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*Salafist-Takfiri Jihadism: the Ideology of the Caucasus
Emirate*

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Abstract:

Awareness of the Caucasus Emirate terrorist group dramatically increased in the last year due to the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi and the Boston Marathon bombings which raised questions about the ideology and objectives of the militants in the North Caucasus. The discussion has ranged from declaring the group as secular nationalists, to Islamists, to Salafist jihadists. This article examines the statements and actions by the Caucasus Emirate and its internet-based propaganda platforms to identify with conclusive evidence its true ideology. Ultimately, this analysis defines them as a Salafist-takfiri jihadist group, adhering to all of the core concepts. It is also certain that the Caucasus Emirate is sympathetic, cooperative, and parallel in ideology with al Qaeda while fighting in many jihadist theaters around the world, exhibiting a threat to international security and stability interests.

Salafist-Takfiri Jihadism: the Ideology of the Caucasus Emirate

Mr. Darion Rhodes

[Awareness of the Caucasus Emirate terrorist group dramatically increased in the last year due to the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi and the Boston Marathon bombings which raised questions about the ideology and objectives of the militants in the North Caucasus. The discussion has ranged from declaring the group as secular nationalists, to Islamists, to Salafist jihadists. This article examines the statements and actions by the Caucasus Emirate and its internet-based propaganda platforms to identify with conclusive evidence its true ideology. Ultimately, this analysis defines them as a Salafist-takfiri jihadist group, adhering to all of the core concepts. It is also certain that the Caucasus Emirate is sympathetic, cooperative, and parallel in ideology with al Qaeda while fighting in many jihadist theaters around the world, exhibiting a threat to international security and stability interests.]

Terms

Al wala' wa'l bara – the complete rejection of non-Muslims and their culture while displaying loyalty only to Muslims and Islamic culture.

Bid'a – innovation in dealing with religious issues, such as changing the original teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.¹

Djamaattakbir.blogspot.de – official website of the mujahideen based in the republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia. It was available only in Russian. It has recently been removed, for reasons still unknown, in the last few weeks. It should be noted that on February 22, 2014, Twitter shut down the account of the Caucasus Emirate: @Kavkazcenter. Thus, pressure from the Russian government could be a factor.

Emir – Arabic title for a leader or commander.

Fatwa – a ruling proclaimed by an Islamic religious leader.

Fard ayn – “individual obligation.” In this article it refers to an individual obligation to commit to jihad.

Fiqh – Islamic jurisprudence.²

Firqah-an-Najiyah – “saved sect”. Salafists believe they are the saved sect of Islam.

Hadith – the speech of or about the Prophet Muhammad written in the Sunnah.³

Hunafa.com – official website of the mujahideen based in the republics of North Ossetia and Ingushetia. It is only available in the Russian language.

Intihar – Arabic word for suicide.

Ijma – Muslim consensus over a certain issue, such as the interpretation of a *sura* or *hadith*.

Ijtihad – Using one's own opinion to interpret the Quran and Sunnah. Salafists reject *ijtihad* in most circumstances.

Islamdin.com – official website of the mujahideen based in the republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay Cherkessia. It is only available in the Russian language.

Istishhad – Arabic word for martyrdom.

Jahiliyyah – the period of ignorance until the revelation of Islam to the Prophet Muhammad.⁴

¹ al-Qahtani, 1993.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The concept of modern-day *jahiliyyah* was introduced by Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s.⁵

Jihad – in this article, it refers to armed conflict against the enemies of Islam.

Kafir (s.), kuffar (pl.) – label for someone who rejects Islam, an infidel.⁶

Kavkazcenter.com – an official website of the Caucasus Emirate. It claims to be an independent news agency. It is available in Russian, English, Arabic and Turkish.

Murtad – an apostate. A Muslim who has had *takfir* declared against them.

Salaf us-Saalih – the “pious ancestors,” Muslims who followed pure Islam from the time of its revelation to the Prophet Muhammad in 610 C.E. until the death of Ahmad ibn Hanbal in 855 C.E.. After this period, Salafists claim Islamic doctrine became distorted over time with concepts such as *bid'a*, *taqlid*, *ijtihad*, etc.⁷

Sharia – the law of Islam based on the Quran and practiced in the Sunnah.

Shirk – an act of idolatry such as worshiping someone or something other than Allah.⁸

Sunnah – practice of living in the way of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions.⁹

Takfir – the act of declaring a Muslim a *murtad*.

Taqlid – using the *ijma* of one the schools of man-interpreted *fiqh* such as the Hanafi, Shafi'i, or Maliki schools to make conclusions about Islamic affairs or interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah.

Tawhid – the divine unity of Allah as One (monotheism).¹⁰

Ummah – the global community of Muslims.¹¹

Vilayatdagestan.com – official website of the mujahideen in the Republic of Dagestan. It is available in Russian and Arabic.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Qutb, 1990, p. 14-16.

⁶ al-Qahtani, 1993.

⁷ Haykel, 2009, p. 39.

⁸ al-Qahtani, 1993.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Introduction:

Today, the ideology of the Caucasus Emirate¹² is a subject of controversy mixed with delusion. Gone are the days of the nationalist guerrilla insurgency which sought to establish an independent Islamic state in Chechnya and Dagestan. Even during the early 1990s, the nationalist banner struggled with radical Salafism propagated from Saudi Arabia, introduced by foreign fighters such as Ibn al Khattab and Abu Umar al-Saif, and then adopted by local jihadist leaders including Shamil Basayev, Anzor Astemirov and later by Said Buryatsky and Doku Umarov. As the 1990s and early 2000s progressed, the rise of Salafist ideology within the Caucasus insurgency became more apparent while secular nationalism was increasingly decaying.

The explicit transformation occurred on October 7, 2007 when leader of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI), Doku Umarov, disbanded the ChRI to establish the Caucasus Emirate, shifting its objective to create an Islamic State based on Sharia law within the entire North Caucasus between the Black and Caspian Seas. However, many security scholars and experts have failed to acknowledge the conversion. It became readily apparent after the terrorist attacks in Boston in April 2013 committed by the Tsarnaev brothers of ethnic-Chechen background, when expert and lay person alike questioned, “Why do Chechens want to attack the United States?”¹³ University of Massachusetts Dartmouth’s Dr. Brian Glyn Williams, an expert on *jihad* in Chechnya, who corresponded with Jokhar Tsarnaev via email before the attacks, continues to argue that the Caucasus Emirate is not a Salafist group linked with al Qaeda, but instead that the movement has fallen victim to “years of Russian disinformation, 9/11, and a sloppy American

¹² Name in Chechen: Imarat Kavkaz

¹³ See for example, Shinkman, 2013; Wellen, 2013.

media.”¹⁴ Many in the media acknowledge that the Caucasus Emirate is an Islamist radical group but do not make a distinction as to what school of Islamist thought they observe. Some analysts have defined the Caucasus Emirate as Salafist but have not engaged in thorough analysis to present solid evidence based on ideological precepts. This gap between labelling and a wealth of conclusive evidence readily available to those interested on learning about the Caucasus Emirate and the insurgency in the North Caucasus has only led to the confusion and delusion that is spoken of today by experts and the general public. Welcome and beneficial efforts have been made by a few experts on insurgency in the North Caucasus who have correctly identified the metamorphosis of the jihad in the North Caucasus, such as Pavel Baev,¹⁵ Gordon Hahn,¹⁶ Alexander Knysh,¹⁷ Sergey Markedonov¹⁸ and Emil Souleimanov¹⁹ as one that adheres to Salafist-takfiri jihadist ideology.

The aim of this paper is to firmly conclude why the Caucasus Emirate is a Salafist-takfiri jihadist terrorist group by analyzing speeches made by the leaders of the Caucasus Emirate and the messages promoted on their many websites and internet-based propaganda platforms. Their rhetoric will be matched with the core tenets of this ideology. Furthermore, this paper will underline why the Caucasus Emirate has long been a threat to international security interests and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

¹⁴ Urbon, 2013.

¹⁵ Baev, 2011.

¹⁶ Hahn, 2011.

¹⁷ Knysh, 2009.

¹⁸ Markedonov, 2010.

¹⁹ Souleimanov, 2011.

Salafism:

Salafist ideology bases itself on a number of concepts. The most important and overarching concept is its dependence on *tawhid* (the oneness of Allah) to influence every thought and action taken on this earth and the blaspheming of any thought or action of *shirk* (polytheism) which subordinates the glory of Allah.²⁰ Salafists also implement a strict literal interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah which includes the hadiths of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad whom they revere as living a pure form of Islam.²¹

In regard to the strict literal interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah, Salafists do not accept innovations (*bida'*) in Islam such as worshipping Allah in ways not mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah or celebrating events that were not celebrated during the time of Muhammad and the *Salaf us-Saalih*, the “pious ancestors” who adhered to pure Islam from the period of 610-855 C.E. until the death of Islamic scholar, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the father of the Hanbali school of *fiqh*.²² In accordance with this concept, Salafists reject human reasoning (*ijtihad*) to interpret the Quran and Sunnah or accepting Islamic schools of interpretation (*taqlid*) from Islamic scholars which do not adhere to the literal interpretation practiced by the *Salaf us-Saalih*.²³ Salafists only accept the Hanbali school of *fiqh* which advocates the strict literal interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah, professed by Islamic scholars such as Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz.²⁴

Any Muslim who does not adhere to the above principles can have *takfir* (apostasy) declared against them. Those who collaborate with non-Muslims are prime targets for takfirists as are

²⁰ al-Louz, 2009, p. 52.

²¹ Mneimneh, 2011, p. 24.

²² Haykel, 2009, p. 24.

²³ Salafists reject the schools of *fiqh* which adhere to *taqlid* such as the Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Maliki schools. See al-Louz, 2009, p. 56.

²⁴ al-Louz, 2009, p. 52.

Muslim governments which do not establish and implement strict Sharia law in their territories. This leads to the Salafist concept of *al wala' wa'l bara*, meaning loyalty to the Muslim and enmity toward the non-Muslim.²⁵ These concepts all have a central theme: that all man-made law and precepts are forms of *shirk* and anyone who follows this path is subject to *takfir* (if they claim to be Muslim) and being labelled a *murtad* (apostate) or as a *kafir* (infidel), both of whom must be destroyed and defeated for true Islam to rule the world. Salafist-jihadists believe that armed jihad is the only route that has been prescribed by Allah in the Quran, as well as by the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions in the Sunnah that can establish Islam and Sharia law on the earth. They also support and celebrate martyrdom attacks (*istishhad*) which moderate and modernist Muslims usually consider to be suicide (*intihar*), condemnable to Hellfire.²⁶ Salafism and Wahhabism hold to all of these concepts as both adhere to the Hanbali school of which Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the father of Wahhabism was a student. Therefore, it should not be surprising that Wahhabists in general claim to Salafists.²⁷

Leaders and Web Sites:

One can find clues into the thought process and ideology of the Caucasus Emirate by observing the names of its leaders and associated web-based propaganda platforms. Its leader, Doku Umarov has adopted the Arabized name of Dokka Abu Usman.²⁸ “Usman” is the Turkish and Chechen form of the name “Uthman” who was one of Prophet Muhammad’s Companions and the third righteous Caliph. Although, this is not direct proof that this name was adopted for ideological reasons, it may not be mere coincidence that Umarov adopted one of the names of

²⁵ al-Awlaki, 2013.

²⁶ Zeidan, 2001.

²⁷ Haykel, 2013, p. 484.

²⁸ See it mentioned in, Astemirov, 2008; Kavkaz Center, 2011, September 6; and Vilayat Dagestan, 2014, January 18.

the Companions of the Prophet, to show his adherence to the teachings of the Quran, Sunnah, and the words of the Companions whom Salafists regard as living a form of “pure Islam” and not in *jahiliyyah* (ignorance). It should also be noted that the Caucasus Emirate now fights under the black flag of jihad with the *shahada*²⁹ on it, illustrating the importance of their religion in their cause and their rejection of nationalism. The flag differs from the one of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria which exhibited religious significance, but more mildly, such as having a green background, which is the color that represents Islam. Neither remains the crest of Chechnya on the flag which Salafists would view as *shirk*, fighting for a cause other than to honor and advance the cause of Allah.

Abu-Umar al-Shishani,³⁰ the leader of the group “Ansar al Sunnah” of the Dagestan *mujahideen* whose group has pledged *bayat* (allegiance) to Doku Umarov and are therefore part of the Caucasus Emirate, has taken a name after the second righteous Caliph, Umar, despite being born as Tarkhan Batirashvili in the Pankisi Gorge, Georgia. It should also be noticed that “Ansar al Sunnah” fights under the black Salafi flag which the text reads, “no god but Allah,”³¹ showing their dedication to *tawhid*, again showing their rejection of their nationalist past. The same flag can be seen flying among al Qaeda and its affiliates such as al-Shabaab in Somalia.³² “Ansar al-Sunnah” itself means “followers of the Sunnah,” a key tenet of Salafism.

The names of three of the websites of the Caucasus Emirate also raise attention to their identity and cause. The two websites of the *mujahideen* in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia,

²⁹ The Shahada is the profession of faith by Muslims and one of the five pillars of Islam: la ilaha illa'llah, Muhammad ar-Rasulu'llah (translation: “There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of God”). See al-Qahtani, 1993.

³⁰ For details on Abu-Umar al-Shishani, see Paraszczuk & Lucas, 2013.

³¹ In Arabic: La ilaha illa Allah.

³² The Salafi flag can be seen behind the two alleged Volgograd suicide bombers in their video appeal. See, Vilayat Dagestan, 2014, January 19.

islamdin.com and djamaattakbir.blogspot.de are worth addressing. “Islam Din” means that Islam is the “complete way of life”³³ while jamaat takbir, “takbir”, meaning “God is greater”, can be implied to mean those fighting for the cause of Allah. The website, hunafa.com of the Ingush and Ossetian *mujahideen* also signifies possible Salafist roots. The “Hunafa”, meaning “those who turn away,” were the early Muslims who were distressed at the idolatry taking place in Mecca, such as the presence of intercessors and the worship of various idols near the *Ka’bah*. The *hunafa*, which included the Prophet Muhammad were termed to be truth-seekers who sought to follow the true religion of Abraham and Ishmael.³⁴ All of these examples explicitly signify the Caucasus Emirate’s religious identity and strategy as well as its dedication to the teachings and way of life of the Prophet Muhammad, his Companions, and the early generations of Muslims (*Salaf us-Saalih*).

To establish the theme for the empirical evidence of this paper, Doku Umarov declared that,

Today we try to bring up every Mujahid, every young man from [the] Caucasus, on [the] following criteria: the first is Tawhid, the second is [the] Sunnah of the Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, the third is al-Wala’ wa-al-Bara’.³⁵

Tawhid:

All Muslims believe in *tawhid*, the oneness of God. However, Salafists adhere to a strict obedience of the concept which conforms all of their thoughts and actions.³⁶ Abd al-Hakim Abu al-Louz, a Muslim author affirms that *tawhid* is the “criterion” used to judge the legitimacy of believers and that Salafists consider it *shirk* (idolatry) to base ones thoughts or actions on

³³ Wadud, 2006, p. 92.

³⁴ Islamic Beliefs, 2010; Ministry of Hajj (n.d.).

³⁵ Umarov, 2009, May 17.

³⁶ Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 208.

anything other than *tawhid*.³⁷ Therefore, the concept is a central theme which will be addressed throughout this article, as Salafists reject obedience to human reasoning when interpreting the Quran and Sunnah (*taqlid* and *ijtihad*), as well as innovation (*bid'a*) in religious practice. According to Bernard Haykel, Salafists have a distinct three-category understanding of *tawhid*: the Oneness of Lordship (*tawhid al-rububiyya*), the Oneness of Godship (*tawhid al-uluhiyya*), and the Oneness of the Names and Attributes (*tawhid al-asma' wa-l-sifat*).³⁸ An article on one of the Caucasus Emirate's websites outlines the importance of all three categories of *tawhid*,³⁹ and as already mentioned, Umarov stated that *tawhid* is instilled in every *mujahid* of the Caucasus Emirate.

Indeed, the Dagestan *mujahideen* consider all their beliefs and actions to be adherent to *tawhid*. They acknowledge the “modern *jahiliyyah*” of idolatry and distortion which has plagued Islam, believing that the return to the “true ideology” of *tawhid* is the only way to purify Islam.⁴⁰ Former *jamaat* leader of the Caucasus Emirate, Anzor Astemirov stated clearly that the,

...main condition for the victory of Muslims is strict, rigorous observance of the Tawhid. Tawhid is the purpose of our life, we fight for it and are ready to die.⁴¹

A video on October 28, 2013 from the Caucasus Emirate fighting in Syria, cries out that the infidels want to force liberality and democracy on Muslims and asks “Where are you, lions of Tawhid?” repeated four times, “Indeed you are called to the battlefield” repeated three times.⁴²

There is much evidence of the Caucasus Emirate condemning polytheism and polytheists. In an address to the *mujahideen* in Syria, Doku Umarov sent a video message in support of their fight

³⁷ al-Louz, 2009, p. 52; Mneimneh, 2011, p. 27.

³⁸ Haykel, 2009, p. 38-39.

³⁹ as-Shami, 2013, April 13.

⁴⁰ Vilayat Dagestan, (n.d.).

⁴¹ Astemirov, Anzor, 2008.

⁴² Imarat Kavkaz Fi Sham [Imarat Kavkaz in Syria], 2013.

against the “polytheist” President Bashar al-Assad. However, what makes this speech notable is his declaration that he only supports the *mujahideen* who are fighting to establish the Word of Allah in Syria, not the jihadists who are only seeking to overthrow the “polytheist” president and establish a secular or democratic state:

[A]s true followers of the Tradition of the Prophet (pbuh), we can only pray for those brothers and ask only for those brothers who are waging the Jihad in Syria in order to establish the Word of Allah there. I swear to Allah, if there are brothers with different intentions - we cannot support them. We support the Jihad to elevate the Word of Allah, to establish the Word of Allah on the Earth, and to remove idolatry.⁴³

Doku Umarov has religious justification for his position, by instructing that Allah warned in the Quran that He will not forgive *shirk* and therefore all laws, rules, and establishments that do not come from Allah are forms of polytheism.⁴⁴ A former deputy *emir* of the Caucasus Emirate directly condemned the Olympics as *shirk*, as well as the United Nations Charter, international law, the celebrations of birthdays and New Year.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most telling event of their adherence to *tawhid* is Doku Umarov stating that he is waging his banner under “La ilaha illa Allah”⁴⁶ and rejecting all *kafir* laws in the world.⁴⁷ This religious justification can only be supported through the Quran and the Sunnah.

The Quran, Sunnah, and Way of the Companions:

Salafists uphold the belief that the Quran and the Sunnah are the only references that are authoritative for Islamic living and disregard man-made law as *shirk*, polytheism.⁴⁸ Doku Umarov speaks directly about this:

⁴³ Umarov, 2012, November 13.

⁴⁴ Umarov, 2007, November 22.

⁴⁵ Kavkaz Center, 2009, February 28.

⁴⁶ Translated: “There is no God but Allah”

⁴⁷ Umarov, 2007, November 22.

With regard to policy I would like to tell all my opponents: the real and wise policy is a policy based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the way of the prophet (pbuh)), and the foolish policy is a policy based on hollow expectations, incomprehensible fantasies and fear of a visible power.⁴⁹

Furthermore, Umarov has said it is unfathomable to “imagine that it is possible to follow anything except the Quran and the Sunnah.”⁵⁰ Since Salafists admire the Islamic practices of the Prophet’s Companions, the Caucasus Emirate has posted an article on its official blog promoting moral Islamic living based on the Companions.⁵¹ Furthermore, the Dagestan *mujahideen* have stated on their website that one needs to understand that the beliefs of the Salaf “is the true creed and *manhaj* [methodology]” and therefore only articles and books which adhere strictly to the Salaf understanding of the Quran and Sunnah will be posted.⁵² According to a sermon posted on the Kavkaz Center website, those who do not support the establishment of the Quran and Sunnah as law or who fight against it are “infidels.”⁵³ It is also important then to determine how the Caucasus Emirate interprets the Quran and Sunnah as this is also conducive to defining the group as Salafist.

Rejection of Bid’a, Taqlid and Ijtihad:

One of the key tenets of Salafist Islam is its rejection of human reasoning when it comes to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). As Islamic author Abd al-Hakim Abu al-Louz complies, Salafists view any attempt to use human reasoning to interpret the Quran and Sunnah as a conspiracy to undermine Islam.⁵⁴ Salafists follow the *fiqh* of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855 C.E.) who

⁴⁸ Haykel, 2009, p. 38-39.

⁴⁹ Umarov, 2007, November 22.

⁵⁰ Umarov, 2007, December 31.

⁵¹ Sinbarigov, 2014, January 1.

⁵² Vilayat Dagestan, (n.d.).

⁵³ Jamaat Sharia, 2010, January 30.

⁵⁴ al-Louz, 2009, p. 52-53.

adhered to a strict literal interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah and was fervently against *bid'a* and *taqlid*.⁵⁵ Therefore, Salafists reject the other schools of *fiqh*, the most common being the Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Maliki schools of thought. Sufis and Shiites in general are adherents of *taqlid* and therefore receive much abuse from Salafists.⁵⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah, the respected scholar of Salafism, stated that he who fights against *bid'a* is a *mujahid* because it seeks to destroy the true nature of Islam.⁵⁷

On the website of the *mujahideen* in Dagestan, they warn against the “heresy” of *bid'a*, *taqlid*, and any “other delusions contrary to the Quran and the Sunnah.”⁵⁸ The Ingush *mujahideen* have included articles on their website from Syrian Salafist Sheikh Abu Basir al-Tartusi who propagates if anyone shows respect to the followers of *bid'a*, they aid in the destruction of Islam.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the *mujahideen* from the Kabardin-Balkar-Karachay *jamaat* dictate that *bid'a* leads to Hellfire.⁶⁰ Condemnation of Sufism as a religion of *bid'a* is also common among the Caucasus Emirate. On a blog posting on Kavkaz Center in January 2014, another Salafi scholar, Imam Ibn al-Jawzi al-Baghdadi, dictates that the screaming, running in circles, and trance-like worship by the Sufis is *bid'a*.⁶¹ Articles on the Caucasus Emirate's websites condemning the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday by Sufis in Chechnya, and tweets criticizing “pagan” holidays are only a few examples, not only denouncing *shirk*, but

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 52.

⁵⁶ Rizvi, (n.d.).

⁵⁷ al-Louz, 2009, p. 55.

⁵⁸ Vilayat Dagestan, (n.d.).

⁵⁹ al-Tartusi, 2013, February 12.

⁶⁰ as-Shami, 2013, April 13.

⁶¹ Sinbarigov, 2014, January 22.

bid'a as well.⁶² This evidence highlights how the Caucasus Emirate is in direct opposition to the practices of the majority Sufi population in the North Caucasus.

In regards to *taqlid*, the adherence to an Islamic school of thought which uses human reasoning, such as the Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Maliki schools, the Salafists disregard all of them because it is a form of *shirk* to put human reasoning above Allah. The *mujahideen* in Dagestan warned against the heresy of *bid'a* and *taqlid* which are contrary to the Quran and Sunnah.⁶³ On the Ingush *mujahideen* website Hunafa.com, a warning from Sultan bin Bajad Al-Utaibi, a leader of the Ikhwan movement which established the modern state of Saudi Arabia, tells Muslims to beware of *taqlid*, because it is a “deadly disease” and that a Muslim must submit themselves to the Salaf understanding of the Quran and Sunnah.⁶⁴ Said Buryatsky, now-deceased leader of the Caucasus Emirate's suicide squad, the Riyadus-Saliheen Brigade of Martyrs, also warned against the use of *ijtihad* (individual human reasoning) to interpret the Quran and Sunnah.⁶⁵ Another neutralized leader of the Caucasus Emirate, Anzor Astemirov repeats that *taqlid* is “not allowed” and that scholars who do so are “misinterpreting [the Quranic Suras' and Hadiths'] meaning for an imaginary benefit.”⁶⁶ A message on Kavkaz Center from Salafist Sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani rejects the views of scholars who use *qiyas* (analogy) and *ijma* (consensus) to interpret the religious texts.⁶⁷ To prevent the further tainting of Islam and maintain the preservation of Salafist ideology, they must not only believe in a particular way but treat others differently, which leads to the concept of *al-wala' wa'l bara*.

⁶² See for example, Umma News, 2012, February 2.

⁶³ Vilayat Dagestan, (n.d.).

⁶⁴ al-Utaibi, 2014, January 23.

⁶⁵ Buryatsky, 2010, July 17.

⁶⁶ Astemirov, 2008, April 15.

⁶⁷ Department of Monitoring Kavkaz Center, 2010, September 27.

Al-wala' wa'l bara:

As was mentioned near the beginning of the paper, Doku Umarov implants on his *mujahideen* the concept of *al-wala' wa'l baraa*, which advocates enmity towards unbelievers. Using the Quran⁶⁸ for justification, he says,

Take not the Jews and the Christians as *awliya'* (friends, protectors, helpers), they are but *awliya'* of each other. And if any amongst you takes them as *awliya'*, then surely, he is one of them.⁶⁹

Umarov reasons that they are at enmity with non-believers and apostates because they are the “enemies of Allah.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, the former deputy of the Caucasus Emirate states that there can be no “peaceful coexistence with disbelievers” because when this has occurred in the past, it has only led to Muslims’ suffering.⁷¹ It shows that Umarov and the Caucasus Emirate are adhering to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah who said that the faithful will desire to be friends of believers and “show the bar to the enemies of Allah.”⁷² The Caucasus Emirate not only speaks about *al-wala' wa'l bara* itself, but propagates other Salafists’ views on their websites which advocate this concept. On Islamdin.com, a *fatwa* from Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the spiritual father of Salafism, states that Muslims should not participate in the Olympics in Sochi because there is nudity, mixing of sexes, music, and wickedness.⁷³ This is yet another example of *al-wala' wa'l bara* as he promotes the complete separation between believers and non-believers. Doku Umarov states that *kuffar* and *murtads* are not subjects of authority but are to be

⁶⁸ Surat al-Maidah (the Table Spread with Food), 5:51.

⁶⁹ Umarov, 2007, December 31.

⁷⁰ Umarov, 2010, October 18.

⁷¹ Kavkaz Center, 2009, February 28.

⁷² Ataya, 2009, April 11.

⁷³ al-Maqdisi, 2012, November 1.

eliminated.⁷⁴ This leads to defining how the Caucasus Emirate defines their mission and strategy as one of religious calling, not nationalist ideology.

Religiosity of the Mission and Strategy:

The Caucasus Emirate has repeatedly defined themselves as *mujahideen* fighting for the cause of Allah. The jihad in the North Caucasus is only one part of their strategy in establishing Sharia law on the earth. When proclaiming the Caucasus Emirate, Umarov declared war not only on Russia, but the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, and “anyone who is waging war against Islam and Muslims.”⁷⁵ The battle has been continuously termed as one between the righteous Muslims and the armies of *Iblis* (the Devil).⁷⁶ In response, to resist the further humiliation of Islam and the Muslim *Ummah* as well as to restore the “golden age” of Islam, it is deemed only attainable through *jihad*. Their goal is to force the withdrawal of Russian forces and influence from the North Caucasus and all the “Muslim lands” inside Russia.⁷⁷ The “Muslim lands” include the Astrakhan region, Idel-Ural (comprising the traditional Muslim republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan as well as the city of Volgograd)⁷⁸, Siberia, and even Moscow.⁷⁹ Doku Umarov has stated that Russia is considered “a single theater of war” and that attacks could take place from the North Caucasus to Vladivostok.⁸⁰

Umarov has made blatantly clear his intention of hostility towards the foreign “enemies of Islam” such as the United States and Israel by saying, “I am saddened by the position of those

⁷⁴ Umarov, 2007, November 22.

⁷⁵ Souleimanov, 2011, p.163.

⁷⁶ Department of Monitoring Kavkaz Center, 2010, October 31.

⁷⁷ Kavkaz Center, 2011, May 17.

⁷⁸ Also includes the republics of Chuvashia, Mari El, Mordovia, and Udmurtia

⁷⁹ Kavkaz Center, 2011, May 17.

⁸⁰ Kavkaz Center, 2011, May 17.

Muslims who declare as their enemies only those kuffar who attacked them directly.”⁸¹ The Caucasus Emirate has also warned about attacks against foreigners inside Russia, especially during the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi in 2014. In 2007, the *mujahideen* in Dagestan warned of attacks against Sochi “Olympic participants” who represent countries which they deem wage war “against Islam and Muslims.”⁸² Doku Umarov has said that the Caucasus Emirate has no plans to stop its *jihad* until judgment day and that anyone who thinks they can “scorn the Islamic religion” and escape unpunished is mistaken.⁸³ Therefore, since Salafi-jihadists consider *jihad* to be the only way to establish Sharia law on the earth it will be interesting to see how the Caucasus Emirate views jihad, not as a general concept but as one that is religiously justified.

Jihad is *fard ayn* and Praise for Suicide Attacks:

The Caucasus Emirate considers *jihad* everywhere as *fard ayn*, an individual duty for every Muslim. Umarov considers the Islamic *Ummah* “inseparable.”⁸⁴ In an appeal to Muslims in the Idel-Ural region of Russia, Umarov states,

“Today, dear brothers, the [global] Ummah is in such a degraded state, in such a poor condition that Jihad becomes obligatory for all of us. Jihad is a fard al-ayn.”⁸⁵

Whenever Umarov speaks about the *Ummah*, he is always speaking about the global Muslim community, which he considers to be one.⁸⁶ This identity, belonging to the *Ummah*, is of the utmost importance to Salafi jihadists, who consider earthly identity to be temporary and

⁸¹ Umarov, 2007, November 22.

⁸² @Kavkazcenter, 2014, January 1.

⁸³ Umarov, 2010, October 18; Umarov, 2007, November 22.

⁸⁴ Umarov, 2007, November 22.

⁸⁵ Umarov, 2011, March 3.

⁸⁶ Umarov, 2011, March 3.

secondary to the eternal and spiritual identity of being a Muslim.⁸⁷ Umarov, using religious justification for *jihad*, promotes that *tawhid* can only be established on this earth with the sword, as it has been since the time of the Prophet and that if it were possible using any other method, the Prophet would not have participated in 27 battles.⁸⁸ The Caucasus Emirate not only participates in *jihad* but justifies suicide attacks as well.

In general, traditional Muslims consider *intihar* (suicide) to be condemnable to judgment and eternal Hellfire while Salafists cite the Quran and Sunnah to justify such attacks.⁸⁹ The Caucasus Emirate has used suicide attacks as a tactic on repeated occasions, taken credit for, and praised such actions. In an interview, Umarov praised the *istishhad* (martyrdom) of the *shaheed* (martyr) who exploded himself inside Domodedovo Airport in January 2011 which caused casualties to over 200 people.⁹⁰ A poem posted on hunafa.com on November 19, 2013 praises the *shaheed* Dmitry Sokolov, the alleged organizer of the successful *istishhad* of his wife, Naida Asiyalova on a bus in Volgograd on October 21, 2013. Many video pleas from suicide attackers (now deceased) can be viewed on the Caucasus Emirate's websites. The final concept that will be discussed in this paper is *takfir* and the Salafists unique interpretation of its use.

Takfir and Firqah-an-Najiyah:

The Caucasus Emirate has been very willing to declare *takfir* (apostasy) on individual Muslims and Islamic regimes around the world which do not adhere strictly to Sharia law. In traditional Islam, *takfir* can only be declared by a Caliph or religious leader. However, Doku Umarov and the Caucasus Emirate have taken exception to this and declared *takfir* on their own. Umarov has

⁸⁷ Moghadam, 2008.

⁸⁸ Umarov, 2007, November 22; Department of Monitoring Kavkaz Center, 2010, October 31.

⁸⁹ Feldner, 2001; Moghadam, 2008.

⁹⁰ Umarov, 2011, August 30.

declared *takfir* on anyone who promotes democracy as well as anyone who collaborates with Russian authorities.⁹¹ Religious justification for their authority to implement their widespread use of *takfir* has appeared on Hunafa.com, stating that,

ordinary people with knowledge in [Sharia] legal provisions and take into account the obstacles of takfir can make takfir...as it was since the times of the Prophet....[And that those who say takfir can only be made exclusively by] judges, muftis, or famous scholars, this opinion is erroneous.⁹²

The Caucasus Emirate has gone so far as to condemn Muslims who heed only to limited *takfir*. On Kavkaz Center, an essay was published by Sheikh Ali ibn al Khudayr from Saudi Arabia which condemned the “moderate” and “modernist” Muslims who limit their use of *takfir*, participate in *bida'*, use *ijtihad* and refuse to commit to *al wala' wa'l bara* and *jihad*.⁹³ Justification for their actions has also come from heeding to the teachings of Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who justified *takfir* against any Muslim who turns away from religion or practices *shirk*.⁹⁴ This has led to the Caucasus Emirate declaring *takfir* on fellow Muslims such as Sufis like the President of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov who is frequently mocked as “Kafyrov”,⁹⁵ “kafir” being the Arabic word for infidel. Shiites have also been a prime target of *takfir* by the Caucasus Emirate and its internet-based propaganda platforms which is also a common feature of Salafists.⁹⁶

Salafists are clear when delineating themselves from their enemies as seen with the adherence to the concept of *al wala' wa'l bara*. Quintan Wiktorowicz, an expert in Salafist ideology, stresses that Salafists believe that only they are the true followers of Islam and will escape judgment.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Umarov, 2007, December 31.

⁹² Merdzhov, 2011, August 16.

⁹³ al-Khudayr, 2009, October 23.

⁹⁴ Merdzhov, 2011, September 9.

⁹⁵ Sinbarigov, 2014, January 3; Buryatsky, 2010, July 17.

⁹⁶ See for example, al-Tartusi, 2013, February 12; Sinbarigov, 2013, December 31.

⁹⁷ Wiktorowicz, 2006, p. 209, 214.

They call themselves the *Firqah-an-Najiyah* (saved sect) because they adhere strictly to the Quran and Sunnah and live in the footsteps of the early Muslims.⁹⁸ No evidence has been found of any leaders in the Caucasus Emirate directly calling themselves part of the *Firqah-an-Najiyah*. However, they have posted numerous articles from Salafist sheikhs, such as Anwar al-Awlaki who have mentioned the *Firqah-an-Najiyah* directly in these writings, which at least leads to the conclusion that the Caucasus Emirate is sympathetic to this concept due to their strict control of their propaganda websites.⁹⁹

Conclusion:

It has been concluded in this paper that the Caucasus Emirate has disbanded in its entirety from its nationalist goals held during the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) and has fully embraced Salafist-takfiri jihadist ideology to liberate the Islamic *Ummah* from *jahiliyyah* and rid the world of *murtads* and *kuffar* to establish Sharia law on the whole earth. Its strict adherence to the upholding of *tawhid* and justification for all thoughts and actions founded in the strict Hanbali literal interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah form the basis not only for Salafists in general but for the Caucasus Emirate as well. Its rejection and profuse hatred towards those who participate in *shirk*, *bid'a*, *taqlid* and *ijtihad* has highlighted their adherence to *al-wala' wa'l bara* and its widespread practice of proclaiming *takfir* against such individuals and governmental regimes. The Caucasus Emirate has repudiated the traditional Sufi population of the North Caucasus, causing many fighters to turn their backs on their cultural and religious heritage. No longer can one claim that Doku Umarov is “fully convinced” that traditional Sufism “should remain the

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 209; al-Awlaki, 2009, November 1.

⁹⁹ See for example, al-Awlaki, 2009, November 1.

basis of Chechen society.”¹⁰⁰ Since it has adopted Salafist-takfiri jihadist ideology and acknowledges unity and support for foreign jihadist groups, such as sending fighters to Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East and South Asia, the Caucasus Emirate is not only a threat to Russia and those inside its territory, but all those who do not embrace their ideology, which deems them an actor which should be viewed with increased scrutiny in the future, not only during the Olympic Winter Games in Sochi.

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¹⁰⁰ Which is what C.W. Blandy concluded in the mid-2000s. See, Blandy, 2006, p. 2.

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