



How Islam Will Change Russia

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Summary

Russia is becoming increasingly a Muslim country. Out of a total population of over 146 million (including two million in annexed Crimea), it counts about 15 million people of Muslim background—even if not all are believers and even fewer practice Islam. Given forthcoming demographic changes, by around 2050 Muslims will represent between one third (according to the most conservative estimates) and one half (according to the most ‘alarmist’ assessments) of the Russian population. This ‘Islamization’ of Russia—not in the sense of radical Islam but of a rising number of citizens self-referring to Islam—will impact both Russia’s domestic situation and its foreign policy options in the medium and long term. Islam’s growing importance in Russia will shape the future of the country in at least five main directions: the overall demographic balance of the country; the strategy of ‘normalizing’ the regions of the North Caucasus; Russia’s migration policy; Russia’s positioning on the international scene; and the transformation of Russian national identity.

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Introduction

The Russian authorities’ incessant promotion of the Russian Orthodox Church, Orthodox symbols, and supposed “Orthodox cultural values” hides an understudied, contradictory trend: Russia is becoming increasingly a Muslim country. Russia counts about 15 million people (in a total population of over 146 million, including two million in annexed Crimea) of Muslim background, or about 11 percent of its population. All are not fervent believers, and even fewer practice Islam routinely. Moscow has the largest Muslim community in Europe: about one million Muslim residents and up to 1.5 million Muslim migrant workers. Given demographic changes, Muslims will represent between one third (the most conservative estimate) and one half (the most generous estimate) of the Russian population by around 2050.

Russia's Muslims mostly belong to the country's traditional ethnic minorities, many of whom are demographically on the rise. To this should be added about five million labor migrants who also belong to traditionally Muslim populations—from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan—and whose activities spread Islam well beyond the historically Muslim regions of Russia, the North Caucasus and the Volga-Urals. Widespread Internet and social media use characterizes Russian society; the upshot is that the Islamic digital world is increasingly available to Russian Muslim citizens, who are no longer isolated from global trends, whether feminine Islamic fashions or debates about halal food or radical online preaching. This “Islamization” of Russia—not in the sense of radical Islam but more of a “Muslimization,” that is, a rising number of citizens self-referring to Islam—will impact both Russia's domestic situation and its foreign policy options in the medium and long term.

The Public Debate on Islam

The Official View

Russian authorities have elaborated three parallel discourses on Islam to appear both Islamophile and fighting radical Islam. [1]

First, they uphold the discourse—inherited from the Soviet regime—on “friendship between peoples”: Russia is a multinational and multi-religious country in which all the historical traditional religions are recognized as equal. [2] The Constitution's preamble acknowledges Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism as inseparable parts of the country's historical heritage—while elevating the “special contribution” of Orthodoxy to the country's history and to the development of its spirituality and culture. [3] Vladimir Putin regularly receives high-level Muslim dignitaries, in particular leaders from the two main institutions that represent Islam in Russia—Talgat Tadjuddin for the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia based in Ufa, and Ravil Gaynutdin for the Muftis Council based in Moscow—and he has created an Interreligious Council of Traditional Religions. In 2009, then-president Dmitry Medvedev noted “Muslim foundations are making an important contribution to promoting peace in society, providing spiritual and moral education for many people, as well as fighting extremism and xenophobia.” [4]

Second, and in parallel, Russian authorities have crafted a narrative on radical Islam in which all non-conformist versions of Islam are subsumed under the label “Wahhabism.” [5] At the start of the second war in Chechnya in 1999, the Russian regime began denouncing supposed Wahhabi violence as a way of delegitimizing Chechen combatants; ever since, the regime has utilized the post-9/11 mantra “War on Terror” in order to lengthen the list of religious currents deemed Wahhabi and therefore banned from operating on Russian territory. [6] Several anti-extremist pieces of legislation have attempted to codify this policy, such as one banning the Hizb-ut Tahrir and the Tablighi Jamaat movements, which are often decried in the Russian media as Wahhabi despite sharing no theological doctrine with this Saudi current. [7] Non-conformist Islam, or non-traditional Islam, by this interpretation, is necessarily “foreign,” and not recognized by the Spiritual Boards. Russian authorities have therefore been cultivating the image of a regime that shows no pity toward “non-traditional” Muslims that they consider “radicals.” They tend to amalgamate three different phenomena: people promoting a literal reading of the Koran (Salafis),

those calling for Islam to become a political ideology, and those inclined to terrorist violence for religious or other reasons.

Third, Russian authorities use the theme of Islam within the international arena to promote Moscow's great power strategy. Russia presents itself as the defender of traditional "conservative" religions, that is, of both Christianity and Islam—with a special focus on the topic of the traditional, heterosexual family—in their opposition to the West's supposed moral decay and its growing recognition of sexual minorities. This enables the Kremlin to cultivate its international relations with Muslim countries, while parading itself as uncompromising in its fight against Islamist violence. In his speech of 2009 mentioned above, Medvedev announced that, owing to its large Muslim population, "Russia does not need to seek friendship with the Muslim world: Our country is an organic part of this world." [8]

On the domestic scene, public debates around Islam are less subtle and compartmented than those of the central state institutions. Many famous politicians, such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy or current deputy prime minister and former leader of the Rodina (Homeland) party Dmitry Rogozin, have been in the spotlight for their Islamophobic remarks. Drawing connections between labor migrants and the spread of Islamic radicalism are mainstream in the Russian media, and even at the level of institutions such as the Federal Service of Migration and law enforcement agencies. [9] Yet, at the regional and local level, relationships to Islam vary considerably. In traditionally Muslim regions, references to Islam are an integral part of public life, and all local leaders attempt to position themselves as supporters of traditional Islam. However, in regions where Islam is only visible through the activities of migrants, tensions are noticeable and on the rise. As in Europe, requests made by Muslim communities to build new mosques are often not well received by local populations, and the authorities remain cautious about any authorizations they grant. [10]

The Popular View

At the popular level, while there is widespread xenophobia against labor migrants, [11] hate crimes against Muslims are less common. Obviously, it can sometimes be difficult to dissociate xenophobia of an ethnic nature from xenophobia with religious motives, as migrants mostly come from nominally Muslim populations. Ethnic violence against people with Muslim backgrounds accounts for a considerable portion of all ethnic violence data collected by the Moscow-based SOVA Center, ranging from 30 to 60 percent depending on the year. [12]

However, the percentage of admitted religious violence—in other words, when Islamophobic comments made by the attackers have been reported—is small. Indeed, few cases of explicit violence against people of Muslim background—or those considered as such by the attackers—have been documented, almost all in Moscow. Between 2013 and 2015, SOVA reported for instance three attacks on women wearing traditional Islamic clothes, and one against a man as he left a Moscow mosque. Violence can also be committed by law enforcement agencies and private security services: in 2013 police officers attacked a group of 30 men of different nationalities sitting in a halal café, and in 2015 a man wanting to pray in a commercial mall was beaten up by a private security guard. [13]

Concerning violence against Muslim architectural symbols, cemeteries or prayer rooms, the numbers of hate acts are higher. Between 2010 and mid-2016, SOVA listed 58 such acts of violence, a number that increases year upon year. Indeed, in 2011, 2013 and 2014 desecration of Islamic symbols topped the list ahead of Christian or Jewish ones. This kind of violence has been perpetrated most in the Novosibirsk region, where in 2011 a series of attacks against Muslim cemeteries was carried out, followed by Orenburg and then Moscow. This kind of violence is often committed by skinhead groups, who usually destroy Islamic symbols and paint Nazi swastikas, Orthodox crosses, or representations of pigs on Muslim graves. [14]

Rampant Islamophobia, however, shows up in much more than hate crime statistics. The world of social media has been developing quickly in Russia over the last decade, and nationalist groups of all ideological persuasions are heavily involved in it. Specific news stories are liable to focus on Islamophobia among ordinary people, such as when, in March 2016, an Uzbek nanny—who was subsequently acknowledged to be psychologically unbalanced—decapitated the baby she was minding. [15] People expressing themselves in online debates and chats made numerous associations between Islam and violence. Yet, compared with the majority of European societies, Russian society overall remains fairly non-Islamophobic: cultural tensions continue to center on inter-ethnic distinctions rather than on religious motives.

The Expert View

The perspectives of the Russian expert community on Islam vary. The majority of experts position themselves in line with the state's interpretation: traditional Islam is welcome in Russia and is celebrated as part of the nation's history, while non-traditional or foreign Islam is considered dangerous. However, many specialists also recognize that this dissociation is artificial, as Russian Islam is now globalized: it is becoming irrelevant to try to dissociate what is national from what is foreign. A good overview of the diversity of viewpoints can be found expressed in the monthly digest *Rossia i musul'manskii mir (Russia and the Muslim World)*, which has been published by the Institute of Information for Sciences and Social Sciences (INION) at the Russian Academy of Sciences since 1992.

Insofar as the role of Islam in Russia is concerned, two leading members of the policy-oriented scholarly community deserve mention: Aleksei Malashenko, chair of the Carnegie Moscow Center's Religion, Society, and Security Program; and Sergei Markedonov, from the Regional Studies and Foreign Policy department of the Russian State University for Humanities. Both are among the most well-known Russian scholars in the United States and Europe. Malashenko follows Islam in Russia, in Central Asia and in the Arab world, while Markedonov works on both the North and South Caucasus, as well as on issues of security in the whole of Eurasia. Both have warned the Russian authorities for several years about ongoing radicalization occurring among some parts of Russian Muslim youth. In late 2015 Malashenko stated: "Russia's official Muslim establishment blames the West for the rise of the self-proclaimed Islamic State and refuses to admit that radical Islam has a real social base, ignoring the radicalization of many ordinary Muslims in Russia and Central Asia." [16] Both scholars follow the new trends of so-called non-traditional Islam. Malashenko does this for Central Asia—he has observed that many Tajik migrants now obtain jobs as imams in Russian mosques—and Markedonov for the Volga-Ural region. [17]

The two scholars consider the Islamic State to be gaining influence in the North Caucasus, especially as the prestige of the Caucasus Emirate fades and local insurgents seek new branding and financial support. [18] Malashenko has observed how the Kadyrov regime now takes a pragmatic view of the Islamic State's influence on the situation in Chechnya and is committing itself to "exorcizing" would-be recruits or returnees from the Middle East, rather than merely destroying them. [19] Markedonov argues that the Islamic State may weaken both the North and South Caucasus, and that the fight against it could be a catalyst for cooperation among the three South Caucasus states (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia) and Russia. Both are critical of the Chechen regime's evolution and its relationship to Moscow, and have warned, as Markedonov puts it, that "while previously developments in the North Caucasus were looked at primarily from the viewpoint of inter-ethnic relations and regional policies, today this theme has expanded to a pan-Russian scale. It is not Chechnya, Ingushetia, or Dagestan *per se* that matter; rather, it is how the Russian heartland perceives those regions." [20] Indeed, the high level of internal migrations of North Caucasian youth to Russia's main cities [21] and of labor migration from Central Asia means that Islam is no longer, as it was for centuries, an issue of regional concern for Russia. It is now a pan-Russian question.

Demographers and sociologists are more divided in their interpretations of Islam. Opinions range between those who do not support mass migrations because of their fear that Russians are at risk of ethnic extinction, and those who, often from the liberal camp, consider demographic and cultural transformation a normal and globalized process that should not be interpreted in cultural terms. An example of the former group is Yuri Krupnov, a scholar at the Institute for Demography, Migration and Regional Development who participated in writing Russia's demographic doctrine and is known for his nationalist views. [22] He has advocated the notion of "national preservation" (*sberezhenie natsii*), which became popular in the mid-2000s in discussions around the need to "preserve" the "ethnic gene pool" (*genofond*) of Russians against migrants. This view was widely adopted by politicians such as Dmitry Rogozin. [23] The latter group is represented by Zhanna Zayonchovskaya from the Institute for Economic Forecasting at the Russian Academy of Science. Zayonchovskaya is a leading scholar on post-Soviet migration and a vocal figure who has appealed for people to see migration as a chance for Russia's future. She has accordingly endorsed a liberal migration policy. [24]

Some Muslim public figures also participate in the general debate on the place of Islam in Russia. Among the most famous and polemical figures is Geidar Dzhemal, one of the founders of Russia's Islamic geopolitics. Dzhemal advances a paradoxical brand of geopolitics that combines pro-Islamic, pro-Russian, and pro-fascist traits in an eclectic "postmodern" blend. His Islamic liberation theology is inspired by Iran's (he is himself a Shiia). Dzhemal's blending of different strains of politics and ideologies resonates with the current debates in many Muslim countries and Islamist movements, which call, as he does, for Islam to become a new Communism, able to drive a new revolution against US-led social injustices in the world. At the same time, Dzhemal reproduces the mainstream geopolitical narrative of Russia nationalists, denouncing the West's hidden goal of negating Russia's status as a great power. He differentiates himself by supporting the leftist opposition to Putin and not participating in the so-called systemic opposition, which defends the Kremlin's position, for instance on the Ukrainian issue. Dzhemal continues to be a fellow traveler of Western far-right esoteric groups and their Russian allies, echoing Alexander Dugin's rehabilitation of occult theories that have historically fueled fascist movements. Dzhemal

thus encapsulates the paradox of simultaneously representing leftist Islamic liberation theology and/or a kind of Islamo-Fascism, a mix of genres typical of digital geopolitics. [25]

Another figure is Abdul-Vakhed Niazov, the director of the Moscow Islamic Cultural Center. Niazov is one of the leading figures on the Muftis Council, the rival institution to Tadjuddin's Spiritual Board. He has supported several initiatives for Russian Muslims to be politicized in favor of the Kremlin regime: the Union of Muslims of Russia, the Refakh movement, the Eurasian Party of Russia, and the "Muslims for Putin" movement. In 2012 Niazov launched Salamworld, an alternative to Facebook that claims to respect "core Islamic values" and is supposed to offer a clean slate for Islamic social media. [26] Shamil Sultanov, the president of the Strategic Center "Rossiia-Islamskii mir," (Russia-Islamic world) is another figure, and close ally of the neo-fascist theoretician Alexander Dugin.

Of the other influential figures, many are ethnic-Russian converts to Islam. The National Organization of Russian Muslims (NORM, *Natsional'naia organizatsiia rossiiskikh musul'man*), which represents the convert community, groups famous public figures such as: Anastasia (Fatima) Ezhova, who runs the Research Fund on Islamic Culture, a joint Russian-Iranian institution that translates Islamic classics into Russian. Ezhova has earned a solid reputation in the Russian Islamic media for her opinion pieces on the website Islam.ru and IslamNews, her Islamic feminism, and her outspoken support of Iran. [27] Another woman, Valeria Pokhorova, is one of the main television personalities to present Islamic principles. Viacheslav Polosin, a former Orthodox priest who converted to Islam, is also a vocal proponent of Russian Islam.

In the Muslim regions, local specialists belonging to ethnic minorities have developed their own interpretation of Islam's place in Russia. In Tatarstan, for instance, Rafael Khakimov, a former political adviser to ex-President Mintimer Shaimiev, and now vice-president of the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences, advocates what he calls "Euro-Islam"—that is, a modern Islam in line with European values, democracy, and economic liberalization. [28] Euro-Islam also sees itself as a sort of "neo-Jadidism": Jadidism was a modernist movement inspired by the ideas of Ismail Gaspiraly (1851–1914) that emerged among Tatar Muslims in the nineteenth century and spread throughout Russian Turkistan and the Turkic world at the turn of the 1900s. [29]

Among the critical questions being discussed by these experts, worth mentioning is the issue of conscription for military service. The question is mostly discussed by Muslim actors and on Muslim websites, which insist that Muslims will represent almost half of the Russian population by 2050. [30] The demographic rise of North Caucasian populations will indeed create a baby-boom effect in 2020, and this will accelerate the gap between ethnic Russians and minorities. [31] Given the size of the cohorts of young people and the generations of childbearing age, Russia will soon have a growing proportion of young men who are up for military service who belong to peoples of Muslim traditions. Already in 2010, 60 percent of all conscripts from the military district of Volga-Urals who claimed to be practicing religious believers were Muslim. [32] In about 10 to 20 years, the majority of conscripts to the Russian army will be of Muslim background. However, the topic is not widely discussed in the Russian media or expert publications, probably because of its sensitivity. Even if the Russian authorities do not want to open a public debate on it, they have been taking measures to deal with the new phenomenon. In 2010 the Russian media mentioned a "Muslim riot," when about a hundred conscripts from the North Caucasus based in

the Perm region refused to follow orders. [33] The same year the Army Headquarters decided for the first time to create mono-ethnic military brigades in order to avoid interethnic tensions. [34]

Another sensitive topic is the notion of “Russian Islam” (*russkii islam*)—to be dissociated from “Russia’s Islam” (*Islam Rossii* or *rossiiskii islam*). The use of the adjective Russian, in the sense of an ethnically and culturally Russian Islam, has been under debate since the early 2000s. The initiators of this notion, Sergei Gradirovsky and Petr Shchedrovitsky, are both close to former image-maker and *polit-technologist* Gleb Pavlovsky and at the time worked for the regional administration of Nizhny-Novgorod. Gradirovsky analyzed and promoted what he saw as the birth of a Russian Islam: the increasingly important use of the Russian language in mosques and the diminishing importance of the ethnic character of places of worship, which are more and more multinational as a result of internal and international migrations flows; the emergence of a considerable population of ethnic Russian converts to Islam; the establishment of Russian-speaking Islamic theological schools under state control; and the structuration of a dense Islamic web net in Russian. [35] But this notion has been widely contested by different groups: the Orthodox Church for one, which refuses to consider that a religion other than Orthodoxy could be *Russian* [36]; by ethnic minority elites, who want to preserve their ethnic identity and avoid any Russification of Islam; and by some Islamic institutions, which insist on the universal mission of the *Ummah*, beyond any cultural distinctions.

It is worth noting that while expert debates about interethnic tensions are widespread in Russia and considered a conventional topic for research, debate about the social and cultural role of Islam in Russia is less widespread. With the exceptions of topics from classic Islamic Studies and more policy-oriented study of “Islamist risks”—read terrorism—the level of expert debate remains small compared to that in Western Europe. Public discussions about Islamophobia in Russia are almost nonexistent and evoked almost exclusively by Muslim websites [37] or, in rare cases, in academic papers. [38] The convert movement has not been studied at all, even though Russia seems to be second after France in the trend of conversion in Europe. [39] Several large sociological studies about the rise of a migrant Islam and the social and cultural transformation of Islam in Russia’s big cities are currently under way at the Sociology Institute of the Academy of Sciences. Nonetheless, the state of research is still limited, given the dimensions and dynamics of the multifaceted “Muslimization” of Russia.

Islam and the Future of Russia: Critical Questions

Islam’s growing importance in Russia will shape the country’s future in at least five main directions: the overall demographic balance of the country; the strategy of “normalizing” the regions of the North Caucasus and, in particular, Chechnya; Russia’s migration policy; Russia’s positioning on the international scene; and the transformation of ethnic and religious identities.

A Demographic Balance in Favor of Muslim Populations

Despite their different methods of calculation, projections from the Russian official statistics as well as the United Nations concur that the Russian population will decline in size. In 2030, Russia’s population could fall to 120–130 million people [40], which would have significant consequences

in terms of labor, pension funding, and securing areas near more populous neighbors such as China—that is, mostly in the Far East.

Russia is a unique case in the world demographic landscape. The reversal that occurred after the fall of the Soviet Union is particularly noticeable: the Russian population declined from 148.5 million in 1992 to 141.9 million in 2009. Population figures stabilized at the turn of the 2010s, with a minor population increase; and, in 2013, there was a positive natural increase for the first time since 1992. In 2015, the authorities welcomed this success, loudly announcing a population of 146.3 million, including 2.3 million new citizens, following the annexation of Crimea. [41] Fertility has risen from its lowest level in 1999 (1.17 children per woman) to 1.54 ten years later. It is supported by improving middle-class living standards, social optimism in young households, and the establishment of a pro-natalist policy, which includes financial support for families (with a “baby bonus” allocated for a second child), programs promoting large families, and tightening access to abortion.

Despite this modest demographic recovery, the outlook remains gloomy. Indeed, this rebound is primarily due to the naturalization of some immigrants and the arrival of more numerous age groups. The rise in births cannot fundamentally change the situation. The number of women of childbearing age will decline by 20 percent around 2025, due only to the age cohort effect. The country no longer has enough young people: 6.5 million 5–14 year olds and little more than 4.5 million 15–19 year olds.

Additionally, this birth policy does not address the challenge at the heart of the Russian population issue, which is excessive male mortality. Life expectancy for men at birth decreased from 63 years in 1990 to 58 in 1996 (a lower rate than existed under Khrushchev), before rising slowly to 65 in 2013. This excessive male mortality is directly and indirectly linked to alcoholism (one out of five Russian men dies from drinking), a very high number of accidents, suicides, and everyday violence. In terms of mortality for external causes (not related to a disease), Russia is tied with Burundi and Congo. [42] Added to this is Russia’s unenviable status as the world leader in heroin use (the country shares first place with Iran) with about 8 million Russian citizens being drug users. [43] This consumption also influences the development of the AIDS epidemic, with Russia’s infection rate among the highest in the world after some sub-Saharan countries.

The Russian authorities have celebrated the rise in the birth rate with great pomp, interpreting it as the country’s long-awaited demographic “rebirth” and as revealing, rightly, an improvement in the welfare of households of childbearing age. They are quieter on male mortality because the public policies needed to fight it are more difficult to implement than natalist policies. Even the most optimistic experts do not believe in the Russian population’s ability to change the current demographic decline, since not even a rapid improvement of public policies in relation to male violent and premature deaths and a natality rate of 2 to 3 children per women would be able to modify the ongoing population collapse as a result of shrinking youth age cohorts.

The only demographically dynamic part of the population is the non-ethnically Russian one, that is, mostly Muslim ethnic groups and the smaller Buddhist and Siberian indigenous groups. Of the twenty regions with positive rates of population increase, 19 are national republics or autonomous districts with relatively high rates of non-ethnic Russian citizens. Chechnya is in the lead with a

natural increase of more than 2 percent (figures that should be taken with caution, given the propaganda of Kadyrov's regime), followed by Ingushetia and Dagestan. After the North Caucasus come regions with Buddhist traditions such as Tuva, and those with significant indigenous populations, such as Khanty-Mansi in Siberia. The thirty peoples considered nominally Muslim have seen a sharp increase (+25 percent) between the 1989 and 2010 censuses. [44]

Moreover, the only way for Russia to maintain its population level at around 130 million inhabitants in the forthcoming three decades—an already optimistic scenario—will be to accelerate the process of legal naturalization of migrants at a rapid pace, similar to that in the United States. In the next twenty years, between 5 and 12 million Central Asians, mostly Uzbeks and Tajiks—the population of Tajikistan will double in the next two decades, from 8 to 16 million—could potentially emigrate to Russia for work and then apply for Russian citizenship. The requirement for schooling of non-Russian children has been booming since the last decade, forcing the Ministry of Education to put in place specific programs for teachers to learn how to teach Russian as a foreign language. [45]

The North Caucasus, or How to Avoid the Pakistani Scenario

The North Caucasus Federal District continues to be one of the main headaches for Putin's regime. Moscow conceives of it as a separate region from the rest of Russian territory, one requiring special statutes. Its view of the region is above all security-oriented: it is a border zone, the periphery of the empire, which must remain under direct control of the center and especially of the security services. This is particularly true for Dagestan, which shares strategic borders with Georgia and Azerbaijan. The regional capital city of Makhachkala is one of Russia's few year-round, ice-free ports, so the republic is of vital importance for Russian national security. But the issues to face are numerous. [46]

First, the ethnic border no longer corresponds to the political border. Ethnic Russians largely dominate in the regions of Krasnodar and Stavropol, as well as in the republic of Adygea: they often represent more than 75 percent of the population and, thanks to migrations from the South Caucasus and the eastern regions of the Federation, their number is increasing. On the contrary, in all the national autonomous republics, the number of Russians is today lower than 10 percent, and even lower than 3 percent in some places, and it continues to fall. Russians are fleeing the autonomous republics and gathering in the northeast and along the Black Sea coast (Sochi region). Even in the capitals, the proportion of Russians is very low (8 percent in Makhachkala in 2002 as compared with 20 percent in 1989). [47] Over time, this will become a major problem for the Kremlin: in a region deemed strategic for Russia (proximity with the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, neighboring Iran, the South Caucasus and Ukraine), Russians are practically no longer present, even if, as is the case in Dagestan, the Russian language indeed serves as the common language for peoples from very diverse origins. The result of this profound ethnic remodeling of the North Caucasus means that the modalities of integration into the Russian Federation of republics whose cultures, traditions, and religions markedly diverge from the common norm operative in the rest of Russia is becoming more and more complex—and costly for the federal budget.

Second, the state program for the development of the North Caucasus until 2025 makes no provision for the financial autonomy of the North Caucasus republics; indeed, the entirety of the region is going to remain one of the largest weights around the neck of the federal budget. Moscow's expenditure centers on social questions: investments in higher education, housing construction, upgrading the health system, the development of access to city gas, and the modernization of transport infrastructures. In terms of economic development, priority is granted to agriculture, followed by tourism (the old tradition of thermal spas and cure baths), which is a stretch given the security situation. Moscow also hopes to be able to integrate the North Caucasus into projects to create a North-South international trade corridor to link up with Iran. The major public companies such as Gazprom and Rosneft are obliged to provide jobs, and training, and to take charge of social programs, while the main oligarchs are strongly "encouraged" to invest in the region. But successes are not evident, as demonstrated by the high level of local poverty compared with the rest of the country and the widespread emigration of North Caucasian youth with few job prospects.

Third, Moscow continues to validate the power abuses of local ethnic leaders, all of whom are closely linked with Putin's security circles. The Kremlin has institutionalized patronage relations by appointing to the head of the North Caucasian republic loyal men who are tasked with eliminating rebellious movements in exchange for unlimited political and economic impunity, and a right to play the card of Islamization. This is transparently the case in Chechnya, where Ramzan Kadyrov has been rapidly Islamicizing the republic in order to reduce the population's attraction for insurrectional movements. Half of the population now goes to Friday prayer, and clothing regulations for girls and women have become stricter in recent years.

In order to increase effectiveness and cohesion, Russian central authorities have also set up local North Caucasian combatant units, which are supposed to be more effective than the federal security services, and which often comprise former amnestied criminals. These brigades-in-the-pay-of-the-local-authorities have heightened the "civil war" character of local conflicts. The Chechen conflict is already largely regionalized, and for some years the risk of a spread of radical Islamism toward the Russian regions of the federal district has been notable. Stavropol, Rostov-on-Don, and Mineralnye Vody already display the existence of significant tensions between local populations and migrants/refugees from the North Caucasus, while the peaceful Islamization of the younger generations can be observed in the whole region.

Depending on political evolutions to come in Moscow, the North Caucasus could thus rapidly follow the path of Pakistan's northern tribal federal areas: local clan leaders and Islamist insurgents maintain a precarious (im)balance in a remote region of the country with the blessing—voluntary at first, now uncontrollable—of the central authorities.

The Difficulties of Russian Migration Policy

In terms of migrant intake, Russia is ranked second in the world—or third if the Persian Gulf region as a whole is taken into account—after the United States. Russia's figures vary from 7 million to 12 million, depending upon the source. Even with the current economic slowdown, Russia remains the main attraction place for CIS migrants. However, the authorities do not want to present this, in the American or Canadian manner, as an asset for the country's economy, which

would encourage blowback from xenophobic public opinion. Economically the country cannot do without migrants: with very few qualifications, they fill the niches that Russian citizens have basically abandoned and thereby enable the economy to function, especially in the large cities, where migrants play key roles in the construction, services, and commerce sectors.

But the country lacks any real migration policy to attract educated foreigners, even though all the major Russian companies have complained of a lack of qualified executives. A quota system was implemented between 2007 and 2014, but this has not been sufficient to meet the labor power needs of the country's companies. Since 2015, the migration system has evolved and migrants are now required to register at the Federal Migration Service and obtain a license (*patent*). [48]

Russian migration policy is weakened by structural problems. [49] The first is the endemic corruption of the law enforcement services, whose organized racket of migrants is for them a very profitable activity. The second is the resistance of the administrative chain, which acts so that the decisions taken by the government or the Presidential Administration are not applied according to statute unless the President or his associates take a personal interest in doing so, which is not the case with migration policy. Lastly, whereas such policy is run principally by the Federal Migrations Service and the Ministry of Interior at the federal level, questions of integration are left to ministerial committees with little influence and to the local authorities, each of which acts in its own way. In the end, it is practically impossible to speak of an integration policy for the country as a whole. In practice, this means that social and cultural tensions around immigrants are bound to be on the rise and to create phenomena like the gangs of "Russian" and "Caucasian" youths that pour into the streets in search of confrontation.

Russia's Islamic Identity on the International Scene

Islam's rise in influence in Russia will also alter profoundly Russian foreign policy in the decades to come.

Right at the start of the 1990s, the autonomous Republic of Tatarstan showed the way of "paradiplomacy" as part of an attempt to develop its own international branding. [50] Tatarstan played the card of its Islamic and Turkic identity by participating in numerous regional fora, such as Turksoy, which aims to promote the world's Turkic cultures, and by developing specific links with foreign Islamic institutions. Tatarstan also hopes to play a lead role in implementing Islamic finance in Russia, all the while remaining cautious about "foreign" Islamic influences. For some years, Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov has replicated this practice, this time aiming at the most conservative countries, in particular the Gulf countries, as well as the universe of Salafist movements. The Russian government promoted Chechnya to Middle Eastern countries to showcase its Islamophile policies. The Russian Foreign Affairs Minister fought, for example, in 2011 to have some holy relics brought to Grozny in order to give the Republic greater legitimacy in the Islamic world. [51]

Russia became a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2005 but its status was subsequently reduced to observer level since membership is now reserved to countries with a Muslim majority. Despite this, Moscow continues to attend all the major OIC conferences, sending high-level delegations, and has since conducted a veritable charm offensive toward Muslim

countries. In addition to historically cordial relations with former Arab socialist countries such as Iraq, Libya, and Syria, as well as the Palestinians, Russia has sought to move closer to more conservative countries such as those of the Gulf, and it entertains sometimes difficult but overall cordial relations with Iran. Russia's objections to the Western intervention in Libya and its engagement alongside Bashar al-Assad have enhanced Russia's image among many Muslim countries. If Russia is considered an enemy by networks of international Jihadism, Muslim public opinion in general, above all in the Arab world, have a rather neutral or sometimes positive view of Russia, since it promotes a discourse that is critical of US-style democracy promotion and its attendant interference. [52]

Over the long term, strategic planners will have to take into consideration Russia's rising Islamic identity and its possible impact on foreign policy. An increasing part of Russia's public opinion will pressure central authorities for a more pro-Muslim foreign policy. The current overlapping of anti-US conspiracy theories both from Russia and the Middle-East is contributing to this geopolitical *rapprochement*. [53]

Transformation of Ethnic and Religious Identities

For centuries, the Russian empire structured divisions between population groups by making religion a key discriminator: one was above all Orthodox, a non-orthodox Christian, a Muslim, or a "Shamanist." During the Soviet period, the discriminator became ethnic, and one's nationality as defined in one's passport decided a proportion of individual and collective destiny: people could be deported in the name of their nationality (punished peoples of the Caucasus and Germans of the Volga), could be banned from occupying certain professional domains (Jews), or could be promoted in the administration or in the Communist Party by belonging to the titular nationality (process of indigenization of the elites of the republics). In the 1990s, the Russian identity debate remained deeply marked by the criterion of ethnicity, whereby minorities would demand their right to political, cultural, and economic "sovereignty."

However, social processes have deeply altered the modalities of identity belonging. Two apparently contradictory phenomena are notable. On the one hand, the identification of ethnic Russians (who represent 80 percent of the population), a formerly rather fuzzy and ill-defined category, is crystallizing around anti-migration themes; the feeling of having to defend a "white" ethnic identity under threat is taking hold, in the same way that we see happening in Western Europe with the success of far right and populist parties. [54] At the same time, minorities' identities seem to be weakening. Claims to sovereignty are jeopardized and federalism no longer appears as a solution for the country's future. Putin's success in the 2000s, and the emergence of new middle classes and new economic spaces have diminished the importance given to the ethnic and linguistic issues of minorities.

On the other hand, religious identities are being reasserted. Not only do 80 percent of Russian citizens claim to be Orthodox (in the sense of asserting an identity affiliation rather than practicing it), but Islam is also brandished more and more openly as a major criterion of identification for North Caucasians and peoples of the Volga-Urals. Faced with this Islamic identification, Islamophobia, which has been historically absent from Russia, is today clearly emerging. Consequently, as in Europe, fear of migrants and fear of Islam are steadily merging. The same

process of revitalized religious identity is also notable among Central Asian migrants. These migrants are young (often less than 30 years of age), practice religion more than their Soviet elders, and, consequently lay less and less claim to their ethnic identity. In the cultural shock constituted by migration, they feel united beyond national differences by their belonging to Islam, which defines them in the eyes of the Russians.

Russia will therefore no longer have to manage only the dilemma of majority versus ethnic minorities, such as it existed in the 1990s. The majority has become more distinctly ethno-nationalist than it was previously, as the success of political figures such as Alexei Navalny demonstrates. [55] The minorities no longer exist as a united block but rather in a three-way split: the North Caucasus, which above all remains a political and security problem linked to the Putin regime; migrants, which constitute the main form of ethnic identity at the present time; and Islam, which is gradually becoming the new cultural identity to be fought. This situation will profoundly alter the terms of the identity debate in Russia.

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Notes

1. See Karina Aitamurto, "Protected and Controlled. Islam and 'Desecularisation from Above' in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 1 (2016): pp. 182–202.
2. Katherine Graney, "'Russian Islam' and the Politics of Religious Multiculturalism in Russia," in Dominique Arel and Blair A. Ruble, eds, *Rebounding Identities: The Politics of Identity in Russia and Ukraine* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press with Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).
3. "The Federal Assembly of Russia, confirming the right of each to freedom of conscience and belief, as well as to equality before the law independently of one's religion or convictions, basing itself on the fact that the Russian Federation is a secular state, recognizing the special role of Orthodoxy in the history of Russia, in the constitution and the development of its spirituality and its culture, respecting Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and the other religions that constitute a steadfast part of the historic heritage of the peoples of Russia, considering it as important to promote understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect in question of the freedom of conscience and of belief, adopts the current federal law."
4. "Medvedev reaches out to Islam," *SRAS Letter*, August 1, 2009, http://www.sras.org/medvedev_reach_out_to_islam.

5. The term Wahhabism is meant to describe the official ideology in force in Saudi Arabia; calls for a literal reading of the Koran and for rediscovering Islam's original purity would be better covered by the term Salafism, which is less widespread in Russia than in Europe.
6. See the many articles devoted to this issue on the Moscow-based SOVA Center, sova-center.ru. See also Aleksandr Verkhovskii, eds, *Xenophobia, Freedom of Conscience and Anti-Extremism in Russia in 2015* (Moscow: SOVA, 2015).
7. See <http://enews.fergananews.com/news.php?id=1166>.
8. "Medvedev reaches out to Islam."
9. See SOVA-Center updates and announcements.
10. Marlene Laruelle, ongoing research.
11. See *Racism and Xenophobia in December 2015: Including Preliminary Results for the Year*, SOVA-Center, January 12, 2016, <http://www.sova-center.ru/en/xenophobia/news-releases/2016/01/d33598/>. See also Theodore P. Gerber, "Beyond Putin? Nationalism and Xenophobia in Russian Public Opinion," *The Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2014): pp. 113–134.
12. Marlene Laruelle, Natalia Yudina, "Islamophobia in Russia," *CSIS Papers*, forthcoming early 2017.
13. Information collected by Natalia Yudina for the SOVA Center.
14. Ibid.
15. See for instance <http://sputnikpogrom.com/russia/51483/a-good-uzbek-fellow/>.
16. Aleksei Malashenko, "Chto oznachaet poslednie terakty dlia musulman Rossii ?" *Carnegie Commentary*, November 18, 2015, <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/2015/11/18/ru-62009/im13>.
17. Sergey Markedonov, "The Rise of Radical and Nonofficial Islamic Groups in Russia's Volga Region," *CSIS Report*, 2013, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/rise-radical-and-nonofficial-islamic-groups-russia%E2%80%99s-volga-region>.
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22. See his website <http://www.kroupnov.ru>.
23. See Marlene Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation. Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2009): pp. 102–118.
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http://www.muslimblog.ru/publ/rubriki/slovo_ekspertu/islamofobija_v_rossii_i_ee_vidy_chastnoe_mnenie_musulmanskogo_analitika/6-1-0-29;
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