

RADICAL ISLAM IN RUSSIA: THE CASE OF TATARSTAN

Abstract

The spread of Radical Islam among Russian Muslim is a central issue for the authorities of Russia. The first conflict in Chechnya facilitated the radicalization of Islam in the North Caucasus. Chechen warlords became involved in terrorism and organized terror bombings in Moscow in 1999, thus making terrorism a domestic issue for Russia. Hence the second Russian military campaign in Chechnya was labeled as counter-terrorism operation. In Volga-Ural region the situation was stable. However, Tatarstan has been encountering the issue of the radicalism since the beginning of the 21st century. During the 2010s there were several Islamic jamaats, which were involved in terror attacks in the territory of Tatarstan (mostly bombing pipelines), international Wahhabi organizations are active in Tatarstan. The terror attack in Kazan in July 2012, when the Mufti of Tatarstan was injured, indicated the strong presence of radicals in the region. The attack made the authorities of Tatarstan take severe approaches towards the radicals. The law enforcement bodies operate professionally: those who are suspected to have radical views are immediately caught and imprisoned. The active propaganda of traditional Islam in which the state is also involved is another way to prevent the radicalization of the region. Though the Wahhabi presence remains, the situation in Tatarstan is stable due to the work of the law enforcement bodies.

Keywords: *Russia, Tatarstan, Islam, Radicalism, Wahhabism*

Introduction

“Our Islamic community is at home” those are the words that the President of Russian Federation Vladimir Putin said during his meeting with Muslim religious leaders in Kazan on 25 January 2018¹ (Putin 2018). Today, about 20 million Muslims live on the territory of Russia. Large numbers of Muslims live in Moscow and St Petersburg. Russian Muslims are

¹ Vladimir Putin, “Vstrecha s Muftijami Centralizovannyh Religioznyh Organizacij Musul'man Rossii i Rukovoditeljami Bolgarskoj Islamskoj Akademii,” (In Russian), [Meeting with Muftis of Centralized Religious Organizations of Muslims of Russia and Leaders of the Bulgarian Islamic Academy], *Official website of Kremlin*, January 25, 2018, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56702> (accessed April 15, 2018).

mostly concentrated in two regions: North Caucasus (Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia), Volga-Ural (Tatarstan, Bashkortostan). According to the geographical position, the Russian Muslims are divided into two communities: Muslim of the North Caucasus and Muslims of Volga Ural region. Despite the anti-religious policies during the Soviet Union, Islam managed to keep its essence. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought the wave of nationalist-separatist movements, and Islam became a unifying force for Muslims who were fighting for the independence of their region.

There are two main branches of Islam: Sunni and Shia. Majority of Muslims in Russia are Sunni. However, Muslims of the North Caucasus and Volga – Ural are ethnically diverse. They practice different forms of Islam, are loosely connected, and have no influence on each other. Muslims of Volga – Ural region belong to Sunni Hanafi school, while Muslims in the North Caucasus profess Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam. In Dagestan small amount of Shia Muslims can be found. Islam in Russia is polycentric, there are fourteen spiritual boards of Muslims across the territory of Russia.

Vladimir Putin demonstrates no discrimination against the Muslim. All are the citizens of the country. The president mentions that the traditional Islam is an essential component of Russian culture. On the other hand, the president adopted severe approaches towards the radical Islam.² Following the breakup of the SU, the dynamics of Islam can be described as the radicalization of Islam or the proliferation of nontraditional Islam, which in Russia is referred to Wahhabism, Salafism, fundamentalism, and Islamism.

The issue of Islamic radicalism in Russia is connected to the conflicts in the North Caucasus, particularly with Chechnya. The first Chechen war triggered the radicalization in the North Caucasus. Though it started as a secular movement for independence, it led to the radicalization of several warlords who later would play an important role in the second Chechen war. The bombings in 1999 organized by Chechen radical leaders in Moscow showed that Russia now had to deal with terrorism. The threat of radicals had reached to the heart of Russia, and the second campaign in Chechnya turned into counter-terrorism operation, and the Chechen fighters were named terrorist.³

Though Putin successfully ceased the radicals of the North Caucasus, still radicalism remains a major issue for the president. In the 2010s the

² Vladimir Putin, "Vstrecha s Muftijami Centralizovannyh Religioznyh."

³ John Russell, "Mujahedeen, Mafia, Madmen: Russian Perceptions of Chechens During the Wars in Chechnya, 1994-96 and 1999-2001," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2002): 73-96.

emergence of ISIS brought new problems for Russia. Many radical Muslims from Russia not only started to support but also to join the terrorist organization. According to Aleksandr Bortnikov, the head of Russian FSB, nearly 4500 Russian citizens have been fighting in ISIS by 2017, and many of them form the North Caucasus.⁴

Compared to the North Caucasus the situation in the Volga Ural region was stable. However, the situation changed after terror attacks in Kazan in July 2012, when a prominent Islamic cleric was killed. These events shocked not only Tatarstan but entire Russia. Tatars are considered to be culturally assimilated to Russians. There is a well-structured Spiritual Board of Muslims that controls the religious life of the society. For almost two decades the Muslim and Orthodox communities of Tatarstan lived in harmony. The July events indicate that radicalism has passed the borders of North Caucasus and gradually is penetrating into the central areas of Russia.

When studying the issue of radical Islam, the North Caucasus comes first, while little has been written on the Volga-Ural region. Thus, this paper aims to study radicalism in the Volga Ural region, concentrating on the case of Tatarstan. Tatarstan is one of the twenty-two federal republics of Russia. The republic is one of the most important subjects of the federal state. Tatarstan is a donor region because of its petroleum resources. The rise of radicalism can definitely bring destabilization of the region which will negatively affect the federal state. The role of Islamic factor for Tatar people, the factors that contribute to the rise of radicalism will be studied in its all complexity for the first time in English.

Literature Review

Most of the literature connects the spread of radicalism to economic grievances, political marginalization and perceived injustices.⁵ These factors affect religious groups differently: religious persecution together with economic marginalization make individual embrace violence. That was the case in Chechnya. The first Chechen war (1994-1996) facilitated the

⁴ "FSB Rasstavljaet Akcenty," (in Russian), [FSB puts emphasis], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, December 19, 2017, <https://rg.ru/2017/12/19/aleksandr-bortnikov-fsb-rossii-svobodna-ot-politicheskogo-vliianiia.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁵ Edwin Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe*, *Institute of International Relations*, (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2006); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Stephen Blomberg et al, "Economic Conditions and Terrorism," *European Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2004): 463–478.

radicalization of Islam in the northern Caucasus and within Russia as a whole.⁶

The Chechen struggle against the secular federal authorities provided both historical and religious justification for the Wahhabi of the region to turn to violence. Historically, the North Caucasus has been less developed region, and after the collapse of the SU the economic situation deteriorated rapidly. From the religious point of view, many local Wahhabi took arms in self-defense against the actions of Russian security services. The Russian overwhelming military response during the first Chechen war created many grievances among the local population, which pushed individuals towards radicalism.⁷ While the second Chechen war created a new Islamic dynamic in the region by institutionalizing official Islam and marginalizing Islamic insurgencies.⁸ After pro-Russian president Ahmad Kadirov, then his son Ramzan Kadirov many radical Islamists were physically destroyed. The remaining insurgencies were under the leadership of Hamil Sadulev (d. 2006) and Doku Umarov (d. 2013) who created the “Caucasus Emirate.”

It is argued that Muslims of Russia are highly diverse and practice different forms of Islam, compared to the North Caucasus, in Volga – Ural the number of Islam practicing Muslims is low.⁹ Moreover, the Muslims of North Caucasus and Volga – Ural regions are weakly connected. Tatar communities have no say in the North Caucasus, and likewise.¹⁰

Some authors argue that Tatar Muslims are russified and have weak Islamic traditions,¹¹ while others claim that, though Tatar Muslims are culturally and spiritually close to Russia, there are no obstacles for them to develop strong Islamic foundations.¹² Tatar Muslims belong to Hanafi

⁶ Dmitri Trenin and Aleksei Malashenko, “Vremya Yuga: Rossiya v Chechne, Chechnya v Rossii,” (in Russian), [Time of South: Russia in Chechnya, Chechnya in Russia], (*Carnegie Moscow Center*, 2002): 257; Elena Pokalova, “Islamic Radicalization in Russia’s North Caucasus: Lessons from Russia’s Handling of Religious Revival,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, (2017).

⁷ Pokalova, Ibid.

⁸ Galina Yemelianova, “Islam, Nationalism and State in the Muslim Caucasus,” *Caucasus Survey*, vol. 1, no.2 (2014): 3-23.

⁹ Elise Giuliano, “Islamic Identity and Political Mobilization in Russia: Chechnya and Dagestan Compared,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* (2005): 195-220; Aleksey Malashenko, “The Dynamics of Russian Islam,” February 1, 2013, *Carnegie Moscow Centre*, <http://carnegie.ru/2013/02/01/dynamics-of-russian-islam-pub-50811> (accessed March 12, 2018).

¹⁰ Ahmed Abdel-Hafez Fawaz, “The Muslims in Russia: Between Historical Legacy and Contemporary Problematics,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2016): 365-382. ilatov, a, ianova, ess (2004).

¹¹ Galina Yemelianova, “Islam and Nation Building in Tatarstan and Dagestan of the Russian Federation,” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1999): 605-629; Aleksey Malashenko, “The Dynamics of Russian Islam”.

¹² Rafael Khakim, “Russia and Tatarstan, Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia,” *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1998): 30-71; Sergei Filatov, “Tatarstan: At the Crossroads of Islam and Orthodoxy,” *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1998): 265-277; Guzel Yusupova, “Making Ethnic Boundaries in the Society of Religious Renaissance: Islam and Everyday Ethnicity in Post-Soviet Tatarstan,” *National Identities*, vol. 20, issue 4, (2018): 345-360.

school of Sunni Islam. They played an important role in the region and contributed to the spread of Islam in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Tatar Muslims are famous modernists or jadids. As a reform movement Jadidism encourages individualism, welcomes all social activities. It calls for the unification of Islamic values with liberalism and democratic values. It encouraged Tatar Muslims to learn the Russian language and culture. Due to Jadidism Tatar Muslims developed a pragmatic variant of Islam, became closer to Europe and established economic ties. Tatar Muslims created a special image and their missions are to bridge Russian and Muslim world and represent Russian Muslims.¹³

The growing trend towards radicalism was unexpected to the region. But the events in the 2010s brought changes in the lives of Tatar Muslims. Radical groups became active, even demonstrations in Tatarstan were held in support of the Islamists in the Middle East. These changes are described in the literature as “Caucasization of Tatarstan.”¹⁴

The spread of wahhabism is linked with the training of clergy and their education, especially with those who studied abroad.¹⁵ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tatarstan did not have sufficient funds for constructing educational institutions, also the collapsed economy of Russia contributed to the establishment of ties with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia not only gave grants to Tatar students but also financed the constructions of mosques. DUMRT (Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan) started to send young Muslims to Arabic states for religious education.¹⁶

The collapse of the SU also brought Turkish Gulen Movement to Tatarstan. The movement is considered to pursue radical views and is banned in several countries including Turkey. Gulen started to open private schools and conduct educational activities. Russian authority viewed these activities as a threat and shut it down in 2008.¹⁷

Today, religious education is becoming more relevant and is gaining more importance in Tatar Muslim society, it has a growing appeal espe-

¹³ Khakim, “Russia and Tatarstan”; Filatov, “Tatarstan: At the Crossroads”; Nadir Devlet, “The Tension at Russia’s Center: Radical Islam in Tatarstan,” *On Wider Europe, Foreign Policy and Civil Society Program* (2012); Yusupova, “Making Ethnic Boundaries in the Society”.

¹⁴ Malashenko, “The Dynamics of Russian Islam”.

¹⁵ Eduard Ponarin, “The Potential of Radical Islam in Tatarstan,” *Central European University* (2008); Malashenko, “The Dynamics of Russian Islam,” *Carnegie Moscow Centre* (2013); Nadir Devlet, “The Tension at Russia’s Center: Radical Islam in Tatarstan,” *On Wider Europe, Foreign Policy and Civil Society Program* (2012).

¹⁶ Azat Akhunov, “Rol’ Zarubezhnogo Faktora v Stanovlenii Sistemy Religioznogo Obrazovaniya v Postsovetском Tatarstane: Problemy i Puti Ikh Preodoleniya,” (in Russian), [Foreign Factor in the Formation the System of Religious Education in Post- Soviet Tatarstan: Problems and Ways of Overcoming Them] *Islam in the modern world*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2015): 179-188.

¹⁷ Devlet, “The Tension at Russia’s Center”.

cially among young people but still many prefer to study abroad. Imams usually receive their higher religious education in the courtiers of the ME mostly in Saudi Arabia. Students usually return with radical or fundamental views. However, researches in this field are limited and do not provide statistics on how many students have fulfilled their education or how many students are currently studying abroad.¹⁸

Another factor that accelerates the spread of radicalism in Tatarstan is external and internal migration.¹⁹ Even president Putin considers immigration as the major factor that contributes to the rise of xenophobia and nationalist extremism in Russia. Islam has become a unifying force for Muslim migrants. Migrants from North Caucasus, Azerbaijan and Central Asia often bring their own Islamic ideologies with them which can be also radical. Migrants especially from Azerbaijan are usually less inclined to turn to religion, but they have started to reclaim Azerbaijani identity and to construct Azerbaijani mosques. Moreover, migration played and continues to play an important role in the ethnic composition of Tatarstan's population. According to official sources, annually nearly 1000 children are born in migrants' families in Tatarstan.²⁰

Some authors also view the lack of unity among Muslim communities as another reason for the growth of radical activities. There is a strong competition between Muslim self-governing bodies. They struggle over government's patronage, control of local communities and financial resources.²¹ Additionally, the Muslim communities in Tatarstan face several challenges such as financial problems, the shortage of literature in an accessible language, lack of highly skilled imams, etc. These factors made them be more dependent on external factors, especially Saudi Arabia, which continues its finance different Muslim communities.²²

The rising interest of young Tatar Muslim in Islam is another important issue regarding the growing trend of radicalism.²³ The young generation has lost its interest in traditional Islam and seeks something new in religion. Young Tatar Muslims have developed a keener sense of religious

¹⁸ Dilyara Suleymanova, "Islam as Moral Education: Madrasa Courses and Contestation of the Secular in the Republic of Tatarstan, Russia," *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2015): 150–167.

¹⁹ Kimitaka Matsuzato, "The Regional Context of Islam in Russia: Diversities Along the Volga," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2006): 449–461; Aleksey Malashenko and Aleksey Starostin, "The Rise of Non-traditional Islam in the Urals," *Carnegie Moscow Centre*, September 30, 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/2015/09/30/rise-of-nontraditional-islam-in-urals-pub-61461> (accessed September 15, 2018).

²⁰ Malashenko, "The Dynamics of Russian Islam".

²¹ Malashenko & Starostin, "The Rise of Nontraditional Islam in the Urals"; Roza Nurullina, "The Revival of Muslim Communities in Russia's Regions," *Russian Social Science Review*, vol. 56, no. 6 (2015).

²² Ibid.

²³ Ponarin, "The Potential of Radical Islam in Tatarstan"; Malashenko, "The Dynamics of Russian Islam".

identity, not linked to ethnic traditions, and have greater interest in political actions. They want to understand the current event in their republic and the world, but traditionalists are not able to give agreeable answers, while radicals are good at providing with the needed information.²⁴

Overall, researches in this field comprehensively elaborate on the factors that contribute to the escalation of the radical trend in Tatarstan. This research will go further and will try to understand the developments of radicalism, what is characteristic to Tatar radicals and, what other factors contribute to the rise of the radicalism.

Wahhabism in Tatarstan

The Spread of Wahhabism in Tatarstan

The spread of Wahhabism in Tatarstan region during the 1990s is connected with the charity funds opened by Middle Eastern countries. Arab sponsors financially supported the activities of a number of Islamic educational institutions in Tatarstan, of which the most popular one was meдресe “Yoldyz” in city Naberezhnye Chelny. Students were trained on the basis of Salafi beliefs, and that rooted the ideology of Wahhabism among young people.²⁵

After the achievement of the sovereignty of Tatarstan in 1992, it was decided by Tatar Muslims that Spiritual Board of Muslims of the European part of Russia and Siberia (DUMES) should be moved to Kazan in order to strengthen the role of the city as a spiritual center of the Tatars. However, the idea was not endorsed by Talgat Tajutdin, the mufti of DUMES.²⁶ Therefore, Tatars created their own SBM, which started to operate independently from DUMES and the mufti became Gabdulla Galiullin. Many mosques did not accept the newly created SBM of Tatarstan and continued to follow DUMES. Tajutdin created a breach of his muftiate in Tatarstan. Hence till 1998 in Tatarstan there were two muftiates: some mosques were following Gabdulla Galiullin, others remained loyal to Tajutdin and Faid Salman, who was appointed by Tajutdin as mufti of Tatarstan. Faid Salman was against the schism and separatism in the religion. He was the first who noticed the spread of Wahhabism and voiced

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Rais Suleymanov, ““Djamaat Bulgar”: predsaviteli Povolija v ryadakh Taliban,” (in Russian), [“Jamaat Bulgar” representeros of Ural in Taliban.”], *The Agency of Political News*. April 16, 2018, <https://www.apn.ru/index.php?newsid=37222> (accessed April 15, 2018).

²⁶ Azar Khurmatullin, “Islam and Political Evaluations in Tatarstan,” *Russian Islamic University*, http://www.pol.ed.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/28682/Islam_and_political_evaluations_in_Tatarstan.pdf (accessed April 15, 2018).

it. However, authorities did not take his warnings into account.²⁷ Only after the terror attack in Kukmar city in Tatarstan in 1999, and the revelation that during the Moscow bombing in 1990 one of the terrorists Denis Saytaev was a student of Yoldyz madrese, the problem of Wahhabism became actual.

The period from 1998 to 2011 when Gusman Iskhakov was the muf-ti of Tatarstan, can be called as the heyday of Wahhabism in the region. Iskhakov favored Wahhabism. He began to appoint Wahhabis to the posts of mukhtasibats (chief imam of the city or districts) or as imams of large mosques. Many businesspeople and state officials started financially support Wahhabis.²⁸

Fears of the possible emergence of radicalism similar to the North Caucasus evoked in November 2011 when three Islamists were killed during the armed clash with the police. Ildus Faizov, that time newly elected Mufti told that Wahhabism and Salafism were a great threat to the region.²⁹ His deputy, Valiulla Yakupov, was an active opponent of Islamic radicalism and even in his interview to Interfax website said the Wahhabism had to be banned in Tatarstan.³⁰ Nowadays, the successor of Ildus Faizov, young muf-ti Kamil Samigullin is actively involved in the propaganda of traditional Islam and demonstrates a strong stance against Wahhabism. Even recently he recommended banning that radical wing of Islam.

In the 2010s ISIS became the new attraction for Tatar Wahhabis. Many started to join the terrorist organization. According to unofficial sources, 88 Tatars are fighting for terrorists in Syria. Some started to come back, but they were immediately caught by law enforcement bodies.

Wahhabism in Social and Islamic Movements

Tatar radicals can be divided into two streams. The first stream is secular nationalists who fight for the independence of Tatarstan. The second stream is Islamic fundamentalist. In the 2000s when Vladimir Putin came

²⁷ Rais Suleymanov, "Problema vahhabizma v Tatarstane nikuda ne delas ...," (in Russian), ["The problem of Wahhabism in Tatarstan has not gone anywhere..."], *Russian National Line*, September 18, 2014, http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2014/09/18/problema_vahhabizma_v_tatarstane_nikuda_ne_delas/ (accessed April 15, 2018).

²⁸ Rais Suleymanov, "Vahhabitskij Holdingm," (in Russian), ["Wahhabi Holding"], *Military Review*, April 4, 2015, <https://topwar.ru/72338-vahhabitskiy-holding.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

²⁹ Nicolas Miletitch, "V Tatarstane preduprezhdajut ob ugroze radikal'nogo islama," (in Russian), [Tatarstan warned of the threat of radical Islam.], *Inosmi*, May 31, 2011, <https://inosmi.ru/social/20110531/170076539.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

³⁰ "Vahhabizm v Rossii dolzhen byt' zapreshhen," (in Russian), ["Wahhabism in Russia should be banned.], *Interfax*, May 16, 2010, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=inter-view&div=267> (accessed April 15, 2018).

to power, Tatars started to depart from the model of secular nationalism. That became evident when the new president of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov began to pray in mosques.³¹ Since then the position of the fundamentalists started to increase, and some nationalists started to proclaim Independent Tatarstan as an Islamic State.

One of the oldest nationalist movements in Tatarstan is Tatar Public Center (TPC), which was formed in 1988. The organization was quite active during the 1990s. They were supporting the leadership of Tatarstan to gain independence. TPC clearly expressed its position towards Islam. They view Islam as a critical element for spiritual revival.³² The first Chechen came to support the radical developments of TPC. The head of TPC Rafis Kashapov was so inspired by Chechen fighter that he himself went to Chechnya and met Basaev.

The TPC still exists, but now it does not have that massive support which it enjoyed at the time of the collapse of the USSR. In 2015 Rafis Kashapov was sentenced to three years in prison. According to the investigation, Kashapov posted materials on the internet which violated the territorial integrity, the constitutional order of the country, incited ethnic hatred. At that time his followers amounted 20.000.³³

Another popular separatist movement is the Tatar youth union “Azatlyk.” The organization was established in 1990. In 1995, the leaders of the organization declared “If we Tatars had the Chechen mountains and spirit, we too would give Russia a trouncing.”³⁴ Their main activity is organizing rallies, pickets, and processions. In 2017, honoring the 25th anniversary of Tatar constitution, the members of organization distributed flags of Tatarstan in different cities of the republic. They mostly organize rallies in support of Tatar language and provide online Tatar language courses.

Among the national movements of Tatarstan “Ittifik” differs with its strongly emphasized radical tendencies. It has a relatively small number of followers, but a charismatic leader, the 67-year-old Tatar writer Fauziya Bayamova. She is also known as “the godmother of Tatar nationalism.” She was the member of the TPC, but in 1990 because of her radical views she withdrew and created “Ittifik.” If “Azatlyk” support the cre-

³¹ “V Tatarstane est’ storonniki IGIL,” (in Russian), [“There are supporters of ISIS in Tatarstan.”], *Rabkor*. October 21, 2015, <http://rabkor.ru/columns/interview/2015/10/21/isis-in-tatarstan/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

³² Khurmatullin, “Islam and Political Evaluations in Tatarstan.”

³³ “Tatarskij aktivist Rafis Kashapov prigovoren k 3 godam kolonii,” (in Russian), [“Tatar activist Rafis Kashapov sentenced to 3 years in prison.”], *Radio Svoboda*. September 15, 2015, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/27249237.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

³⁴ Trenin and Malashenko, “Time of South: Russia in Chechnya.”

ation of a secular independent Tatar state, Bayamova claims independent Tatarstan as an Islamic republic and calls for a Chechen style resolute actions. In 2014 Bayamova was convicted to one-year prison for inciting ethnic hatred.³⁵

Along with the rise of nationalism in the 1990s Wahhabism and Salafism started to penetrate into the social layers of Tatarstan. “Tablighi Jamaat” ideological movement appeared in Tatarstan in the 1990s. The followers of the movement are also known as silent Wahhabists³⁶ can be noticed in traditional Pakistani clothing. Though they declare that they won’t participate in socio-political life the region, they have political ambitions – that is the establishment of a radical and uncompromising form of Islam. In Tatarstan, Tablighis can be found in Nurulla and Salikhjan mosques. Though the movement was banned in 2009, it continues its existence.³⁷ In 2017, nine members of the movement were arrested and sentenced to prison, there were accused of propagandizing the creation of a caliphate. The members mostly conduct activities in mosques and various public places and try to attract as many people as possible.³⁸

“Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islam” is an international Salafi movement which came to Tatarstan in 1996. The first emissaries came from Uzbekistan and created their own circle, which included local Tatars, of which the most famous was Rustem Safin, who later became the imam of “Al-Ikhlās” mosque. The tactic of the moment at first was distribution of leaflets and newspapers. Then social networks became a popular mean to spread the information. Though the movement was banned in 2003, the followers continued their activities in Tatarstan. In 2006, 25 followers were detained of which 12 were sentenced to four to eight years in prison. They were accused of “preparing for a forcible takeover of power.” After the events of 2012, seven members were arrested including the head Rustem Safin. That raised the outrage of the members and for the first time, the banned organization publicly manifested itself by organizing massive

³⁵ “Tatarstan’s Outspoken Activist Gets One-Year-In-Prison Suspended Sentence,” *Radio Free Europe*, October 2, 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tatarstan-fauziya-bayramova-sentence-trial/26617458.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

³⁶ Dmitriy Katargin, “S “Tablighi Dzhamaatom” polemiziroval ubitij terroristami Valiulla Jakupov,” (in Russian), [With “Tablighi Jamaat,” polemized Valiulla Yakupov killed by Taliban”], *Biznes Online*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/326153> (accessed April 15, 2018).

³⁷ Islam Nurly, “Dzhamaat Tablig v Tatarstane,” (in Russian), [“Jamaat Tabligh in Tatarstan”], *DUMRT*, December 19, 2011, http://dumrt.ru/ru/articles/mm-islam/mm-islam_1369.html (accessed April 15, 2018).

³⁸ Andrej Smirnov, “V Tatarstane osuzhdeny uchastniki jekstremistskoj organizacii “Tablighi dzhamaat,” (in Russian), [“In Tatarstan, participants in the extremist organization Tablighi Jamaat.”], *Kommersant*, April 4, 2017 <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3276620> (accessed April 15, 2018).

auto rallies in October and December. In 2013 Safin was sentenced to two years in prison, and Al-Ikhlās was closed.³⁹ The mosque still remains closed, and there is no information on Safin after his release. In 2017 eight members of organization, one of which was Azat Adiev an Honored artist of the Republic of Tatarstan, were arrested. The court sentenced the members of the banned organization to 145 years of the colony.⁴⁰

Jamaats and Terrorism in Tatarstan

Islamic Jamaat

The first terrorist organization which appeared on the territory of Tatarstan in 2001 was called “Islamic Jamaat.” The creation of the jamaat was the initiative of Chechen commanders Khattab and Shamil Basayev, and Ilham Gumerov, the graduate of the “Caucasus” diversionary center, became the leader. The main goal of the jamaat was to create an Islamic state. The main goal of the terrorist was the destabilization of Tatarstan.⁴¹ For three years the members of armed organization have been able to conspire their actions. Only in 2004 after a series of murders the terrorist was found. The members were murdering people in the Borovets forest, in the car burnt by terrorists, human bodies were found. Hafiz Razzakow who was suspected in series of murders admitted that he was punishing infidels. In 2008, 17 members of terrorist organization including the leader Ilham Gumerov were arrested and sentenced to prison.⁴²

Rybno-Slobodsky Jamaat

Terrorist organizations “Rybno-Slobodsky jamaat” was founded by Albert Galiev in 2004. Galiev came up with the idea of creating a jamaat during his trip to the Caucasus in the 2000s. The trip was organized by Ilham Gumerov, the leader of “Islamic jamaat.” According to investigations, in Chechnya Galiev joint the terrorist group of Arab commander

³⁹ “Hizb-ut-Tahrir v Tatarstane,” (in Russian), [“Hizb ut-Tahrir in Tatarstan”], *RISI*, February 18, 2014, <https://riss.ru/analitics/4876/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁴⁰ “V Kazani sud prigovoril uchastnikov «Hizb ut-Tahrir» k 145 godam kolonii,” (in Russian), [“In Kazan, the court sentenced Hizb ut-Tahrir members to 145 years in prison.”], *Biznes Online*, December 8, 2017, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/366384> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁴¹ Andrey Shepticky, “Nachalsja sud nad “gruppoj Galieva,” (in Russian), [“The trial of the “group of Galiyev” has begun,”] *Vid*, 2007, <http://www.e-vid.ru/index-m-192-p-63-article-17987.htm> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁴² “Islamskij dzhamaat ne postroit na territorii Povolzh’ja islamskogo gosudarstva [Islamic Jamaat will not build an Islamic state on the territory of the Volga region,”] *RG*, February 15, 2008, <https://rg.ru/2008/02/15/reg-volga-ural/dzhamaat-anons.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

Seif-Islam and started his training there. He pledged his loyalty to Shamil Basayev, a well-known Islamic leader in Chechnya. On October 2004, he met Alikhan Saduev and the 'president of Ichkeria' Abdul Khalim Sadulayev, from whom he received approval for starting a jihad in Tatarstan. Moreover, the Chechen radical leaders provided Galiev with weapons, money and religious literature.⁴³ Galiev regularly visited Chechnya, his formally created jamaat became a part of the terrorist organization "Supreme Military Majlisul Shura of the United Mujahideen of the Caucasus" under the command of Basayev. Jamaat consisted of 7 members, two of which were from Chechnya.⁴⁴

The terrorist organization was active during the 2004-2005 period. Within six months the members of the organization carried out seven explosions and five attempts to blow up electric power lines, gas pipelines not only in the territory of Tatarstan but also in other subjects of Volga-Urals region. First, Galiev and his supporters organized terror attacks in the neighboring region of Tatarstan. Attacks in Tatarstan started in July 2005. Terrorists exploded a power line in Tyulyachinsky district and a pipeline in Laishevsky district. After those events four members of jamaat were arrested. According to the investigation, extremists were involved in preparing another terror attack for the 1000th anniversary of Kazan.⁴⁵ In December 2014 other two members of the jamaat were captured. The arrested terrorists in 2007 was imprisoned.

Galiev was reported missing. He became the most wanted terrorist of Tatarstan⁴⁶, and he went into hiding for 10 years. Only on May 12, 2015, Galiev was captured in the village Bolshaya Elga. The criminal case of Albert Galiev had been investigated for 2 months. Galiev was accused of 11 terror attacks and sentenced to 22 years in prison. Galiev told in the court that his actions were ordered by Shamil Basayev.

The death of Shamil Basayev in 2006 and the arrest of 4 members significantly reduced the intensity of activities of the jamaat. Galiev was

⁴³ Irina Plotnikova, "*«Vtoroj poshel»: v Kazani osuzhden «amir Tatarstana»*," (in Russian), ["The second went": "Amir of Tatarstan" was convicted in Kazan.], *RealnoeVremya*, April 26, 2016, <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/29864> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁴⁴ Darja Vanjashina, "Predvoditel' tatarstanskih terroristov prigovoren k 22 godam kolonii," (in Russian), ["Leader of Tatarstan terrorists sentenced to 22 years in prison"], *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 26, 2016, <https://www.kazan.kp.ru/daily/26521/3538475/> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁴⁵ Angelina Golovataja, "Ne snimajte nas! My pozhaluemsja v Roskomnadzor!: pocht 250 let tjur'my dlja jekstremistov," (in Russian), ["Do not remove us! We will complain to Roskomnadzor!": Almost 250 years of prison for extremists,] *Biznes Online*, December 9, 2017, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/366440> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁴⁶ Angelina Golovataja, "Aleksandr Shagulin, Al'bert Galiev, amir modzhahedov Tatarstana, osuzhden na 22 goda," (in Russian), ["Albert Galiyev, Amir of the Mujahideen of Tatarstan, sentenced to 22 years"], *Posredi*, April 27, 2016, <http://posredi.ru/amir-modzhahedov-tatarstana.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

mainly involved in the robbery of weapons. By 2018 all members of the terrorist organization are under arrest. In 2017 all six captured terrorists (Galiev not included) were sentenced to 101 years in prison.⁴⁷

Chistopolsky Jamaat or Mujahedeen of Tatarstan

In the morning of July 19, 2012 in the courtyard of the house, six shots from firearms killed Deputy Mufti of Tatarstan Valiulla Yakupov. Later, at 10:15, in the other part of the city, there was an assassination attempt on the Mufti of Tatarstan, Ildar Faizov, his car was blown up. Mufti managed to get out of the car in a few seconds before the explosion. As a result of the attempt, Faizov was only injured.⁴⁸

The event shocked Tatarstan. Ministry of Internal Affairs took urgent measures. All important people were taken under the protection. The “Volcano Four” the operation of finding and detaining dangerous criminals was launched. Though there is no official number of arrested, some sources mention that nearly 500 people were arrested. The president of the Republic of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov mentioned that traditional Islam had never allowed such things especially towards them who serve to Islam.⁴⁹

On the same day of the terror attack, a video appeared on the internet where seven people, six in black masks, in the forest introduced themselves as mujahedeen of Tatarstan. Their head Muhammad, who called himself the emir of Tatarstan pledged his loyalty to Doku Umarov. On August 3, another video appeared where the emir took the responsibility for the attack. On that same day another important event happened. During the extraordinary meeting of the State Council of the RT, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Artem Khokhorin announced that over 13 years on the territory of the republic there had been an undeclared war. According to Khokhorin extremism in Tatarstan had transformed from the individual manifestations into a critical mass. He also added that the attempt of assassination of Mufti was not just a crime, it was a political challenge.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Angelina Golovataja, “Ne snimajte nas!”.

⁴⁸ Elena Gorbunchikova, “Glavarja terroristov pohoronili zanovo [The leader of the terrorists was buried again,] *Kazan MK*, May 7, 2014, <http://kazan.mk.ru/articles/2014/05/07/glavarya-terroristov-pohoronili-zanovo.html> (accessed 15 April, 2018).

⁴⁹ “Pravoohranitel’nye organy ob’edinili usilija dlja raskrytija besprecedentnogo rezonansnogo prestuplenija,” (in Russian), [Law enforcement authorities join forces to uncover an unprecedented resonant crime,], *Ministerstvo Vnutrennih Del Po Respublike Tatarstan*, July 19, 2012, <https://16.mvd.pf/news/item/287040> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁵⁰ Artem Hohorin, “Obshhim frontom my dolzhny ogradit’ zhitelej RT ot zarazy jekstremizma,” (in Russian), [“We must protect the people of Tajikistan from the infection of extremism with a common front,”] *Ministerstvo Vnutrennih Del Po Respublike Tatarstan*, August 3, 2012, <https://16.mvd.pf/news/item/287085> (accessed April 15, 2018).

In the late October another video was launched on the internet where the new emir Abdu Musa informed about the death of emir Muhammad (the funeral of the emir was shown on the video). It was investigated that the first emir who also took the responsibility of attack was Rais Mingaleev, who, according to law enforcement agencies, in 2007 created his own network of terrorists, which in 2014 Artem Khokhorin would give the name of “Chistopolsky Jamaat.”⁵¹ The second one was Robert Valeev. Both from Chistopol village. Moreover, it was disclosed that Mingaleev faked his death.

Interfax information center in Tatarstan announced that the attempted assassination of Tatarstan’s Mufti Ildus Faizov and the murder of Valiulla Yakupova were backed by Taliban.⁵² According to the information, Rais Mingaleev in the early 2000s joined the terrorist cell of the “Bulgarian Jamaat”, which was a militant formation within Taliban. The Uyгур-Bulgarian Jamaat was founded in 1999 by a group of Russian citizens who migrated to Afghanistan. In 2009, the group operated in Pakistan and numbered more than 100 participants, about 30 of whom had previously lived in Russia.⁵³

On October 24, 2012, Valeev was killed during the special operation, while Mingaleev managed to go into hiding. Only on May 2014 during the special operation conducted by “Alpha” division of the FSB two terrorists were neutralized, one of which was Rais Mingaleev. Both terrorists killed during the operation.⁵⁴ During 2014-2015 period the members of Chistopolsky Jamaat had been detained. In autumn 2014, two were arrested. In the winter other four members were arrested and sentenced to prison. On February 16, 2015, Ildara Vafin was detained and sentenced to 16 years in prison.

On September 26, 2016, Volga Ural military court received the case of “Chistopolsky Jamaat”. Nine people were charged with terrorism and for illegal use and construction of weapons. One of the arrested, Gafurov, was accused of participation in the terrorist organization “Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islam”. The case of “Chistopolsky jamaat” was considered to be one

⁵¹ Regina Hisamova, “Delo “Chistopolyskogo dzhamaata” zakrito,” (in Russian), [“The case of “Chistopol Jamaat” is closed,”] *Idel. Realii*, March 23, 2017, <https://www.idelreal.org/a/28386294.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁵² “Pokushavshiesja na duhovnyh liderov Tatarstana vhodili v dvizhenie “Taliban” – spetssluzhby,” (in Russian), [“Those who took part in the spiritual leaders of Tatarstan were included in the Taliban movement – the special services,”], *Interfax*, October 25, 2012, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=48577> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁵³ “Za muftiem Tatarstana ohotilsja «Taliban»?,” (in Russian), [“Is Taliban hunting the mufti of Tatarstan?”], *Biznes Online*, November 1, 2012, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/69270> (accessed April 15, 2018).

⁵⁴ “Unichtozheny terroristy, prichastnye k pokusheniju na muftija Tatarstana,” (in Russian), [“Destroyed terrorists involved in the murder attempt on the mufti of Tatarstan,”] *TVC*, May 1, 2014 <http://www.tvc.ru/news/show/id/38699> (accessed April 15, 2018).

of the “loudest” in the history of Tatarstan. There were nearly 400 witnesses. All nine were accused of terror attack near “the Stone of Wishes” in the town of Bilyar, burning a prayer house in the village of Lenino, burning a church on November 17, 2013, launching of explosive devices.⁵⁵ On March 23, 2017, all nine has been sentenced to 16 to 24 years in prison. By 2018 16 members of the jamaat are under the arrest. Any connections between the terrorist groups and members of above mentioned social movements, with one exception, were not found.

Analysis

Based on the collected data and expert interviews it can be argued that one of the reasons that conditions the religious stability in Tatarstan is the existence of one united Spiritual Board of Muslims. Unlike the other republics of Russia, where there are two or three muftiates, who compete with each other, in Tatarstan there is no strong competition within the local Muslim communities. The Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan controls all the mosques and the activities of imams. All imams are members of the spiritual administration. What imams should say, how they should say, how they should behave, all these are controlled by the muftiate. Thus, it is impossible to introduce any kind of radical propaganda as it will be detected immediately.

The Spiritual Board during the times of mufti Ildus Faizov not only had clearly defined goals of fighting radical manifestations but also had consistently implemented them, and the July events in Tatarstan have become the reaction of that work. Today, the Spiritual Board is actively involved in propaganda of traditional Islam. And the fight against the radical ideas is conducted through promotion of traditional values. The propagation of traditional values is requested not only by the Republic of Tatarstan but also by the Russian Federation. However, the term “traditional Islam” remains a debatable issue among scholars. In general, traditional Islam can be interpreted as a form of Islam which was historically accepted and entered into the traditions and culture of the people. However, in Tatarstan different experts define traditional Islam in different ways. For example, one expert says that it is necessary to divide traditional Islam by regions of Russia. In different regions, the term is understood differently. According to that same expert, traditional Islam of Tatarstan is ritual Islam, because the supporters of traditional Islam say that one must

⁵⁵ Regina Hisamova, “Delo “Chistopolyskogo dzhamaata” vikhodit na finish,” (in Russian), [The case of the “Chistopol Jamaat” goes to the finish line,”] *Idel Realii*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.idelreal.org/a/28313626.html> (accessed April 15, 2018).

observe their own traditions, which the Arabs do not have (e.g. memorials for the dead on the third, seventh and fortieth days). Other experts say that Islam in Tatarstan is characterized as mystical-contemplative and intellectual. The other expert mentions the traditional Islam can be defined regarding to what extent it is affiliated to Sufism. While regarding the Sufism another expert says that branch has no influence in Tatarstan. One of the experts mentions that traditional Islam must be loyal to the current political system of the region.

As it is argued, the spiritual Board assures the dominance of traditional Islamic values in Tatarstan. However, the fundamental part of believers does not recognize the structure of the Spiritual Board. There are many disagreements on different issues between traditionalist and those who share fundamental or radical views. For example, fundamentalists insist that Muslim women should wear hijab, while traditionalists say that traditional Tatars cap is enough. Most importantly, the core conflict between the traditionalist and the fundamentalists is that the latter blame the former for being excessively secular. Today, religion in Tatarstan is controlled by the state. The muftiate is heavily dependent on the state and allows it to intervene in religious affairs. Even the Spiritual board can be called as a *de facto* ministry of religious affairs. One of the experts highlights that the control of the state for the religious life of society is conditioned by factors of state security and constitutional inviolability.

Nowadays, in Tatarstan, the religiosity of people is rising and Islamic factor is becoming more important. Both political and economic factors can explain the raising stance of Islamic factor. The elite of Tatarstan have demonstratively become devout people. Those who were secular people 10 years ago have become pious Muslims and participate in all religious holidays. Moreover, the state finances the construction of mosques. That can be explained that the authorities of Tatarstan want oil rich Arab countries to invest in the economy of Tatarstan, and even the president of the republic often travels to Arab courtiers and participate in different economic forums. Also, the authorities of Tatarstan try to play the role of the pioneer by establishing relations with the Islamic world and then letting Moscow to develop these relations. In this regard, Islam plays an important role in international relations, as for Muslim countries, it is easier to talk with Muslims. While, regarding the role of Islam in everyday life of Tatarstan, there are two views. Some experts say that Islam plays an important role in the social life of Tatar Muslims. That is why many state officials finance the construction of mosques in order to appeal the people and receive their support. While other experts claim that Islam has little influence on the everyday life of Muslim Tatars. Though

the religiosity of the population, the number of mosques has increased, the majority of Tatar Muslims are not actively practicing Islam. They mostly go to mosques on Fridays, on the other days the mosques are generally empty. As one of the experts mentioned Islam has become a “fashion” in Tatarstan.

Simultaneously, in Tatarstan, the radicals are becoming more active. According to the experts, 2% of Tatar Muslims are Wahhabi. Though some of them have left the region, others are under arrest, however, there are still hiding Wahhabis. Moreover, two experts mentioned that there are Wahhabi leaders who enjoy the support of local state officials. For example, head of a district may support the imam who is Wahhabi, he expresses sympathy, protects him, and the imam uses such support and expends the base of his followers. Now the authorities try to prevent such actions.

The appearance of radical groups in Tatarstan according to the experts can be connected with the economic situation of the region. As a rule, when there is a poverty people are moving towards the religion. In Tatarstan the economic situation is stable. Also, two experts mention that high urbanization of the region does not give an opportunity to radicals to find places for hiding. However, there are factors that contribute to the radicalization. One of the experts mentions that there are quite serious transformations of Islamic communities, such as erosion of values, transformation of family institutions and inter-punctual relations. Radicalization of the Islamic communities is the reaction to these transformations. If traditionalists focus on preserving the established values without an open conflict with the emerging system, radicals insist on a coordinated breakdown of the emerging modernity. An important factor which, according to three experts, cannot be ruled out is the factor of ‘individuals.’ Radicalism in Tatarstan is not a mass phenomenon, radicals are separate individuals and one expert is inclined to the view that radicalization is often a phenomenon of self-realization.

One of the experts holds a different view. According to him, there are no radicals in the region. The terror attacks which have been in the territory of Tatarstan are done by criminals, who use Wahhabism as cover. Even the video of “Mujahedeen of Tatarstan” he considered as fake and unprofessionally shot. The goal of those criminals who cover themselves as Wahhabis is to take control over the recourses and to destabilize the region.

According to experts, local authorities, law enforcement agencies are controlling the situation. All experts highlighted the professional job that the law enforcement agencies are doing. Radicals are regularly caught and imprisoned. The law enforcement bodies adopted harsh approaches

towards the radicals. They operate by the principle of isolating the radicals from the society. Usually radicals receive long jail times. Laws have been adopted according to which even expressing sympathy towards the radicals, regarding the issue of radicalism, is united, everyone wants the situation in the region to be stable and peaceful. Moreover, on expert emphasized that in Tatarstan people and the authorities are very concerned with the image of the republic. Thus they are trying to portrait that the siltation is under the control. They are trying to show that radicals are only separate individuals, that the social background for the development of radicalism does not exist.

Overall, based on the conducted interviews, there are three views regarding the issue of radicalization of the region. First, the radicalization is very actual and there is a potential that the situation can be worse, thus the law enforcement agencies must be alert. Second, Tatarstan does not face the issue of radicalism. Third, though there are individual with radical views, they cannot facilitate radicalization in the region.

Conclusion

This research argues that one of the reasons which explain the spread of Wahhabism is the fact that till now Tatar Muslims do not have clearly defined perceptions of traditional Islam. If in Chechnya Sufism has been recognized as the traditional religion, then in Tatarstan the clergy has to yet clearly and precisely identify the concept of traditional Islam. An important factor is that not only in Tatarstan but in entire Russian Islamic concepts are misused. Fundamentalism, Wahhabism, and Salafism are considered non-traditional and radical. However, it is wrong to consider all fundamentals as radicals, and Wahhabism and Salafism as the same branch of Islam. Though conceptually they are the same but have different approaches. There are also variations within the Wahhabism. On the one hand it is the official religion of Saudi Arabia, on the other hand the conceptual base of ISIS. In-depth examination will show that they are some vivid differences between these two variants of Wahhabism. They are many Muslims in Russia who consider themselves Wahhabi but are not radicals. Thus, calling them all as radicals can arouse frustration and lead them to radical actions.

Based on the collected data and analysis the connection of Tatars to international terrorist organizations facilitates the spread of radicalism. The international social movements, such as “Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islam,” “Tablighi Jamaat” which are based on Wahhabi ideology were quite ac-

tive during the 2010s, and many Tatars were recruited into those organizations. The Tatar terrorist networks had connections to Chechnya and Afghanistan. As the data showed, several Tatar terrorists regularly visited Chechen radical leaders. It is important to note that radicals in Tatarstan are not a mass phenomenon, the number of participants in jamaats never exceeded the twenty, and different jamaats were active in different periods. Still, radicalism continues to remain a critical issue for Tatarstan. However, the number of terror acts has significantly reduced, and nearly all the terrorists who were active during the 2010s, also the members of Wahhabi social movements are in prison now. Under the strong control of both the state and the SBM, the situation in Tatarstan is stable.