
PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

IGOR DOBAEV. THE SPLIT OF THE MUSLIM ELITE IN
THE NORTH CAUCASUS: REASONS AND CONSEQUENCES

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*Abstract. In the post-Soviet period, due to the weakening of
Russian state institutions, under strong external influence, there was a
steady process of politicization and radicalization of Islam and Islamic
groups, as well as the emergence and institutionalization of non-
traditional Islamist movements in the country. This process was
aggravated by the weakness and disunity of traditional and official Islam
in Russia, and the implementation of separatist projects in some regions*

of the country, primarily in the North Caucasus. Due to a number of reasons, objective and subjective factors, stable groups of radical Salafis emerged and gained foothold on the territory of Russia; they were initially institutionalized in some North Caucasian republics. Subsequently, the "spread of jihad" occurred practically throughout the entire North Caucasus, and then the ground for the formation of radical Salafist groups was prepared in the Volga region, the Urals and Western Siberia; there were also preconditions created for their emergence in the "Muslim enclaves" of Russian megacities.

Islam in the Russian Federation is predominantly localized in its Sunni version of the Hanafi school. At the same time, almost until recently, researchers clearly differentiated two qualitatively different areas of Islam – the Volga region, the Urals and Western Siberia, on the one hand, and the North Caucasus on the other. In the North Caucasus over the past two decades, religious and political extremism and terrorism have become a harsh reality, so we will focus on it.

In the North Caucasus, as in other regions of Russia and the world, Islam is not a monolith, but is disunited within the framework of existing trends, interpretations and ideological currents. In the region, as in other subjects of the Russian Federation, its Sunni version dominates, a relatively small number of Shiites (according to the Committee for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Dagestan, about 45 thousand people) live in the southern part of this North Caucasian republic. Their small numbers and relative political passivity allow us to take them out of the scope of this analysis in the course of further analysis.

As for the schools of thought (madhhabs, or legal schools in Islam), from this point of view North Caucasian Islam can be divided into two parts: in the North-West and Central Caucasus (Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia-Alania) the Hanafi school of thought is represented, which is considered the softest and most flexible in Islam. In the North-East Caucasus (Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia) the Shafi'i school of thought predominates, which is more rigid than the Hanafi school of thought.