



# THE RISE OF NONTRADITIONAL ISLAM IN THE URALS

Alexey Malashenko and Alexey Starostin



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Carnegie Moscow Center  
16/2 Tverskaya  
Moscow, 125009, Russia  
Tel. +7 495 935 8904  
Fax: +7 495 935 8906  
[info@Carnegie.ru](mailto:info@Carnegie.ru)

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## About the Authors

**Alexey Malashenko** is the chair of the Carnegie Moscow Center's Religion, Society, and Security Program. Malashenko taught at the Higher School of Economics from 2007 to 2008 and was a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations from 2000 to 2006. Malashenko is a professor of political science as well as a member of the RIA Novosti advisory council. He serves on the editorial boards of the journals *Central Asia and the Caucasus* and *Acta Eurasica* and the newsletter "Russia and the Muslim World," and he is a board member of the International Federation for Peace and Conciliation.

**Alexey Starostin** is the deputy chair of the theology department and the head of the Russian Language Testing Center for Foreigners at the Ural State Mining University (Yekaterinburg). He is also the chairman of the Public Advisory Council at the Sverdlovsk Regional Office of the Federal Migration Service of Russia.



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## Summary

There have been significant changes in the composition and distribution of Russia's Muslim community during the era of President Vladimir Putin. In particular, as Islam expands in the Ural Federal District, religious and political life there is evolving. Much of this expansion is due to the arrival of Muslim migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and some migrants bring with them religious radicalism—a challenge that requires a more effective official response.

### Key Themes

- Islam is expanding across the Russian Federation, particularly on the territory of the Ural Federal District, whose hydrocarbon-rich areas provide more than one-third of Russia's federal budget revenues.
- The ethnic composition of the Ural region is changing as a result of an influx of migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus, occasionally causing tensions between migrants and locals.
- Most migrants in the Urals are Muslims. Some of them belong to radical Islamist organizations.
- A number of Muslims from the Ural Federal District have participated in terrorist acts in Central Asia and the Caucasus or have gone to fight for the self-proclaimed Islamic State in the Middle East.

### Next Steps for Russia

**Focus on education.** Youth educational programs that involve Muslim intellectuals and scholars can help counteract the growth of religious radicalism. Similarly, increased levels of professionalism and education among traditional Muslim clergy in Russia would enable imams in the Urals to challenge radical narratives and address the concerns of their congregations.

**Organize on-the-job training programs for the clergy, including public speaking classes.** The Russian Federal Migration Service should more actively involve the clergy in working with newly arrived Muslim migrants. Imams and muftis should be encouraged to play a more active role in integrating migrants into local society, to help decrease ethnic and religious tensions.

**Introduce more Muslim-oriented programs and materials through public media outlets, including television, radio, and periodicals.** The public should be



informed of charitable work in the Muslim community, Islamic cultural events, the opening of new mosques, and opportunities for interfaith dialogue.

**Adopt stricter migration regulations to stem the poorly controlled influx of migrants.** Russian law enforcement organizations should enhance cooperation with their Central Asian counterparts to prevent known Islamic extremists from entering Russia. The northern areas of the Tyumen region, which hold the bulk of Russia's hydrocarbons and provide more than one-third of federal budget revenues, should be designated as a closed territory to reduce the growth of internal and external migration. This would help reduce interethnic tensions, which continue to increase in the northern Urals.

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## Introduction

Russia's Muslim community at the start of the twenty-first century is characterized by expanding migration, a changing ethnic composition, and an increasing number of followers of what can be called nontraditional Islam. Most politicians and experts associate this strand of the religion—which includes political Islam and approaches that were brought to Russia in the 1990s from the Arab world, as well as Salafism—with religious radicalism.

The number of Muslims living in Russia cannot be determined exactly. Russia keeps no official records of its citizens' religious preferences, as it is officially a secular country. As a rule, when experts refer to a certain Russian citizen as a Muslim, they extrapolate this information mainly from the person's ethnicity. While such an extrapolation may be valid when it comes to the ethnic groups of the North Caucasus, where Islam predominates, other ethnicities display greater religious diversity. For instance, Russia's Turkic minorities—mainly the Tatars and Bashkirs—subscribe to a number of religious beliefs within a given ethnic group: some of them adhere to Tengrism, a pre-Islamic pagan cult, while others hold atheist beliefs. This paper, however, treats ethnic and religious identifications as interchangeable. This assumption puts Russia's number of Muslim citizens at around 16 million.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, Russia is home to 5 million Muslim migrants from Central Asia and the South Caucasus.<sup>2</sup> Yet this figure is just an approximation: even Russia's Federal Migration Service lacks precise data on the number of these migrants because most of them reside in Russia illegally. Due to the Russian economic crisis that began in 2014, the number of migrants who entered the country in January 2015 was down by 70 percent relative to the same month in 2014, according to Federal Migration Service data.<sup>3</sup> It is hard to say, however, how long the number of migrants in Russia will continue to decline. In February 2015, the head of the migration service, Konstantin Romodanovsky, said that “the economic situation for foreign migrants is actually not that bad.”<sup>4</sup>

This paper focuses on Muslims in the Ural Federal District, which is composed of six entities: Kurgan, Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk, and Tyumen Oblasts, as well as Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District—Yugra (KMAD) and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District (YNAD).

The Ural region has exceptional economic importance for the Russian Federation. The Ural Federal District is economically unique in the Russian Federation, as it is where most of Russia's hydrocarbons are extracted. Tax transfers from KMAD and YNAD account for one-third of the Russian federal budget. YNAD is Russia's number-one gas-producing region and is home to Yamal,

**Table 1: Muslim Places of Worship in the Ural Federal District in 2015**

Constituent entity	Number of mosques	Number of prayer houses	Number of prayer rooms	Total
YNAD	12	3	10	25
KMAD	23	7	—	30
Tyumen Oblast	80	22	5	107*
Sverdlovsk Oblast	47	15	29	91
Kurgan Oblast	31	14	1	46
Chelyabinsk Oblast	74	23	6	103
<i>Total</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>402</i>

\* 117, according to an alternative source: *Islam in Tyumen Oblast* (Tyumen: Tyumen State University, 2013), 118.

Sources: “Muslim Organizations in Russia, Ural FD” [in Russian], *Islam and Society*, [http://www.islamio.ru/structure/ural\\_federal\\_district/](http://www.islamio.ru/structure/ural_federal_district/), accessed July 16, 2015; and the authors’ field research.

Russia’s main gas platform.<sup>5</sup> Yamal’s total initial gas resources are in excess of 5,191 trillion cubic feet.<sup>6</sup> And this economic status brings with it a sociopolitical dimension—the level of social and political stability in the Ural Federal District has a significant effect on the situation in the entire country.

The spread of radical Islam in the Urals has not yet reached critical proportions, but radical sentiments among some members of local Muslim communities are on the rise. Joint efforts between government officials and religious leaders in particular would help combat this increasing extremism.

## Demographics and Religion

As a rule, research on Russia’s Muslim communities and on Islam’s place in Russian society has focused on the North Caucasus and Tatarstan. The Muslim periphery—that is, the rest of Russia—has not generated much interest from scholars or policymakers. In the context of Islam, the territories to the east of the Urals have remained terra incognita.

However, the Urals are no longer a Muslim periphery, as data on the number of mosques and other Muslim places of worship suggest. In 2015, there were 267 mosques in the Ural Federal District (see table 1).

Russia’s minority Tatar and Bashkir ethnic groups make up the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the Ural Federal District. These groups mostly adhere to Hanafi, one of the four theological and legal schools of thought in Sunni Islam, and their Islamic practices are combined with pagan elements. Sufism as dominated by the Naqshbandi spiritual order is another strain of Islam that is practiced among the inhabitants of the Ural region and includes local ethnocultural traditions; here it is referred to as “traditional” Islam.<sup>7</sup>

In the past, Islam was not politicized, and most local Muslims were completely indifferent to the religion's radical elements. Until recently, Islam had a minimal impact on the political situation in the Urals and Western Siberia.

However, Islam's image in the Asian part of Russia, including the Urals, has been rapidly changing due to migration. Data from Russia's 1989, 2002, and 2010 censuses reveal that while Tatars and Bashkirs comprised the majority of local Muslims before the Soviet collapse, their numbers significantly decreased in the 1990s and 2000s (see table 2). The number of Tatars and Bashkirs living in the Ural Federal District fell by 9 percent from 919,660 to 834,115 between the years of 1989 and 2010. The only exceptions were YNAD and KMAD, where there was a 10 percent increase in the number of Tatars and Bashkirs, and the south of Tyumen Oblast. In all other parts of the Ural Federal District, the absolute numbers for these two ethnic groups declined because of natural attrition, assimilation, or a change in ethnic identity.

Nevertheless, the total number of Muslims in the region and the Muslim share in the general population remained practically unchanged due to an increase in the number of migrants from outside the Ural Federal District—mostly from Central Asia, Azerbaijan, and the North Caucasus.

Today, the cities of Novy Urengoy, Gubkinsky, and Noyabrsk in YNAD as well as Nizhnevartovsk, Raduzhny, Nefteyugansk, Megion, and Surgut in KMAD remain hotbeds of the Salafist movement in the Ural Federal District.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Salafist communities exist in practically every city in KMAD, including its capital, Khanty-Mansiysk. In total, several thousand radicals make the Ural Federal District their residence.<sup>9</sup>

## Salafists and Rising Social Tensions

These changes in the Ural Federal District's ethnic composition have led to ethnic and social tensions between the recently arrived Muslim migrants and long-time residents. The Center for Research on National Conflicts and the Regions Club studied the level of ethnic tension in Russian regions from September 2013 to March 2014, paying particular attention to three of the Ural Federal District's six regions. The study found that changes in ethnic composition have led to shifts in religious outlooks. Nontraditional Islam is especially noticeable in Tyumen Oblast, and especially in KMAD and YNAD.<sup>10</sup> According to the research, nontraditional Islam, with its greater radicalism and emphasis on political activism, drives away traditional Islam in KMAD, for example.

Salafism is a main strand of nontraditional Islam. To a degree, its presence in the Urals is a product of the evolution of traditional Islamic ideals. Salafism is a reaction to the limitations of traditional Islam, specifically to its inability to respond to pressing practical and political issues.

But Muslim migration has also facilitated Salafism's rise. Followers of the Salafist movement, which appeals to some Tatar youth, arrived in the Urals

**Table 2: Changes in the Ethnic Composition of the Muslim Community in the Ural Federal District,**

Category	1989 Census		2002 Census		2010 Census	
	Number of people	Relative share, %	Number of people	Relative share, %	Number of people	Relative share, %
Muslim population, total	1,073,267	8.57	1,152,938	9.32	1,133,770	9.39
Tatars and Bashkirs	919,660	7.34	910,845	7.36	834,115	6.90
Central Asian natives	90,431	0.72	111,889	0.90	153,808	1.27
North Caucasian natives	31,617	0.25	61,607	0.50	77,198	0.64
Azeris	31,081	0.25	66,632	0.54	66,819	0.55
Others (Arabs, Uighurs, etc.)	478	0.00	1,965	0.02	1,830	0.02

**Sources:** Calculations are based on “All-Union Census of 1989,” Demoscope Weekly, [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus\\_nac\\_89.php](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_nac_89.php), accessed July 16, 2015; “National Population Census in 2002,” Demoscope Weekly, [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus\\_nac\\_02.php](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_nac_02.php), accessed July 16, 2015; and “All-Russia Population Census 2010,” Demoscope Weekly, [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus\\_etn\\_10.php](http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_etn_10.php), accessed July 16, 2015.

(and the rest of Russian Asia) along with migrants from Central Asia and the North Caucasus. Central Asian migrants outnumber other worshippers in many mosques in the Ural cities, while rural mosques remain monoethnic—that is, Tatar or Bashkir. Of all the Muslim clergy in Sverdlovsk Oblast, 4 percent now come from the Caucasus, while 2 percent are from Central Asia. In KMAD, the proportion of Muslim clergy from the Caucasus and Central Asia is 10 percent, and in YNAD the figures for Central Asian and Caucasian clergy are 10 and 15 percent, respectively.<sup>11</sup> Khaydar Khafizov, a mufti at YNAD’s Regional Muslim Spiritual Directorate, concludes that “the era of Tatar Islam and Tatar imams is gone.”<sup>12</sup>

The total number of Salafists living in KMAD is estimated at 2,000 to 3,000.<sup>13</sup> Their ranks include members of various ethnic groups: natives of the Russian republics of Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Dagestan, and Tatarstan; individuals from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; and Russian and Ukrainian converts.

Salafist imams work in officially registered administrative bodies that deal with the spiritual life of the Muslim community. Salafist religious infrastructure runs parallel to that of official Islam, and Salafists run a number of well-concealed unofficial prayer rooms.<sup>14</sup>

Many of these imams were educated in the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia. Armed with a deep knowledge of Arabic and of religious matters including the Quran, sunna, and theological treatises, they come out ahead in debates with the region’s traditional religious leaders, who adhere to the Hanafi school of thought. Most traditional imams lack the education and knowledge needed to meet their congregants’ demand for religious instruction and are unable to provide practical guidance on ritual observance. Only one out of ten traditional imams, who make up 9 percent of all imams in the Urals, have secondary or higher religious education.<sup>15</sup>

## 1989–2010

	Population growth rate, %	Relative share growth rate, %	Population change, times	Relative share change, times
	6	10	1.1	1.1
	-9	-6	0.9	0.9
	70	76	1.7	1.8
	144	153	2.4	2.5
	115	123	2.1	2.2
	283	297	3.8	4.0

The Urals also do not have Islamic educational institutions, despite a ten-year-old discussion on the need to create such institutions in the Ural Federal District. To receive an Islamic education, imams have to travel to cities in the Volga Federal District—Kazan or Ufa. The only way to receive a state-recognized bachelor's degree in theology without leaving the city of Yekaterinburg in Sverdlovsk Oblast is by enrolling in a program at the Department of Theology at the Ural State Mining University, which has been training Islamic theologians since 2011.<sup>16</sup>

The former head of the Department of Religion at the Tyumen Oblast Ethnic Affairs Committee, Igor Bobrov, noted that Tyumen Oblast's former mufti, Galimzhan Bikmullin, has been “actively involving Central Asian natives, especially Uzbeks, in the process of reviving Islam” since the 1990s. The same official pointed out that most Uzbeks and Tajiks who were involved in the construction of mosques and in teaching at Tyumen Oblast's prestigious Yembayev madrasa in the 1990s and early 2000s had received private training from Islamic authorities and were previously members of Uzbek and Tajik radical factions.

The Tatar clergy resent being pushed out by the migrants. They claim that these strangers, as they put it, encourage and disseminate radical norms and practices that are alien to traditional Islam.

There is some evidence that some Salafists in the region use violence to further their ideals. There have been secret Salafist groups in the region since the late 1990s, when militants from the North Caucasus used it as their recreational base to rest, heal their wartime wounds, and obtain legal status by changing their names and passports.<sup>17</sup> Widows of militants killed in counterterrorist operations visited YNAD and KMAD.

Classes at the Yembayev madrasa were suspended in 2000 after a former student was arrested in Kyrgyzstan for an attempted assault on a Kyrgyz border

patrol. It was discovered that before enrolling in the Muslim school, he had received combat training at an Islamist boot camp in Tajikistan.<sup>18</sup>

From 2003 to 2006, the imam of the Matmasy Township mosque in Tyumen Oblast, Maksud Kadyrshayev (commonly known as Sheikh Maksud), urged predominantly Central Asian and North Caucasian worshippers at his mosque to wage jihad.<sup>19</sup>

## A Plethora of Salafist Communities

Just as in the rest of Russia, competition among pro-regime Muslim self-governing bodies has a negative impact on the situation in the Ural Federal District's Muslim community. These bodies struggle for the government's patronage, control over local communities, and financial resources. The central conflict is between two groups: the Ufa-based Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate, which has been headed by Talgat Tadzhuddin since Soviet times; and the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in the Asian Part of Russia, led by the co-chair of Russia's Mufti Council, Nafigulla Ashirov.

The Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate controls 166 of the Ural Federal District's approximately 400 local Muslim communities and commands more influence there than the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in the Asian Part of Russia does. That is thanks in no small part to the Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate's close ties with local authorities.

The Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in the Asian Part of Russia controls 46 local religious organizations and over 40 religious groups.<sup>20</sup> However, a number of communities under this directorate cooperate with certain radical groups and individuals persecuted by the federal authorities. Ashirov is known for his statements in support of the Taliban as well as his contacts with Islamic leaders overseas.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, several independent Muslim spiritual directorates operate in the Urals. While not part of either of the two main spiritual directorates mentioned above, they are nevertheless affiliated with one of them. The number of centralized religious organizations varies from region to region. For instance, practically all KMAD Islamic communities are part of the Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate; Kurgan Oblast has two regional muftiates; Tyumen Oblast has three; and Sverdlovsk Oblast boasts as many as six.

A few communities fall under the jurisdiction of the federal-level Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation. However, this directorate has failed to gain more influence in the Urals.

## Radical Influences and Internal Clashes in Salafism

A number of these communities have espoused radical views, at times bringing them into conflict with adherents of traditional Islam. Over the course of a decade, organizations like Nur Islam and the communities around the Rahmat and Pokachi mosques have raised an entire generation of Muslims who are critical of the structure of the Russian state. Adherents of these groups try to live in strict accordance with sharia law and criticize those who choose to live differently or adopt a secular way of life. Hundreds of people of very different ethnic backgrounds aged twenty to forty—Tatars, Bashkirs, Russians, Ukrainians, North Caucasians, and Central Asian natives—have been brought up in the traditions of moderate Salafism, a nonradical and nonextremist strand of the movement.

### Nur Islam

The Nur Islam organization, founded in the city of Novy Urengoy in 1996, was part of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in the Asian Part of Russia. The group ran a mosque, also called Nur Islam, that attracted 600 congregants from 25 ethnic communities. Security services declared Nur Islam and the Noyabrsk-based Iman faction to be radical Muslim organizations.

The imam of the Nur Islam mosque, an ethnic Uzbek named Isomitdin Akbarov, had connections to the Wahhabi faction of the Islamic Party of Turkestan, an Islamic militant organization that operates in Central Asia.<sup>22</sup> Akbarov and his deputy, I. S. Nurmatov, were wanted by the Uzbek authorities, and an international warrant was issued for their arrest. Both men disseminated Wahhabi philosophy at lectures in the mosque. Akbarov was killed in 2010, and his son, Muhammad Akbarov, who received his religious education in Saudi Arabia, took charge of the community in the fall of 2010.

The community was later chaired by an ethnic Ukrainian, Dmitri Chernomorchenko, known under his adopted name of Khamzat. He became widely known as a blogger critical of the Russian regime and was forced to move to Turkey after being pressured by the authorities in Russia. He continues his dissident activities online from Turkey.

Another congregant of the Nur Islam mosque and the head of a Bashkir militant group, Nafis Shaymukhametov, was responsible for killing police officers in the Suksunsky District of the Perm Krai and for attempting to blow up a pipeline in the town of Birk.

The leadership of the Nur Islam mosque has always denied having ties to terrorist groups. Congregants claim that sermons at the mosque have never contained any extremist rhetoric. At the same time, Nur Islam's official website, entitled *Christianity and Islam*, urges the adherents of other religions to convert to Islam.<sup>23</sup> After the community was featured in several television programs, it



became well-known in Russia and across the globe. A Saudi sheikh described the mosque and the community in detail in his book.<sup>24</sup>

In 2010, the Russian police and Federal Security Service conducted a search of the Nur Islam mosque's premises, detaining 70 congregants present there at the time. Most of the detainees were subsequently released.<sup>25</sup> A failed attempt to disband the community was made in 2011. The Nur Islam mosque was ultimately closed down in 2014, and the community ceased to exist as a legal entity. Some of the congregants became members of the newly built cathedral mosque, which belongs to the pro-regime Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate.<sup>26</sup>

### The Rahmat Mosque

In Sverdlovsk Oblast, the Salafist movement reportedly held sway over Yekaterinburg's Rahmat mosque, headed by Amir Muzaffarov, Muhammad Rustam Gabdrakhimov, and Amir Yakupov. Muzaffarov was educated at Mecca's Dar al-Hadeeth madrasa, one of the world's most prestigious Salafist educational institutions. On his return to Yekaterinburg, he taught Arabic and the foundations of Islam at the Rahmat mosque, becoming its imam in 2005. His Internet sermons were circulated across Russia and other former Soviet countries. Gabdrakhimov also received his education in Saudi Arabia. Yakupov was trained in Egypt and subsequently hosted a program on regional television from 2007 to 2009.

The mosque's leaders frequently spoke about the negative influence of secular culture on Muslims and of the Russian state's repressive policies toward Muslims. They did not directly advocate extremism, but they also refrained from condemning terrorist attacks. When the authorities asked the mosque leaders to denounce the December 2013 terrorist attacks in Volgograd, the leaders flatly refused to do so.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Rahmat mosque had a lasting ideological effect on Muslims in Sverdlovsk Oblast and the entire Ural Federal District. Russian Muslims started associating Yekaterinburg with that mosque. Sverdlovsk's Kazyyat Muslim Directorate, which is under the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in the Asian Part of Russia, used the mosque to train rural imams. As a result, prayers are recited according to the Salafist tradition in a number of villages in Sverdlovsk Oblast; elderly worshippers believe that this is the only way to pray.

In addition, Ibn Taymiyyah, a medieval theologian whose views became the basis for today's Islamist ideology, and other Salafist authors became popular among Sverdlovsk Oblast's imams. Thanks to the spread of information technologies, the speeches made by leaders of the Rahmat mosque became readily available to Muslims in other parts of the Ural Federal District. The production of videos stopped in 2010, but public speeches, as well as activities on the Internet and social networks, continued. The mosque's popularity was so great that its Friday sermons attracted worshippers living 100–200 miles away. Its prayer hall was always full on Fridays.

In the course of searches conducted at the Rahmat mosque between 2010 and 2014, the authorities reportedly discovered extremist literature.<sup>27</sup> The mosque had been consistently pressured by the local administration, which terminated its lease in 2014. The Rahmat community was forced to vacate the premises it was leasing. The deputy mayor of Yekaterinburg, Sergey Tushin, explained to journalists:

Rahmat's leadership changed. People that adhere to the more extreme forms of Islam, some of whom received their religious education in Saudi Arabia, took over. As a result, a center that disseminates radicalism appeared in Yekaterinburg. According to law enforcement officials, only over the recent period, 50 administrative and four criminal cases were filed in connection with distributing extremist literature. Other violations run the whole gamut: illegal possession of weapons, illegal vending, and migration and labor law infractions. Thus, we have made a conscious decision [to terminate the lease], although initially we thought of keeping the mosque in that building.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Pokachi Mosque**

In the 2000s, Dagestani Salafists assumed tacit control of a mosque in the city of Pokachi in the Ural Federal District. The local imam, an ethnic Tatar named Ilshat Yakhin, shared their views and delivered his sermons accordingly.

Alarmed by the situation, the KMAD mufti enlisted the help of the authorities to replace the local imam with the traditionalist Rustam Rakhmatullin. After that, the Salafists started threatening Rakhmatullin and members of his family.

Two congregations formed within the mosque. Following the Friday sermons that Rakhmatullin delivered for the adherents of Hanafi, former imams of the mosque delivered their own sermons for the Salafists. In the spring of 2013, the Salafists removed all the literature from the mosque, and later they set Rakhmatullin's garage on fire. Only in the aftermath of these incidents, in early 2014, did the police detain 20 Salafist congregants.<sup>29</sup>

### **Other Incidents**

This conflict between Salafists and an officially appointed imam is not the only illustration of such tensions. In January 2013, an Azerbaijani native who subscribed to Salafist views approached an imam's assistant in a Nefteyugansk mosque after the midday prayer and physically assaulted him with the words, "You pray wrong."<sup>30</sup>

The Salafist communities are making a serious effort to protect themselves at various levels: with the aid of law enforcement officials, members of parliament, or community organizers. Salafist connections in local administrations and businesses contribute to the success of these efforts. These connections allow the Salafists to persecute their ideological adversaries, including the students of the Sufi Sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi, who was killed in a terrorist attack in 2012. These predominantly North Caucasian students are trying to prevent the Salafists from taking control of northern mosques. Such a conflict took place in 2011 in Raduzhny in KMAD.

This clash is symptomatic of a broader, serious conflict in a region far removed from the Caucasus: the conflict between Salafists and Dagestani-born traditionalists. With the agreement of the Yugra mufti, Tagir Samatov, the spiritual directorate of Dagestan's Muslims has been sending delegations of Quran readers and preachers to the north for several years to take part in the Prophet Muhammad's birthday celebration, in an effort to stem the Salafist influence.<sup>31</sup>

## Salafists' Financing, Recruitment, and Combat Operations

The activities of some Salafists are made possible by their constant contacts with the administrations of certain territories and by their criminal connections, which help finance their work. The Salafists were reportedly financed by Sultan Dukhayev, also known by the alias "Beard," a Chechen criminal leader who was arrested in Yekaterinburg in 2013.<sup>32</sup>

Salafists also actively proselytize in the region and are encouraging ex-convicts to join their ranks. According to one source who preferred to remain anonymous, former criminals "provide [Salafists] with means of support, resettle them in local communities, or simply provide them with housing... Support, money, work—this is a recipe for turning out new [Salafists]." <sup>33</sup> The autonomous districts in the Urals house a large number of prisons, thus creating fertile ground for Salafist propaganda. As an illustration, in 2013, security services observed an increase in the number of ethnic Russians who converted to Islam in the Lokosovo federal penitentiary in KMAD. Apparently, the number increased after the individuals charged with setting Tatarstan's Orthodox churches ablaze in the fall of 2013 were transferred to the Lokosovo penal colony. The penal colony has a working mosque and provides religious literature, some of which is extremist in nature. Through the sermons they gave in the mosque, imprisoned Salafists convinced their cellmates to convert to Islam.

Migrants are another convenient target for Salafists' recruitment efforts. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Tajik migrants come to the region without particular religious convictions and are concerned mostly with making a living; however, they often leave the region as Salafists. Salafist preachers take advantage of vulnerable individuals who are looking for sympathy and support while living in harsh conditions.

In December 2013, Radio Liberty's Uzbek service published an interview with Kyrgyz native Akhmadzhan Khashimov, who lived in the city of Surgut. He succumbed to the influence of an Uzbek preacher, underwent military training in Islamist camps in Russia and Kyrgyzstan, and joined the ranks of the Syrian opposition.<sup>34</sup> The story, reprinted by many media outlets, has had an enormous impact on local residents in the Urals. In a further illustration of the influence of Salafism, Dagestani Salafists in the Urals sometimes marry

Russian women, who convert to Islam at their husbands' request and embrace their radical ideas.

Young people of different ethnic backgrounds find Salafists' calls for change from the outside world, as well as their internationalism, appealing. Russian has become the primary language of communication and consolidation for the Salafists.

A number of Ural cities are now becoming centers of propaganda for Muslims whose goal is to recruit new volunteers into the self-styled Islamic State.<sup>35</sup>

In 2007, a recent convert originally from KMAD, who had served a five-year sentence for terrorist activity in Afghanistan, was detained while crossing the Afghan border in a hijab. After converting to Islam in his home city, Nizhnevartovsk, he went on to study Islam in Iran and Pakistan; he attempted to return to KMAD after his failed attempt to relocate to Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> In 2009, other residents of Nizhnevartovsk, who had been recruited in a mosque in KMAD, were killed during a counterterrorist operation in the North Caucasus.<sup>37</sup>

And regional security services reported in November 2014 that 50 people from the south of Tyumen Oblast alone had left for the Middle East to participate in the armed struggle led by the Islamic State.<sup>38</sup> One of them was arrested in Chelyabinsk in 2015 on charges of recruiting Muslims to fight for the Islamic State in 2013–2014.<sup>39</sup>

The exact number of Islamic State combatants from the autonomous districts of the Urals is unknown, but it is believed that there are many North Caucasian natives among them. Some of these North Caucasians, who are increasingly numerous in the Urals, bring with them radical ideas and are a main source of Islamic radicalization. Akhmet Yarlykapov, a senior associate at the Center for Caucasian Issues and Regional Security at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, noted in March 2015 that according to various estimates, 2,000 to 7,000 natives of the Caucasus are now fighting in the Middle East—and that not all of them went there directly from the North Caucasus. As Yarlykapov explained:

At the end of September 2014, I was on a research trip in the village of Oguzer in Dagestan's Kizlyar District, where we were told of four village natives now fighting in Syria. One of them previously lived in KMAD. Just for the sake of comparison: the village has a total of 250 households, 150 of which are now located in the north.

Salafist-oriented Muslims from the Urals have also participated in combat operations in Central Asia and the North Caucasus on numerous occasions.

Tajik law enforcement officials arrested members of congregations from Tyumen and Surgut as they attempted to cross the Tajik-Afghan border. Six combatants were recruited in Tyumen Oblast and KMAD and sent to fight in Afghanistan. Subsequently, in 2010, these individuals, along with other convicted Islamists, escaped from the Dushanbe detention center where they were being held, complicating the situation in Tajikistan.<sup>40</sup>

The head of the Nizhnevartovsk religious community, S. M. Abdurakhmanov, and collaborators—members of the Gubdenskaya terrorist cell—were killed in the course of a special operation in Dagestan’s Karabudakhkent District.<sup>41</sup>

The head of the Surgut religious community, E. A. Tagibekov (otherwise known as Umar), who was also a member of the Gubdenskaya terrorist cell, was killed in the capital of Dagestan in 2010. In the city of Buynaksk, also in Dagestan, a suicide bomber who formerly attended the Nur Islam mosque blew up a car at the Dalni military camp.<sup>42</sup>

In the summer of 2011, a group of former YNAD residents left for Dagestan to take part in combat operations there, but they were thwarted by law enforcement officials. In 2012, another YNAD resident dropped out of medical school and secretly left home to fight in the North Caucasus. Law enforcement officials managed to return him home by enlisting the help of his mother.<sup>43</sup>

In 2010, a group of terrorists who sought to carry out terrorist attacks in the Republic of Bashkortostan and KMAD was destroyed in Bashkortostan.<sup>44</sup>

Some terrorist attacks have involved Slavs who converted to Islam in the north of Tyumen Oblast. These new Muslims of Slavic descent are increasingly visible at the forefront of terrorist activities. Six Russian citizens, including a KMAD resident, were killed as part of an armed group in the course of a special operation in Tajikistan.<sup>45</sup>

## International Ambitions: Hizb ut-Tahrir

Hizb ut-Tahrir, a pan-Islamic political organization founded in 1953, has become more active in the Urals in the last fifty years. The group, which was outlawed in Russia as an extremist organization by a 2003 decision of the country’s supreme court, advocates for the creation of a transborder Islamic caliphate. The relatively rapid growth of Hizb ut-Tahrir adherents in Russia in the 2000s was in part caused by the stringent policies of Uzbek President Islam Karimov, who was pushing the organization’s members out of his country. The Kyrgyz authorities are now trying to act in a similar fashion.

One of the first Hizb ut-Tahrir cells appeared in the KMAD city of Nizhnevartovsk in 1999. After that, groups and cells sprang up in Tobolsk and Tyumen. Hizb ut-Tahrir’s presence is noticeable in the southern Ural metropolitan areas of Chelyabinsk and Magnitogorsk, as well as in smaller industrial towns like Satka. Just as in the north of the Ural Federal District, Hizb ut-Tahrir cells had both Central Asian and Tatar members in the mid-2000s.

### Recruitment and Makeup

Hizb ut-Tahrir representatives recruit a wide spectrum of people from different ethnic groups and social strata. It has sought to draw support from illegal immigrants and ex-convicts as well as students, professionals, intellectuals, and others

who are unhappy with their social status and see an opportunity to improve it through the creation of a caliphate.

Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, Hizb ut-Tahrir's main tactic in the southern Urals has been the distribution of leaflets, newspapers, and other propaganda literature. Social networks have become a popular means of spreading information about the group. At the same time, the organization's members and supporters try to recruit new followers through classes on Islam taught in private apartments. Songs, literature, and videos used during these classes criticize Russia, praise martyrdom, and call for war against non-Islamic governments and for the establishment of an Islamic state across the globe.<sup>46</sup>

The high concentration of ethnic Muslims in Tyumen Oblast, especially in the north, as well as the large number of seasonal workers from Tatarstan and Bashkortostan employed in the oil and gas industry, help account for Hizb ut-Tahrir's active presence in Tyumen Oblast. Islam expert Ayslu Yunusova believes that rotation workers are especially attractive potential recruits for extremists because they disappear off the police radar rather quickly at their workplaces and are not monitored as closely at home as regular laborers are.<sup>47</sup>

Tyumen researcher Aleksandr Yarkov points out that the organization's Tobolsk cell, whose members were convicted for extremism in 2005, included people of different educational backgrounds, as well as Russians, Ukrainians, Kazan and Siberian Tatars, Uzbeks, and Tajiks. The Tyumen cell that was exposed in 2006 was mostly made up of illegal immigrants working at the city's construction sites and markets.<sup>48</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir activists have also been known to preach to ex-convicts.

It is possible that the extremists are using mind-altering drugs during recruitment and educational sessions. In this context, evidence gathered against a Hizb ut-Tahrir activist arrested in Satka in 2014 may provide insight into the extremists' recruiting practices. The young man was recruiting Hizb ut-Tahrir supporters on social networks. He proposed to one young woman, tried to convince her to convert to Islam, and supplied her with Hizb ut-Tahrir literature. The man was arrested when the couple met to discuss their wedding plans. When the police searched his home, the police discovered a package with several grams of a strong stimulant, which was allegedly meant to be used in recruitment efforts.<sup>49</sup>

Research conducted by the R. G. Kuzeev Institute of Ethnological Studies' Ufa Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences reveals that the composition of Hizb ut-Tahrir cells has changed across Russia. The current members of the organization are mostly young people aged eighteen to thirty of different ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of ethnic Muslims has decreased to 50 percent, while the share of Slavs (Russians and Ukrainians) has increased to 40 percent.<sup>50</sup>

Most Hizb ut-Tahrir members have a college education; many work in professional fields, such as healthcare or banking. The majority of young Hizb ut-Tahrir members come from well-to-do families. Entire families join Hizb ut-Tahrir cells, and women play active roles. In Bashkortostan, 30 Hizb ut-Tahrir members aged

from twenty-two to forty were charged with participation in an extremist organization. The average age of the organization's members was twenty-seven.

### Activism and Positions

In some areas, Hizb ut-Tahrir followers have become more activist over time. Underground classes have given way to active propaganda of the organization's causes in public. Hizb ut-Tahrir publicizes instances of persecution against Muslims in Russia and criticizes Russian policies as a whole.

Hizb ut-Tahrir activist Renat Idelbayev posted a video on social networks in which he urged Muslims not to take part in the Russian presidential election because Russian law contradicts Islam.<sup>51</sup> Members and their supporters have conducted a number of high-profile public events in Chelyabinsk. In the fall of 2013, they unfurled a thirteen-foot-long banner on one of the city's highways that read, "Russia Against Islam. Koran Is Outlawed. 09.17. 2013."<sup>52</sup>

Hizb ut-Tahrir is also publically active in Tyumen Oblast and KMAD. In 2013, the group's members placed a poster outside a Tyumen store telling the public that Russia had banned the Quran and hijab and killed a figure of Muslim authority. Rinat Bagaveyev, whom some call Hizb ut-Tahrir's press secretary in KMAD, provides information on how activists can organize one-man protests throughout the region and place banners on federal highways. He also advises followers on how to collect signatures against the alleged ban on the Quran and hijab in Russia, as well as against the killings, arrests, and kidnappings of Muslim preachers and the destruction of mosques.<sup>53</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir is less active in Sverdlovsk Oblast, where it lacks strong cells.<sup>54</sup>

Members take an interest in secular, antisystem opposition as well. For instance, a graduate of the Institute al-Furkan madrassa in Buguruslan cooperated with secular liberal opposition leaders in the southern Urals and allegedly received support from their leaders, Sergey Udaltsov and Boris Nemtsov.<sup>55</sup> In 2012, Federal Security Service operatives discovered Hizb ut-Tahrir literature during a search of the Chelyabinsk regional chapter of the opposition's election committee.

Secular liberals have also expressed interest in building bridges with Islamists. In 2012, Udaltsov met with Kazan's national Islamists and urged them to come out for the Million Men March against Russian President Vladimir Putin on September 15. Also in 2012 in Tatarstan, the head of a local opposition organization called Against Crime and Lawlessness joined a Hizb ut-Tahrir demonstration, waving a Russian flag. The Islamists, however, forced him to put down this symbol of the "infidel state."<sup>56</sup>

### Arrests and Searches

Security forces and law enforcement officials wage a constant struggle against Hizb ut-Tahrir's rising popularity and propagandist activities, which include calls for the creation of a caliphate.

Most of the organization's activists were arrested and subsequently convicted in KMAD in 2003. In September 2005, a court found the leader of the Nizhnevartovsk Hizb ut-Tahrir cell, Eduard Husainov, guilty of terrorism and of organizing an extremist group. Also in 2005, the Tobolsk municipal court sentenced nine Hizb ut-Tahrir members. The cell's leaders, Marat Saybatalov and Dmitri Petrichenko, were each given six years in prison. Russian, Uzbek, and Tajik citizens were among those sentenced.

In 2006, a Hizb ut-Tahrir member who was a citizen of Kyrgyzstan surrendered to Tyumen Federal Security Service officials of his own free will. He provided them with extremist literature and lists of students who studied Hizb ut-Tahrir ideology in underground classes. A total of sixteen Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders and supporters—both locals and migrants—were arrested in Tyumen Oblast (including its autonomous districts) in the period from 2004 to 2010. Another five-member Hizb ut-Tahrir cell was eliminated in 2013.

Just as in the north of Tyumen, Hizb ut-Tahrir followers in the southern Urals acquire weapons and maps of potential terrorist attack sites. Searches in several apartments yielded nine hand-grenade casings and explosives manuals, as well as photographs of the Chelyabinsk regional government buildings (where the police and Federal Security Service are headquartered), the Chelyabinsk airport, and the Sheshnevsky Water Reserve Dam.<sup>57</sup>

Hizb ut-Tahrir activists have strong support networks that collect funds to help the group's members who are serving prison sentences.<sup>58</sup>

Despite an attempted crackdown, Hizb ut-Tahrir continues its activities in the Urals. The leader of the group's Chelyabinsk cell, Rinat Galiullin, received two convictions for his role in the organization. But after completing his last jail sentence in March 2009, he immediately started organizing another Hizb ut-Tahrir cell in Chelyabinsk.<sup>59</sup> Vadim Nasyrov, an activist who was convicted in 2009 of preparing to commit terrorist acts, also began to work on behalf of Hizb ut-Tahrir upon his release from prison. Vadim Khabirov, another member of the group, was sentenced to two years in a penal colony by a Chelyabinsk court in June 2010 for engaging in extremist activities. He was arrested again in September 2012 for organizing a cell in Bashkortostan.<sup>60</sup> Upon their release, Hizb ut-Tahrir members are welcomed home as heroes and "prisoners of conscience."<sup>61</sup>

As borne out by the facts on the ground, punitive measures do not always yield the desired result. Greater flexibility is required to counteract Islamism, which should be understood as a global phenomenon and not merely the result of the activities of certain criminal groups. The federal authorities already recognize that the use of force in the North Caucasus will not resolve the existing conflicts there. In some instances, the administration of the Ural Federal District (at both the regional and the local levels) is also capable of a balanced and cautious approach that avoids direct clashes with Islamic dissenters. Instead, such an approach stresses education, which will help explain to young people that traditional Islam is more appropriate to their culture and mentality.



## Other Factions

In addition to Hizb ut-Tahrir, other extremist factions are active in the Ural Federal District. They include the Islamic Party of Turkestan, Nurcular, Jamaat Tablig, and the Caucasus Emirate.

### Islamic Party of Turkestan

The Islamic Party of Turkestan (IPT, formerly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) is the most radical Islamist organization in Central Asia. It includes opposition parties and groups that are outlawed in their native countries. The IPT is also outlawed in Russia and the United States. Its main goal is to create an Islamic state—first in the Fergana Valley, then in the rest of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China.

Most IPT members live in exile in Muslim countries. Some members live in Russia, including in the Ural Federal District, where they work among migrants.

However, the IPT's popularity is not as great as Hizb ut-Tahrir's, and the organization is much smaller in terms of membership. The IPT is in contact with Salafist communities in the Urals, and possibly with Salafist communities in the North Caucasus, although there is no direct evidence of such contact. In 2007–2008, the security services in Tyumen and Chelyabinsk exposed a few dozen of the organization's supporters.<sup>62</sup> There has been no additional information on IPT members' arrests, and that could mean that their activities have been reduced to a minimum.

### Nurcular

Nurcular promotes the ideas of the early-twentieth-century Turkish theologian Said Nursi. The group's activities in the Urals are minor in comparison with other Russian regions.

In the mid-1990s, Turkish foundations established Russian-Turkish lyceums in Yekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk for the study of Nursi's works.<sup>63</sup> But in 2001, local authorities closed the schools, claiming that they incited national and religious hatred. Specific charges were leveled against two citizens of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan who distributed illegal religious literature and taught classes in Yekaterinburg and Perm mosques. Experts offered varying assessments of the harm posed by the confiscated literature. Eventually, the case was dismissed for lack of evidence.<sup>64</sup>

In 2004, Russian federal authorities deported two Turkish citizens who taught Turkish at Ural State University. The pair was also suspected of ties to Nurcular, but law enforcement officials failed to prove such links.

The last Nurcular-related court case involved three residents of Chelyabinsk and Kurgan Oblasts. The three Nurcular members opened two schools in Chelyabinsk and a madrasa in the village of Anzalino in Kurgan Oblast. The schools' curriculum included banned religious literature.

### **Jamaat Tablig**

The Jamaat Tablig movement, which was founded by Mulana Muhammad Ilyas in India in 1926, is tasked with the spiritual perfection of Muslims around the world. Jamaat's goal is religious revival among the traditional followers of Islam, a group that also includes Russian Muslims.

Before the movement was banned in 2009, its representatives visited the Urals, and KMAD in particular, on numerous occasions. For instance, in 2007, Jamaat Tablig conducted a seminar at a mosque in the city of Pervouralsk in Sverdlovsk Oblast.

After the ban, Jamaat missionaries practically ceased their work in Russia. A number of Muslims and religious experts were surprised by the movement's ban. Even law enforcement officials in Russia and Central Asia consider such a measure excessive.

### **Caucasus Emirate**

The Caucasus Emirate, an extreme organization created in the North Caucasus in 2007, also made its presence felt in the Ural Federal District. Its leader, Doku Umarov, who was killed in 2014, tried to expand the organization's reach to the rest of Russia. He even declared the creation of the autonomous province of Idel-Ural, which he believed should become part of a Russian emirate. But the province never materialized, and other radical factions operated on its territory.<sup>65</sup>

## **Cooperation or Competition in the Future?**

Islamic organizations are trying to obtain legal status through local mosques. They also seek to increase their membership by attracting Slavic adherents in addition to ethnic Muslims. Nizhnevartovsk is one of the cities where the number of ethnic Russians converting to Islam is on the rise. Conversions to Islam accompany almost every Friday night prayer, and Russian ladies wearing hijabs can be seen on every street.<sup>66</sup>

Radical Islamic organizations operating in the Ural Federal District tend to coalesce into a joint structure due to their relatively small size. Salafists, followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and members of the Islamic Party of Turkestan enter into temporary agreements and refrain from attacking each other on theological grounds. This tactic helps them gain new members and create joint infrastructure. Now, Islamists coordinate joint political events, use similar religious and political rhetoric, and send new recruits to Central Asia and the Caucasus. Since 2014, these groups have also been sending their followers to the Middle East to support the Islamic State there.

Nevertheless, one should not assume that these efforts will lead to the creation of a single Islamic faction in the Ural Federal District. Competition between Islamist groups persists.

## Ineffective Official Responses

The official approach to the struggle against Islamists favors the use of force. The authorities also regularly resort to confiscating allegedly extremist literature as part of their efforts to stem the tide of Islamism. New materials are frequently added to the list of banned publications, even though religious scholars are divided over the impact these banned materials have on their readers' and listeners' psyches. Dozens of forensic evaluations conducted over the course of thirteen years came to contradictory conclusions.

The materials included on this list often have nothing to do with extremism, and some of them are classics of theological literature. Examples are the works of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, whose *Criterion of Action* and *Advice for Kings* are read by practically every educated Muslim. And among the books confiscated during the 2010 search of the Nur Islam mosque were Abdul Aziz bin Muhammad's *A Religious Treatise on the Meaning of Ilaahiyyah*, Abul Ala Maududi's *The Moral Foundations of the Islamic Movement*, Abdul Rahman Rafat al-Basha's *Glimpses from the Lives of the Companions*, as well as *Islam Today*, a Muslim magazine published in Russia. All of these publications were declared extremist.<sup>67</sup> But Abul Ala Maududi is considered one of the greatest thinkers in the Muslim world. His works were published in Russia and are the subject of extensive research, some of which was even published in the Soviet Union.

Only one of the confiscated Nur Islam items generated almost universal agreement by analysts and authoritative religious scholars: the audio and video lectures of Said Buryatsky. These can indeed be considered extremist. Buryatsky, killed in 2010, called for an armed struggle and approved terrorist attacks.

The ban on selling Valeria Porokhova's Russian translation of the Quran in Dagestan's capital of Makhachkala is another illustration of the authorities' misguided attempts to counteract Islamic extremism. The translation was banned because it was read by local Salafists, although the Quran itself was never prohibited in the Urals.

The list of extremist literature is frequently updated. In most cases, new items are added, but occasionally, some works are removed.

In February 2015, a regional court in the city of Orenburg reversed the decision of a district court that had put 50 Muslim books, including some classics, on the list.<sup>68</sup>

To avoid the confiscation of literature and other materials, many muftiates host regular seminars at which imams are informed of changes to the list of banned literature.

Despite the prohibitions, most literature on the list is readily available online, so all those with Internet access are able to read it. Hizb ut-Tahrir's Russian-language website is also accessible to the public. The Buryatsky recordings too can be found on the Internet, as can the jihad-glorifying songs of the Chechen bard Timur Mutsurayev.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

The number of Muslims in the Ural Federal District and their share in the total population have increased in the last decade. A process of Islamization is under way in some of the Ural Federal District's territories, namely Yamalo-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Districts. The Urals are no longer the periphery for Russia's Muslim community. These processes are also taking place in the rest of the country.

More Islamist organizations are establishing a presence in the Ural Federal District, and their active participation in the Muslim communities in the district is steadily growing. This growth is accompanied by perennial frictions among official Muslim structures that compete for the control of mosques and their congregations.

Conflicts among Muslims of different ethnic backgrounds are also on the rise. Tensions between the locals and the newcomers contribute to a fear of Islam and migrants. In this context, many young people become attracted to the ideology of changing the outside world through what they perceive as the struggle for Allah's way. They are also enticed by the aura of underground romanticism and internationalism that is present in Islamic communities.

Meanwhile, dozens of Ural residents are among the thousands of Russian citizens who are fighting in the Middle East on the side of the Islamic State.

The need for joint efforts in combating extremism is stressed at meetings among high-ranking government officials and religious leaders, but few programs have appeared in practice. Among the most recent is the School of Young Imams, a 2013–2014 project sponsored by the Sverdlovsk Oblast administration and the Ural State Mining University, which consisted of a series of professional development seminars for the Muslim clergy.<sup>69</sup> Also of note is a 2014–2015 series of roundtable discussions and lectures on preventing extremism and radical behavior, organized by the Sverdlovsk Oblast Muslims' Spiritual Directorate and paid for by a grant from the Civil Society Development Foundation.<sup>70</sup>

More efforts along these lines are needed.

Education programs theoretically may help stem the growth of religious radicalism. Muslim spiritual boards, in cooperation with Islamic schools and institutes, should set up more educational programs that involve Muslim intellectuals and scholars among the youth.

The professional and educational level of traditional Muslim clergy in Russia should also be increased to ensure that these imams can challenge radical narratives and properly address the concerns of their congregants. Muslim clergymen as well as representatives of the secular administration should consider organizing university-based on-the-job training programs for the clergy, which would include public-speaking classes. Such classes would increase the educational level of the clergy so they can resist the influence of Salafists. One such program has already been started in the Volga region with the participation of Kazan Federal University.

The Russian Federal Migration Service should also actively involve clergy in work with newly arrived Muslim migrants, and imams and muftis should be encouraged to play a more active role integrating migrants into local society. Both of these steps would help to decrease ethnic and religious tensions and help prevent the spread of radicalism.

The Russian state should introduce more Muslim-oriented programs and materials through public media outlets—including television, radio, and periodicals. Even better would be if such initiatives came from the local people. These efforts could include programs that inform the public of charitable events in the Muslim community, Islamic cultural events, the opening of new mosques, and opportunities for interfaith dialogue.

And if the Russian state adopted stricter migration regulations, it would help stem the poorly controlled influx of migrants into Russia. At the same time, Russian law-enforcement organizations should enhance cooperation with their Central Asian counterparts to prevent known Islamic extremists from entering the country. In particular, designating the northern areas of the Tyumen region, which is the richest Russian region in terms of natural resources and minerals, as a “closed territory” could help reduce the growth of internal and external migration to help reduce interethnic tensions that are on the increase in the northern Ural region.

All of these Islam-related events take place in a region that holds the bulk of Russia’s hydrocarbons. It can rightly be considered the basis of the financial well-being of the Russian economy. Consequently, the stability of the Urals is of great importance for the country’s future.

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