

Dagestan—'Syria comes to Russia...'

By F. William Engdahl, 12 September 2012

Part I: Syria comes to the Russian Caucasus

On August 28 Sheikh Said Afandi, acknowledged spiritual leader of the Autonomous Russian Republic of Dagestan, was assassinated. A jihadist female suicide bomber managed to enter his house and detonate an explosive device.

The murder target had been carefully selected. Sheikh Afandi, a seventy-five-year old Sufi Muslim leader, had played the critical role in attempting to bring about reconciliation in Dagestan between jihadist Salafi Sunni Muslims and other factions, many of whom in Dagestan see themselves as followers of Sufi. With no replacement of his moral stature and respect visible, authorities fear possible outbreak of religious war in the tiny Russian autonomous republic.¹

The police reported that the assassin was an ethnic Russian woman who had converted to Islam and was linked to an Islamic fundamentalist or Salafist insurgency against Russia and regional governments loyal to Moscow in the autonomous republics and across the volatile Muslim-populated North Caucasus region.

Ethnic Muslim populations in this region of Russia and of the former Soviet Union, including Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and into China's Xinjiang Province, have been the target of various US and NATO intelligence operations since the Cold War era ended in 1990. Washington sees manipulation of Muslim groups as the vehicle to bring uncontrollable chaos to Russia and Central Asia. It's being carried out by some of the same organizations engaged in creating chaos and destruction inside Syria against the government of Bashar Al-Assad. In a real sense, as Russian security services clearly understand, if they don't succeed in stopping the Jihadists insurgency in Syria, it will come home to them via the Caucasus.

The latest Salafist murders of Sufi and other moderate Muslim leaders in the Caucasus are apparently part of what is becoming ever clearer as perhaps the most dangerous US intelligence operation ever—playing globally with Muslim fundamentalism.

Previously US and allied intelligence services had played fast and loose with religious organizations or beliefs in one or another country. What makes the present situation particularly dangerous—notably since the decision in Washington to unleash the misnamed Arab Spring upheavals that began in Tunisia late 2010, spreading like a brushfire across the entire Islamic world from Afghanistan across Central Asia to Morocco—is the incalculable wave upon wave of killing, hatreds, destruction of entire cultures that Washington has unleashed in the name of that elusive dream named "democracy." They do this using alleged Al-Qaeda groups, Saudi Salafists or Wahhabites, or using disciples of Turkey's Fethullah Gülen Movement to ignite fires of religious hatred within Islam and against other faiths that could take decades to extinguish. It could easily spill over into a new World War.

Fundamentalism comes to Caucasus

Following the dissolution of the USSR, radical Afghanistani Mujahadeen, Islamists from Saudi Arabia, from Turkey, Pakistan and other Islamic countries flooded into the Muslim regions of the former USSR. One of the best-organized of these was the Gülen Movement of Fethullah Gülen, leader of a global network of Islamic schools and reported to be the major policy influence on Turkey's Erdogan AKP party.

Gülen was quick to establish The International Dagestani-Turkish College in Dagestan. During the chaotic days after the Soviet collapse, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation officially

registered and permitted unfettered activity for a variety of Islamic foundations and organizations. These included the League of the Islamic World, the World Muslim Youth Assembly, the reportedly Al-Qaeda friendly Saudi foundation 'Ibrahim ben Abd al-Aziz al-Ibrahim.' The blacklist also included Al-Haramain a Saudi foundation reported tied to Al-Qaeda, and IHH,² a Turkish organization banned in Germany, that allegedly raised funds for jihadi fighters in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan, and was charged by French intelligence of ties to Al Qaeda.³ Many of these charities were covers for fundamentalist Salafists with their own special agenda.

As many of the foreign Islamists in Chechnya and Dagestan were found involved in fomenting the regional unrest and civil war, Russian authorities withdrew permission of most to run schools and institutions. Throughout the North Caucasus at the time of the Chechnya war in the late 1990's, there were more than two dozen Islamic institutes, some 200 *madrassas* and numerous *maktabas* (Koranic study schools) present at almost all mosques.

The International Dagestani-Turkish College was one that was forced to close its doors in Dagestan. The College was run by the Fethullah Gülen organization.⁴

At the point of the Russian crackdown on the spread of Salafist teaching inside Russia at the end of the 1990's, there was an exodus of hundreds of young Dagestani and Chechnya Muslim students to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other places in The Middle east, reportedly to receive training with the Gülen movement and various Saudi-financed organizations, including Salafists.⁵ It is believed in Russia that the students trained by Gülen supporters or Saudi and other Salafist fundamentalist centers then were sent back to Dagestan and the North Caucasus to spread their radical strain of Islam.

By 2005 the situation in the Caucasus was so influenced by this Salafist intervention that the Chechen Salafist, Doku Umarov, cited by the UN Security Council for links to Al-Qaeda,⁶ unilaterally declared creation of what he called the Caucasus Emirate, announcing he planned to establish an Islamic state under Sharia law encompassing the entire North Caucasus region including Dagestan. He modestly proclaimed himself Emir of the Caucasus Emirate.⁷

Part II: Salafism at war with Sufi tradition

Salafism, known in Saudi Arabia as Wahhabism, is a fundamentalist strain of Islam which drew world attention and became notorious in March 2001 just weeks before the attacks of September 11. That was when the Salafist Taliban government in Afghanistan willfully dynamited and destroyed the historic gigantic Buddhas of Bamiyan on the ancient Silk Road, religious statues dating from the 6th Century. The Taliban Salafist leaders also banned as "un-islamic" all forms of imagery, music and sports, including television, in accordance with what they considered a strict interpretation of Sharia.

Afghani sources reported that the order to destroy the Buddhas was made by Saudi-born jihadist Wahhabite, Osama bin Laden, who ultimately convinced Mullah Omar, Taliban supreme leader at the time to execute the act.⁸



Before and...After Salafist Taliban ...



While Sufis incorporate the worship of saints and theatrical ceremonial prayers into their practice, Salafis condemn as idolatry any non-traditional forms of worship. They also call for the establishment of Islamic political rule and strict Sharia law. Sufism is home to the great spiritual and musical heritage of Islam, said by Islamic scholars to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam, going back centuries.

As one Sufi scholar described the core of Sufism, "While all Muslims believe that they are on the pathway to God and will become close to God in Paradise--after death and the 'Final Judgment'-- Sufis believe as well that it is possible to become close to God and to experience this closeness--while one is alive. Furthermore, the attainment of the knowledge that comes with such intimacy with God, Sufis assert, is the very purpose of the creation. Here they mention the *hadith qudsi* in which God states, 'I was a hidden treasure and I loved that I be known, so I created the creation in order to be known.' Hence for the Sufis there is already a momentum, a continuous attraction on their hearts exerted by God, pulling them, in love, towards God." ⁹

The mystical Islamic current of Sufism and its striving to become close to or one with God is in stark contrast to the Jihadist Salafi or Wahhabi current that is armed with deadly weapons, preaches a false doctrine of jihad, and a perverse sense of martyrdom, committing countless acts of violence. Little wonder that the victims of Salafist Jihads are mostly other pacific forms of Islam including most especially Sufis.

The respected seventy-five year old Afandi had publicly denounced Salafist Islamic fundamentalism. His murder followed a July 19 coordinated attack on two high-ranking muftis in the Russian Volga Republic of Tatarstan. Both victims were state-approved religious leaders who had attacked radical Islam. This latest round of murders opens a new front in the Salafist war against Russia, namely attacks on moderate Sufi Muslim leaders.

Whether or not Dagestan now descends into internal religious civil war that then spreads across the geopolitically sensitive Russian Caucasus is not yet certain. What is almost certain is that the same circles who have been feeding violence and terror inside Syria against the regime of Alawite President Bashar al-Assad are behind the killing of Sheikh Afandi as well as sparking related acts of terror or unrest across Russia's Muslim-populated Caucasus. In a very real sense it represents Russia's nightmare scenario of "Syria coming to Russia." It demonstrates dramatically why Putin has made such a determined effort to stop a descent into a murderous hell in Syria.

Salafism and the CIA

The existence of the so-called jihadist Salafi brand of Islam in Dagestan is quite recent. It has also been deliberately imported. Salafism is sometimes also called the name of the older Saudi-centered Wahhabism. Wahhabism is a minority originally-Bedouin form of the faith originating within Islam, dominant in Saudi Arabia since the 1700's.

Irfan Al-Alawi and Stephen Schwartz of the Centre for Islamic Pluralism give the following description of Saudi conditions under the rigid Wahhabi brand of Islam:

*"Women living under Saudi rule must wear the abaya, or total body cloak, and niqab, the face veil; they have limited opportunities for schooling and careers; they are prohibited from driving vehicles; are banned from social contact with men not relatives, and all personal activity must be supervised including opening bank accounts, by a male family member or "guardian." These Wahhabi rules are enforced by a mutawiyin, or morals militia, also known as "the religious police," officially designated the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) who patrol Saudi cities, armed with leather-covered sticks which they freely used against those they considered wayward. They raid homes looking for alcohol and drugs, and harassed non-Wahhabi Muslims as well as believers in other faiths."*¹⁰



It's widely reported that the obscenely opulent and morally-perhaps-not-entirely-of- the-highest-standards Saudi Royal Family made a Faustian deal with Wahhabite leaders. The deal supposedly, was that the Wahhabists are free to export their fanatical brand of Islam around to the Islamic populations of the world in return for agreeing to leave the Saudi Royals alone.¹¹ There are, however, other dark and dirty spoons stirring the Wahhabite-Salafist Saudi stew.



Little known is the fact that the present form of aggressive Saudi Wahhabism, in reality a kind of fusion between imported jihadi Salafists from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and the fundamentalist Saudi Wahhabites. Leading Salafist members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood were introduced into the Saudi Kingdom in the 1950's by the CIA in a complex series of events, when Nasser cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood following an assassination attempt. By the 1960's an influx of Egyptian members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia fleeing Nasserite repression, had filled many of the leading teaching posts in Saudi religious schools. One student there was a young well-to-do Saudi, Osama bin Laden. ¹²

During the Third Reich, Hitler Germany had supported the Muslim Brotherhood as a weapon against the British in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East. Marc Erikson describes the Nazi roots of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood thus:

...as Italian and German fascism sought greater stakes in the Middle East in the 1930s and '40s to counter British and French controlling power, close collaboration between fascist agents and Islamist leaders ensued. During the 1936-39 Arab Revolt, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of German military intelligence, sent agents and money to support the Palestine uprising against the British, as did Muslim Brotherhood founder and "supreme guide" Hassan al-Banna. A key individual in the fascist-Islamist nexus and go-between for the Nazis and al-Banna became the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini.¹³

After the defeat of Germany, British Intelligence moved in to take over control of the Muslim Brotherhood. Ultimately, for financial and other reasons, the British decided to hand their assets within the Muslim Brotherhood over to their CIA colleagues in the 1950s. ¹⁴

According to former US Justice Department Nazi researcher John Loftus, "during the 1950s, the CIA evacuated the Nazis of the Muslim Brotherhood to Saudi Arabia. Now, when they arrived in Saudi Arabia, some of the leading lights of the Muslim Brotherhood, like Dr Abdullah Azzam, became the teachers in the madrassas, the religious schools. And there they combined the doctrines of Nazism with this weird Islamic cult, Wahhabism." ¹⁵

"Everyone thinks that Islam is this fanatical religion, but it is not," Loftus continues. "They think that Islam--the Saudi version of Islam--is typical, but it's not. The Wahhabi cult has been condemned as a heresy more than 60 times by the Muslim nations. But when the Saudis got wealthy, they bought a lot of silence. This is a very harsh cult. Wahhabism was only practised by the Taliban and in Saudi Arabia--that's how extreme it is. It really has nothing to do with Islam. Islam is a very peaceful and tolerant religion. It always had good relationships with the Jews for the first thousand years of its existence." ¹⁶

Loftus identified the significance of what today is emerging from the shadows to take over Egypt under Muslim Brotherhood President Morsi, and the so-called Syrian National Council, dominated in reality by the Muslim Brotherhood and publicly led by the more "politically correct" or presentable likes of Bassma Kodmani. Kodmani, foreign affairs spokesman for the SNC was twice an invited guest at the Bilderberg elite gathering, latest in Chantilly, Virginia earlier this year. ¹⁷

The most bizarre and alarming feature of the US-financed regime changes set into motion in 2010, which have led to the destruction of the secular Arab regime of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Muhammer Qaddafi in Libya, and the secular regime of President Ben Ali in Tunisia, and which have wreaked savage destruction across the Middle East, especially in the past eighteen months in Syria, is the pattern of emerging power grabs by representatives of the murky Salafist Muslim Brotherhood.

By informed accounts, a Saudi-financed Sunni Islamic Muslim Brotherhood dominates the members of the exile Syrian National Council that is backed by the US State Department's Secretary Clinton and by Hollande's France. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood is tied, not surprisingly to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood of President Mohammed Morsi who recently in a meeting of the Non-Aligned in Iran called openly for the removal of Syria's Assad, a logical step if his Muslim Brothers in the present Syrian National Council are to take the reins of power. The Saudis are also rumored to have financed the ascent to power in Tunisia of the governing Islamist Ennahda Party, ¹⁸ and are documented to be financing the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Syrian National Council against President Bashar al-Assad. ¹⁹

Part III: Morsi's Reign of Salafi Terror

Indicative of the true agenda of this Muslim Brotherhood and related jihadists today is the fact that once they have power, they drop the veil of moderation and reconciliation and reveal their violently intolerant roots. This is visible in Egypt today under Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammed Morsi.

Unreported in mainstream Western media to date are alarming direct reports from Christian missionary organizations in Egypt that Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood has already begun to drop the veil of "moderation and conciliation" and show its brutal totalitarian Salafist colors, much as Khomeini's radical Sharia forces did in Iran after taking control in 1979-81.

In a letter distributed by the Christian Aid Mission (CAM), a Christian Egyptian missionary wrote that Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood "announced they would destroy the country if Morsi didn't win, but they also said they will take revenge from all those who voted for [his opponent Ahmed] Shafiq, especially the Christians as they are sure we did vote for Shafiq. Yesterday they began by killing two believers in el Sharqiya because of this," the missionary added, speaking on condition of anonymity. ²⁰

This report came only weeks after Egyptian State TV (under Morsi's control) showed ghastly video footage of a convert from Islam to Christianity being murdered by Muslims. The footage showed a young man being held down by masked men with a knife to his throat. As one man was heard chanting Muslim prayers in Arabic, mostly condemning Christianity, another man holding the knife to the Christian convert's throat began to cut, slowly severing the head amid cries of "Allahu Akbar" ("Allah is great"), according to transcripts. In the letter, the Egyptian missionary leader added that, "soon after Morsi won, Christians in upper Egypt were forcibly prevented from going to churches." Many Muslims,

the letter claimed, "also began to speak to women in the streets that they had to wear Islamic clothing including the head covering. They act as if they got the country for their own, it's theirs now." ²¹

Already in 2011 Morsi's Salafist followers began attacking and destroying Sufi mosques across Egypt. According to the authoritative newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm (Today's Egyptian)*, 16 historic mosques in Alexandria belonging to Sufi orders have been marked for destruction by so-called 'Salafis'. Alexandria has 40 mosques associated with Sufis, and is the headquarters for 36 Sufi groups. Half a million Sufis live in the city, out of a municipal total of four million people. Aggression against the Sufis in Egypt has included a raid on Alexandria's most distinguished mosque, named for, and housing, the tomb of the 13th century Sufi Al-Mursi Abu'l Abbas.²²

Notably, the so-called "democratically elected" regime in Libya following the toppling of Moammar Gaddafi by NATO bombs in 2011, has also been zealous in destroying Sufi mosques and places of worship. In August this year, UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova expressed "grave concern" at the destruction by Islamic Jihadists of Sufi sites in Zliten, Misrata and Tripoli and urged perpetrators to "cease the destruction immediately." ²³ Under behind-the-scenes machinations the Libyan government is dominated by Jihadists and by followers of the Muslim Brotherhood, as in Tunisia and Egypt. ²⁴

The explosive cocktail of violence inherent in allowing the rise to power of Salafist Islamists across the Middle East was clear to see, symbolically enough on the night of September 11,th when a mob of angry supporters of the fanatical Salafist group, Ansar Al-Sharia, murdered the US Ambassador to Libya and three US diplomats, burning the US Consulate in Benghazi to the ground in protest over a YouTube release of a film by an American filmmaker showing the Prophet Mohammed indulging in multiple sex affairs and casting doubt on his role as God's messenger. Ironically that US Ambassador had played a key role in toppling Gaddafi and opening the door to the Salafist takeover in Libya. At the same time angry mobs of thousands of Salafists surrounded the US Embassy in Cairo in protest to the US film. ²⁵

Ansar Al-Sharia ("Partisans of Islamic law" in Arabic) reportedly is a spinoff of Al-Qaeda and claims organizations across the Middle East from Yemen to Tunisia to Iraq, Egypt and Libya. Ansar al-Sharia says it is reproducing the model of Sharia or strict Islamic law espoused by the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic State of Iraq, a militant umbrella group that includes al-Qaeda in Iraq. The core of the group are jihadists who came out of an "Islamic state", either in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, or among jihadists in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003.²⁶

The deliberate detonation now of a new round of Salafist fundamentalist Jihad terror inside Muslim regions of the Russian Caucasus is exquisitely timed politically to put maximum pressure at home on the government of Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Putin and the Russian Government are the strongest and most essential backer of the current Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, and for Russia as well the maintenance of Russia's only Mediterranean naval base at Syria's Tartus port is vital strategically. At the same time, Obama's sly message to Medvedev to wait until Obama's re-election to evaluate US intent towards Russia and Putin's cryptic recent comment that a compromise with a re-elected President Obama might be possible, but not with a President Romney, ²⁷ indicate that the Washington "stick-and-carrot" or hard cop-soft cop tactics with Moscow might tempt Russia to sacrifice major geopolitical alliances, perhaps even that special close and recent geopolitical alliance with China.²⁸ Were that to happen, the World might witness a "reset" in US-Russian relations with catastrophic consequences for world peace.

Endnotes:

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"Is it possible to find a solution to the problem, if current President Obama is re-elected for a second term? Theoretically, yes," Mr. Putin said, according to the official transcript posted on the Kremlin's Web site. "But this isn't just about President Obama. For all I know, his desire to work out a solution is quite sincere," Mr. Putin continued. "I met him recently on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Los Cabos, Mexico, where we had a chance to talk. And though we talked mostly about Syria, I could still take stock of my counterpart. My feeling is that he is a very honest man, and that he sincerely wants to make many good changes. But can he do it? Will they let him do it?"

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