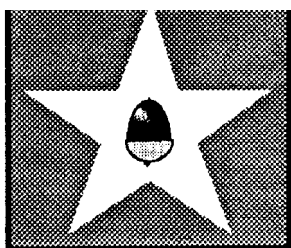


**Conflict Studies Research Centre**

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# Russia & Islam

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## Russia & Islam

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*Russian fears that an Islamic international terrorist threat is being coordinated by a single source are highly exaggerated. But shared concerns are creating a basis for closer cooperation with Russia in Central Asia, including China. Harsh official attitudes may even create the Islamic revolution they fear.*

The Russian leadership sees Islamic extremism as one of the main threats to the security of the Russian Federation. It fears that Islamic extremist forces could gain control of all of former Soviet Central Asia and parts of the Russian Federation (presumably regions such as the Northern Caucasus and Moslem parts of the Volga-Urals region, such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan). In July 2000, in an interview with *Paris Match*, President Vladimir Putin portrayed the threat in extremely graphic terms, speaking of the emergence of an extremist international extending from the Philippines to Kosovo.

**Paris Match:** *In your words, Russia is the outpost on the path of expansion of Moslem extremism. I speak not only of Chechnya, but also of Kyrgyziya, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.*

**Putin:** I am glad to hear that Russian soldiers today are at the forefront of the struggle with Islamic extremism. This is indeed the case. Unfortunately, only few note this. Today we are the witnesses of the creation of an extremist international in the so-called arc of instability beginning in the Philippines and ending in Kosovo. This is in the first instance very dangerous for Europe, as it has a large Moslem population. People who adhere to Islam as a religion to achieve provocative and terrorist goals compromise Islam. Islam is a religion of peaceable and orderly people. What does the problem consist of? You indeed know that one of the extremist organisations, which is headed by the notorious terrorist no.1 in the world Osama Ben Laden, is the International Islamic Front, which, in my opinion, puts as its task the creation of an Islamic haliphate, a United States of Islam, in which should enter a number of Islamic states, and some Central Asian states and part of the contemporary territory of the Russian Federation. Such are their fascist plans. I call them fascist, as they call for the creation of a united front against the Jews and "crusaders" as they call us. This is indeed a terrorist international. And in this sense Russia stands at the forefront of the struggle against this international terrorism. And Europe should get on its knees and show a large amount of gratitude for the fact that we struggle against it, so far, unfortunately, on our own.<sup>1</sup>

These words were similar to sentiments expressed when he visited Uzbekistan in May 2000. On that occasion he warned:

It is common knowledge that attempts are under way to carve up the post-Soviet lands along criminal lines with the aid of religious extremism and international terrorism ... an arc of instability has emerged in the republics on Russia's doorstep.<sup>2</sup>

The former defence minister Igor Sergeyev has issued similar warnings. In November 2000 he stated:

The vector of potential threat to the security of the Russian Federation is gradually moving to the south. This is conditioned firstly, by the widening of the zone of influence of the Taliban up to the border with Tajikistan. The threat of the spreading of Islamic extremism throughout the entire region of Central Asia, which has exclusively important significance for Russia, is becoming all the more real. Secondly, the West is gradually becoming aware that the efforts of the entire global community are needed to counter international terrorism. Today the front against terrorism goes through the Balkans, Central Asia, the Northern Caucasus and the Middle East.

Today Russia and the Central Asian states of the CIS are in fact opposing the main threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, religious extremism, nationalist extremism, and international terrorism.<sup>3</sup>

A few days later he stated that "religious extremism, separatism and international terrorism" are the biggest threats to Russia's security. "The greatest threat to Russia's security comes from the North Caucasus and Central Asia ... today's international terrorist centre is Afghanistan."<sup>4</sup> As a consequence Moscow has decided to station more armed forces in southwest Russia and the regions bordering Central Asia.

In May 2001, foreign minister Igor Ivanov stated that international terrorism emanated from Afghanistan, where it threatened Central Asia, and from Kosovo where it threatened the Balkans.<sup>5</sup>

From the statements of Putin, Sergeyev and Igor Ivanov, several main Russian perceptions are obvious:

- A threat of Islamic extremism has emerged in Central Asia and the Islamic regions of the Russian Federation.
- This threat is posed by a coordinated international movement which extends from the Philippines to Kosovo.
- The Taliban regime in Afghanistan is one of the main centres for this extremist Islamic international. It particularly desires to export its revolution to Central Asia.
- By militarily confronting this threat, Russia is protecting the entire international community (particularly the West), and deserves its support.
- This threat is the main security challenge at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This perception has been used to justify the second military intervention in Chechnya in 1999, the support for the current regimes in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan

and Kyrgyzstan. It also heavily influenced Russian arguments against the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999.

It should be noted that Russian perceptions of an extremist Islamic international are shared by the former Soviet states of Central Asia, with the exception of Turkmenistan. China also shares Russian perceptions, and does face the threat of an Uighur separatist movement in Sinkiang.

It should also be noted that the Russian leadership is careful not to identify the Moslem faith as such with the threat it sees as emanating from these extremist forces. Igor Ivanov commented in May 2001 that Russia will not use the term "Islamic terrorism", and described these forces as the forces of "international terrorism", which were not motivated by religious or ethnic motives.<sup>6</sup> This distinction is made in order not to alienate either the Moslem peoples of the Russian Federation and CIS, or Moslem states outside CIS borders. The Russian line is that these forces are the forces of terrorism or extremism which use Islamic slogans as justification for their actions. In official Russian parlance, the terms "international terrorism", "religious extremism", or just "extremism", or sometimes "Islamic extremism" are synonymous.

## Perceptions of The Taliban

The Taliban movement emerged in Afghanistan in 1994, when it captured Kandhar. In September 1996 it captured Kabul, and since the late 1990s it has been in control of around 90% of the territory of Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> Its main opponent is the Northern Alliance in northern Afghanistan, controlled by Ahmad Shah Masud. The Northern Alliance is effectively a Russian ally.

Moscow has been concerned about the Taliban since at least 1996. At that time the Russian leadership expressed concern about their advances in Afghanistan. In October 1996, then Russian prime minister Viktor Chernomyrdin met the leaders of four Central Asian states and issued a joint communiqué on the situation in Afghanistan:

The flame of war is approaching the borders of the CIS states, and this creates a direct threat to the national interests and security of these states and of the CIS in general and destabilises the regional and international situation. We declare that any activity which undermines stability on the borders with Afghanistan is unacceptable. Such activity, no matter who is responsible for it, will be regarded as a threat to common interests and will meet with an appropriate response.<sup>8</sup>

There is a fear that the Taliban's success could have long-term strategic consequences detrimental to Russian interests. In October 1996, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* warned that:

The Taliban's successes and their proclamation of an Islamic state are significantly changing the geostrategic situation in the Central Asia region, and this very directly affects Russia's interests. Indeed, it is no accident that the Pakistani authorities are supporting the Taliban as a means of putting pressure upon Iran and India in the struggle for trade routes to the markets of former Soviet Central Asian republics.

Faced with this threat, the presidents of former Soviet Central Asia, observers believe, could unite around Moscow. But it could be that something else will happen: for example a successful northward advance by the Taliban. Then it would become difficult to hold the Tajik border on the river Pyandzh, and at worst we might have to quit the Central Asian republics, which would mean the exodus of ten million Russian speaking refugees from the region.<sup>9</sup>

Since then, Moscow has expressed concern about the Taliban exporting terrorism to Central Asia, China and Chechnya. In September 2000, when Russian presidential envoy Sergey Yastrzhembskiy visited Pakistan, he claimed that terrorist training camps were being run in Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan. He stated that five camps had been identified as imparting training to Chechens, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Uighur Muslims of China.<sup>10</sup> During this visit, Yastrzhembskiy expressed concern about militant Islam emanating from Afghanistan. In October 2000 Yastrzhembskiy again drew attention to his perception of a link between the Taliban and anti-Moscow forces in Chechnya. He claimed that Chechen separatists intended to meet the Taliban movement to urge it to begin hostilities in Central Asia proper. "The leaders of the bandit formations think that such a turn of events might force Moscow to transfer part of its military forces from the Caucasus region and thus alleviate the situation for the militants in Chechnya."<sup>11</sup>

Russia's concern about the threat it believes is posed by the Taliban led to speculation in May and June 2000 about the possibility of Russian air strikes against Taliban positions in Afghanistan. However, no action was taken, and it seems unlikely that Russia would undertake such action now. She prefers instead to work for the isolation of the Taliban regime, and so supports UN sanctions against the Taliban, and indeed argues for the strengthening of sanctions. In addition to the fear that the Taliban might export their revolution by supporting extremist Islamic forces such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Hizb ut-Tahrir movement in Kyrgyzstan, there is the fear that instability caused by conflict could result in an increase in drug trafficking from Afghanistan through Central Asia into Russia.

## **Russian Contacts With Taliban**

Russia has had unofficial contacts with the Taliban since at least June 1997, when then deputy foreign minister Viktor Posuvalyuk met a Taliban official in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> By 2000 there were some voices in Russia calling for an official recognition of the Taliban.<sup>13</sup> However this was rejected by Moscow, not least because of the Taliban's decision to recognise Chechen independence. Moscow has however edged towards closer contact with the Taliban and desires to use Pakistan as a means of communication with them. Moscow hopes that Pakistan will be a moderating influence on Taliban policy. In February 2001, deputy foreign minister Aleksandr Losyukov told Pakistan's ambassador to Moscow, Iftikhar Murshed, that Russia wanted Pakistan to use its influence with Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia to halt actions undermining stability and security in the region.<sup>14</sup>

In March 2001, first deputy foreign minister Nikolay Trubnikov outlined the purpose of maintaining contacts with the Taliban. Trubnikov said:

We have unofficial contacts with the Taliban ... It is necessary to try to talk with the Taliban, but only about sitting them down to the negotiating

table and convincing them that they will not be the winners of this war. ... the main thing is that we are obliged to demand that the Taliban stop training international bandits on territory under their control; these bandits later sneak into Chechnya and commit acts of vandalism, terror and the like. For this too it is necessary to talk with the Taliban from time to time. Afghanistan has already become an enclave where international class terrorists are produced.<sup>15</sup>

## Taliban & The West

Some in Russia have blamed the USA for backing the Taliban. For example, the deputy minister for nationalities and federal policy Kim Tsagolov accused the USA in June 2000 of creating the Taliban in order to create instability on the borders of Russia and the CIS. He argued that the USA was striving to pull Russia into a conflict in this region and that the aim of the USA and Europe was to see a Russian strategic withdrawal from Central Asia and the Caucasus. Presumably the USA's decision to cooperate with Russia over Afghanistan since 1996 is seen as insincere. Tsalogov says that US support for both the Taliban and Chechen fighters is no secret.<sup>16</sup>

## Challenges To Standard Russian Views

The standard Russian view on the Taliban has been challenged, although any challenges are unlikely to have much effect. In *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in October 2000, Semyon Bagdasarov considered the view of the Taliban held by the Russian leadership and most commentators to be based on several myths.<sup>17</sup> He outlined these myths as follows:

**MYTH 1:** The Taliban is devoted to spreading radical Islam and dreams of creating an Islamic haliphate.

**REFUTATION:** The Taliban is a movement consisting largely of Pushtuns, the largest ethnic grouping in Afghanistan, and its main aim is to counter various separatist movements in the country.

**MYTH 2:** The Taliban is the main sponsor of the IMU and Hizb ut-Tahrir, Islamic movements that have conducted military operations in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

**REFUTATION:** IMU bases are located in Tajikistan and parts of Afghanistan controlled by non-Taliban forces.

**MYTH 3:** The Taliban plans to launch a military strike against the states of Central Asia.

**REFUTATION:** This is highly unlikely given Afghanistan's internal problems. The Taliban is only likely to strike into Central Asia if Central Asian states support the Northern Alliance.

Another challenge to the official view was also made in October 2000 by Islamic specialist Aleksandr Ignatenko, who prepared a paper for the Institute of Social Systems of Moscow State University entitled "Islamism - a global threat?" It was

proposed that this paper be sent to the executive and legislative branches of power in the Russian Federation.<sup>18</sup>

Igantenko's paper sought to give an overall exposition of the nature of modern Islam, examining the development of Islam since the late 1970s. It gives a balanced explanation of various Islamic movements, noting the difference between extremist Islamic movements (which he calls Islamism), and the Moslem religion and Islamic states that are not committed to the violent export of Islamic revolution and are indeed threatened by extremist Islamic movements themselves. He notes that there is no single global coordinating centre for Islam, a view which runs directly counter to that of the Putin leadership. Ignatenko accepted however that extremist Islam does pose a threat to Russian interests. He concluded:

Russia should at the current time, with the aim of ensuring internal political stability and regional security, independently undertake a range of measures directed at the limitation and/or liquidation of the Islamic danger, taking into account the circumstance that Islamism has already penetrated the territory of the country and has become a parasite on Russian Islam. Among these measures, which should be discussed at the level of experts, are: the depoliticisation of Islam, and the de-Islamisation of politics (through the introduction of corresponding clauses in legislation on social associations and on freedom of conscience and on religious associations); the exclusion of interference in the socio-political sphere of Islamic organisations (both Russian and foreign); the limitation or full ban on the the activities of foreign Islamic organisations which are definitely spreading Islamism in the form of Wahhabism or Khomeinism on the territory of Russia; the consistent fulfilment of the constitutional, that is the fundamental principle, of the Russian state, namely its secular nature (this means, in particular, the equal distance of the state from all confessions, with the guarantee to citizens of all religious rights and freedoms, outlined in the constitution and by legislation); the reconsidering of foreign policy priorities towards cooperation with states which either do not use Islamism in foreign policy, or at a minimum do not use it against Russia.

## **The Development of a Central Asian Security System<sup>19</sup>**

However, as noted above, the Russian leadership appears rigidly wedded to the view that there is a single Islamic force, stretching from, to use Putin's words, the Philippines to Kosovo, and that the Taliban in Afghanistan is one of the key centres of this force, seeking to extend its influence deep into Central Asia and Russia itself. This view is shared by the leaderships of the Central Asian states (with the exception of Turkmenistan), and Moscow has thus been able to forge a consensus between itself and these states on this issues. The threat of Islamic extremism and terrorism is therefore useful to Moscow as it enables Russia to maintain a strategic presence in Central Asia, and to a certain extent to bind the states of Central Asia to her and ensure that Russian influence is maintained in this region. The Central Asian leaderships share the Russian perception, as these movements do have an alternative world-view to them, and therefore threaten the status quo. They therefore see Moscow as a logical security partner.

The first significant moves towards creating a Central Asian security system came in October 2000, when the CIS Collective Security Council (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan) met in Bishkek and signed a document setting up a collective security system. The principles of the construction of a regional security system were agreed upon, and an agreement was signed on the status of the formation of forces and means. The General Staffs of the signatories were to define the composition of forces that will form the collective security forces.<sup>20</sup> The Secretary-General of the CIS Collective Security Council (CSC) Valery Nikolayenko, said that regional headquarters for rapid deployment forces would be formed. The forces will be stationed on their own national territories and will be deployed with the sanction of the CSC to trouble spots when necessary.<sup>21</sup>

The development of CIS collective security forces and rapid deployment forces for Central Asia was also discussed at the meeting of the secretaries of Security Councils of CIS CSC members in Yerevan in April 2001.<sup>22</sup> This meeting considered the creation of a system for exchanging intelligence between intelligence services and other special services, and also improving coordination between the power structures to rebuff armed actions by extremists. Each CSC member state is likely to provide a battalion, and the permanent collective forces will number about 1,500-1,700. The Secretary-General of the Council Valery Nikolayenko was expecting the formation of a collective rapid deployment force to get under way by August 2001.<sup>23</sup>

Nikolayenko said that "one of the topics under discussion at the meeting is setting up regional CSC structures, primarily a collective rapid deployment force in Central Asia...at the initial stage they will be extremely limited in size. Moreover, the units allocated by member states will remain on their own territory. All they will do is train, plan and so on to a common schedule. A small administrative body is being set up to organize this, which will be jointly funded, as will specific joint exercises which these forces will carry out." The Central Asian forces will be the first of the CIS rapid reaction forces. It is planned to create additional forces for Belarus and the Caucasus. A protocol was signed in Yerevan at the end of May 2001 on the creation of a CIS rapid reaction force for Central Asia. Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will contribute forces.<sup>24</sup>

It is likely that an additional centre will be added to the already functioning anti-terrorist centre. The first branch of this centre will be opened in Bishkek later in 2001. Alongside this, the Shanghai Five (renamed the Shanghai Forum in June 2001 - see below) decided in April 2001 to create this anti-terrorist centre, and signed a letter of intent on furthering their anti-terrorist cooperation. In May 2001, Igor Ivanov confirmed that the Shanghai Five had set up an anti-terrorist centre.<sup>25</sup> This thus means greater Chinese involvement in CIS security structures.

## **Islam & the Russian Stance on the Balkans**

One of Moscow's main arguments in the information war over Operation Allied Force in 1999 was that NATO was unwittingly encouraging the possible emergence of an extremist Islamic state in Kosovo. Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov stated in April 1999 that military detachments of mujahedin from Afghanistan, Pakistan and a number of Persian Gulf countries would join the Kosovo Liberation Army and so create a centre of Islamic extremism in the heart of Europe.<sup>26</sup> In March 2001, both Putin and Sergey Ivanov drew a parallel between Chechnya and the conflict between Albanian forces and the Macedonian government in western Macedonia.<sup>27</sup>



Ivanov said that the events in Macedonia were reminiscent of Chechnya's aggression against Dagestan in 1999. Foreign ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko claimed that Macedonia was a target of "international terrorism". The Russian leadership sees the forces of "international terrorism" as a single entity synonymous with extremist forces that use Islam to justify their activities. In an interview in *Le Figaro* in April 2001, Igor Ivanov was extremely explicit in his belief that terrorism in Afghanistan, Chechnya and the Balkans was closely linked.

**Le Figaro:** You assert that Macedonia is the target of a terrorist international. You denounce the Albanians of the Kosovo Liberation Army as tools of Islamic fundamentalist networks that strike at both the Russian army in Chechnya and an American ship in the Gulf of Aden. Will you be able to persuade your partners in the contact group on Yugoslavia?

**Ivanov:** What good does it do to draw a distinction between the nationalist motivations of religious fanaticism? A terrorist is a terrorist! It is now clear that the Balkans have become a bridgehead for all extremists. From Kosovo, all of Europe is contaminated by dealers in arms and drugs. The situation is always the same: Once a country succumbs to instability the terrorist organizations flock to it. We have seen this in Asia, in the Middle East, in the Persian Gulf, in the Balkans, and of course in the Caucasus. We have very good intelligence proving that these organizations coordinate with each other. They help each other by sharing arms and money. They train combatants and then lend them to each other without distinguishing between ideological labels. Russia emphasizes that in the face of terrorism solidarity is the only solution.

**Le Figaro:** Would it not be better to adapt each remedy to each illness? The militants of "Greater Albania," the Chechen separatists and the Taliban fundamentalists do not necessarily have the same interests.

**Ivanov:** The facts are clear. The terrorists who spill blood in Chechnya are often mercenaries from abroad. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has officially recognized the representative of the Chechen republic, whom they treat like an ambassador. Afghanistan is where the Chechen terrorists are trained, where they receive money, weapons and moral support. The same is true of the Balkans. The guerrilla fighters of Chechnya who have not gone to Afghanistan have been trained in camps in Bosnia and Kosovo. There is thus a glaringly obvious complicity between the Chechen terrorists and those of the Balkans and Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup>

## A Threat Within Russia?

To judge by Putin's interview with *Paris Match*, he certainly believes that Islamic extremism poses a threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. Presumably he fears that this so-called Islamic international may endeavour to seize control of the Islamic regions of the Russian Federation. This would almost certainly comprise the Islamic parts of the Northern Caucasus and also the Islamic parts of the Volga-Urals region.<sup>29</sup>

In mid-1992 there were seven Islamic spiritual administrations in Russia. Six were in the Northern Caucasus (Adygey, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Stavropol', North Osetia, Chechen-Ingushetia). The seventh was the Spiritual Administration of

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Moslems in the European part of the CIS and Siberia. Two independent centres were created in Dagestan (the Avar centre and the Kuzmik centre). Independent administrations were formed in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in August-September 1992.<sup>30</sup> Estimates of the Moslem population of the Russian Federation vary from 15 to 21 million. The conflict in Chechnya has assumed a greater Islamic character since the start of the First Chechen War in December 1994, and, as noted above, the Russian leadership perceives that Chechnya is a victim of "international terrorism", which is a synonym for Islamic extremism.

Islamic extremism has made little headway in the Volga-Urals region, although there is a strong concern by the Russian Moslem leadership that it could do so. Supreme Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin, head of the Spiritual Administration of Moslems of the European Part of Russia and Siberia, said in April 2001:

The situation is quite alarming and adverse in Orenburg and Ulyanovsk regions, Tatarstan and Mordovia. The extremism, fanaticism, and varieties of Wahhabism there are attempting to acquire a wide field of activity. There is no prohibition on them in legislation today. Any preacher from overseas has the right to create any organization. Twenty summer camps, at which 200-250 children aged 13-14 have gathered, have been set up in Russia annually in the past 7-8 years. Overseas emissaries have arranged testing for them and have after several months sent them for training overseas. This has been done openly. Such camps have as of last year come to be conducted covertly. Via whom this is done and how is known to the authorities of law and order. We are attempting to oppose this to the best of our abilities.<sup>31</sup>

Various extremist Islamic groups from Islamic countries have been identified as operating in Tatarstan, attempting to spread Wahhabism.<sup>32</sup> Among these movements are: Al' Igas (member of the World Islamic League in Saudi Arabia), Ibragim-Al- Ibragim, Tayba, and Tablik from Pakistan. It is rumoured that some Tatars have gone to fight in Chechnya against Moscow. Some Tatar citizens have travelled to Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia in order to receive religious instruction. Some have also done likewise in Ichkeria, where they also received military training.

In December 1999, an explosion occurred on the Perm-Kazan-Nizhniy Novgorod gas pipeline in Kirovskaya oblast near Tatarstan. The Tatarstan KGB investigated the incident and detained 12 persons of various nationalities from Kirovskaya oblast, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Those detained claimed that the aim of the bombing was to draw Western attention to Chechnya. Two participants in the bombing were Ayrat Gil'metdinov, a former student of the Almetevskiy Islamic Institute and Ramazan Ishkil'din from Bashkortostan, who studied in 1999 in a camp run by Chechen field commander Khattab.

So far the influence of extremist Islam in regions such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan has been very limited, and is likely to remain so. However, this is not to say that the problem will not become larger, although it would be fanciful to suggest that Wahhabite activities in the Volga-Urals region are part of a single strategy coordinated from a centre in an overseas Islamic state.

## Conclusions

The Russian leadership's concerns of the threat posed by Islamic extremism are not groundless, but they are also exaggerated. To speak of a large international movement with a single coordinating centre that aims at creating an Islamic empire over vast swathes of the territory of the former Soviet Union and Middle East appears highly fanciful. In some respects the perception of Islam in this way is similar to Western (particularly American) perceptions of "international communism" in the late 1940s and early 1950s, or the Soviet perceptions of western "imperialism" during the Cold War. These perceptions assumed that "communism" and "imperialism" were coherent entities that pursued a single strategy. Such perceptions grossly simplified reality, as does the current Russian perception of Islamic extremism.

This perception leads to misunderstanding the nature of the conflicts in areas such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo and Macedonia. The Tajik opposition that fought against the Rakhmonov government from 1992-97 is closer to the Northern Alliance of Ahmad Shah Masud than it is to the Taliban.<sup>33</sup> The Taliban is a Pushtun movement and has fought in Afghanistan against Tajik, Uzbek and Khazar separatist forces. The IMU is again far closer to the Northern Alliance than the Taliban. It is also wrong to assume that the IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir are closely aligned. The IMU proposed an alliance with Hizb ut-Tahrir which the latter rejected.<sup>34</sup> The different outlooks between various Islamic movements undermines the Russian perception of a single movement controlled by one centre.

The Tajik government has sometimes permitted opponents of the Uzbek government to operate from its territory against Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government has also allowed opponents of the Tajik government to operate from its territory against Tajikistan. It is also claimed that there are members of the Uzbek political elite who may be interested in forming alliances with Islamic extremists to further their position. These factors make it clear that there is no single extremist international. The repressive attitude of Central Asian (particularly the Uzbek) leaderships toward Islamic organisations runs the risk of alienating their populations and driving them into the arms of these organisations. Official Russian and Central Asian attitudes could therefore create the Islamic revolution that they fear.

As noted above, Russia holds to this perception as it justifies Russian involvement in Central Asia, and to a certain extent enables Russia to centralise CIS security policy and to exercise a certain degree of influence over these states. Uzbekistan left the CIS Collective Security Treaty in 1999, so reducing Moscow's influence over Uzbekistan. However, Uzbek concerns over the Taliban and IMU provide Moscow with the opportunity to achieve closer cooperation with Uzbekistan in security matters and recoup lost influence. Uzbekistan became a member of the Shanghai Five (which was thus renamed the Shanghai Forum) in June 2001, so signifying a closer association with Moscow. It is also possible that Pakistan could join the Shanghai Forum grouping.<sup>35</sup> If she does do so, this may provide Moscow with further opportunities to use Pakistan to influence the Taliban in Afghanistan. If membership of the Shanghai Forum results in Pakistan sharing the consensus viewpoint of Russia and the other members of the group on Central Asian security, this may be seen by Russia as strategically advantageous, and may give Russia a forum in which she can further extend influence throughout Central and Southern Asia. It may also in the longer term bring about a *modus vivendi* with the Taliban regime, which may be advantageous for Russia. Afghanistan cannot be ignored, particularly in view of the agreement signed in October 1995 by Turkmenistan and

Unocal to build a gas pipeline from Daulatabad in Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Multan in central Pakistan.<sup>36</sup> Although this project was abandoned in December 1998, interest in future projects may emerge should Afghanistan ever become more stable.

Official Russian perceptions of Islamic extremism do not appear to have damaged Russia's ties with Moslem states. Indeed it may help strengthen Russia's relations with many of these states, as some of them are threatened by extremist movements. Iran's relations with the Taliban are poor, and Tehran probably welcomes Moscow's hostility towards the Taliban regime. There is a strong Russian belief that Wahabbite groups based in Saudi Arabia are backing the Chechen forces fighting for independence, along with other extremist Islamic groups in other Moslem parts of the Russian Federation.<sup>37</sup> This does not appear to have undermined the Russo-Saudi interstate relationship, although the Saudi Embassy in Moscow put out a statement in April 2001 denying official Saudi support for Chechen fighters.<sup>38</sup>

The greatest danger for Moscow is that any indiscriminate application of the label "Islamic extremist" may help radicalise Islamic communities both in Central Asia and within Russia, and so create a host of new security problems for the Russian leadership.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This interview was republished under the title 'We will reach agreement with the Chechens', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 8 July 2000.

<sup>2</sup> BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) SU/3845, 20 May 2000.

<sup>3</sup> 'The tasks and priorities of military construction are defined for 2001', Krasnaya Zvezda, 22 November 2000.

<sup>4</sup> SWB SU/4007, 25 November 2000.

<sup>5</sup> SWB SU/4160, 21 May 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> For accounts of the rise of the Taliban, see Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia, London, New York, IB Tauris, 2000, and William Maley ed, Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban, London, Hurst and Co, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Inside Central Asia, No 141, (30 September-6 October 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 1 October 1996.

<sup>10</sup> SWB SU/3957, 28 September 2000.

<sup>11</sup> SWB SU/3972, 16 October 2000.

<sup>12</sup> SWB SU/2942, B/6, 11 June 1997.

<sup>13</sup> SWB SU/3958, 29 September 2000. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy called for recognition of the Taliban. On 28 September 2000 Vladimir Lukin called for talks with the Taliban.

<sup>14</sup> SWB SU/4061, 3 February 2001.

<sup>15</sup> 'Politicians give out licenses to catch spies.' Komsomolskaya Pravda, 29 March 2001.

<sup>16</sup> See Ruslan Abayev, 'Measure seven times', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 24 June 2000. For a while the USA was supportive of the Taliban regime, seeing it as a force that could unite Afghanistan. US policy was strongly influenced by Unocal, which desired to build a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. See Rashid *op cit*, p160-182.

<sup>17</sup> Semyon Bagdasarov, 'Myths about the Taliban', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 18 October 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Aleksandr Ignatenko, 'From the Philippines to Kosovo', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 12 October 2000.

<sup>19</sup> For a useful recent study of security in Central Asia, see Roy Allison & Lena Jonson eds, Central Asian Security: The New International Context, London and Washington, Royal Institute of International Affairs and Brookings Institution Press, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> See SWB SU/3969 12 October 2000 and SU/3970 13 October 2000 for details of the Bishkek summit.

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- <sup>21</sup> See Lyudmila Romanova & Vladimir Mukhin, 'A Central Asian security system is created', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 11 October 2000 and Vladimir Mukhin, 'The Collective Security Treaty is assuming a concrete outline', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 19 October 2000.
- <sup>22</sup> For details of the summit of secretaries of the Security Councils of the CIS Collective Security Treaty signatories, see SWB SU/4136, 27 April 2001; SU/4138, 29 April 2001.
- <sup>23</sup> Interfax, 24 May 2001, in <http://news.monitor.bbc.co.uk>
- <sup>24</sup> SWB SU/4166, 27 May 2001. Lyudmila Romanova, 'Putin arrives in Yerevan', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 25 May 2001 and Vladimir Mukhin, 'Collective defence becomes a reality', *ibid.* See also Lyudmila Romanova, Rita Karapetyan, 'There will be CIS rapid reaction forces', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 26 May 2001. For discussion on the CIS rapid reaction forces see Vadim Solovyev, 'Together against terrorism', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 26 April 2001.
- <sup>25</sup> SWB SU/4160, 21 May 2001.
- <sup>26</sup> SWB SU/3506, B/3, 12 April 1999 and SWB SU/3548, B/2, 31 May 1999.
- <sup>27</sup> SWB SU/4102, 23 March 2001.
- <sup>28</sup> Le Figaro 12 April 2001.
- <sup>29</sup> For a study of Islam in the Russian Federation, see Aleksey Malashenko's book, Islamskoye vozrozhdeniye v sovremennoy Rossii, Moscow, Carnegie Centre, 1998. See also his study of Islam in the Northern Caucasus, Islamskiye orientiry Severnogo Kavkaza, Moscow, Carnegie Centre, 2001. Both books are available on <http://pubs.carnegie.ru>
- <sup>30</sup> See G Mikhaylov, 'Islam v Rossii', in Igor' Yermakov, Dmitry Mikulskiy eds, Islam v Rossii I Sredney Azii, Lotos, Moskva, 1993, p17-30.
- <sup>31</sup> Izvestiya, 27 April 2001.
- <sup>32</sup> See the survey of extremist Islamic groups in Tatarstan by Vasily Surkov, 'Russian mercenaries: ideas and truth', Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 15 May 2000, REGIONY, Supplement No 11.
- <sup>33</sup> International Crisis Group Report Asia Report, No 14, Central Asia: Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security, 1 March 2001, p10-11. This can be downloaded from <http://www.intl-crisis-grp.org> For a study of Islam in Central Asia, see Aleksey Malashenko, 'Islam in Central Asia', in Roy Allison & Lena Jonson eds, Central Asian Security: The New International Context, London and Washington, Royal Institute of International Affairs and Brookings Institution Press, 2001, p49-68.
- <sup>34</sup> International Crisis Group Report Asia Report, No 14, *ibid.*, p6.
- <sup>35</sup> In June 2001 the deputy chairman of the international affairs committee of the Federation Council Mikhail Margelov spoke out in favour of Pakistan, India and Iran eventually joining the Shanghai Forum. He noted that Pakistan would have to alter its current policy towards the Taliban. See SWB SU/4185, 15 June 2001.
- <sup>36</sup> Rashid, op cit, 2000, p160, 175. Gazprom was offered a 10% stake in a Unocal-led consortium, but refused it, due to opposition by Moscow. See Rashid, *ibid.*, p173-4.
- <sup>37</sup> See article by Mikhail Fal'kov, 'En route to the Moscow haliphate', Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye, No 16, 11 May 2001. Fal'kov claims that the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Education and Instruction is supporting Islamic extremists within Chechnya and Dagestan. He claims that Saudi Arabia, along with countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Pakistan are backing these forces through non-governmental philanthropic foundations and religious organisations. He claims that Saudi intelligence (along with its Pakistani counterpart) often manages these organisations' activities in Russia.
- <sup>38</sup> ITAR-TASS, 17 April 2001 in <http://news/monitor.bbc.co.uk>

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