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“Russia and the Moslem World”

FROM DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION

OF FREEDOM TO COLLISION OF ANTI-CULTURE

The terrorist attack on editorial office of the satirical magazine “Charlie Hebdo”, that occurred January 7, 2015, terrified Europe. This cynical and cold-blooded shooting of Parisians, when 12 people were killed and 11 injured, shocked the world. The terrorist act was a revenge for the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, published in the magazine. It’s impossible to find any justification for this insane slaughter. Millions of people around the world, Muslims and non-Muslims, have protested against this inhuman act of self-appointed executioners from religion. “Charlie Hebdo” has become a symbol of the struggle between the good and the evil, since the name of the publication continues to be mentioned in the mass media after acts of terror and vandalism in various countries around the world.

Nevertheless, a lot of sensible citizens of different states do not support the editorial policy of the magazine. The representative of the well-known European aristocratic family Carl-Philippe d'Orléans, Duke of Anjou, explained his position as follows: “Charlie Hebdo” – is a vulgar piece, despising any opinion except its own, engaged in

provocation under the pretext of freedom of expression. “Charlie Hebdo” is an aggressive edition spreading hate among religious people and calling it humor. “Charlie Hebdo” is a representative of the European atheistic society undermining public order and sowing enmity among people, regardless of race, color or religion.” Having condemned this barbaric act and expressed condolences to the families of the victims, the Duke refused to participate in the “national sacred action for “Charlie”, considering it meaningless, and denounced the hypocrisy of people who either have never read this humorous weekly, or criticized it.

Many people expressed their outrage at the encroachment on the sacred values for the Europeans – human rights, civil society, the rule of law and secular policy. For some it was an occasion to speak out against excessive political correctness, multiculturalism, ostentatious self-isolation of migrants and manifestations of Islamic radicalism becoming more frequent.

It is worth remembering that the traditions of secularism, liberation of people from church dogmas, and victory of secular ethics over religious began to assert themselves in France more than two centuries ago, in the epoch of Romanticism and the Enlightenment. However, certain limits of decency were always observed. “Charlie Hebdo” is the trend of modern times, it opposes right radicals, positioning itself as a publication that reflects “all components of left pluralism.” For many years it has enjoyed a reputation as an unscrupulous, non-conformist weekly of anti-clerical and even anti-religious orientation, flaunting with obscenity, its credo is cynical mockery of all famous characters in the world, and its goal is to win fame by any means and, as a result, earn more money. It seems that the reasons for this phenomenon should be sought in serious socio-cultural shifts, in changing ideas of freedom taking place in Western

civilization. They are related primarily to the expansion of neoliberal capitalism. The prevailing market freedom needs to remove constraints to promote it, both at the national and global levels.

The technological basis of contemporary transnational capitalism requires the formation of corresponding superstructure in the form of World Society for unlimited consumption. It is intended to preserve the system of the dictatorship of the market to increase its influence. Such a society is beneficial to the system. The modern average homo-economicus learns to think primarily in economic terms. His lifestyle is nothing but unlimited consumption. The homo-economicus forces himself to slave away and often work for more hours due to insatiable desire for enrichment. His educational background is limited and subordinated to execution of professional tasks. He is a man of primitive mass culture, easily controlled by the authorities.

Culture in its broad sense is focused on the spiritual, moral and ethical development to a lesser extent in modern society. Art, science and education are considered commercial products, above all, simplified and dehumanized. Their regulatory and protective social functions are significantly reduced.

The cultural and spiritual life of western society has not been changed for the better over the past decade. In this context, “Charlie Hebdo” can legitimately be regarded as a product illustrating the modern mass consumer society.

Naturally, the trends destroying spiritual life cause protests in the East, especially in the Islamic world – the world of traditional culture, where faith and ethics are bound together, and where community ties are strong.

More and more Muslims have been protesting against the Western interpretation of freedom of speech, insulting their religious and moral feelings. Many people have regarded it anti-Islamic and also

anti-democratic, because the Muslim section of European society cannot bring those who commit blatant sacrilege to legal responsibility. In turn, Western public holds the view of the incompatibility of Islamic values with advanced democracy. Such mindsets are seriously alarming and can lead to dangerous consequences.

However, many followers of Islam live in democratic countries of the West or in the democratic conditions in their own countries. They use all democratic mechanisms and freedoms in order to protect their rights and participate in political parties and movements. Of course, far from all democratic freedoms and human rights current in the West are suitable for Muslims.

Islamic organizations, public figures and scholars have developed their own Declaration of Human Rights, which are not contrary to the fundamental tenets of the human rights adopted in the West. (Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights. 1981; Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam. 1990). It is unreasonable to reject the generally accepted norms of human rights, as implacable ideologues of Islamism do, for whom all the Western standards of life are sinful. The UN Resolution of 1948 granted equal civil and political rights and opportunities to all mankind, which reflected the fundamental principles of living, such as equality before the law, security of person and property, freedom of thought, religious, political and social beliefs, and gender equality. These rights deny racism and nationalism, exploitation of children and women, harm to their health, guarantee the right to work and pensions, as well as education and health. They are in line with the Islamic concern for people, and meet beliefs of millions of followers of Islam.

The fusion of permissiveness, unprincipled commerce and boundless egotism, which is interpreted as progress in the West, is one of the causes of natural irritation in the Muslim world. Whereas faith,

ethics and law relating to Islam have kept the pursuit of justice, mutual responsibility for the present and the future, and spiritual and physical health as great cultural values to this day. This includes diligence, temperance, concern for the family and for those in need, condemnation of greed and parasitism, and respect for the world around the Muslims. Millions of people follow or try to follow these principles. Islam is a way of life that preserves human dignity and spiritual balance, a culture that defines the limits of freedom, the freedom that does not contradict the fundamental humanitarian gains of mankind, but saves its own civilizational values.

The theme of the clash of civilizations has begun to be discussed again after the tragic shooting in “Charlie Hebdo” and the subsequent acts of terror and vandalism in different countries of the world. This is a provocative concept, drawing a picture of the fatal incompatibility of Western culture with Eastern, and, above all, with Islamic culture. In fact, the example of “Charlie Hebdo” is not a struggle of civilizations, but a clash of ignorance with ignorance, barbarism with a lack of culture, cynical sacrilege with blind religious fanaticism. Some allow themselves permissiveness on behalf of the primacy of human rights, while others – in the name of God. Insurmountable contradictions have arisen between anti-cultures, but not between the world's civilizations.

The above reflections on the deterioration of socio-cultural changes in the Western world should not be taken as a phenomenon of the total decline of Western civilization. The fundamental cultural achievements continue to define the mindset and behavior of a considerable part of people in the West, enrich and continue to enrich the culture of other nations. At the same time, they absorb values of the rest of the world. High European culture is alive and prevents reducing

individuals to the average level of “homo-ekonomicus”, and it generates advanced ideas of world development.

Islamic civilization has passed a long way of evolution, retaining its fundamental moral and ethical values. The principles to implement various elements of Islamic economics, democracy and social state construction are built on that basis. Summarizing, we can say that they offer a specific “third way” of development – a middle option between the extremes of neo-liberalism and a rigid socialist experiment, degrading private property, individual incentives and the freedom of citizens to a minimum. Modern Islam puts forward the concept of the middle way. It covers the most important aspects of life of Muslims, ranging from theology and education to law, politics and economics. There is a hope to balance personal and social interests and preserve high ideals of Islamic culture.

From this position, Islamic teachings do not reject the market economy, but call for a fair and reasonable regulation and do not reject a democratic system. At the same time there should be limits to the market society of boundless consumption, and moderation and harmony with the environment, that is consonant with the Western concept of ethical economy and sustainable development, which is gaining popularity now.

The manifestations of jihadist terror, which is on everyone's mind, are nothing but examples of savagery, barbarism, tyranny and ignorance. It's a return to the past, which is doomed to contempt and failure in the modern world, including the Muslim world. We should not forget that Islam was born in the fight against savagery.

*This article was submitted by the author for publication
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**POLICY OF TURKMENISTAN
IN THE SPHERE OF NATIONAL SECURITY**

The exacerbation of domestic political situation in Afghanistan and the strengthening of the positions of radical Islamists in that country create a threat to the neighboring countries of Central Asia. During the current year fighting has been going on in the northwestern provinces of Afghanistan near the Tajik and Turkmen borders between government troops and al Qaeda and Taliban militants. Experts do not exclude the possibility of a breakthrough of groupings of radical Islamists across these borders. Turkmenistan with its big gas reserves is of special interest to them.

For the entire 2014 the situation on Afghan territory near the border with Turkmenistan remained tense. Last August the Taliban units captured the Afghan town of Shah situated near the Turkmen border, which is 744 kilometers long. Last year Taliban fighters repeatedly made incursions in the border area, killing Turkmen border-guards.¹

Experts do not exclude the possibility of Taliban fighters' breakthrough to Turkmenistan's territory, which will jeopardize oil and gas projects not only in that country, but also in some other neighboring states. Turkmenistan is a coveted target for the Taliban – its rich gas deposits, possibility to use its territory for drug trafficking to the North, outlet to the Caspian Sea, and relatively weak state power create favorable conditions for all and sundry ventures. The realization of such scenario will put to danger the Central Asian and Caspian regions. At present radical Islamists control a considerable part of the territory of Afghanistan through which the planned TAPI gas pipeline (Turkmenistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan – India) should pass.²

Many experts maintain that Turkmenistan is the weakest link among the northern neighbors of Afghanistan. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are members of CSTO and SCO, and they have Russian military bases on their territory, while Uzbekistan has a sufficiently strong army and actively cooperates with NATO. Besides, as experts note, Afghan provinces bordering on Turkmenistan have been put under protection of Uzbekistan with NATO consent.³ In these conditions the status of neutrality, which Turkmenistan has adhered to since its independence, can weaken its positions in opposing terrorist threats.

This status has officially been recognized by the UN. In January 2009 Turkmenistan endorsed its new military doctrine of a defensive character and based on the principle of “positive neutrality.” It envisages Turkmenistan’s non-membership of any military alliances or blocs, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and non-participation in any local and regional conflicts. Apart from that, Turkmenistan does not allow any country to deploy military bases on its territory. Proceeding from this doctrine, the numerical strength of the Turkmen army has considerably decreased.⁴

It should be noted that the actions of the incumbent president of Turkmenistan, above all, its assistance to the NATO forces, has caused discontent of radical Islamists. The country has actively cooperated with the United States and its allies in fuel supplies and logistics operations of the coalition forces and in the fight against drug trafficking.

Turkmenistan takes certain measures for the defense of its borders, all the more so since there are numerous tribes of ethnic Turkmens living on Afghan territory in border areas.

There are several components in the present strategy of the republican leadership for the strengthening of national security. First, the modernization of the country’s armed forces and the strengthening

of border protection. In experts' estimates, the armed forces of Turkmenistan are bigger and stronger than those of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, but considerably inferior to the armies of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. To date the units of the Ministry of Defense of Turkmenistan include land forces, airforce and anti-aircraft units. Their numerical strength is about 20,000 men.

The land forces have operational-tactical missile complexes "Elbrus", BMP-1, armored personnel carriers, self-propelled cannons, howitzers and mortars. The T-72 tank is a shock force. During the modernization process the republic has acquired new arms and military equipment, such as the T-90CA tank, volley fire installations "Grad," etc., as well as anti-tank missile complexes "Karakal."

The airforce and anti-aircraft units are considered the most battle-worthy structure of Turkmenistan's armed forces. According to sources, 43 aircraft and eight helicopters have been completely modernized. Apart from that, the country has bought two new aircraft from Georgia and military transport planes from Ukraine. Within the framework of modernizing the anti-aircraft system Turkmenistan has bought the latest radar stations "Kolchuga."

The aviation and anti-aircraft systems are mainly used for the protection of the country's energy interests in the Caspian basin, compensating the weakness of the country's navy.

The latter began to be built in the early 2000s. Its main aim is the protection of the water area of the Caspian Sea and the shore-line more than 800-kilometer-long. The water-guard units have several patrol boats bought from Ukraine, Russia and the United States, and also seven boats rented from Iran. In 2011 Turkmenistan's navy acquired two shock missile boats.

In recent years the State border guard service of Turkmenistan has acquired unmanned aerial vehicles and special land vehicles.

The plans for border strengthening include the use of sputnik communication and air and land radar data.

Along with increasing the battle readiness of the armed forces, Turkmenistan is using diplomatic means and methods for lowering threats to national security, for one, the strengthening of its economic and political ties with Afghanistan. Last October President Berdymukhamedov of Turkmenistan offered the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai to supply Turkmen electric energy to Afghan border provinces at a lower price, and help build schools and hospitals.

Turkmenistan has expressed readiness to mediate in peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the opposition forces.

Although officially Turkmenistan continues to declare its defensive self-sufficiency, it is forced to take measures for finding allies in the event of the worsening terrorist situation among its main big foreign-policy actors in Central Asia and also among its nearest neighbors. Most experts tend to believe that it was China with its influence on the economy of the republic and the necessity to protect its own interests in the oil and gas sector that will be able to render military aid to Turkmenistan.

The latter is becoming an important source of hydrocarbon raw materials for China. In 2013 more than half of all gas imported by China came from Turkmenistan (27 billion cubic meters of 53 billion). Beijing plans to buy in Turkmenistan up to 65 billion cubic meters, which will amount to over 40 percent of all gas imported by China annually.

In the view of certain experts, Turkmenistan will rather look for closer relations not with NATO or CSTO, where the military stake is put on Russia, but on SCO with the main emphasis on the People's Republic of China. The latter can guarantee Turkmenistan non-

interference in its internal affairs, including from Russia.⁵ As experts believe, it is probable that in case of an exacerbation of the situation Beijing will not be able to stay aloof, despite its policy of military non-interference in conflicts of other states, and for the protection of its own gas interests it could bring in a small military contingent to Turkmenistan, or even to Afghanistan.⁶

Ashkhabad relies on support from Iran with which Turkmenistan has been maintaining friendly relations and close economic ties. Iran is a major partner of Turkmenistan in its energy transactions (Tehran buys Turkmen gas, which is supplied to Iran along two gas pipelines) and transport projects. The softening of the western sanctions against Iran leads to increasing its own oil and gas extraction, which will make it again one of the biggest energy powers. According to forecasts of certain observers, this may lead to Tehran's refusal to buy Turkmen gas. Indeed, last August Iran announced that it might discontinue to purchase Turkmen gas, however, further on it became clear that this step has been made with a view to lowering gas prices by Turkmenistan. In early October it became known that Iran increased its purchases of natural gas from Turkmenistan.

Besides, Iran has become a major partner of Turkmenistan in the development of the regional transport system. Last July the construction of its stretch of the railway line Kazakhstan – Turkmenistan – Iran, which would connect Iran with Kazakhstan and Russia, was completed. In early August in Oman the foreign ministers of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Oman signed a memorandum on mutual understanding concerning an agreement on the creation of a transport corridor between their countries. The implementation of this project would be a major event in interregional relations and allow to broaden considerably mutually advantageous connections between countries of the region.

Against the backdrop of the development of economic partnership of Iran and Turkmenistan the broadening ties in the military-political sphere of the two countries look quite natural. In particular, on September 17 there was a meeting in Ashkhabad between President Berdymukhamedov and the Minister of Defense of Iran H. Dehgan, who emphasized his country's readiness to exert efforts, jointly with Turkmenistan, for the sake of ensuring peace, stability and security in the region.⁷ During their meeting certain concrete aspects of Ashkhabad's interactions with Tehran were discussed in an event of any invasion of Turkmenistan from Afghanistan. The two sides paid special attention to the problems of security in the northwestern part of Afghanistan. Iran expressed readiness to help Turkmenistan in ensuring military security in these border districts.

Turkmenistan has chosen another ally in the struggle against terrorism – Uzbekistan. On October 24, the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov made an official visit to Turkmenistan. At the high-level talks special attention was paid to adoption of joint measures against terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, trans-border criminal activity, and border protection. Among the documents signed by the two heads of state was a program of cooperation between foreign-policy departments of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for 2015–2016.⁸

Turkmenistan does not conceal its worry over the growing terrorist threat, which is shown, among other things, by its address to the United Nations with a proposal to hold a forum in Ashkhabad under the aegis of this organization on the problems of security and peace in Central Asia. Apart from that, President Berdymukhamedov has held meetings with the leaders of Russia and China on the subject of regional security within the framework of SCO.

Turkmenistan's cooperation with the countries of the Caspian basin is expanding, and one of the major subjects of their discussion is the problem of ensuring regional security.

Another step in strengthening regional security has been the adoption of decisions on a summit meeting of the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Iran in Astrakhan, which took place in Astrakhan at the end of last September. On the eve of the meeting a framework agreement on security on the Caspian Sea went into force, which was signed at the previous summit meeting in 2010. The participants in the Astrakhan summit endorsed the principle of "non-presence on the Caspian Sea of the armed forces of alien states." It was noted in the summary political document of the participant-countries that the heads of the five Caspian states agreed on the principles of a stable balance of armaments on the Caspian Sea and military construction within the bounds of "reasonable sufficiency," as well as on principles of "observance of the agreed measures of trust in military activity in the spirit of predictability and transparency in accordance with joint efforts for the strengthening of regional security and stability."⁹

Nevertheless, it is too early to speak of the creation of a real mechanism of collective security in the Caspian basin, which would be capable to ensure proper interaction and accord in the fight against common risks and problems. In the view of the Russian side, the present framework agreement on security does not clearly define the format of multilateral cooperation in the sphere of collective security in the Caspian basin.¹⁰

The situation is aggravated by the unregulated character of the Caspian Sea status. This is why the principles, which were agreed on at the summit and which should be the foundation of a Convention on the Caspian Sea legal status, are also important for the creation of an

effective security system in the Caspian basin. In the words of President Putin, “the Caspian countries have succeeded in evolving clear-cut formulas on the delimitation of water areas, the bottom and subsoil of the seabed,” and the Convention itself could be adopted already in 2015.

While adhering to the positions of neutrality and restraint toward the idea of closer integration with Russia, including within the framework of the Eurasian economic union, Turkmenistan does not forget the need to develop bilateral contacts with the Russian Federation. The leadership of the republic cannot but take into account the growing role of Russia as a guarantor of ensuring security of Central Asia. According to the words of President Berdymukhamedov, Russia is a strategic partner of Turkmenistan, although the latter does not plan to join the Eurasian economic union.

In its relations with the Russian Federation the leadership of Turkmenistan lays an emphasis on the development of bilateral economic cooperation. Turkmenistan develops relations especially actively with such regions of Russia as Tatarstan and Astrakhan and Sverdlovsk regions. At present Turkmenistan is connected by economic projects with more than twenty regions of the Russian Federation. They deal with the chemical ship-building, textile, food and some other industries.

At the same time the initiatives put forward by President Berdymukhamedov at the Astrakhan summit show that Turkmenistan is going to establish multilateral cooperation with Russian participation. For example, the head of Turkmenistan proposed to start preparation of a project of trade and economic cooperation between the Caspian states, as well as to set up a permanently functioning Caspian economic forum with its meetings to be held alternately in seashore towns of these states. The head of Turkmenistan also favored the development of

partnership in the sphere of energy, emphasizing that “politicization of any energy projects in the Caspian basin would be counterproductive.” Besides, in Berdymukhamedov’s view, it was necessary to evolve a draft agreement on cooperation in the sphere of transport on the Caspian Sea, inasmuch as the crux of the matter was the creation of principally new relations in this sphere. Turkmenistan and Russia closely cooperate in the development of the transport infrastructure of the Caspian region, in particular, the creation of the transport corridor “North – South” which is of primary importance for Russia. This corridor should connect countries of West and North-West Europe with South Asia through Russia, the Caspian basin and Iran. Turkmenistan also supports the project of creating a railway circle around the Caspian basin; Turkmenistan has already completed the eastern semicircle between Kazakhstan and Iran. Turkmenistan’s President has also proposed to create a uniform regional transport-logistics center.

At present Turkmenistan continues to discuss the question about a pipeline on the bottom of the Caspian Sea. For its part, Moscow insists that the construction of such pipeline will deal irreparable harm to the ecological system of the Caspian basin; it reiterates that decisions on this matter should be adopted on the basis of consensus and only after the final determination of the status of the Caspian Sea.

In case of the implementation of this project the presence of the West in the post-Soviet area may considerably grow. The United States and its allies may undertake measures to strengthen their ties in the sphere of security with the post-Soviet states in Central Asia and the Caspian region. This may lead to increasing confrontation between Russia and the United States in Central Asia, and the countries of the region, including Turkmenistan, may face the difficult problem of choosing foreign-policy priorities.

Notes

- ¹ <http://m.rosbalt.ru/exussr/201/09/1312645.html>
- ² <http://www.centrasia.ru/news.php?CR=5>
- ³ <http://cont.ws/post/58124>
- ⁴ <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1404799080>
- ⁵ <http://www.poliyrus.com/2014/05/16/china-turkmen/>
- ⁶ <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1407129840>
- ⁷ http://gundogarnews.com/index.php?category_id=1&news_id325
- ⁸ <http://e-center.asia/ru/news/view?id=6325>
- ⁹ http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20140929/1026099285.html
- ¹⁰ <http://vesti.az/m/?c=show&id=222323>

*“Rossiya i noviye gosudarsva Evrazii / IMEMO RAN.”
Moscow, 2014, No 4, pp. 115–126.*

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KABARDINO-BALKARIA IN SEARCH OF RELIGIOUS PEACE

The Kabardians and Balkarians adopted Islam later than many other people in the Russian Federation. The history of religion of these two peoples is connected with alternate veneration of heathen, Christian and Muslim traditions, each of which has left a trace in the spiritual and cultural life of these peoples. The last two religious systems often acquire certain features of heathen cults. The consciousness of the Kabardian people is well reflected in the folk proverb: “It’s better to revere all Gods than to offer prayers to one, but neglect others, for they may feel offended.”

One of the main national features of the Adygeis (including the Kabardians) is the existence of an original ethical code regulating family and economic life, as well as the equestrian code of honor. In the view of certain contemporary Kabardian ideologists, Adygei ethics is

the only true national religion of the Adygeis, which had been given them by God. Barazbi Bgazhnokov, a scholar and public figure, maintains that it is Adygei ethics that made Kabardian Islam more tolerant and cultured and created a layer of the Muslim intelligentsia, so-called Kabarda aristocracy, which had completely been eliminated under Soviet power. In his view, “Muslimism is observance of the principles of Adygei which is accompanied by reading the Koran and fulfilling Islamic rites. This creates the ground for the establishment of humanistic Islam dominated by peaceableness, accord and mutual understanding. Adygei ethics can rightly be compared with unshakeable national religion, which is loyal and tolerant to the world religions – Islam and Christianity.”

The Balkarian people (Turkic by origin) also have their popular ethics (mountain adap) closely connected with Islam.

The revival of Islam, which began in the years of *perestroika*, is in complex relations with Adygei ethics. They may take the form of symbiosis, or the form of a military conflict. One of the expressions of the complex character of these relations is the ideology of the leaders of the main national organizations of the Kabardians – Adyge Hase (Circassian Congress). Among them are supporters of peaceful symbiosis and equality of Adygei ideology and Islam, domination of Islam, and domination of Adygei.

There were only two mosques officially functioning in Kabardino-Balkaria – in Nalchik (the capital) and in Kyzburun. Beginning from 1985 the number of Muslim organizations began to increase. By the end of the 1980s there were nine mosques. In 1989 the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the North Caucasus, which had existed in Soviet times, split into seven independent republican spiritual departments. The first congress of Muslims of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic took place in Nalchik in 1990. It formed the Spiritual Board

of Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria. The main candidate to head it and supported by the authorities was Shafik Pshikhachev, the only Kabardian who had Muslim education and was completing his studies in Syria at the time. The Balkarians put forward their own candidate – Sharafutdin Chochayev. Pshikhachev refused to accept nomination, and on his proposal the repatriate from Jordan, Muhammed Khuanzh, was elected mufti, and Chochayev his deputy. A year later, after completing his studies, Pshikhachev took the post of the head of the board. Chochayev remained his deputy with wide powers. At the time a conflict flared up between Kabardians and Balkarians. Pshikhachev kept neutrality in the conflict, and emphasized the importance of Chochayev's role. As a result, it was possible to avoid a split of the board into two parts – Kabardian and Balkarian. Since then the mufti has always been Kabardian and his deputy – Balkarian.

In 1992 Valeri Kokov was elected President of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. From that time the spiritual board has been in constant contact with the republican authorities, despite the fact that there has been a strong opposition to President Kokov. Sh. Pshikhachev has consistently pursued the policy of the revival of Islam as he understood it, that is, maximal cooperation with the authorities, and alliance with Adygei and other public organizations. All this presupposed an ideological compromise with public opinion.

In 1992 a construction project of a big public and religious center in Nalchik was started in Nalchik, which would house the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria, Islamic university, a prayer hall accommodating 1,500, a hall for wedding ceremonies, a conference hall, a book depository, and a print-shop. In 1994, republican Muslims, with the participation of President V. Kokov, representatives of public organizations, and municipal bodies, laid the foundation stone of this center.

Sh. Pshikhachev was against the introduction of the Shariah norms. He maintained that they should be accepted “spiritually,” “symbolically.” In the view of one of the heads of the Spiritual Board of Muslims, the Shariah law will not be fully accepted in the republic. The Sufi tradition is an intellectual tradition of Islam and Sufism has its historical roots in Kabarda. It is especially popular with the old folk. The heads of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the republic hope that they will be able to create such atmosphere there, which existed in Kabarda before the 1917 revolution in the midst of the Kabardian Muslim intelligentsia, when Shariah judiciary was combined with local traditions and Islam was regarded the softest, tolerant and loyal religious cult toward Russia in the North Caucasus. Sh. Pshikhachev adhered to liberal views on Islam and favored the introduction of European values in Muslim world outlook, and regarded himself a fellow-thinker of the liberal mufti Talgat Tajuddi, rather than Ravil Gainutdin.

During the 1990s the main aim of the policy of the Kabardino-Balkarian Islamic leaders was the construction and opening of mosques in all populated centers (it was achieved by 2010), the development of Muslim education, and training of teaching personnel in various educational establishments, primarily in the Middle East. In 1991 the first official madrasah was opened in Nalchik, which was transformed into an Islamic institute in 1993. About one hundred students from Kabardino-Balkaria have studied in Saudi Arabia (at Mohammad ben Saud University), Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Turkey. The Arab charity organizations accredited in the republic rendered material assistance to students. Saudi Arabia helped open the Center of Islamic Youth in Nalchik, and also a section of the International organization for saving Islam “Daugat.” It had fifty employees working in different places of the republic. Its activity and plans were coordinated by the Spiritual

Board of Muslims. “Daugat” concentrated its work on kindergartens and schools. The study of the foundations of Islam has gradually been introduced in all public schools of the republic. Official madrasahs have also been opened, besides Nalchik, in Baksan, Kurkuzhin, Sarmakovo, Kamlyukovo, and Tyrnauz.

In the mid-1990s a legal opposition to the leadership of the Spiritual Board of Muslims was formed in Kabardino-Balkaria, which was called “Young Muslims.” True religion for them was “pure Islam” without folk customs and the Sufi tradition. The Shariah is the norm of Muslim life, the ideal which should be reached, if possible. At first, the leaders of the opposition were officially members of the Spiritual Board. There were also informal leaders of the opposition, among them representatives of the Wahhabi trend of Islam. The dissenters accused the Spiritual Board of excessive loyalty to the authorities and of neglect of orthodox Islam and the interests of Muslims.

In the first years of their activity the dissenters advocated only peaceful methods. However, as time went by the most radical representatives of Islamic young people became militants fighting for the idea of an Islamic state. In the latter half of the 1990s extremist tendencies emerged in Kabarda Islam, which caused a corresponding reaction of the authorities and a considerable part of society.

The first manifestation of rejection of “court Islam” was the demonstration against the Spiritual Board organized by amir A. Kazdokhov in 1996. He threatened the Board with “bayonets of the faithful.” Kazdokhov was stopped, but his brazen demonstration marked the beginning of the movement of Islamic extremists and terrorists. In 1997 an attempt was made to blow up the monument to the 400th anniversary of Kabarda joining Russia. In 1998 the armed gang of the Wahhabi A. Atabayev was defeated. Soon after that the building of the Ministry of the Interior was shot at by a grenade gun. In the early

2000s several hundred Wahhabis formed a well-armed gang and set up a virtual military base on the border of Karachayevo-Circassia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Georgia. The bandits committed several acts of terror on the territory of the North Caucasus. But the gang was eventually destroyed. Some of its members were killed, others were arrested and tried, still others fled abroad.

The local authorities connected the danger of Wahhabism and extremism in Kabardino-Balkaria mainly with semi-legal communities and underground groups which emerged spontaneously as a result of the activity of Chechen and Middle Eastern preachers of “pure Islam” and “jihad” against the “infidels” in Russia. According to Sh. Pshikhachev, “there are underground amirs in the republic who have the aim of creating a caliphate... These young men are very much like Wahhabis...” In 2002 Pshikhachev resigned and the Spiritual Board was headed by Anas Pshikhachev, his relative, who headed the struggle against the radical opposition.

In the late 1990s an opposition organization came into being – Jamaat of Kabardino-Balkaria, which could replace the official muftiat at any moment. According to the law-enforcement agencies, sections of the jamaat were set up practically in all districts of the republic uniting up to ten thousand people. From the very beginning of jamaat’s activity its leaders opposed themselves to the official Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, the republican authorities, and the law-enforcement agencies.

By 2004 the villages of Sbrun-3, Kuba-Taba and Volny Aul, where young Islamists had virtually ousted all followers of traditional Islam from the mosques, became the centers of the radical Islamic opposition. The peak of the extremist-terrorist activity was in the middle of the 2000s. In reply to growing extremism the authorities

stepped up the persecution of Islamists and restriction of the activity of Muslim organizations.

In 1999 the republican Law on freedom of conscience was adopted. It contained special premises for controlling the activity of Muslim communities. According to the Law, there should be 50 members in a religious organization so that it could be registered, but not ten, as was the case of the federal Law. A religious organization has the right to exist only after registration. During several years after 2000 the authorities ordered the closing down of all Islamic centers sponsored or patronized by foreign Arab organizations accredited in the republic. Any Muslim activity was considered lawful only within the framework of the Spiritual Board.

In 2003–2004 the authorities took active measures against the heads and members of the jamaat of Kabardino-Balkaria. Quite a few of them were detained and searched on suspicion of their contacts with the commander of Chechen gangs Shamil Basayev.

The decision to build a big Islamic center in Nalchik was revised. The authorities deemed that such a center in the city was not needed and gave Muslims the cinema theater in the outskirts of Nalchik to turn it into mosque. The social activity of Muslims was put under control of the authorities. Mosques were now opened only on Fridays for an hour and a half. Mufti Anas Pshikhachev noted with indignation that after 2000 control of the authorities over the life and activity of Muslim communities was too strict.

At the same time Anas Pshikhachev has stated time and again that this activity of the authorities has a positive aspect, because it is directed against the spreading of the Wahhabi trend in the republic. In particular, the mufti was satisfied with the fact that sermons in mosques should now be delivered with permission of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the republic. The authorities also control the

appointment of imams who should now receive personnel appraisal by a special commission of the Spiritual Board.

However, the terrorist activity of radical Islamists has been growing. The leading role in the Wahhabi opposition to the muftiat and the secular authorities now belonged to the “Yarmuk” jamaat headed by ten inhabitants of Kabardino-Balkaria headed by Muslim Atayev, who had previously fought in the ranks of the Chechen separatist militants.

In an anti-terrorist operation in Nalchik Muslim Atayev was killed. But the terrorist grouping continued its subversive and terrorist operations.

In 2005 Valeri Kokov was replaced as President of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic by Arsen Kanokov. He decided to soften religious policy somewhat. The authorities agreed to give more freedom to the Spiritual Board of Muslims and allowed it to implement certain initiatives, provided they would be strictly controlled by the law-enforcement agencies. Mopping-up operations in mosques were softened, and the construction of the Islamic center was resumed. But the Islamists continued their extremist and terrorist activities.

The radical Islamic movement has acquired new energy and strength. In 2005 Kabardian Islamists made the most brazen and bloody raid. In the morning of October 13, 2005, several groups of well-armed Islamists attacked buildings of government and law-enforcement offices in several districts of the republican capital Nalchik. Fighting continued for more than 24 hours. After that the terrorist groups were smashed. Among the casualties were 92 terrorists, 12 peaceful citizens and 35 men and officers of the police and law-enforcement agencies.

In August 2006, there was a bitter fighting between radical extremists and representatives of the special services in a suburb of Nalchik.

In November 2006, Anzor Astemirov, who headed the extremists' attack on Nalchik in 2004 and 2005, published his address to the authorities of Russia in the Google Video service. "We do not accept any laws except the laws of Allah, and those who do not wish to submit to His will and live by His laws will be duly punished." He called on all Muslims to fight the Satan helpers and "wage jihad against the system of international Satanism, one part of which is the Russian state, which has been trying from olden times to eradicate Islam, enslave Muslims, and turn our children away from our faith. The Muslims of the Caucasus, the Urals, the Volga area and Tatarstan should unite in the struggle for faith." Astemirov declared Kabardino-Balkaria a zone of fighting operations and promised to carry out spectacular acts of terror on its territory. The amir of Kabardino-Balkaria promised to begin his campaign of terror with the elimination of "traitors," important officials in the republic, and the clergymen, and businessmen supporting the authorities. "Up to now we have been indulgent toward those who regard themselves Muslims, but now things will be different. Now we shall distinguish between the genuine Muslim in deed and the one in words." Apart from that, Astemirov announced that his fighters would punish, in the name of Allah, all Muslim traitors. He also said that the Wahhabi underground includes not only rank-and-file citizens of Kabardino-Balkaria, but also representatives of special services and law-enforcement agencies, who actively help the revival of the Islamic republic.

In March 2009 Astemirov was killed in battle with the fighters of the law-enforcement agencies. Despite the loss of leaders, the Islamists have succeeded to dispose of the Kabardino-Balkarian mufti. On December 15, 2010, Anas Pshikhachev was killed in Nalchik.

On March 15, 2011 at an extraordinary congress of Muslims of the republic Khazretali Dzasezhev was elected head of the Spiritual

Board of Muslims of the republic (mufti). He continued the policy of his predecessor.

After the death of the jamaat leader Anzor Astemirov and several of his close friends and accomplices, new Islamists have come to replace them. They formed a branch of the Imarat Kavkaz and levied local entrepreneurs with “tax on jihad” under threat of bodily harm.

In February 2011 the militants thwarted the holiday season in the vicinity of the Elbrus Mountain; they broke the cableway and shot and killed a group of tourists from Moscow.

On January 26, 2012, Islamist fighters broke into a gym of a school in the center of Nalchik and killed an army officer who played volleyball with a group of friends there.

Among the victims of terrorist acts are mostly Kabardians and Balkarians (and seldom Russians). It’s because the Salaphite terrorists consider it their primary duty “to improve the souls of the mountain people. Local policemen, government officials, “bad” imams, and representatives of the secular intelligentsia are the main targets of terror.

Since then armed raids of terrorists have become regular events in Kabardino-Balkaria. The republic is in a state of a sluggish civil war, as it were. Wahhabi sentiments are widespread among senior secondary school pupils, technical school and university students. According to expert estimates, about thirty percent of Kabardian and Balkarian students share Wahhabi beliefs, and it should be noted that Kabardians are more religious than Balkarians. It is indicative that during the past sixteen years several dozen Russians have adopted Islam, and some of them have joined the extremist fighters. The federal authorities became dissatisfied with the inefficient struggle against terrorism, and this resulted in a change of the head of the republic. In December 2013 President Kanokov was replaced by Yuri Kokov, who had spent a great

part of his working life at the law-enforcement agencies. Experts expect that this change will lead to a much harsher policy toward Islamic extremists.

The struggle of the special forces, the police and law-enforcement agencies against terrorists is not an isolated struggle between these two groups. There is a growing fear among the Kabardian and Balkarian public and intelligentsia for the future of their people and republic as a whole. People are afraid of their land becoming an arena of a full-scale bloody war as was the case of Chechnya and Daghestan. The continuing construction of the Islamic center in Nalchik is causing numerous protests of part of the local public who fears that this center may become a hotbed of Islamism.

A majority of the republican population (three-quarters) is formed by Kabardians, Balkarians, and other traditionally Muslim groups of people. Apart from them, there is a numerous Christian community represented by Orthodox Christians, Protestants and very tiny Catholic community. Russians and other traditionally Christian people are about 200,000, or one-quarter of the population of the republic

Orthodox Christianity and other Christian confessions appeared on the territory of the present Kabardino-Balkarian Republic comparatively recently – in the 19th century. Russians live mostly on the border with Stavropol territory, in the Cossack districts (towns of Prokhladny and Maisky), as well as in Nalchik. Orthodox Christian Kabardians live on the territory of North Ossetia in Mozdok district, who renounced Islam in the 19th century. The influence of radical Islam make many Russians leave the region.

In 1990–2003 the Stavropol bishopric, which included the North Caucasian republics, was headed by Metropolitan Gedeon (Dokukin). He positioned himself as “Orthodox Christian patriot” and regarded his

diocese as an outpost on Russia's border with the Muslim world. In his view, the state should support the Orthodox Church and the latter should propagandize state interests. He maintained constant contacts with muftis and government officials. The local press contained reports and articles saying that the church and mosques are able to maintain peace in the North Caucasus.

In 2003–2011 the head of the Stavropol bishopric, Bishop Feofan pursued a policy of unconditional priority of peaceful coexistence of Islam and Orthodox Christianity.

Protestantism plays a noticeable role in the religious life of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. There are about forty Protestant churches and groups in the republic. In the conditions of the struggle with extremist tendencies and the Wahhabi trend the Protestant Church plays a positive role. Besides, it helps foster young people in the spirit of tolerance and constantly works for their deliverance from drug addiction.

There is a small but active Catholic community consisting of three parishes – St. Joseph in Nalchik, Holy Family in Prokhladny, and Annunciation in Blagoveshchensk. They do fruitful work among young people, organize summer camps, sports competitions, etc. Catholic missionaries have built a big rehabilitation center for drug addicts. The Catholic community also renders financial and other assistance to the boarding school for mentally retarded children in Nalchik.

In 1994–1995 the authorities formed a strategic alliance of the Russian Orthodox Church and official Islam – the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. The concept of the alliance was as follows: the two main traditional religious communities should bear responsibility for the spiritual revival of the people and cooperate with the authorities and between themselves. In December 1995 the Council for ties with religious organizations was formed under

the President of the republic with two Orthodox priests, four representatives of the Muslim clergy, and one rabbi.

Representatives of Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Judaism are also members of the Public Chamber, and take part in conferences, forums and programs organized and supported by the authorities.

Islam is the main religion in the republic. The Spiritual Board unites 125 organizations, practically in each populated center where there is either a mosque or community. Protestantism comes next – 26 churches and Orthodox Christianity – 21 organizations.

The republic has adopted a special educational program for young people with a view to fostering tolerance among them. Contests on “Religion and Tolerance” are arranged among school pupils. Within the framework of these contests children draw and write verses on the subject of friendship of peoples, peace between religions, and opposition to extremism. The panel of judges includes artists, teachers, writers, an Orthodox priest, mufti and rabbi. Social and cultural projects have the motto “We are different, but together,” and “Good deeds – our religion.”

Representatives of the authorities note the growing influence of the Protestant Church in the republic, which draws both Kabardians and Balkarians, but this is not a matter of great concern in society. The authorities are quite tolerant to the religious and social activities of Protestants and Catholics who help poor and homeless people and do voluntary work at hospitals.

In 2010 the republican administration organized an inter-confessional camp in which Orthodox believers and Muslims took part. The Russian Orthodox believers and Judaists observe their holidays quite freely and with the help of the authorities – New Year celebrations and Purim. There is a special committee in charge of organizing hajj (in 2012, 440 men went to Saudi Arabia and in 2013 – 319). The

Foundation of support of Islamic culture and education regularly arranges conferences and seminars for Muslims.

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FERGHANA VALLEY: REASONS FOR CRISIS PHENOMENA AND WAYS OF THEIR NEUTRALIZATION

The destruction of social peace in Syria, the continuing crisis in Ukraine, the Middle East in flames, and the revival of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – all these events can be included in the modern

concept of “Eurasian Balkans,” which came to life in the 1990s. Initially, the “Eurasian Balkans” included nine countries: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. Potential candidates to this list, in the view of Zbigniew Brzezinski, were Turkey and Iran. The exacerbation of the situation in the conditions of the world crisis has increased the number of such countries: now they include Iraq, Syria and Ukraine. However, their main distinguishing feature remains the same, namely, instability of poly-ethnic areas.

One of the most conflict-breeding zones, maximally close to the borders of Russia is Central Asia, which in turn has its own “super-Balkans” – the Ferghana Valley.

Basic Reasons for Conflict Phenomena in the Ferghana Valley

The special significance of the Ferghana Valley not only in regional, but also world politics can be explained by natural-geographic, ethnocultural and geopolitical factors. Situated in the southeastern part of Central Asia, surrounded by mountains, and rich in water of the Syrdarya, the longest river in Central Asia, and its numerous tributaries, the Ferghana Valley boasts high soil fertility (22,000 square kilometers of plains).

The unique natural and geographic position of the valley has determined its significance for the entire region of Central Asia, which, in turn, could not but influence the entire demographic situation. At present the Ferghana Valley is inhabited by slightly more than a quarter of the entire population of the region – almost 15 million of 63 million.

The conflict-breeding potential of the FV is determined by a complex of interconnected factors. Among the most important ones,

capable to play the key role in a possible destabilization of the situation, three groups of factors can be singled out.

First group – socio-economic reasons for crisis phenomena, including demography, migration, and high unemployment.

Second group – broad range of historical and political problems manifested in the problem of enclaves.

Third group – interest of outside players, new challenges and threats to security of the entire region, which are largely a consequence of the development of the globalization epoch.

We begin with the first group. The Ferghana Valley has the highest population density in Central Asia; it holds tenth place in the world by this index (on average, 659 people per one square kilometer, but in some districts population density exceed 2,000 per square kilometer, and in not so distant future the region may become one of the five most densely populated regions of the planet). However, it is not so much the density of the population, as its ethnic and religious composition that may cause one to stop and ponder of the dangerous future of the region.

The valley is divided into three unequal parts. The central part includes the most densely populated districts of Uzbekistan (Ferghana, Namangan and Andizhan regions). One-third of Uzbekistan's population lives there. Two "border" parts of the Ferghana Valley belong to Kyrgyzstan (Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken regions) and Tajikistan (Sogdian region).

The Tajik part of the FV is inhabited by over a third of the republican population, and the Kyrgyz part – by about a half. The annual birth rate of the valley population amounts to over two percent, or over 300,000 a year.

The direct consequence of overpopulation is shortage of land, unemployment, and labor migration. The number of people living

below the poverty line in some districts reaches 40 percent and more. Labor migration and outflow of the population are an indirect confirmation of growing unemployment.

Migration can solve, if partly, the problem of unemployment and living standards, yet it gives rise to other problems. In recent years there have been twice as many divorces, the growing number of incomplete families with small children, and an increase of the gender imbalance in migration flows.

According to the data of the World Migration Organization, the UN and the World Bank, about 300,000 women below 30 years of age are unmarried, which seriously affects the destabilization of the region and deforms the traditional style of life which existed for centuries.

Another new challenge to the FV has been the so-called creeping migration of ethnic Tajiks and Tajik citizens in Kyrgyz villages. As a result, in a few years' time the villages formally belonging to Kyrgyzstan will be populated mainly by Tajiks, which can lead to the emergence of the so-called Albanian casus, or the appearance of a new state formation of the Kosovo type. The possible proclamation of an autonomy, and then independence from the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, of territories populated by ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks.

Economic factors of crisis phenomena form a separate bloc of the first group. Just as in a whole number of other conflicts of our day, nationalism is an outward manifestation of economic and political problems. Economics closely connected with politics is one of the main reasons for the destabilization of the region.

The overwhelming part of the population of the Ferghana Valley is engaged in agriculture. Cotton, rice, grapes, melons and water melons, and grain are grown on irrigated lands. The Ferghana Valley is a big area of sericulture with a 1,500-year history of silkworm breeding and silk production. But the Ferghana Valley has suffered from the old

Soviet problem – a shortage of plough-land. The per capita area of plough-land is about 0.11 hectare, which is the lowest in the CIS. In the Kyrgyz part of the valley this figure is somewhat higher, and in the Uzbek part it amounts to 0.19 hectare.

These figures are much lower than the average world standard – 0.3 hectare per capita. However, this is not the limit. In many districts of the FV the figure is less than 0.1 hectare per capita. Such state of affairs cannot be considered other than critical and fraught with serious conflicts. And it is only one of the problems.

Cattle breeding is no less important for the regional population. The emergence of new state borders has violated the free movement of cattle breeders from plain to mountain pasture lands. This, naturally, affected the qualitative and quantitative indices of cattle breeding, as well as the employment of people, which, in turn, worsens the general economic situation directly connected with the physical survival of the local population.

However, the Ferghana Valley yields not only agricultural products. It is known as a major trade station on the Great Silk Route and is today an important wholesale base of the region. Its monthly trade turnover exceeds \$200 million, according to official data. The shadow turnover is twice as big, according to admissions of local traders.

The *problem of water resources* is a cause for conflicts in Central Asian countries. This also concerns the situation in the Ferghana Valley.

According to Uzbek experts, the shortage of water for irrigation on the Uzbek territory of the FV reaches 1.5 billion cubic meters a year. The population of the Kyrgyz and Tajik regions of the valley suffers less.

This problem regularly leads to disputes and conflicts between the different national groups inhabiting the region. All people who are

aware of the problem remember the words of President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, which he said during his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2012: “The water resources can become the problem causing an exacerbation of relations between people, and not only in our region. The situation may worsen to such an extent that there can be not only a confrontation, but even wars.”

Indeed, it is hardly likely that the people of the Ferghana Valley will be able to agree on a just distribution of the water resources between the “upstream” and “downstream” countries.

Historical and Political Causes of Destabilization of Ferghana Valley

The tense situation in the region is largely a result of the social and political experiments during the Soviet period. There are now three states in the Ferghana Valley, whereas during the greater part of its history the FV had existed under one and only political rule.

In ancient time it was part of the Persian Empire, in the 13th century it fell under the rule of Mongols and was included in the khanate of Chagatai. The political borders were lifted after the Turkic groups and Islam had come to the region, which was now ruled as a single whole. In the 18th – 19th centuries the Ferghana Valley was the center of the Kokand khanate, and in 1876 it became part of the Russian Empire. However, in the Soviet period, after numerous changes of interstate borders based on the principle of self-determination of nations the Ferghana Valley was divided between three Central Asian republics – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The proclamation of independence of former Soviet republics required the immediate demarcation and delimitation of the state borders, which, in a number of cases (especially in enclaves), have not been carried out. The pendency of these problems is the basis of permanent conflicts caused, among other things, by nationalism, which

are frequently accompanied with human casualties. Clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyzs, Kyrgyzs and Tajiks, and Tajiks and Uzbeks have become almost regular. Most often conflicts take place along the borders. Of the last most serious conflicts mention should be made of clashes on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in January and May of 2014.

The problem of enclaves should be regarded as a separate factor of the crisis phenomena in the Central Asian countries as a whole, and in the Ferghana Valley, in particular. The enclaves, which appeared in the Soviet period, seriously aggravate the situation in the FV. There are several enclaves at present, including Uzbek enclaves surrounded by Kyrgyz territory, a Kyrgyz enclave surrounded by Uzbek territory, as well as three Tajik villages in Kyrgyz and Uzbek territory. Conflicts in these enclaves occur almost every day, but sometimes they acquire an ethnic tint.

Activity of Extremist and Terrorist Organizations

The problems of the Ferghana Valley create conditions for the emergence of the most dangerous phenomena today. It is not for nothing that the Valley is called “a paradise for extremists and terrorists.”

According to the data of the Center of strategic studies under the President of Tajikistan, the activity of 13 organizations regarded as extremist and terrorist have been banned on the territory of the republic; among them is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. By experts' estimates, there are no less than from three to five thousand extremists and potential terrorists in the Ferghana Valley.

The situation is far from simple and calm in the Kyrgyz part of the valley. For one, the town of Kara-Suu is not only the biggest trade junction, but also a center of Wahhabi Muslims and the opposition to the official authorities of both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Most experts believe that after the withdrawal of the NATO and U.S. forces from Afghanistan the situation concerning Islamic radicalism in the Ferghana Valley and in the whole of Central Asia, for that matter, will seriously deteriorate. “Militants from Central Asia now fighting in Afghanistan will most probably return home and will look for other spheres of activity and plans. For instance, to eliminate Christians and Jews and proclaim a world caliphate. The destabilization of the Ferghana Valley will be a good beginning for the export of Islamic revolution. Besides, the stepping up of terrorist activity in the region may cause destabilization in the entire Central Asian region and become a threat to Russia, where twenty million Muslims live.” This is one of the conclusions of western experts.

Corruption, criminal activity and drug trafficking are related to the third group of factors breeding conflicts.

Drug trafficking is the most dangerous of all these vices. Afghanistan is the world’s leader in drug production, supplying the international black market with more than 90 percent of all opiates produced in the world.

According to UN data, Afghan heroin is the cause of death of more than 100,000 people in the world annually. One-third of them are Russians. In 2010 more than 80,000 died in our country due to narcotic drugs, that is, over 200 each day.

Evidently, narcotic drugs have become a powerful weapon in the world today, which is used for reaching serious geopolitical aims: drugs “bleed white” whole nations and corrupt the elites of countries rich in natural and other resources. It is necessary to take all steps possible to remove this threat of physical annihilation of people.

Interests of Geopolitical Giants as a Factor of Destabilization

The influence of the leading actors of world politics, among which are big states (U.S.A., China) and transnational and supranational companies and organizations (TNC, NATO), as well as regional powers (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey), on Central Asia is conditioned, above all, by economic and geopolitical interest. Foreign actors are ably using the entire range of the above-mentioned problems for the promotion of their interests. The United States and NATO countries are interested in destabilizing this region and drawing it in the drug zone, whereas the Islamic states support radical Islamic theories capable to prompt the inhabitants of Central Asia to work for the formation of an Islamic caliphate.

Suffice it to recall the events of the “Arab spring,” to say nothing of the Ukrainian crisis, and observe the growing activity of pro-western non-governmental organizations.

In recent years the activity of the latter has noticeably grown in the Ferghana Valley, at least in its Tajik and Kyrgyz parts.

Among other things, seminars and training sessions for local journalists writing about conflicts have become regular.

One of the catalysts of the conflict can be the project of building a railway line called Chinese-Kyrgyz-Uzbek along the route Kashgar-Osh-Andizhan, which is lobbied by the Kyrgyz establishment.

Along with the growing activity of Russia and China in the region, there will be more pretexts for conflicts among our western partners. However, irrespective of the presence of *casus belli*, several dozen militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (which is supervised by the U.S. and British special services) will be transferred to the Ferghana Valley for maximal destabilization of the region. For this purpose a section of the British *MI6* has been set up in the Afghan

town of Faizabad near the Afghan-Tajik border; the area of its activity includes Darvaz, Pamirs and Ferghana.

It should be clearly understood that even a small group of militants can easily provoke an open interethnic conflict whose consequences may be catastrophic for the entire region. It is also important to realize that a conflict will inevitably draw the CSTO, and first and foremost Russia. And the main aim of such conflict is the weakening of the main geopolitical rivals of the West, that is, Russia, China and Iran.

The Role and Place of Russia in Settling Crisis Phenomena in the Ferghana Valley.

It should be noted that in the conditions of the exacerbation of the international situation, especially in the context of the present Ukrainian crisis causing the confrontation between Russia and the West, any aggravation of the situation in Central Asia can be used against Russia and will directly tell on its domestic political situation. Any serious conflict in the Ferghana Valley will lead to an increase of the flow of refugees and drugs, the active penetration of extremist groups of radical Islamists in Russian territory, and possible terrorist attacks there. To combat these phenomena and their consequences is much harder than to prevent them. The Ukrainian crisis is a vivid confirmation.

Rivalry for influence in Central Asia has long acquired a multi-level character.

The first level is geopolitical clashes for the strengthening of the influence and positions of the geopolitical giants – Russia, the United States and China in the region, which does not exclude the possibility of using the military-political and regional blocs – CSTO, NATO and SCO.

The second level is regional, between the Central Asian countries themselves.

The third level is conflicts between political groupings within the Central Asian countries.

What role should Russia play in order to prevent the further deterioration and “Afghanization” of the countries of the region?

Evidently, at the first level the main allies of Russia in the region are the CSTO and SCO member-countries. This is why more attention should be paid to the strengthening of these organizations and their greater activity in the Central Asian region. There should be more offices of CSTO and SCO in regional countries, and they should be properly equipped. They should organize seminars, training sessions, etc. for representatives of the local authorities, government officials, and employees of the special services. At this level the struggle against drug trafficking and radical extremist and terrorist organizations should be stepped up, and this will be impossible without the strengthening of border security in order to prevent the penetration of militants and drug dealers from Afghan territory in to the Ferghana Valley.

The second level presupposes closer interaction of power at all levels of the Russian Federation and Central Asian countries. Work with the political elites of Central Asian countries, as well as young people of different social groups, should be stepped up.

Parallel with the “soft power” presence in these countries, socio-economic measures should be increased, which is impossible without close economic integration and the expansion of the Eurasian economic community.

A free-trade zone could be set up in the Ferghana Valley. Then the problems of enclaves, borders and corruption will be better and more rapidly resolved. However, it should be realized that the stabilization of the situation in the Ferghana Valley is impossible

without its reindustrialization and modernization of the economy of all three countries bordering on each other in the valley. This can only be achieved through rapid integration within the framework of a uniform economic area. For this purpose it is necessary to persuade the political leadership and population of the Central Asian countries in the advantages and vital necessity of integration and the development of the Eurasian economic community.

The new level of penetration in the political elite, just as work with the opposition and young people will definitely contribute to lifting off the contradictions of the third level, that is, those within these countries.

Thus, the role of Russia in the regulation of crisis phenomena in the Ferghana Valley goes far beyond the bounds of the Eurasian “super-Balkans.”

Security of this micro-region depends on complicated problems whose solution can only be comprehensive, which, in turn, demands that the Russian leadership should revise its foreign-policy priorities and approaches in the region.

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ISLAMIC FACTOR OF LEGITIMATION

OF POWER IN NORTH CAUCASIAN REPUBLICS

In the present conditions the Islamic factor in the North Caucasus becomes the most significant in the functioning and legitimation of the institutions of power and management. Although North Caucasian societies and the official institutions of power are largely secularized, religion has an ever growing influence on all socio-political values, playing an important role in the sphere of political symbols. Regulated by legislation, the formal institutions of power and management closely interact with informal ones, operating in accordance with customs, traditions and religious norms. Informal institutions in North Caucasian

republics have their own ethnic and confessional specific features, but their socio-political and cultural matrix is similar. In order to understand the successes, failures, legitimation processes of power, and the transformation of the basic institutions of society, as well as shifts in the social and political spheres in these societies, it is necessary to analyze the role of religion, above all Islam.

Muslim religion has for many centuries been playing the key role in the formation of traditional relations, institutions and managerial practices in these societies. The post-Soviet archaic style of socio-political institutions has brought to the fore ethnic-confessional structures in the legitimation process of power. Accordingly, Islam is coming out as one of the political subjects in the socio-political process. The influence of Muslim religion on the functioning mechanisms and legitimation of power in North Caucasus societies has not been studied well enough. Despite a considerable number of works on the subject, there has been no systematic and comprehensive analysis of the influence of Islam on all these processes. The study of the influence of religion on them is one of the most urgent tasks facing modern Russian social sciences.

The present-day Islamic revival in the North Caucasus determining the ethical, political and legal standards of behavior of the population and family and everyday-life foundations are conditioned by the natural striving of man and social groups for an integral perception of life and themselves as its inalienable part. In day-to-day life, in the questions of personal status (marriage, the family, inheritance, etc.), as well as in the post-criminal conciliation, the North Caucasian ethno-confessional society oriented to Islam is based, as always, on the norms of the Muslim and traditional adat (law). This should be regarded not so much as a confrontation with the modern legal system, but as the

continuing succession and reproduction of Muslim law in the concrete conditions of the formation of a modern law-abiding state.

These processes are conditioned by the importance of the individual-group and spiritual-moral perception of the world. Islam in society is functioning as religion determining the entire social life.

The growing role of this religion in the region is also explained by the fact that the political-institutional structures and formal-legal norms established during the post-Soviet period have given rise and legitimized the savage exploitation of man by man, profound social inequality unheard-of and unseen in these societies, mass impoverishment of the population, and socio-psychological splits and conflicts. Religiousness in the region has become part and parcel of the socio-cultural identification of individuals and groups. Islam has become a major universal socio-political factor for most citizens of the North Caucasian republics exerting considerable influence not only on the spiritual life, but also on all spheres of the vital activity of these societies. The real motivation of behavior in the political sphere, the system of political-legal values and norms, and attitude to the institutions of power and management are largely determined by the religious views of the population oriented to equality and justice in relations between all people. These processes are conditioned by cultural habits, traditions, the way of life, and the system of self-government and self-organization evolved over many centuries.

Today, under the influence of religious, moral, political and legal factors passed on from generation to generation the formation process of a new type of political thinking is going on. Regarding Islam as part of the political and cultural tradition of North Caucasian societies and as an important factor of the legitimation of power and mobilization of the Muslim popular masses, the author notes that this factor is not taken into account properly in the activity of the official authorities. This is

why success and effectiveness of the modern legitimation processes of power in North Caucasian societies depend on how many proper socio-political and legal mechanisms, values and social communities will be used by socio-political institutions in these processes.

Analyzing political and socio-cultural processes in the North Caucasus connected with Islamic renaissance, certain experts note the very high degree of religiousness of the population in the region. Just one expression of this is the growing number of devout Muslim believers, the restoration of old and construction of new mosques and prayer houses, the expansion of the system of religious education, and the wider use of traditional Islamic rites and rituals in the everyday life of North Caucasian peoples. This includes not only spiritual and ethical processes, but also economic, political and socio-cultural ones. All this goes to show the rapidly growing role of Islam in our life.

Being a universal, social, normative-value and regulatory phenomenon of Muslim societies in the North Caucasus, Islam has also become a powerful factor of the self-consciousness of the North Caucasian people, the legitimation processes of government and managerial institutions, and a guarantee of their stability. This article connects the “Islamic factor” with its synthetic character, which is determined not only as the reason for the legitimation processes of power in North Caucasian societies, but also as the meaning of their motive force. The role of the institutions of power and management in these societies cannot be overestimated, however, for a stable socio-political development they should be not only legally based on formal legal acts, but also legitimate, that is, enjoy the real trust and support of the population.

Legitimation of power in North Caucasian societies in various periods of history has been connected with different events and political processes taking place in the region, their specific features, and

geopolitical orientations of the institutions of power and management. At the same time, these processes and phenomena occurred with due account of public opinion and under the influence of the Islamic factor. This is connected with the fact that this religion as an integral socio-cultural, political, legal and institutionally organized system claims the all-round regulation of all spheres of the vital activity of Muslim society. Islam in modern Muslim societies of the North Caucasus has turned into a powerful source of legitimation of all institutions of power and management, which cannot exist and be effective without support of the broad sections of the Muslim population. There are no socio-political, legal or economic problems in North Caucasian societies which, directly or indirectly, would not be connected with Islamic norms and values.

Religious structures, the system of mutual relations and values in them, being an important informal social institution, take part in legitimation of power and management, fulfilling the function of ensuring unity of North Caucasian societies and the mobilizing factor of the political activity of Muslims. Islam ensures the preservation of religious traditions and comes out in the political systems of the North Caucasian republics as a political factor of their legitimation.

Traditional Islam is the basic and most authoritative and popular political subject capable to influence the legitimation processes of power in the political processes taking place in these societies.

The institutionalized Muslim clergy in the form of the spiritual boards of Muslims, the administrative bodies of religious organizations, public religious movements, etc. hold an important place in the structure of a given political subject of legitimation of power. The given subject of legitimation of power and management in North Caucasian societies has monopolized the sphere of power and confessional relations and pays much attention to expanding its political and

administrative influence in these societies. Along with the creation of vertical religious structures and a hierarchic system of taxonomy, the spiritual boards of Muslims are trying to incorporate as many of its supporters as possible in republican and local bodies of administrative and managerial power with a view to increasing their influence and pursuing their policy. Institutionalized traditional Islam has today taken an official course to establishing close ties with the bodies of state power and management and receiving maximal support of the republican leadership. Such turn of events evokes stiff opposition and extreme irritation of the supporters of radical Islam.

Comparing the socio-political and value-standard possibilities of traditional and radical Islam, certain experts note that in the present conditions the former with its system of religious and political standards and values proves more adaptive to the local socio-political conditions. This circumstance ensures the dominating influence of traditional Islam on the broad sections of the North Caucasian population, on the one hand, and on the other, support of traditional Islam by the republican authorities and the ethnic elites connected with them, or even opposed to them.

In the view of certain experts, religiousness of political subjects can lend them special charismatic qualities, which have a great legitimating force and mobilizing possibilities. As is known, no power confines itself only to material, emotional or idealistic motives as the foundation guaranteeing its firmness and stability. Each tries to give rise to and confirm belief in its legitimacy. This belief can only be based on legitimation leading to the proper interpretation of the power situation and recognition of the claims of the authorities as just. Any power needs self-justification, as many experts admit.

Consequently, trust in the authorities and effectiveness of further democratization depend on how efficiently the institutions of power and

management of these societies use the democratic, traditional socio-political, including Islamic, resources of legitimation of power and combine the vectors of democratic, socio-economic and ethno-confessional development. On the other hand, legitimation of power contributes to overcoming and solving a complex and contradictory socio-economic, political, cultural and ethno-confessional situation now observed in the North Caucasian republics.

However, despite the obviousness and conclusiveness of the above-mentioned considerations, it should be admitted that one of the reasons for falling down legitimacy of power in the region is replacement of democratic elections and processes with their imitation, which leads to the absence of the local population's control over the authorities, and society's influence on power. These processes result in the loss of faith in democratic ideals and procedures, absence of the citizens' rights and the weakening of the ability of the local elites to resolve numerous social problems and conflicts. They have led to a grater destabilization than that in the case of free and honest elections with the participation of all political subjects. The political parties in the North Caucasian republics, due to election rigging, have ceased to play any tangible role and lost the ability to influence the socio-political processes in these societies. They are unable to contribute to the integration of their republics in the socio-political, cultural and legal area of the Russian Federation. The arbitrariness of the authorities in municipal elections leads societies to an impasse and isolates the institutions of local self-government from people.

The people elected who have access to the socio-economic and administrative-managerial resources and are interested in the preservation of the status quo serve not people, but the officials who helped them be elected to lucrative posts. The absence of legitimate channels for most citizens in this socio-political situation for their

participation in state affairs and influence on the authorities contributes to the growing popularity of alternative ways and means of self-government and self-organization based on radical Islamic trends. People take to nationalistic religious teachings contributing to alienation of the North Caucasus from the rest of Russia.

The legitimation processes of bodies of power and management in North Caucasian societies, which are determined by support or dislike of their activity by the broad masses of the Muslim population, are connected with the lawful and just use of society's resources by the authorities in the interests of all citizens. These processes are based on socially significant reasons, values and circumstances, which do not contradict traditional religious norms, are accepted by public opinion and explain the legitimate character of power of modern political subjects, which are in a minority. This minority rules the majority relying on the above-mentioned foundations. And the majority, seeing this reasonable accord, implements the decisions adopted by the minority, voluntarily submitting to this minority. The motivation of such behavior of the majority lies in the basic interests and requirements of the main socio-political subjects. The right and activity of political subjects are recognized by most Muslims of the region, provided these subjects in their activity observe the generally accepted traditional religious norms.

Legitimation of power is an interdisciplinary problem and is connected with the democratization processes in the socio-political aspect. On the other hand, this problem is connected with the processes of delegating power to the authorities by society and dividing it between the institutions of power and management within the political system. Legitimation of power is expressed in the stable functioning of the feedback between the political and legal actions of the authorities and the vital processes of society. Multilateral and stable mutual ties

and mutual dependence between power and society exist as a result of the functioning of traditional regulatory mechanisms of mutual responsibility based on the system of rights and obligations of the institutions of power and management to society and control of the latter over power. The socio-political result of these processes of legitimation of power is the establishment and maintenance of a social order supported by most people, and restriction of their claims capable to destabilize socio-political processes in society.

Referring to legitimation processes and increasing faith in the just character of its activity, power is always trying to cite more and more arguments in its favor. Consequently, power is legitimized to a degree in which the governed majority recognizes the right of the governing minority to rule and use society's resources. Such legitimacy supported by democratic procedures and mass support of citizens ensures stability of power and is the coveted aim of all political regimes and bodies of power and management. Power can become legitimate in North Caucasian societies, provided it is formed and function within the framework of democratic procedures and offers programs and tasks common to all citizens. Legitimation is also connected with the ability of power to give society a symbolic matrix of socio-economic, religious-ethical and political unity and a real development prospect. This process is also connected with the role of the bodies of power as the source of socially valuable meanings for all citizens, which harmonize with Islamic morality and generally accepted norms.

An important factor of the crisis of legitimacy of power in these societies is the idea that most socio-economic and political and managerial problems are till unresolved, which is due to rampant corruption and dishonesty of officials in all echelons of power and management.

Neglect of the Islamic factor in the formation and functioning of the institutions of power and management in the North Caucasus inevitably leads to reduction of its legitimation. Rampant corruption, clan monopoly on power, mass unemployment, and social deprivation are evils no less destructive than terror, which devalue the foundations of Russian power. The local elites vie for lucrative posts and donations from the federal budget. Power in the region has turned into a closed caste. It controls more than fifty percent of all economic activity of the region. It trades in official posts and eliminates unwanted persons.

Legitimate power is associated in public consciousness with images of efficient and authoritative power capable to tackle socio-economic, ethical and other problems in society. There is a growing demand for a moral policy based, among other things, on traditional religious and ethical values.

Judging by relations between power and society, the development of democratic institutions and procedures and the able combination of traditional Islamic values by political subjects are of great importance in supporting legitimacy of the institutions of power and management.

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**REASONS FOR AND CONSEQUENCES
OF FALLING PRICES OF OIL: U.S.A.
AND SAUDI ARABIA INTERESTS**

A drop in oil prices has a negative impact on the financial and economic situation in Russia, leading not only to a reduction in the budget revenue and the stabilization fund. Oil prices are a tool of geopolitics and a means of changing the spheres of influence among consumers and producers of oil against the background of unfavorable relations with Russia, expressed in sanctions and political pressure initiated by West European countries and the United States.

A drop in oil prices from \$114 to 50 and below has given rise to assumptions and theories about the causes of this trend. The head of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) of Russia, former Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov said in an interview with Bloomberg that the West and its allies seek to weaken Russia through sanctions and attacks on the exchange rate and the price of oil. “Reducing the Russian currency rate by more than 30% was caused by the actions of the United States.”¹

The Russian President Vladimir Putin gave the following explanation of the decrease in oil prices in an interview with the Chinese media on the eve of the APEC summit in China. He said that the objective reason for the decline in world oil prices was a slowdown in the economy, and hence the energy consumption in a number of countries. In addition, both strategic and commercial oil reserves are at a historic high in developed countries. Innovations in technology influence oil production, which leads to the emergence of new volumes of hydrocarbons on regional markets.

There is also a political component in the price of oil. Moreover, politics prevails in energy pricing during economic crises.

Lack of a direct link between the oil markets and financial markets is another negative factor. This often enhances the volatility of oil prices. Unfortunately, such situation creates conditions for speculative actions and, as a consequence, for manipulation of prices².

Factors affecting oil prices are many and varied. According to one version, the world price has been constrained by OPEC countries, especially Saudi Arabia, in order to stop the production of shale oil in the United States and keep it out of the world oil market.

The main idea is that the cost of the “shale” projects will be unprofitable for U.S. companies if the oil price is low. The Gulf States, with half the votes in the OPEC, formed a united front for the preservation of production quotas at the present level – 30 million barrels a day (40 per cent of world production) at the ministerial session in Vienna on November 27, 2014.

Representatives of Saudi Arabia say they do not intend to call for a reduction of production in the near future, even if prices continue to decline to a level of \$60 per barrel. According to Abdally El Badri, the OPEC general secretary, price reduction is a result of excess supply from countries outside the OPEC, and they must first reduce the production of excess oil against the background of the market, provoking a fall in prices below \$50 for barrel³.

Another explanation is that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia adopted a plan to significantly reduce world oil prices to inflict financial damage to Russia and its partners – Iran and Venezuela. Barack Obama's visit to Saudi Arabia, which took place immediately after the G-7 Summit at The Hague in spring 2014, where harsh statements against Russia were made, caused a multitude of comments on the subject. Similar to those in the 1980s, when Saudi Arabia decided to lift restrictions on oil

production, which led to a sharp drop in prices and a serious blow to the financial sustainability of the U.S.S.R.

This is consistent with the current state of international relations, when the United States and its NATO allies have made efforts to cause political, financial and economic isolation of Russia in answer to the strengthening of its role in world affairs and the growth of its economy. As noted by the new Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, approved by President Vladimir Putin in December 2014, the development of the world at the present stage is characterized by increased global competition, tension in the various fields of interstate and interregional relations, rivalry of values and development models, and instability of economic processes and political developments at the global and regional levels⁴.

It is obvious that one of the main trends of the modern world is the redistribution of the former geopolitical realities and the striving of the leading countries to maintain control over resources at the global and regional levels.

On January 20, 2015, the U.S. President Barack Obama addressed his State of the Union message to Congress, which mentioned, among other things, a considerable damage inflicted on the Russian economy by the U.S. He said that today America continues to be strong and united, like its allies, while Russia is isolated, and “its economy is in tatters.”⁵

The US aim is clear – to prevent the rebirth of a strong Russia, block all attempts to its strengthening by various means and methods and thus cause a significant damage to it. Russia has become a part of the global world, and such damage can now be done in the financial and economic sphere without resorting to military force.

Taking into account the financial, economic and political opportunities of the United States, one can state that it has effective

instruments to influence the prices of oil on world markets. There has been a tendency to reduce the role of the United States as an importer of oil and its gradual transformation into an exporter of oil and oil products in recent years. It is supposed that we can see the transformation of the bipolar world oil market into a unipolar one, where the key role will be played only by the United States, instead of the current two centers of “oil power” (the United States and Saudi Arabia with OPEC). And there is every reason to believe this assertion.

Then there is a boom in production of shale oil in the United States. The strategic goal of the United States is to become independent of imported oil supplies, in the first place – from the Middle East.

The Energy Information Administration of the United States (EIA) predicts the level of crude oil production in the U.S.: in 2015 – 9.3 million barrels a day, and in 2019 – 9.9 million barrels a day.⁶ The United States will overtake Russia and Saudi Arabia in terms of oil production and will approach self-sufficiency as a result of the shale boom. Experts of the British Petroleum predict that the U.S. can become an almost self-sufficient country in energy by 2035.⁷

Oil has become not only a means of exchange, but also a financial asset (“paper” oil) as a result of globalization. Initially, the exchange price of oil was determined by the balance of supply and demand, and did not depend too much on factors of financial nature. Transition from short-term to long-term contracts, and then – to futures transactions occurred by the beginning of 2000s. The repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999 in the United States, limiting the speculative activities of U.S. banks, led to additional growth of market liquidity.

These new derivatives of “oil” financial assets began to exceed the volume of trading on the “physical” oil market. Today most of the world's oil is sold by long-term contracts, which determine its price. Thus, it is enough for the United States to limit or increase the flow of

dollars to oil exchange purposefully, providing an inflow or outflow of capital, with a view to having an influence on the price of oil.

An analysis of reasons for a drop of oil prices revealed that it occurs also due to the formation of excess amount of oil on the world market, and not just because of the unilateral actions of Saudi Arabia against the USSR in the 1980s.

Western countries have taken systematic measures to ensure energy security after the oil embargo of 1973 introduced by OPEC. New technologies have been developed to save oil, new oil fields have been discovered, including in the North Sea, and new oil extraction projects launched. The OPEC's share in the world oil production declined from 51 percent in 1973 to 41 percent in 1981, and to 28 percent in 1985. It became clear that the situation cannot be restrained: oil of Dubai varieties fell from \$36 per barrel in 1980 to \$28 in 1984, despite all attempts of OPEC to keep high prices by restricting oil production.

In 1985, Saudi Arabia adopted a strategy aimed at preserving its high earnings from oil export. In December 1985 Saudi Arabia raised oil output to the level of its OPEC quota. Oil prices have fallen as a result of oversupply. However, even price reductions provided its margin of profitability, given the low production cost level in Saudi Arabia.

Economic growth rates decreased to zero or very low values, the budget deficit will average about seven percent of the GDP over the next 10 years, the national debt grew to more than 100 percent of GDP in 1990 due to a decrease in oil production. So it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia will repeat the negative experience, that is, lose its market share and also a significant share of profits as a result of falling prices.

Today's price drop is beneficial to Saudi Arabia and works against the United States, since the "shale revolution" in the U.S.A. will

be under threat of failure, and shale technology will be unprofitable if oil prices fall to a very low level.⁸

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has suggested that the observed decline in oil prices today is a sign of the onset of a new stage in the evolution of the global oil sector, which is a threat to social stability of some oil-producing countries.⁹

In October 2014 the IMF gave an assessment of the level of oil prices, necessary to individual countries for a balanced budget. According to the fund, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates will be satisfied with \$70 per barrel, while Iran will be satisfied with \$136, Venezuela and Nigeria \$120, while Russia – \$101. US dollars.¹⁰

The fall of world oil prices and the weakening of the ruble against the background of the financial and economic sanctions have emphasized the losses and vulnerability of Russia. The Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation has estimated the loss of budget for 2015 due to low oil prices and low economic growth rates and the import problems at about one trillion rubles. If this situation continues, the country's budget will not be able to get about 500 billion rubles of income in 2015.¹¹

Today Russia still has a margin of safety, as the country has a low public debt and the budget deficit is still under control – there is the stabilization fund reserves and gold and currency reserves, as opposed to the era of *perestroika*.

New political challenges specify the financial and economic opportunities and ways out of the pre-crisis situation. The weakening of the ruble allows us to obtain a greater income from oil sales, when it is converted into dollars. On the other hand, the private sector suffers damage, a further depreciation of the ruble leads to an increase in payment for import, and rising prices can create political problems.

Reduced real incomes and continued capital outflow also create problems. It is obvious that the time has come of major structural economic reforms and changes in the economic development model of Russia. It is necessary not only to evolve and implement an anti-crisis program. The financial and economic sovereignty of Russia is under threat because of its dependence on the dollar, foreign investments and incomes from the excessive export of raw materials. Besides, Russia has been, and still is, under external pressure.

The United States and Saudi Arabia have tools to influence the oil prices and can use them in their interests, which may either coincide or be in conflict, depending on the situation in the oil and gas industry and the geopolitical situation in the Middle East and in the world. A low price of oil up to a certain minimum is not a threat or a challenge to their economies. Obviously, the United States, Western countries, China and India stand to benefit from lower oil prices, as the largest consumers of hydrocarbon resources. The countries whose budgets are largely dependent on oil exports end up in failure. With this in mind, the United States and Saudi Arabia can create financial and social tension to their competitors deliberately. The lowering of oil prices even for a short time is a tool for inflicting damage to the global socio-economic progress.

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