

Challenges of Terrorism and Extremism Faced by Regional Public Administration in the North Caucasus: a Kabardian-Balkarian case

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Abstract

This article is aimed at highlighting the current practices of public administration in the regions of the Russian Federation, where a terrorism and extremism threat remains to exist. The author focuses on the radical Islamic terrorism in the North Caucasus and its effect on local governance and federal coordination over the recent decades. The research is based on local and federal acts, decrees and documents issued by local authorities, together with interviews given by residents and regional government officials of the Kabardian-Balkarian Republic on condition of anonymity. The article analyses such burning issues of regional public administration as preventing regional diarchy, countering Wahhabism propaganda, overcoming the influence of Muslim clergy on local governance, fighting against terrorist racketeering and extortion, attracting potential investors, conditions required for steady development of the region.

Keywords: terrorism, extremism, wahhabism, regional government, the North Caucasus.

Currently the North Caucasian Federal District of Russia is a safe and developed region, where nearly ten million residents work effectively in the fields of domestic/international tourism and agricultural industry, providing more than two percent of the GDP of the country. Nevertheless, this favourable state of affairs was established through hard simultaneous efforts of both regional and the Federal governments for the last two decades on their intention to provide salvation of the district from its major and most horrific problem – radical Islamic terrorism and extremism.

The first ten years of the new millennium were quite harsh for the Caucasian region: the Second Chechen war, the guerrilla warfare of radical islamists in the Republic of Dagestan, the attempt of terrorist takeover of the city of Nalchik – not mentioning minor cases of the terrorist acts with explosions, kidnapping, hostage-taking – which numbers were more than a thousand. This constant trend of illegal violence with hundreds of people deceased and thousands injured was not just a challenge to the constitutional authority, but a real and potent aspiration to depose it and to build an anarchic-Islamic terrorist quasi-state, existing in a situation of de facto diarchy with the Federal Government.

The Greatest challenge of the regional public administration officials was to prevent this development of events from happening. Letting terrorists to influence both economically and violently on the lives of citizens except for an obvious financial losses led to the dramatically worse consequences – the loss of trust of the citizens to the constitutional government. Living in a constant state of fear for their families and future, people sometimes started looking for safety through satisfying terrorist needs and accepting their rule in exchange for protection, which the legal administration could not always provide to them.

Major acts, which the local public administration was to prevent to keep its constitutional power, were regional diarchy and urgency to overthrow the legal power, Wahhabism ideology propaganda (especially across the youth generation), Muslim clergy's negative influence on local government, practices of terrorist racketeering and extortion. To adduce each of the challenges with a relevant counter-measures regional public administration required vigorous and effective changes in its policy in accordance to the actual tricky and complex social and political reality.

To observe mentioned above cases, study of the Kabardian-Balkarian Republic, author's native land, was taken as an example of fortunate and beneficial solutions of such challenges. All the names of the interviewed witnesses and direct participants of the presented cases were changed, due to their private safety as governmental officials and business executives.

Starting with the diarchy and tries to depose the constitutional power, being the most dangerous challenge to any public administration. If to look into the theoretical side of question, any authority is always supported by the power, using which it can provide sovereign, legal and exceptional right of using violence, according to the Maximillian Weber. Moreover, if the monopoly of the government on violence is broken by terrorists and extremists, the state loses its authority among its citizens, which results in its inevitable collapse.

That is what nearly happened in the capital of the Republic, city of Nalchik, on the 13th of October 2005. Several united groups of more than 200 terrorists of the Caucasian Front (pro-independent Chechen Republic of Ichkeria terrorist organization) armed with machineguns and rocket-propelled grenade launchers attacked the city's administrative and law enforcement buildings. It was a unique and emergent occasion – the attack was not targeted to just terrorizing the population, but to take over the city, overthrowing both regional public administration and military out of it.

Furthermore, by demonstrating to the city dwellers weakness of the law enforcement protection, regional public administration system de facto has proved its incompetence to proceed with countermeasures to the extremist actions and to defend the citizens. “We heard gunshots that day and then we saw from our windows groups of militiamen (police) scattering into their cars and leaving in panic, followed by some men in camo shooting in the air and screaming something. I and other locals started to come towards them and asking if the power changed and if there is a war now. It seemed like many of my mates would have actually accepted new regime, after looking on the old one falling back so desperately – I cannot say I had not got such a mind too” – Eugen, specialist student, nowadays official of the regional ministry of Internal affairs. After several hours the situation was taken under control again by the FSS Special Forces and the Internal Military forces, but even this short time of letting terrorist power rule over the city fueled a new wave of independence movement in whole Northern Caucasus.

Main mistakes, made by the regional public administration, which resulted in such an extreme act of violence, were pressure on the religious autonomy and ignoring the citizens' complaints about the corrupted police actions. The first mistake was practically a result of discoordination between the Federal governments, ordering to provide surveillance over the Muslim clergy to control the spreading of the Radical Islamism. The greatest unpredicted impact was that to please the upstanding authorities regional public administration overdid the order and had not just controlled, but straightly influenced the process of Imams (hosts of the mosques) being elected by banning "uncomfortable" candidates. That resulted in hatred and dishonor of the legal government in the eyes of Muslim clergy, which they have spread to their worshippers and followers. So when the armed extremists came to them with a proposition of protection from persecutions of the official authorities, many of them agreed.

The other downfall was letting the corruption in law enforcement services to spread dramatically. Terrible rates of bribing and police violence resulted in a complete loss of trust to the police. "I have once faced an investigator, who brought to me a young man, all beaten up badly. "Here we have a frank confession, barn robbery". I asked the boy: "You did it? What was the door lock?" He mumbled: "Yes, I did it – it was, err, padlock?" – The lock was actually internal, which meant the investigator bit the confession out of an innocent just to complete the plan. I let the boy go and the next day sent a messenger to him to ask him to officially accuse the investigator – but he was gone, as his mother said – left to the forests, which meant - to the Wahhabists" – Marat, district prosecutor, nowadays retired. This is a particular example of a widespread phenomenon of citizens illegally offended by the corrupted law enforcement and seeking protection of illegal armed organizations, so-called "roof".

The "roofing" by the Wahhabists was not even always payed, even though many of the business executives were ready to pay a sum to the "protectors" not to have any problems with them in future, even though sometimes the process of taking money by force was presented as a new yet undocumented tax or even a

charity. “I had a small grey-legal alcohol production not far from the town – one day several men in official suits and beards came: “There is a new tax now – the rebuilding and restructuration tax – pay up your percent”. I wondered: “Rebuilding of what?” – “Of Chechnya, of course”. I understood how exactly would my money be spent that moment and disagreed, which meant I had to quit the business not to lose my life – police would not had done anything anyway” – Alim, businessman.

Summing all the mistakes of the regional authorities, we must not forget several brilliant moves made on a way to restrict the development of the terrorist threat. At first – an effective counter-propaganda versus the extremist groups’ one – especially for the teenagers, the main risk group. There was a common issue of Internet and phonecall propaganda of joining so-called “battle-groups”, targeted on both poor families children and youth and those bored from the everyday tempo of life. Due to the lack of emotional connection of school or university to the student this subtle agitation of terrorist was painfully effective in the earlier 10-s with no actual and united governmental strategy of counter-propaganda. One of the most genuine and greatest step to stop this terrifying practice was the massive introduction of the young generation into the world of sport, especially – wrestling. Wrestling classes were sponsored from the regional and federal budget programs, and coaches were made for many young men psychologists and tutors. The result – nearly full closing of the practices of such propaganda and dozens of the European, Olympic and World wrestling champions for the Republic.

However, after competing with the active challenges of terror, it comes to the regional public administration to face the hardest one – passive casual everyday measures aimed to the readiness for an emergent reaction to a potential act of terrorism or extremism. For the regional authorities it means a complex and multidimensional plan of actions for as governmental officials and law enforcements, as businesses and employees. Generally, civil public administration is interested in deep cooperation with the law enforcement anti-terrorist agencies, which ones in turn receive a quite legitimate and potent influence on all the decisions made. It turns local authorities to accepting a new model of co-operation

with the regional office of the FSS, when the head of the office is accepted, in fact, as a powerful regional minister without portfolio in regional government, with the opinion of whom it is inevitable to correlate. “When I prepared the list of candidates for the posts of the deputies of minister, stamped it and passed to the secretariat, I have suddenly received it back in a day. It was accompanied with a letter from the FSS declaring, that candidates X and Y are highly likely connected to the terrorist groups through their relatives and it was very unwillingly for any of them to get that important post. The list was momentarily corrected – sometimes I think, that all the decisions made here are supervised by them” – Zulia, protocol secretary of the regional ministry.

Summarizing all the said above I would like to declare, that the threat of terrorism is not yet overthrown, and even though we do not face a perspective of overtaking power in regions by terrorist forces anymore, we still have a grand problem of terrorism affecting lives of the Russian citizens and tourists. As the President of the Russian Federation observed: “In spite of the obvious positive shifts and changes, the terrorist threat in the North Caucasus still keeps itself, and it is necessary to improve the level of security, to mobilize all the law enforcement and to upgrade the coordination between different state instances, their effectiveness in seeking new ways of fighting terrorism and extremism”. This task will unavoidably laid on the shoulders of modern students of public administration – future regional authority officials of the national Republics of the North Caucasus district.

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