumptions about the nature of IR that are fundamental to the Realist paradigm. Taking into consideration the famous metaphor of 'billiard ball', Neoclassical Realism contends that the properties of the 'billiard ball' affect the tactics of a state's actions. In other words, how Northedge (1986) argues, foreign policy of a country is to a large extent determined by its domestic structure and factors, as well as the external environment.

In case of Russian foreign policy in relation to Syria, certain connection between Russian domestic security implications and its foreign policy can be traced. One of these domestic security implications I can suggest to be a threat posed by intensification of 'Islamist' activities during the Arab Spring. As it was argued by Askari (2013), fears of 'Islamist' expansion prompted Russia's support for the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. I would agree with Snetkov (2014) in suggesting that one of the arguments of Russia's support to Assad's regime was that a functioning regime in Syria is a better source of defense against a spread of 'Islamism' in the region and beyond. Therefore, as it is noticed by a number of authors (Baczynska, 2015; Pickles, 2015), the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, as well as the Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, urged all Middle Eastern states and their Western allies to cooperate with the Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, although current political crisis existing between Russia-EU and Russia-US heavily affects constructive dialogue.

Moreover, I also share the opinion offered by Askari (2013), that Russia is opposed to regime change in Syria because it fears that new 'Islamists' governments in the Muslim world encourage separatist and Islamist tendencies close to and across Russia. These fears do not seem groundless. According to Malashenko (Malashenko, Heinrich & Lobova, 2010), political victories of 'Islamists' during the Arab Spring and their growing activities intensified 'Islamists' opposition in Russia and bolstered revolutionary moods among some groups of Russian Muslims. In August 2012, in Kazan, a capital of Tatarstan, protesters called for the overthrow of the Russia's government (Malashenko, Heinrich & Lobova, 2010). In February 2013, in Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala, two Islamic organizations held a demonstration to show solidarity with Assad's opponents (Malashenko, Heinrich & Lobova, 2010).

In August 2012, 'Islamic Extremists' from the Hizbut-Tahrir's cell in Tatarstan organised celebration of a Muslim holiday in Kazan and demanded that Russian flags be removed and replaced with their symbols (Malashenko, Heinrich & Lobova, 2010). According to Mezzofiore (2014), "Hizbut-Tahrir al-Islami, or Islamic Party of Liberation, is considered a terrorist organization in many countries, including Russia, which banned its activities in 2003 under Supreme Court decision." 'Radicals' have also become more active in the neighbouring Republic of Bashkortostan, where several 'Islamist' groups already existed (Malashenko, Heinrich & Lobova, 2010).

Islamic State (IS), which has in many ways become a 'product' of the Arab Spring, demonstrated its interest in the Russian Caucasus on a number of occasions. In September 2014, The IS militants posted a video-threat to Bashar al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin. As found by Dubovikova (2014), in the video the terrorists said that 'Assad's weapons will be turned against him.' Dubovikova (2014) also notes that one IS militant says he would like to convey a message to Putin, telling the latter that IS will "liberate Chechnya and the Caucasus" and that Putin's throne will be taken by IS. IS claims to territory within Russia are not new. According to Barmin (2014), since a recent map released by the IS, they color Russia's South as part of 'the Islamic Caliphate' to be established by 2020. It is no secret that Russian nationals are fighting in IS and other 'Islamic Extremist' groups in Syria.

“According to Alexander Bortnikov, director of the Russian Federal Security Service, nearly 1,700 Russian nationals are believed to be fighting on the side of IS” (TASS, 2015). Dearden (2014) believes that some IS militants are believed to be veterans of the separatist Chechen wars or relatives of exiles, disaffected by a lack of jobs and angered by Russia's perceived dominance in the Caucasus. The President of the Religion and Society Information and Analysis Center, Alexey Grishin (2012), points out, ‘Middle Eastern Islamists are also providing tangible support to their coreligionists in Russia’. That support might evolve into direct sponsorship of the ‘Islamists’ activities on the territory of the Russian Federation, where large Muslim populations live. In such a way that poses direct threat to Russia's domestic security.

Moreover, as Barmin (2014) argues, IS constantly seeks to lure more of their compatriots from Russia and has stated a goal of establishing a Chechen brigade. Falkowski (2014) makes a very interesting note that “the fact that Caucasian radicals have physically joined the global jihad sets a precedent in the history of modern Caucasian wars - never before have they participated on a mass scale in jihad outside the Caucasus.” It appears, however, that attracting Chechens as fighters is not the sole goal of IS. As also found by Barmin (2014), it has become known that the organization has set up a Caucasus-focused school for Russian-speaking children, fighters-to-be, in Syria's Rakka. Moreover, IS created a website that specifically targets Russia (Barmin 2014). Therefore, as we can see, Russia has many reasons to fear further intensification of Islamist activities in Syria, and elsewhere in the world.

Conclusion

The study of Russia and its foreign policy currently presents particular value, as Russia ‘appears’ in news reports on a daily basis. Nowadays, Russia prompts a policy, which goes in contrast to the line held by the US and its European allies. Such a tendency in many ways produces anti-Russian sentiments that are quite often sourced in lack of knowledge of the Russian history, identity, domestic issues and general political culture. All that forms a demand in an in-depth study of Russian foreign policy. The present study has a goal to fulfill such a demand and offer a research of Russian foreign policy in relation to the Syrian conflict. Syria is taken as a case study, although that doesn't mean that the research findings are not transferable to other cases involving Russia. At the same time it is also important to outline that the threat posed for the Russian national security and territorial integrity by intensification of global ‘Islamist’ activities during the Arab Spring, and in Syria in particular, has not become the only factor affecting Russian foreign policy decisions in relation to Syria. There are other factors, which equally stand behind Russian foreign policy decisions in case of Syria, although they are not covered by this article. Particular attention of this article is devoted to the analysis of Islam in Russia, its history, and in particular the forms of ‘Religious Extremism’, which considered to be the threats of Russian national security nowadays. As a multi-national and multi-confession state, Russia has a big community of Muslims. Unfortunately some groups of these Muslims adhere in their beliefs to the logic of ‘Religious Extremism’, and the number of these groups grow in Russia. These groups quite often receive financial and spiritual support from their co-religionists from the Middle East, therefore a certain tie between ‘Islamists’ in Russia and ‘Islamists’ in the Middle East can hardly be disputed. Russian government constantly stresses its effectiveness in fight against ‘Religious Extremism’ inside the state. Chechnya and the Caucasus region have become relatively peaceful regions; however, there are still many problems that need to be settled. At the same time, I believe, such a ‘peace’ in many ways is an illusion, and the chances of ‘Religious Extremism’ intensification within Russia, either by itself or with the help from outside, are high.

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