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Russia and the Muslim World

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The publication analyzes the Russian Federation's policies regarding the Muslim community and examines Russian policy towards radical Islam and its representatives. It provides an overview of Russia's ties with different Muslim countries in the energy sector and the military-technical cooperation field.

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INTRODUCTION

Religion has long played a role in foreign policy. Inter-faith relations are among the circumstances taken into account in resolving numerous conflicts. Among the many factors shaping countries' foreign policy, the religious dimension is often cited and helps to make it more comprehensible in the eyes of the public.

How important is it to take into consideration the religious identity of one's partner or opponent when setting foreign policy? "Faith-based diplomacy can be a useful tool of foreign policy," former U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright said. "The resurgence of religious feeling will continue to influence world events."[1]

This statement applies most fully to the Muslim world. For all the selectiveness of their approach to each individual Muslim country, the USA, Europe, Russia and China always take into account these countries' place in the Islamic community. The reasons for this include:

- The inherently politicized nature of Islam;
- The membership of all of these countries in transnational Muslim institutions;
- Islamic solidarity (if only partial and formal) observed at state and public levels;
- The existence of a trans-border radical religious and political movement;
- Islam's geographical expansion and its spread in Africa and Europe;
- The existence of conflict zones in the Muslim world and adjoining territories.

One can add to this the argument that emerged in the West at the turn of the century about the need to democratize the entire Muslim world, an argument that implies the reform of Islam and states its homogeneity.

At the same time, another view holds that the concept of the Muslim world is no more than a myth or quite simply political speculation. This is the view of influential French scholar Olivier Roy, for example, who says that "An Islamic geo-strategy does not exist because neither the land of Islam nor the Muslim community exist."[2]

The problem is that in foreign policy it is impossible to fully accept one of these views or to disengage oneself from it. Certainly, from an economic and political standpoint the Muslim world is a variegated mosaic, but the self-perception of unity of the Islamic umma relative to the rest of the world cannot be entirely disregarded. In the same way, it is impossible to ignore the religious dimension of conflicts in which Muslims are involved. The duality of an approach that sees the Muslim world as a political and cultural whole and at the same time as an artificial conglomerate is objectively inevitable and has an impact on relations with the Muslim countries.

[1] *Albright M.* Faith and Diplomacy // The Review of Faith & International Affairs. — 2006. — Vol. 4. — № 2. — Fall. — P. 9.

[2] *Roy O.* L'Islam Mondialisé. — Paris: Seuil, 2002. — P. 210.

BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

The fact that Russia is in no hurry to make its own final geopolitical choice and decide which civilization it belongs to is an additional reason for it to consider the religious factor in shaping foreign policy relations with the Muslim world.

First, Russia is incapable of fitting itself into Western Christian civilization. It is unable to take a full place in the Western community and over the first decade of this century has abandoned this desire.

Second, this pushes Russia into turning towards the South and the East, putting the emphasis on a dual civilization identity. The Eurasian or, as it is sometimes called now, "neo-Eurasian" ideology forms the foundation of this approach. "This neo-Eurasian ideology offers Russia's leaders a strategic vision that liberates non-Western civilizations from globalism and proposes a rapprochement with the Muslim countries, as the gap between them and the United States continues to grow all the time."[3]

In reality, the neo-Eurasian ideology is an artificial construct that cannot be applied to a single practical aspect of Russia's foreign policy, including to Russian-Chinese or Russian-Indian relations, not to mention attempts to gain a stronger foothold in Latin America. There is no playing the neo-Eurasian card in Russian-Islamic relations either, though some Russian Muslim ideologues, above all the head of the Central Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Russia and the European Countries of the CIS, Talgat Tadzhutdin, have tried to do this.

Only Kazakhstan places real value on the neo-Eurasian ideology, and this is for purely opportunistic reasons that could undergo considerable change over the coming years.

The search for a dual civilization approach is laden with difficulties: ultimately, Russia is perceived as a stranger in the South and the East. The words of Russian philosopher Pyotr Chaadayev, spoken 200 years ago, come to mind: "We never traveled the same road together with other peoples, we never belonged to any of the known families of humankind, neither in the West nor the East, and we have not the traditions of either the one or the other."[4]

One of the most incomprehensible concepts in the official ideology is the "civilization-based dimension of national security," the purpose of which is to "defend against external threats in all areas of life: the political and economic systems, ethnic and religious structures, all forms of public awareness, identity, traditions and way of life." At the same time, "religion is also an important element in national security," and "religious faiths, above all Orthodoxy, contribute to uniting society and increase protection of the spiritual space."[5]

Russia's place between East and West is presented as a convenient justification for declaring special relations with Muslims. Moscow finds it easier to have dealings with them than with the Europeans or Americans. The Muslims do not raise the kinds of questions that typically come up in Russia's dealings with the West, that is, the extent to which Russia's political system conforms to recognized democratic standards. During his visit to Muslim countries in 2007, then President Vladimir Putin found himself watching a completely different performance: the door opened onto a different world in which there were no thorny issues and relations were nothing but good and free of conflict, the shadow of suspicion and the mutual reproach that had marred visits to other parts of the world.

Even in Westward-looking Turkey people note that, unlike European and American politicians, Russian politicians show respect for their Turkish counterparts. The Turks also note similarities in political culture, in particular the emphasis on the state's central role.[6]

Muslim leaders never raise the issue of human rights. They were a lot milder than expected in their criticism of Moscow for the war in Chechnya. Russian diplomats at the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva admitted that Russia spoke as one voice with the Muslim countries, Saudi Arabia in particular, and they took the Chechnya issue off the agenda. Russia for its part does not call on the Muslims to accept democracy, does not meddle in their internal affairs and shows understanding towards the authoritarianism that is dominant in the Muslim world. As the newspaper Kommersant sarcastically noted in this regard, "Our political sub-group in the world is Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan, and not the G8."[7]

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[3] *Chaudet D., Parmentier F., Pelopidas B.* L'empire au miroir. — Genève; Paris, 2007. — P. 158. — Librairie DROZ.

[4] *Chaadayev P. Y.* Izbrannye sochineniya i pisma. — M., 1991. — P. 25.

[5] *Kirshin Y. Y.* Tsivilizatsionnaya sostavlyayushchaya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti // Nezavisimaya Gazeta. — 2008. — February 1.

[6] *Kiniklioglu S.* The Anatomy of Turkish-Russian Relations // Insight Turkey [Ankara]. — 2006. — Apr.—June. — Vol. 8. — № 2 — P. 86.

[7] *Strokan S.* Tsena voprosa // Kommersant. — 2007. — February 14.

Third, "the search for special relations with the Arab and Muslim world fits in with the idea of strengthening multi-polarity in the world that Russia has proclaimed as its foreign policy principle."[8] In this respect, we can also note that Moscow cautiously puts forward the idea that Russia and the Muslim world face common threats and challenges from the West, above all from the USA. This argument strikes a sensitive chord with a number of Muslim politicians. During Vladimir Putin's visit to Libya in April 2008, for example, the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, said there are forces that attack Iraq and Afghanistan, and that these forces "pretend they are helping Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Chechnya, when in reality they are destabilizing the situation."[9]

Fourth, the presence in Russia of a Muslim minority numbering almost 20 million people, whose mood the Kremlin has to take into account, gives added significance to the Islamic factor in Russian foreign policy.[10]

Fifth, the threat of religious extremism makes the "Islamic factor" important. Compared to other non-Muslim countries Russia has had the greatest number of terrorist attacks carried out by perpetrators calling themselves mujahedeen. The fight against religious extremism has thus become grounds for cooperation with the West.

HOW THE VIEW OF THE MUSLIM WORLD HAS CHANGED

During the first years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's relations with the Muslim world underwent dramatic change. Andrei Kozyrev, the new foreign minister, stated the importance of relations with the Muslim countries, more precisely with the Middle East, but saw them as something inert and of lesser significance inherited from Soviet foreign policy. Against the backdrop of rapprochement with the West, talk of developing relations with the Muslim East was simply for the sake of politeness and sounded false.

From its foreign policy doctrine Moscow excluded support for national movements and abandoned independent initiatives in Middle East policy, relying in full on its American and European partners. This was not hard to do, given that the Soviet Union's role in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict had been devalued ever since the start of the Camp David process in 1977.

It became apparent along the way that the Soviet Union left Russia no economic legacy of any worth in the Muslim world, only debts. The Soviet Union sponsored friendly countries and obtained no economic advantages in return.

But Russia's indifference to the Muslim world did not mean that the Islamic factor had vanished from foreign policy. When the Soviet Union collapsed, and the bipolar world with it, Islam fitted itself fully into the world political situation that emerged, and forces acting under religious slogans became an actor in world politics.

This had especially important implications for Russia. Indeed, it was the Islamic factor that revealed continuity, albeit of a tragic kind, in Russia's foreign policy: Russia soon had its own "Muslim front", and just a few years after the Afghan jihad ended, the Chechen jihad began. Just as the Afghan war before it, the war in Chechnya had a negative impact on Russia's standing in the international community.

The Islamic factor has also been creeping quietly into Russia's relations with its nearest Muslim neighbors. The former Soviet republics' desire to stress their identity within the Muslim world and look towards Islam increased the distance between them and the center. Of course, the ruling elite in these countries did not share this desire to incorporate themselves into the Muslim community (they would have been a foreign body there), but appeals to Islam, even if inconsistent, and more active relations with their co-religionists abroad have created additional possibilities for foreign policy maneuvering. Besides, many politicians in these countries hoped to use this nascent public passion for Islam to get economic help from their fellow Muslims abroad. A teeming Muslim enclave that has now lost its Soviet identity and is prey to sporadic outbursts of religious radicalism has emerged along Russia's southern borders.

In 1994, Yevgeny Primakov, then head of the Foreign Intelligence Service, suggested that Russia would face an increase in the "Islamic threat." According to the scenario drawn up, Islam would come

[8] *Levesque J.* Russia and the Muslim World: The Chechnya Factor and Beyond // Russian Analytical Digest. — 2008. — 44/08. — July 2. — P. 6.

[9] Poseyali zerna i sobrali urozhai // Vremya Novostei. — 2008. — April 18.

[10] 20 million is the official figure put on the number of Muslims in Russia and has often been quoted by Russian presidents and the country's Foreign Ministry. Other data puts the figure at between 15-20 million, though some in the Muslim community think the number of followers of Islam in Russia is actually a lot higher.

from Tajikistan, which was in the grip of civil war at that time, and Afghanistan, where the Taliban movement had gathered strength. In 1994, the war in Chechnya began destabilizing the situation in the North Caucasus, and in 1996, the Taliban took power in Kabul. Afghanistan became a center for international Islam, where extremists from Central Asia and the Caucasus received training. A "crescent of instability" emerged with the Caucasus at one end and China's Xinjiang Province at the other.

Of course, the "Islamist crescent" had risen earlier in the geopolitical sky. It emerged with the Iranian revolution and the war in Afghanistan, which led to the internationalization of the jihad, of which Bin Laden's Al Qaida would go on to become the symbol. The Afghan resistance gave some the illusion that Islamic radicalism could be manipulated with impunity, while others felt it made no sense to fight against it.

Russia's decision not to take any part in internal events in Afghanistan was one of the biggest mistakes at that time. In 1994-1995, Russia had a real chance to maintain its presence on the political stage in Afghanistan, by drawing on the pro-Russian sentiments of Ahmad Shah Massoud, for example, one of the key figures in the country, but this was not done for a number of objective and subjective reasons.[11]

September 11, 2001, in my view, did not add anything principally new to relations between the Muslim world and the West, including Russia. In 2001 in a Briefing with the provocative title, "The world hasn't changed..." I wrote: "It did not bring about any significant revision in the political references and principles of different countries and political blocs."[12] But the human and political tragedy that took place that day gave a brutal demonstration of the seriousness of these unresolved and drawn out relations in the immediate historical perspective.

In this context, Russia not only had to define its attitude towards Islam as a player in its extremist form, that is to say, its attitude towards the Islamist threat, but also had to reflect on ways of using this factor more effectively in its foreign policy.

The Islamist threat soon emerged within Russia itself. The barrier between home-grown Islam and foreign Islam became much easier to penetrate and contacts between Russian Muslims, whether in the North Caucasus, or to a lesser extent, along the Volga River and in the southern Urals, became regular and diverse. A number of charity organizations with an ideological and political dimension started working in Russia, including Salvation (MIOS), Jamaat Ihia at-Turas al-Islami (Society for the Renaissance of the Islamic Heritage), Al Haramein (Two Holy Places), Al Hairiya (Charity), Benevolens International Foundation, Qatar, and also groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, Al Qaida, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Islamism established itself in Russia's immediate neighborhood. The emotional tone used in various "counter-terrorist" publications was designed to form the opinion that the Islamist threat arose exclusively through the activities of external forces. But this approach was a deliberate choice of a line to feed public opinion and ignored the internal causes of the rise in pro-Islamic sentiment. It is typical in authoritarian regimes to see social protest take a religious form in the absence of any real functioning democratic institutions, and in this situation Islamism has become the only opposition. In the words of former prime minister of Kazakhstan, Akezhan Kazhegeldin, "The people who are taking up arms in Central Asia are those for whom the newly proclaimed khans and sultans have left no legal niche for political opposition."[13]

The reality of the threat from religious extremists is also linked to the fact that in their vision Russia (its culture, religious identity and history) is part of the West. Ayatollah Khomeini called America the "Great Satan" and the Soviet Union the "Little Satan", and this expression remains relevant today. Of course, the different Islamist groups shift the emphasis to the noun or the adjective depending on the particular line they follow. But no matter what the emphasis, the notion of "Satan" is always present, even if for opportunistic reasons it is not always said aloud. One can imagine that in the eyes of the Hamas radicals Russia is a "little Satan", while in the eyes of radicals in the Caucasus it is a "great Satan".

After September 11, 2001, Russia entered the anti-terrorist coalition and joined forces with the West to fight the common enemy – the extremism destabilizing the situation in the world. Islamism has forced Russia, America and Europe to cooperate, all the more so as it is international in nature and ideologically consolidated, at least in terms of its slogans. The only way to fight it is to join forces (although even then this partnership was soon darkened by the storm clouds gathering over Saddam's Iraq).

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[11] See, for example: *Lyakhovsky A., Nekrasov V.* Grazhdanin, politik, voin. — M., 2007.

[12] *Malashenko A.* A mir ostaetsya prezhnim. — M., 2001. — Briefing / Carnegie Moscow Center; Issue 9-10, September-October

[13] *Kazhegeldin A.* Oppozitsia srednevekovyu. — London; Moscow, 2000. — P. 236.

The decision to take part in the fight against terrorism was "an instrumental decision to cooperate on the specific issue of fighting Islamic terrorism and a gamble that working with the United States would bring Russia recognition as an indispensable pillar in the post-September 11 world order."[14]

The threat of Islamist extremism was a convenient and justified excuse for bolstering Russia's military and political presence in Central Asia. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was established to fight extremism. Terrorism was also on the agenda of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, established in 1996 at China's initiative. In the spring of 1998, Russia proposed to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the idea of founding an alliance to fight radical Islam (this never came into being). The fear of being squeezed out of Central Asia prompts Moscow into using the Islamist threat to blackmail its post-Soviet partners to a certain extent. Counter-terrorism activities have become an obligatory part of all of Russia's agreements with the countries in the region. But the international organizations in the post-Soviet area are unable to prevent the rise of Islam through the use of force, if only because its roots lie in the domestic problems of the participant countries and because the Islamic radicals take a guerilla approach in their activities, something these kinds of organizations are powerless to combat. Russia's handful of military bases are also not adapted to fighting terrorism (there were plans in 1994 to increase the number of bases to up to 30, but Moscow subsequently had to abandon such ambitious projects).

Russia would not be so bold as to intervene directly in the domestic political situation in a particular country if a mass movement led by Islamic slogans really did unfold there. If a conflict broke out in the main hotbed of Islamism in the region – the Fergana Valley – not one Russian soldier would set foot there. After the failed Soviet "experiment" in Afghanistan and America's unimaginable difficulties in Iraq and in this same Afghanistan, no one is likely to want to risk sending a Russian "limited contingent" into Central Asia. The Russian public would not swallow this kind of "fraternal assistance" now (it is impossible to imagine such a scenario today).

Vladimir Putin said: "We (Russia – A.M.) are not ready and do not want to take upon ourselves the responsibility for settling conflicts in full. We do not want any of the parties to unload their responsibility for resolving crises on Russia."[15] Putin did not specify precisely which conflicts he had in mind, which suggests that he was referring to both conflicts between countries and domestic conflicts.

The days of personal sympathies and antipathies among Moscow and post-Soviet politicians are over. The Kremlin prefers to deal with those who show clear acceptance for the rules it lays down, and who are ready to take into account Russian interests regardless of the role that the religious element plays in their world vision and official ideology.

Russia accepts the semi-traditional nature of the post-Soviet Muslim regimes and is not obsessed with whether they are secular or not. Moscow is happy enough to recognize their "unique nature" and loudly proclaims its skepticism over the idea of applying a Western model to them that is alien to their identity. The notions of "particularities of national democracy" and the "need to preserve a specific civilization identity" and so on are music to the ears of Moscow politicians, busy promoting their own idea of "Russia's own development pathway" and their own variety of "sovereign democracy". Russia would rather have these regimes in a state of eternal transition, making it easier to deal with the local authorities and maintain its presence in the region.

With the start of the new century, Moscow began making attempts to rebuild its weakened standing in the Muslim world. "The Russian moves are impressive – strengthening ties with Saudi Arabia, gaining observer status in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC),[16] revival of ties with Syria and Egypt, contact with Hamas, networking with Iraqi Sunni tribal leaderships... and, arguably, the heavily nuanced line on Iran."[17] Also worth noting is that Russia's relations with the Muslims are not limited to the Middle East region.

Starting in 2004, President Putin made several visits to Muslim countries and received their leaders in Moscow. The Russian Foreign Ministry has been active, too, and Russian companies have started trying to step up their efforts in this direction, though without great result so far. It would be wrong to see Russia's efforts to develop ties with the Muslim world as simply a declaration of intent or a nostalgic desire to remind the world that it is still a major power, present in all corners of the globe. Rather, these efforts reveal a desire to sketch in the outlines of another circle of Russian national interests.

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[14] *Mankoff J.* Russia and the West // The Washington Quarterly. — 2007. — Spring. — P. 132.

[15] *Rashidov B.* Rossia v Tsentralnoy Azii: vozmozhnosti i perspektivy // http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4182&print=1.

[16] The Organization of the Islamic Conference was founded in 1969 and currently has 57 members, including 2 from Europe, 2 Latin American countries, and 6 CIS countries.

[17] *Bhadrakumar M. K.* Searching for attackers lurking in the night // Asia Times [Bangkok]. — 2006. — April 8. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HD08Ak03.html.

BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE WEST

Russia's emphasis on itself as a country of many religions is based on the fact that it is both a Christian and a Muslim country, and this determines its desire to establish a place for itself in two (or even several) civilizations at once. This explains why "Moscow shows itself ready to play the role of a link between the West and the Islamic world."[18]

In 2004, the State Duma established the parliamentary group "Russia and the Islamic World: Strategic Dialogue." This group's stated aims, in the words of Duma deputy Shamil Sultanov, are to: "provide the legislative foundation for developing Russia's relations with the Muslim countries and international Islamic organizations, above all the OIC...; propose initiatives for participation in integration processes in the Islamic world; ...create the conditions for constructive dialogue between the political and economic elites in Russia and the Islamic world," etc.[19]

Veniamin Popov, Russian Foreign Ministry ambassador-at-large, has noted on several occasions that "Russia can and must speak up for the need for dialogue between Christians and Muslims." "Islam," Popov writes, "is the only religion that has created its own intergovernmental organization – the Organization of the Islamic Conference."[20] Russia fought hard for many years for entry into the OIC (with observer status as a country with a Muslim minority) in the name of establishing special relations with the Muslim countries.

Sporadic contacts with the OIC had been going on since Soviet times. The organization played a part in helping to free prisoners of war in Afghanistan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the organization's secretaries-general visited Russia in 1994 and 1997.

In the mid-1990s, Yevgeny Primakov, a prominent politician who served as foreign minister and prime minister, repeatedly raised the idea of Russia joining the OIC. Primakov was greatly respected by Muslim politicians and was able to convince them of the mutual advantages to be gained from this step. Russia's Muslims also spoke in favor of Russia's entry into the OIC on numerous occasions. The first to raise the idea was Vakhid Niyazov, head of the Islamic Cultural Center and an influential figure in the late 1990s. In 1997, the idea was taken up by chairman of the Russian Union of Muslims, Nadirshakh Khalichayev, who said that joining the OIC would give Russian Muslims greater rights and boost their status. He held talks with OIC representatives and took part in OIC events, though this participation was not as a representative of Russia, but on behalf of his own organization.

Some people thought that Moscow's desire to join the OIC had only one concrete and practical reason, and that was the hope of softening negative reactions in the Muslim countries to the war in Chechnya. It is hard to say if this could have had any real positive effect. By the time Russia did join the OIC, major military operations in Chechnya were over. Furthermore, the Muslim community showed for the most part little support for separatist ambitions in Chechnya, focusing their criticism chiefly on the way the Russian army conducted its military operations. Although many national and international radical Islamic organizations supported the Chechen separatists, only Bosnia, the Turkish Republic of Cyprus, and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan ever recognized the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. The pillars of world Islam, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and also countries with influential Chechen émigré communities (Turkey, Jordan) recognized Russia's territorial integrity. Turkey, from Moscow's point of view, held an "objective and positive position"[21] during the first Chechen war. It began taking a tougher line only after an Islamist government came to power. Iran also did not criticize Russia. Moreover, when emissaries from Arab field commander Khattab, one of the Chechen separatist leaders, arrived in Iran in 1996 asking for SAM-7 anti-tank weapons, their request was denied.[22]

In 1994, the OIC summit turned down a resolution proposed by Azerbaijan (led at that time by anti-Russian Abdulfaz Elchibei) and Saudi Arabia to support Chechnya. The same summit also rejected Chechen President Djokhar Dudayev's request to give the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria membership in the organization. An indirect sign that Muslim leaders sought to avoid the deterioration of relations with Russia over the Chechen issue was the fact that 10 years later, the authorities in Qatar made little fuss about handing back to Russia the Russian intelligence officers who carried out a liquidation operation there against Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, one of the most influential Chechen separatist leaders

[18] *Popov V.* Rossia namerena prisoyedinitsya k islamskoi konferentsii // Otechestvennye Zapiski. — 2003. — No 5. — P. 219.

[19] Rossia i islam: Interview with State Duma deputy Sh. Sultanov // Literaturnaya Gazeta. — 2004. — October 13-19.

[20] Islamsky mir i vneshnyaya politika Rossii // Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'. — 2005. — No5. — pp. 77-79.

[21] *Gudiashvili D.* Turtsia i rossiisko-chechenskaya voina 1994-1996. // Tsentr. Azia i Kavkaz [Lulea, Sweden]. — 2002. — No. 5 (23). — P. 87.

[22] *Kalika A.* La Russie en guèrre: Mythes et réalités tchétchènes. — Paris, 2005. — P. 128.

and a key figure in the Chechen resistance. In another sign of its loyalty towards Russia, OIC observers were present together with a delegation from the League of Arab States at the 2003 presidential elections in Chechnya, which saw the victory of the Kremlin-backed candidate, Akhmad-Khadji Kadyrov.

The Chechen separatist leaders Djokhar Dudayev and Aslan Maskhadov had every reason to complain about the lack of Islamic solidarity. Although several hundred foreign mujahedeen did take part in the war, the Chechen-Moscow front on the whole never became international.[23]

In short, the Chechnya issue was not Russia's main motivation for joining the OIC. Its main reason for wanting to join this organization was a desire to offset its worsening relations with the West with efforts to build up relations in other parts of the world. This issue was raised at the top level when an OIC delegation, led by Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi, visited Moscow in 1999. In April 2003, in a conversation with mufti of Tajikistan Amonullah Nematzade, President Putin said that "Russia is to a certain extent also part of the Muslim world."[24]

OIC missions became more frequent in Moscow. In January 2003, the Russian foreign minister invited then secretary general of the OIC, Abdul Wahid Belkaziz, to Russia. The Foreign Ministry established the post of ambassador for special ties with the OIC. An impressive Russian delegation headed by Vladimir Putin took part in the OIC summit in Kuala Lumpur in 2003. The delegation included a large group of influential Russian Muslim politicians – property minister Farit Gazizulin, deputy chief of staff of the Presidential Administration Djakhan Pollieva, the presidents of Bashkiria and Kabardino-Balkaria, and chairman of the Coordinating Center of the North Caucasus Muslims Ismail Berdiev. The President of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov, was also in the delegation. Putin's speech at the summit was full of words about dialogue between civilizations and the unacceptability of Islamophobia.

In Istanbul in 2004, after the end of the OIC foreign ministers' XXXI summit, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, who was present at the event, said that "Russia and the OIC can do a great deal to ensure that divisions do not arise along civilization and religious lines."[25]

Not all Muslim governments welcomed Russia's desire to join the OIC. Pakistan, for example, declared that Russia should not join the world's main Islamic organization because it is a Christian country in terms of culture and political orientation and its recent history is darkened by wars fought against Muslims. Finally, Russian membership in the OIC could change the organization's entire configuration. There was a specific background to Pakistan's doubts, namely, the fears in Islamabad that if Russia joined the OIC it could be followed by Pakistan's enemy – India.[26]

The opposition mounted by the skeptics in Pakistan was weak, however, while countries such as Malaysia, Iran, Syria, and even Saudi Arabia to a certain degree, were lobbying for Russia's interests. As a result, Russia was granted observer status in the OIC in June 2005.[27]

A few months later, Moscow set up the group "Strategic Vision: Russia and the Islamic World." Several Russian politicians were among the group's members, including Yevgeny Primakov, president of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev, and president of Chechnya Alu Alkhanov. The group also included politicians (both current and retired) from Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Pakistan, and representatives of the Central Asian countries. At the group's first meeting in March 2006, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, secretary general of the OIC, sent a letter noting the "close positions Russia and the OIC countries share on many issues in international relations," in particular on "preventing attempts to drag the international community into confrontation between different cultures and civilizations."[28]

The group held its second meeting in Kazan in 2006. In his greetings to the meeting, President of Tatarstan Shaimiev said that "the world is split between Christians, Jews and Muslims, and a crack has appeared that could grow into a yawning chasm." Shaimiev also said that "Fate made Tatarstan the northern outpost of the Islamic world, and it remains such to this day."[29]

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[23] True, according to one version in 1996, representatives of Islamic organizations meeting in the Somali capital of Mogadiscio discussed plans to send 700 Muslim volunteers from various countries to fight in Chechnya, but these mujahedeen did not subsequently show up in Chechnya.

[24] Rossia — chast musulmanskogo mira // Vse ob Islame. — 2003. — No 8. — May — P. 2.

[25] Riselet. Poslanie [Ufa]. — 2004. — No 7 (74). — July. — P. 1.

[26] India was invited to join the OIC in January 2006, but India's differences with Pakistan intervened.

[27] Bolshaya Politika. — 2006. — No 3 (5). — P. 20.

[28] Press release. On the first meeting of the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group. 29-03-2006. / Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs // http://www.mid.ru/ns-rasia.nsf/dde54dd22f01755c43256a65004daaee/432569d80021.

[29] Documents of the second meeting of the Strategic Vision Group... Kazan, August 29-31, 2006// http://www.mid.ru/ns-rasia.nsf/dde54dd22f01755c43256a65004daaee/a2F366de85188.

Moscow saw fit to play the "Tatarstan card'" in its efforts to develop contacts with the Islamic world. Tatarstan, which is in a better economic situation than the other Muslim regions in Russia, became a sort of showcase of Muslim Russia. In June 2008, the Islamic Development Bank held an international investment conference in Kazan. The conference, the first to take place in a country that was not a full member of the OIC, drew 115 foreign investors from 23 countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Malaysia, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.[30]

That same year, Kazan played host to the Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation, under the aegis of the OIC, and a meeting of the Islamic Academy of Sciences. Tatarstan is trying to build up ties with the Islamic Development Bank, and Kazan also hosted a meeting of the Russian-Arab Business Council.

Mintimer Shaimiev has tried to place Tatarstan's role in developing Russian-Muslim relations within the context of the Eurasian concept. He has called Tatarstan a "ready-made real model of Eurasian society" and even a "real Eurasian republic."[31] The same approach is taken by Alexander Dugin, the ideologue of the Eurasian vision, who came up with something called "Eurasian Islam,"[32] supposedly widespread in Russia (at one time Dugin proposed another very strange concept – "Atlantic Islam").

But these ideas are artificial and, as one Tatar researcher, Nail Mukharyamov, put it, "ambiguous."[33] Most Islamic ideologues also take an ironic view of "Eurasian Islam".

The Muslim countries' "soft" line in relations with Russia can be attributed to the search for new allies at a time when relations with the West are tense. "Faced with the oncoming democratization of the Greater Middle East, stubbornly pursued by the United States, the Arab elites, fearing destabilization, are searching for new sources of support."[34] Even if not always absolutely reliable, Russia provides a pillar of support in many conflict situations, from the Iranian nuclear program to the conflict in the Middle East. Muslims are far from exaggerating Russia's importance, but they are not about to give up an additional source of support.

Russia's entry into the Organization of the Islamic Conference did not bring about any fundamental changes in Russian-Muslim relations. Moscow did not expect concrete results, such as economic benefits, from joining the OIC. Russia's membership is a way of giving legitimacy to Russia's "special place" in the world and serves as a reminder that although Russia is a Christian country, it cannot be identified with the stereotypes of the West that have taken root in the Muslim world. It is hard to imagine, say, France, where the ratio of Muslims to Christians is similar to Russia, joining the OIC (Muslims account for around 10 percent of the population in France and around 12-13 percent in Russia).

Russian politicians like to remind the world that, unlike the West, Russia shows more understanding towards the Islamic world, forgiving its bouts of hyperactivity. Whenever Europe or the USA start having trouble with Islam, Moscow is always on hand to call for moderation and caution. When the "cartoon war" flared up in 2006, for example (the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten published cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed, reprinted in several European media outlets, which stirred up a storm of protest in the Muslim world), Vladimir Putin not only expressed understanding for the Muslims' position, but even compared the cartoons to child pornography, saying that "if the state is not able to prevent something, it should at least apologize for not being able to act.[35]

Following a speech by Pope Benedict XVI in Regensburg in September 2006, perceived as anti-Islamic in the Muslim world (the pope quoted a letter by Byzantine emperor Manuel II, saying that the Prophet Mohammed had brought into the world "evil and inhuman things" and "orders to spread belief through the sword"), Putin called on all to show "responsibility and restraint" and repeated that "Russia will do everything it can to establish dialogue between civilizations." Moscow's position during

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[30] ISI Emerging Markets // Rosbalt News. — 2008. — 11.06. http://www.securities.com.

[31] Vremya i Dengi [Kazan]. — 2000. — August 29.

[32] See: *Dugin A.* Proekt "Evrazia". — M., 2004.

[33] *Mukharyamov N.* Respublika Tatarstan: vyzovy modernizatsii // Rossiiskaya modernizatsia: razmyshlyaya o samobytnosti. — M., 2008. — P. 393.

[34] *Shermatova S.* Podruzhitsya c islamskim mirom Rossii legche, chem so svoimi musulmanami // Bolshaya Politika. — 2006. — No 5. — May. — P. 46.

[35] Public Shiite organization Ahl-al-Beit (Moscow) http://www.islam.ru/press/world/2006-02-7.

the incident differed from that of other European capitals, where many politicians expressed their surprise at Muslims' lack of tolerance. German chancellor Angela Merkel even said she thought the pope's additional apologies to Muslims excessive.

At the same time, officials monitoring the situation with Islam in Russia made it clear that they were far from happy with the riotous behavior of the "Muslim street" in the Middle East, Europe and Pakistan. As a result, most Russian imams and muftis showed restraint and tact in their criticism of those who "blasphemed" against Islam.

Anti-American politicians encourage Russia's overtures to the Muslim world with their claims that the West (whether Washington or the Pope) is trying to prevent Russia's rapprochement with Islam and wants to create confrontation between Russia and the Muslim world and "obstruct the development of relations with the Muslim countries."[36]

But Russia's policy of developing relations with the Muslim world is not limited to declarations of close or even common mutual interests. Russia's claims for special relations with the Muslim world are looking more and more like an attempt to restore its status as one of the key global players and bolster its importance in the international security system. The southern (Muslim) direction is becoming a priority.

In his greeting to the XI summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (March 2008), Vladimir Putin said that "Russia considers efforts to deepen its friendship and cooperation with the Islamic world a part of its strategic policy."[37] This assertion is not just about simple politeness, but is actually quite sincere, because Russia's difficulties in relations with the West need to be compensated for somehow by better relations in the Muslim south. Looking at the mutual cooling in relations between the West and the Muslim world, dubbed the "conflict of civilizations", Russia thinks it has a chance to look "non-Western" in Muslims' eyes. This position also betrays elements of post-Soviet nostalgia.

Russia's relations with the Muslim countries do not carry the ideological load they did during the Soviet years. Despite its "great power" discourse, Russia's policy is more about pragmatism and shows sensitivity towards potential partners, regardless of their ideology and rhetoric. "Russia's new attitude and its renewed sense of power have shaped its moves in the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf, and are part of Russia's goal of playing a more important role within the international system," said American analyst Dario Christiani.[38]

Are the Muslim elites shaking off their prejudices with regard to the USSR's successors? Now that communism is more or less dead, the Saudis are more receptive to Russian concerns, said Marshall Goldman from Wellesley College. There is no doubt that the other Muslim regimes also share this view to some extent, but experience shows that it is nonetheless a very thorny road to genuine trust and confidence.

MEDIATION WITH THE ISLAMISTS: HOPES DO NOT COME TRUE

Since midway through the decade, Moscow has positioned itself as a mediator between Islamic radicals and the West. The most visible example is Iran, where the president has declared that he will continue the Islamic revolution and called his country the main bastion in the confrontation between the Muslim and the Judeo-Christian world. Russia has for the most part "not heard" the extremist notes in Mahmud Ahmadinejad's words and behavior, treating him exclusively as a national leader and not a charismatic religious figure. Sometimes the Iranians go too far. In 2006, for example, a conference on "Denying the Holocaust" took place in Teheran, and drew the Russian Foreign Ministry's condemnation.

In the endless intrigues over the Iranian nuclear program, Russia remains confident that it can persuade Iran to make concessions (enriching uranium on Russian territory, establishing strict control over dual-purpose materials, and getting Teheran to abandon the full nuclear cycle[39]). Moscow perhaps hoped for a key role in this dispute, in which it acted as Iran's "protector", while at the same time not forgetting its own interests. On several occasions these goals seemed to be

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[36] *Galiullin M.* Sotrudnichestvo vo imya budushchego // Musulmanskaya Gazeta. — 2000. — No 4. — April-May — P. 6.

[37] Transcript of speech by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov at the XI summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference — Dakar, March 13, 2008.

[38] The Power and Interest News Report (PINR). — 2007 — March 1. // http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view&report_id=624&language_id=1.

[39] Iran, Its Neighbors and the Regional Crises: A Middle East Program Report // Chattam House. The Royal Inst. of Intern. Affairs. — [S. l.], 2006. P.40.

in sight. A number of Russian-Iranian meetings took place in 2006, and each time the Kremlin announced just beforehand that Teheran was ready to compromise, but each time these hopes turned out to be groundless.

In 2006-2008, Russia attempted to act as a mediator with the Islamic resistance movement Hamas, which won elections in Palestine. Hamas's electoral triumph was an important event. It changed the balance of power within Palestinian society, greatly complicated Israeli-Palestinian contacts and put an end to the peace process "roadmap", which was drawn up by a quartet of mediators, but initiated by the USA. Moscow saw its chance in this situation to seize the initiative and return to the Middle East as an independent player with serious proposals of its own. Russia's position looked at once productive and risky, given Hamas's unwillingness to compromise. Russian diplomacy was looking for recognition in the Muslim world, including influential Saudi Arabia. "As the spiritual leader of the Sunni world, Saudi Arabia is extremely important for Moscow in terms of balancing relations with the Shiite forces of Hezbollah and Hamas."[40] American journalist Steven Lee Myers said it was "above all a battle for prestige."[41]

When it first invited a Hamas delegation headed by the organization's leader, Khaled Machaal, to Moscow in March 2006, the Kremlin hoped to play on its desire to gain respectability in the eyes of the world community. Israel considers Machaal the inspirer and organizer of terrorist attacks. But at the same time, it was Machaal who began to show some political flexibility when he became leader of the Hamas Political Bureau in 1995, and his attitude towards Israel was, as Alec Epstein put it, "full of rhetoric."[42] Moscow hoped to reach an agreement with Hamas and make a breakthrough in the Middle East peace process.

In autumn that same year, Russia made another generous gesture in not including Hamas or Hezbollah on the list of 17 terrorist organizations drawn up by the Federal Security Service. This was also a challenge to the United States, where these two organizations are both listed as terrorist organizations.

But actual discussions with the Islamists revealed the problems in Russian diplomacy. Neither the Presidential Administration nor the Foreign Ministry had worked out a clear line to follow. This became immediately apparent during Machaal's seemingly historic 2006 visit to Moscow. The visit's program looked ambiguous and from the start did not involve meetings with Russia's senior leaders. There were unofficial contacts with parliamentarians and diplomats. The semi-confidential discussions with Mikhail Margelov, chairman of the Federation Council's Committee for International Affairs and a former Arab world scholar, hardly counted as official talks. These meetings were voluntary affairs for the hosts and the guests. The Friday prayers together at the main Moscow Mosque also looked absurd. The prayers were led by the Chairman of the Russian Council of Muftis, Ravil Gainutdin, who had repeatedly denounced religious radicalism in the past.

The first Hamas visit was at once symbolic and perplexing, but contacts between Moscow and Hamas did not end there. A year later, in March 2007, Mahmoud Zakhar, the foreign minister in the Hamas government, visited Russia while in transit and met with Russian Foreign Ministry officials, though without result. Hopes that the talks would persuade the Islamists to change their position on Israel were not fulfilled. Russia failed to talk the Islamists into compromise and thus secure itself a place as a successful and independent soloist in the Middle East "concert". Moscow realized that the Islamists were still just playing their own game and that rapprochement with Russia was no more than an extra card in their hands for contact with the West, a precedent (albeit fragile) for dialogue with Europe and perhaps even with America. The visit to Moscow, which involved no commitment of any kind, gave Hamas the opportunity to show that in diplomatic terms, it had gone beyond the limits of the Muslim world. There are similarities in this case to the Iranian negotiators' visits to Moscow (and Russian diplomats' visits to Teheran): the result in both cases did not live up to Russia's expectations.

Russia's disappointment was even greater after the capture and execution of members of the Russian Embassy staff in the summer of 2006 in Baghdad. The Russians were abducted by a previously unknown organization, the Council of Mujahedeen of Iraq, which had no direct link to either Hamas or Shiite Hezbollah. The extremists' act had symbolic overtones and signified that the Islamic radicals considered Russia part of the West. It was telling that not a single Islamist organization stepped in to help Moscow in its efforts to free the hostages, though the Kremlin and the Russian Foreign Ministry hoped they would.

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[40] *Yasmann V.* Putin Uses Persian Gulf Trip to Boost Russian Role in the Arab World // Anderwelt. — 2007. — February 13 — (RFE/RL).

[41] *Lee Myers S.* The New Role for Russia in Mideast? It Seeks It? // The New York Times. — 2006. — September 10.

[42] *Epshtein A. D.* Hamas v regionalnoy politike / Institut Blizhnego Vostoka. — M., 2007. — P. 113.

In the summer of 2006 Russia had another chance to engage in dialogue with the Islamists, this time with Lebanon's Hezbollah, which won something of a moral victory during the brief war with Israel, saw its popularity in the country reach record levels, and became an influential force in Europe's eyes. Hezbollah received no invitation to come to Moscow, although if the Kremlin had been more consistent in its policy, it could have made the invitation.

There are several reasons why Hezbollah representatives were not invited to Moscow. First, Putin did not want to increase tension in relations with the USA. The step would probably have not been well received in Europe either, for though the Europeans had some sympathy for Hezbollah, they were not ready to go as far as to enter into dialogue with the group. Second, direct contacts with the radicals could have completely destroyed an already strained relationship with Israel. Third (and probably most important), the Kremlin realized that talks with Hezbollah would most likely bring no result. To be successful they would require the support of Iran, the country able to make Hezbollah's leader, Nasrullah, more open to compromise. But Teheran had no need for Russian mediation in the Lebanese-Israeli conflict. Finally, Hezbollah's leadership did not see Russia as an effective mediator and preferred to deal with Moscow through its own Syrian patrons. The Syrians also had no burning desire to push Hezbollah into contacts with Moscow. Further, contact with Hezbollah could be interpreted as the start of cooperation with Iran on the Middle East conflict, and this would not have gone down well at all in the USA and Israel.

Another circumstance acting to devalue the Russian-Islamic dialogue is that the Islamists, whether Hamas and their supporters or Ahmadinejad's followers, arouse fear and irritation among the ruling Muslim elites. Confrontation between radical Islamists and the authorities is probably the main axis around which the political process in the Muslim world revolves. At the same time, the presidents and kings in these countries consider relations with the Islamists to be their own internal affair and are far from happy about having someone else trying to carry on an independent dialogue with the religious radicals.

When it invited the Hamas delegation, Moscow was acting with the best of intentions, hoping, aside from everything else, to play the role of mediator between the Islamists and the head of the Palestinian Authority, secular politician Mahmoud Abbas. It became clear how vain these hopes were in May-June 2007, when the Islamists split the Palestinians into two separate camps and proclaimed their own "state" in Gaza. Russia found itself having to choose between supporting the secular and moderate Palestinian movement led by Abbas, or taking a risk and trying again to act as a mediator in what had now become an internecine conflict among the Palestinians.

Here Russia's efforts were doomed to fail. The decisive word in the inter-Palestinian dialogue belonged to Saudi Arabia, which managed to get the Palestinians to agree to a government of national unity, albeit short-lived (this took place at the same time as the Kremlin was actively pursuing contacts with Hamas). Along with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan also play an effective mediator role, acting to maintain dialogue, even if not always very stable, between Hamas and Mahmoud Abbas, and also between Hamas and the Israeli government. In June 2008, under pressure from the mediators, Hamas and Israel concluded a cease-fire agreement.

The regimes in the Muslim countries remain willy-nilly partners of the USA and Europe, whether they like it or not, even though they constantly criticize them. Both the former and the latter find themselves on the same side of the barricades in the fight against Islamist opposition. Russia's attempts to talk to the Islamists are met with skepticism, all the more so, given the way the Russian authorities view their own radicals at home.

Neither America, nor Europe has expressed any serious concerns about Russia's contacts with the radical Islamists. As Time magazine put it, Americans reacted calmly to Moscow's contacts with Hamas because the latter "passed on the right message about recognizing Israel, renouncing terrorism and adhering to all the obligations the Palestinian authorities had undertaken..."[43] As for Iran, Washington has expressed hope in the past that Russian initiatives will prove effective in restraining Iran and establishing control over the Iranian nuclear program. But some in the USA also hold an opposite view, saying that Russia's contacts with Iran, Hamas and other forces hostile to America, such as Venezuela and North Korea, make it one of the links in a "new axis of evil" that presents a direct threat to the United States.

Moscow recognizes the Islamists' political legitimacy if they have the majority support in this or that country. Russia's decision to exclude Hamas and Hezbollah from the list of terrorist organizations showed its selective approach to the different factions in the Islamist movement. But the Islamic radicals are unlikely to ever become strategic allies of Russia (Islamic radicalism is

[43] *McAllister J. F. O.* Russia's New World Order // Time. — 2006. — July 10 — P. 22.

not the same thing as the national liberation movements of the Soviet years, and Russia's official ideology is not a copy of the Soviet official ideology). If Russian mediation continues, it will sooner or later become unnecessary. It would end in the event of success, because other countries would then join the dialogue with the radical Islamists and talks would become a common cause. Failure of mediation, on the other hand, would see it fade away as something unneeded and even potentially harmful, because in such a case it would be encouraging not moderation, but a tough line and adventurist stance among the Islamists.

RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA

Very little analysis has ever been done of Russia's relations with Central Asia in the context of Islam, and there are perfectly justifiable reasons for this. During the first decade following the Soviet Union's collapse, the region remained part of the post-Soviet area. Central Asia was mentioned in an earlier section, but as an active factor at work along Russia's southern borders rather than in connection with foreign policy.

As the post-Soviet identity fades and the Central Asian countries start developing a multi-vector foreign policy, Russia gradually finds itself facing the question of whether to see these countries as genuinely Muslim, and how consequently to adjust its policy. The issue now is not one of the region as a whole, but of countries taken individually. The Islamic factor can be left aside in relations with Kazakhstan, but in the case of relations with, say, Tajikistan this would be a foolish oversight.

What kind of Muslim Central Asia will Russia find itself dealing with, working together with and even perhaps conflicting with? The ineffectiveness and failure of many reforms have created a situation where a large part of the region is returning to a conservative and Islamic past. An increasingly impoverished and dissatisfied population is turning to Islam ever more readily and forcing the elite to do the same. The elite finds itself having to "take over" Islam as a political instrument, if only for its own political survival. The Europeanized sections of the elite will pass off Islam as an instrument that can be modernized, but it is conservative trends that have gained the upper hand among the general public. The Central Asian countries will see a growing sense of their own regional identity and solidarity with the world Muslim community.

Russia will be obliged to deal with more traditionalist countries and perhaps rulers, too. Unlike Europe, it is not separated from them by thousands of kilometers. The paradox is that the traditionalists or quasi-traditionalists will be ever more eager to develop relations with the Europeans and Americans. There are several reasons for this: first, they can offer more attractive conditions for cooperation; second, they will overlook the absence of a civil society and human rights violations; and third, the Central Asian countries remain wary of Russia as the former power center and a country with a tendency towards heavy-handedness.

If the Islamists do end up becoming part of the ruling coalition in Central Asia, would Russia be ready to enter into a dialogue with them? The answer is yes. For a start, Russia is not trembling at the thought of Islam gaining a greater hold in Central Asia (although this is not discussed out loud), especially as its experience of contacts with Islamists in Tajikistan proved quite successful. Moscow facilitated the peace talks and the signing of a peace agreement in 1997 between secular forces and the United Tajik Opposition, the main base of which was formed by the local Islamic Renaissance Party.

Russia's relations with the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan require separate analysis. It is simply to be noted here that sooner or later Moscow is going to have to give its Muslim component greater consideration when setting its foreign policy.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

In the view of Sergei Rogov, director of the Institute for the USA and Canada, the "political aspect of our relations with the Muslim world is a lot more important than the economic aspect."[44] It is hard not to agree, but at the same time it would be short-sighted to overlook economic interests, which are always tied up with politics in any case.

Even supporters of closer rapprochement with the Muslim world realize that effective cooperation with them in the oil and gas sector is impossible. There is practically no likelihood at all of shared Russian-Muslim positions (Russian-Arab, Russian-Iranian) on this issue. But at the same time, hopes arise from time to time, accompanied by flurries of propaganda about the "vast possibilities" suddenly opening before the potential partners.

[44] Islamsky mir i vneshnyaya politika Rossii // Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'. — 2005. — No 9. — P. 80.

Would it be right to say that Russia's energy exports have ever had a direct impact on relations with the Muslim world? Formally the answer is no. But this is not a categorical "no" if we take into account some of the nuances and hidden stumbling blocks that are part and parcel of oil sector politics. The Soviet Union, for example, maintained neutrality during the "oil war" of 1973-1974. The concept of the "Muslim world" had not yet emerged on the geopolitical map of the world, but it was Muslim regimes that were challenging Western consumers and trying to put their economies in a dependent position (this tactic ended up hurting the oil producers themselves). By not taking part in the "war", that is, continuing to supply oil, the Soviet Union showed solidarity with the Western countries in its acts, while continuing to support the "developing countries' just struggle" in its words (true, the Soviet Union gave these countries more than pure rhetoric and the Muslim countries received regular deliveries of Soviet military supplies).

Russia is both an exporter and consumer of fossil fuels. Russia's annual per capita oil exports come to just 3 tons, as compared to 60 tons for Qatar, more than 40 for the United Arab Emirates, and around 20 for Kuwait.[45] Finally, Russia's relations with the West are different than those of the Muslim oil-producing countries.

The boundaries of partnership and competition are unclear and fluctuating. We can note two directions: cooperation with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), where Muslim countries make up the lion's share, and cooperation with individual countries.

OPEC welcomes cooperation with non-member countries, building relations with them based on reciprocal concessions in maintaining price levels. Of course, "Russia has gone from being a secondary player to being one of the main players on the global oil market and has become OPEC's and Saudi Arabia's main competitor, but OPEC nevertheless seeks constructive dialogue with Russia."[46] At the start of the decade, Russia was present at OPEC meetings as an observer, and after September 11, 2001, agreed to cut back oil supplies to the market. Faten al-Awadi, an analyst at the OPEC Department of Energy Research, said that "we have seen many signs of cooperation lately between the two sides."[47]

A common view in the Muslim world is that Russia's oil barons are focused on the West, backed by their allies in the USA. In the view of Russian supporters of rapprochement with the Muslim world, this policy did not reflect Russia's national interests. Now that the oligarchs have been defeated and the state has established its hold on the production and export of fossil fuels, there could be increasing opportunities for cooperation between Russia and OPEC.

In the middle of the decade, Moscow suddenly began to hope that the energy-producing countries could become allies in regulating oil and gas prices. This hope was clearly motivated by the "discovery" that with its annual gas exports now reaching 270 billion cubic meters, if the producers got together to impose prices, Russia could bring in another several billion dollars in revenue.[48]

The proposal to set up a "gas cartel" along the lines of OPEC (Iran first came up with the proposal, but Russia tried to give it concrete substance) was a significant step in this direction. Russia, Iran, Qatar and Algeria, which between them account for 42 percent of world gas production, were to form the backbone of this organization. An organization of this kind would limit the consumer countries' room to maneuver, especially in Europe. But the project's authors did not take into account such simple things as the absence of rapid changes in gas prices (unlike oil prices), the long-term nature of gas contracts (unlike oil contracts), the particularities of gas transportation, and so on.

Experts even in Russia itself were skeptical about the idea of a gas cartel, which caused annoyance in Europe and the USA and did not receive due support even from its potential Muslim participants. Gas-exporting countries met in Doha (Qatar) in April 2007, but no documents on the gas cartel proposal were signed. The project was later rejected by Algeria, anxious to avoid straining its relations with European clients. The President of the Libyan Oil Company, former Libyan prime minister Shoukri Ganem, said that rather than setting up an organization along the lines of OPEC, what could be discussed was "closer coordination in order to avoid unnecessary rivalry and exchange mutually beneficial information."[49]

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[45] *Milov V.* Mozhet li Rossia stat' neftyanym rayem? // Pro et Contra. — 2006. — No 2—3 (32). — PP. 10-11.

[46] *Batyrshin I.* Torgovo-ekonomicheskiye svyazi Rossiiskoi Federatsii so stranami Soveta sotrudnichestva arabskykh gosudarstv Persidskogo zaliva: sovremenniye tendentsii i potentsial razvitiya. — M., 2007. — P. 39. — (Analytical report. / Scientific-Coordinating Council on International Studies. MGIMO (U) Russian Foreign Ministry, Issue 2 (17) (April 2007)).

[47] *Kravets M.* Neft 2020: prognoz OPEC // Neftegazovaya Vertikal. — 2004. — No 2. — P. 54.

[48] Golovokruzheniye ot OPEKov // Nezavisimaya Gazeta. — 2008. — January 25.

[49] Poseyali zerna...

What can be said about Russia's relations with individual countries?

There were big hopes for cooperation with Saudi Arabia at the end of the 1990s, above all for "this country's potential as an investor in the Russian fuel and energy sector."[50] There was talk of Saudi participation in developing resources in Russia and the CIS countries. A delegation of Saudi oil industry representatives even visited Moscow in the spring of 1997, but no ongoing cooperation resulted.

In 1991, a joint company was set up, Petrosakh, in which the Saudi company Nimr Petroleum had a controlling stake (according to the Russian-Arab Business Council, the venture was organized with Nimr and the Russian company SAMEKO holding equal stakes.) The company invested $100 million in oil development on Sakhalin, but in 1997, cooperation came to a halt and Petrosakh was later turned into a closed joint-stock company.

Russian-Saudi relations gained new impetus in the middle of 2002. This was due to an escalation in Saudi-U.S. tensions and the rumors that the USA was supposedly considering using Russian oil instead of Saudi oil to build up its strategic reserves. The USA attempted to use Russia to put pressure on the Saudis. Having run into difficulties with its main partner, Riyadh decided to give itself some insurance and play on the contradictions between the USA and Russia. A protocol on multilateral cooperation was signed in autumn 2002, the Saudi-Russian Business Club was established, and many senior Russian officials were invited to visit the kingdom. It was at this time that talk of cooperation in the oil sector livened up. Russian officials, including energy minister Igor Yusufov, declared in numerous statements that Russia would not compete against Saudi Arabia on the American oil market and that what was being discussed with the Americans was just a one-time delivery to cover a possible shortage.[51]

But there is still no real cooperation with Saudi Arabia in the energy sector to this day. Russia's LUKOIL is engaged in a project to explore and produce natural gas at Rub al-Hali valued at two to three billion dollars, but the gas fields there are not of high quality and no significant profits will be made from their operation.

Set against this backdrop, OAO Russian Railways' successful bid to construct a 520-km railway line from Az-Zabir to Riyadh seemed a real breakthrough. The project was estimated to cost $800 million, and the Saudis awarded the tender to Russia because of the extremely low cost proposed. OAO Russian Railways would have asked for four times more for building the same kind of railway in Russia itself.[52] But the project suddenly fell through for purely political reasons. During Vladimir Putin's visit to Libya at the start of 2008, an impressive contract to build a $3.5-billion railway from Sirt to Bengazi in Libya was signed. This greatly annoyed the Saudis, who have very strained relations with Libya. Riyadh did not forgive Moscow for the agreement with Muammar Gaddafi and cancelled the railway project with Russia.

Cooperation with Kuwait is insignificant. Kuwait, interested in Russia as a factor in the stability in the Persian Gulf, gave the USSR loans totaling $1 billion over 1987-1991, which were later redirected to Russia. Afterwards the Kuwaitis provided another loan.[53] But there has been no progress in oil production itself. The founding of the Russian-Kuwaiti Business Council in 2008 has not brought anything new to relations between the two countries, either.

Russia had close economic relations with Iraq up until 2003. In 1997, LUKOIL signed a contract with Iraq (a project in which it had a 68.5% stake), but the contract was cancelled in 2002 because of LUKOIL's contacts with the Iraqi opposition and the American government, which later supposedly ensured that the contract would come back into effect after Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled in 2003.[54] But LUKOIL's prospects have looked unconvincing even after 2003. The Western Kurna-2 project that LUKOIL was counting on has become a joint project with America's Conoco-Philips. In an effort to promote its economic interests in Iraq Russia agreed to write off part of Iraq's debt, but even after this was done the country's new authorities showed little interest in cooperation with LUKOIL. Prospects are murky for the Russian company Stroitransgaz, too. It signed a contract with the new Iraqi government for geological prospecting, but the work has not actually begun yet.

Nothing is fully clear either regarding cooperation with Iran in the oil and gas sector. In 1996, Gazprom, together with France's Total and Malaysia's Petronas, signed a contract to develop the

[50] *Zhiznin S. Z.* Energeticheskaya diplomatiya. — M., 1999. — P. 122.

[51] Russian Business Monitor. — 2002. — October 16.

[52] *Yekimovsky A.* OAO RZhD tyanet relsy na Blizhnii Vostok // Kommersant. — 2008. — January 22.

[53] *Zhiznin S.Z.* Op. cit. — P. 221.

[54] *Zaslavsky A.* Rossiiskaya dobycha na Blizhnem Vostoke // Pro et Contra. — 2006. — No 2-3 (32). — pp. 46-47.

Southern Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf. The USA insisted that the contract be cancelled, but Russia, France, the EU and Malaysia united forces and overcame American pressure. The project has a total cost of around $2 billion.

During a visit to Moscow at the end of 2007 by Iran's deputy oil industry minister, Hossein Nokrekar-Shirazi, Gazprom once again proposed joint development of the Southern Pars field, and also the construction of gas storage facilities and related infrastructure. In February 2008, chairman of the Board of Gazprom Alexei Miller went to Teheran and signed a contract for developing Southern Pars and the Kirsh field, and also for building a large gas reservoir. It is interesting to note that this was immediately followed by a 2.16% increase in Gazprom's shares on the London Stock Exchange.[55] Gazprom and the Iranians also discussed building pipelines in the fossil fuel producing areas around the Caspian Sea, which looked rather strange, given that the issue of the demarcation of the Caspian has still not been resolved. Finally, aside from the private agreements signed, a decision was reached to hold regular consultations between specialists.

At the same time, Iran remains a potential rival to Russia in gas exports. Fearful that Gazprom could establish a monopoly in their market, the Europeans hope to limit it, in part with the help of gas supplies from Iran and the construction of a gas pipeline that would bypass Russia (Iran currently exports just 5.6 billion cubic meters of gas, and it is all delivered to Turkey.) In 2006, when Russian-Georgian relations were at a breaking point, Tbilisi feared that the pipeline from Russia would be cut off and decided to take out some insurance by signing a small contract for gas supplies from Iran.

Russia's Tatneft is moving into Iran, Iraq, and Syria, offering equipment and maintenance services. But its contracts are worth no more than a few hundred thousand dollars. In 2005, Tatneft won a bid for the geological exploration and development of a 2.3-square-kilometer field in the Libyan province of Gadames. It is said that Tatneft's successful bid was helped along by the reform-minded wing of the Libyan leadership, which wants to prove to an aging Muammar Gaddafi the benefits to be gained from cooperation with foreign companies. Gazprom is also becoming ever more active and is now developing 6 oil and gas deposits together with Tatneft. Gazprom and the Libyan national oil company, Jamahiria, agreed to set up a joint company following a visit to the country by Alexei Miller, chairman of Gazprom's board of directors.

In 2006-2007, Gazprom began developing ties with the Algerian oil and gas company Sonatrach, one of the main suppliers of natural gas to Europe. In 2006, Alexei Miller and the head of Sonatrach, Mohammed Mezian, signed a memorandum providing for cooperation in third countries. Gazprom saw bright prospects in cooperation with Algeria because it hoped in this way not only to bolster its position in Europe, but also to reach agreements on working together on price formation. But two years later, it is clear that no large-scale cooperation with Sonatrach has ensued. In the words of Mohammed Mezian, the agreement signed during Vladimir Putin's visit to Algeria "did not lead to any concrete results." In the end, the Algerians decided to increase their cooperation with France's Gaz de France. At the same time, two Russian companies, Rosneft and Stroitransgaz, have begun developing two oil fields, and industrial oil production is scheduled to begin there in 2011.

Russia is also active in Central Asia (as was said already, issues related to this region are treated separately.) It has a strong position in the region and its oil companies and Gazprom seek to expand their presence. At the same time, "the increasing Russian presence in the Central Asian energy sector will probably not be decisive for the economic and political future of these countries, because Russia will encounter increasing influence in the region of other international players such as China, India, the USA and Europe."[56]

The oil and gas pipelines under construction or on the drawing board will cross the territory of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Discussions have been going on for 15 years now on a Trans-Afghanistan gas pipeline, making the problem of radical Islam and the "neo-Taliban", whose activities create increased tension for their northern neighbors, more relevant than ever.

No matter what direction it takes, any energy infrastructure in Eurasia inevitably crosses Muslim regions. This situation alone makes the Islamic factor topical, tying it tightly to the energy issue. Oil and gas pipelines are at once a source of peace and contention. Everyone whose territory the pipelines cross seemingly has an interest in ensuring that order is maintained, but at the same time, this order, or the lack of it, provides a convenient target for blackmail and bargaining.

Russia's cooperation with Muslim oil and gas businesses is sporadic and overall not very effective (Central Asia is a separate case.) The talk about expansion in this area is reminiscent of the talk in the 1990s about an inflow of "Islamic capital" into Russia – an inflow that never came. There is little hope

[55] *Ter-Oganov N. K.* Iran delaet stavku na prirodny gaz / Institut Blizhnego Vostoka. // http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2008/05-03-08.htm.

[56] O*lcott M. B.* "Druzhba narodov" v mire energetiki // Pro et Contra. — 2006. — March-June. — P. 32.

for any real breakthrough in the oil and gas sector in the foreseeable future. Constantly expanding sales markets, steady growth in Southeast Asia and China and increasing energy demands in Africa should lessen the competition somewhat between exporters, it would seem, but at the same time, oil and gas consumers' desire to diversify their energy imports could lead to an increase in competition.

MILITARY-TECHNICAL COOPERATION

Russia's military cooperation with the Muslim countries, as during the Soviet years, is still largely shaped by political factors. Russia's arms sales to Islamic countries are noticeably lower than sales to its main arms markets – China and India. Between 1995 and 2005, Russian arms exports reached a total of $48.696 billion, of which almost 60 percent was sales to China and India[57] (by 2008, the total share of China and India dropped to 55 percent, while Latin America, especially Venezuela, saw its share grow.[58])

In 2004, exports of military hardware to the Middle East and North Africa were only 10 percent of total military exports.[59] Russia cannot achieve a large-scale entry into the Middle East arms market, though it had hopes of being able to do so after September 11, 2001, and the difficulties that arose between the USA and the Persian Gulf countries. Competition from the Americans and Europeans, whose arms surpass Russia's in terms of advanced technology, has prevented Russia from increasing its exports to the region. In the 1990s, it was the Muslim countries' huge debts to the Soviet Union that prevented arms exports from developing. Iraq had direct debts exceeding $9.421 billion, Syria owed $1.378 billion,[60] and Algeria owed $4.7 billion.[61] Use of a so-called "compensation" system has made it possible to restructure and reduce these debts in recent years. Algeria's debt was reduced by 40 percent, for example,[62] and in 2006 was practically liquidated altogether when it became part of a settlements agreement in Russian-Algerian economic relations. Syria's debt was also reduced by 73 percent.[63]

In most cases, Russian arms sales do not affect the strategic balance of power between the Muslim states and their non-Muslim adversaries. But even so, supplies to the Middle East and Iran give some regimes and some of the Muslim radicals an impression of strength and sense of being less vulnerable, and in some cases this incites them to take a tougher political stance. The political aspect is reflected most strongly in military supplies to the members of the "axis of evil", Syria and Iran, and also to Lebanon's Hezbollah. The Muslim countries most active in signing arms contracts with Russia are Algeria, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates.

Syria, which has difficult relations with the USA and Europe, has aging Soviet arms constantly in need of repair. It purchased 200 helicopters from the Soviet Union, for example, of which 60 are currently in use, and it is becoming harder all the time to maintain them in working order. Its fleet of aircraft consists of MiG fighter planes of various models, and it has air defense systems purchased in the 1970s-80s. It also has Soviet armored vehicles. Military cooperation between the two countries amounts to little more than maintaining existing arms in working order. Supplies of new modern arms from Russia are rare and are mostly limited to anti-tank weapons and ammunition for guns.

The situation changed after Russia decided to write off 73 percent of Syria's debt in January 2005, in exchange for new arms contracts. A contract for Strelets and Pantsir-C1 low-range (up to 5km) anti-aircraft systems and also Buk-M2 and Tunguska systems was signed in 2006 during a visit to Damascus by Russian chief of General Staff Yury Baluyevsky.[64]

In 2006, the military confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah raised questions about Hezbollah, considered a terrorist group in the West, having Russian arms. Hezbollah did indeed have several Grad artillery systems, and some Soviet-made armored vehicles and tanks. This hardware was all very out-of-

[57] Exported weapons from Russia in 1995-2005 // http://web.sipri.org/contents/armstrad/at_data.html.

[58] The figures for Russia's arms sales to Muslim countries are, for understandable reasons, not always exact.

[59] ARMS-TASS. http://www.armstass.su/?page=article$aid=20735$cid=43.

[60] Appendix 51 to the law "On the 2007 Federal Budget" – the size of debts owed by foreign states for credits provided by the former USSR and the Government of the Russian Federation (as of January 1, 2006).

[61] The debts are higher in reality. Iraq, for example, has a direct debt of $7 billion. (*Mironov N. V.* Neftyanaya promyshlennost Iraka – yest li u rossiiskikh kompanii perspektivy prinyat uchastiye v osvoyenii bogateishikh resursov regiona posle snyatiya sanktsii OON? // Vneshekonomicheskiye Vesti. — 1998. — No 7 — P. 51).

[62] ARMS-TASS. http://www.armstass.su/?page=article$aid=20735$cid=43.

[63] Snyat osadu Asada // Vremya Novostei. — 2006. — December 5.

[64] *Plugatev I.* Genshtab ne zabyvayet o voyennom sotrudnichestve s Siriyei // Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye. — 2002. — February 10.

date (some of it was made in the 1970s and even in the 1960s), but to Israeli eyes it was nevertheless a sign of Russian support for the Islamists. Hezbollah had only a few pieces of modern military hardware (Kornet-E and Metis-M anti-tank missile systems), which they received from Syria.[65]

Analysts note the "very closed nature of Russian-Iranian military-technical cooperation,"[66] which makes it possible to sign and fulfill contracts that can help to enhance Iran's defense system. Iran already has a fair amount of Soviet military hardware. The Iranian armed forces and Revolutionary Guards have hundreds of T-72M1 and T-55 tanks, as well as armored personnel carriers. In 2004, Iran received 36 Mi-171Sh helicopters, and in 2005, a contract was signed to modernize 30 Su-24 bombers that can be equipped with tactical nuclear weapons.[67]

Teheran's chief priority is to receive modern air defense systems to provide cover for the key facilities in the Iranian nuclear program. Existing information on the Pentagon's plans shows around 1,200 Iranian military and nuclear sites as targets for potential strikes[68] (other figures of 1,500 or 2,000 are sometimes quoted). These sites are protected by 300 air defense systems, 80 percent of which "are already obsolete."[69] The Iranians are well aware of the need to modernize their air defense systems. This became even clearer after Israeli planes carried out a strike against a nuclear installation in Syria in September 2007.

Iran bought 10 S-200 and 6 S-300 air defense systems from Belarus in the mid-1990s. But this is far from enough to cover Iran's airspace. Russian deliveries of modern air defense systems, especially the S-300 system, are still just a possibility. But even these relatively modern systems would not fully protect strategic sites from air strikes, because more advanced technology is able to penetrate their radar systems. Furthermore, personnel would need training to be able to actually use the S-300 system in battle.

In 2005, Iran signed a contract for the purchase of 30 Top-M1 air defense systems (for a total of $1.4 billion), which Russia says does not upset the balance of power in the region. Then deputy prime minister Sergei Ivanov said, "the contract will be carried out whether others like it or not."[70] These supplies fit into Russia's overall approach to the Iranian nuclear program.

Russia's cooperation with Iran in the nuclear technology field, which goes beyond purely economic cooperation, comes hand-in-hand with a military component. This gives rise to questions about what the consequences would be for Russia if Iran developed nuclear weapons, or "the Islamic atom bomb", as this scenario is sometimes dubbed. This interpretation is ideologically and emotionally charged, but in the hands of forces led by Islamic convictions, nuclear weapons could be seen as a means of defending the interests of Islam. If attempts to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons fail, there are Muslim candidates besides Iran who would potentially like to get their hands on such weapons – Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to name just two.

If the "atomic bomb" ceases to be such a rarity in the Muslim world (at the moment only Pakistan has nuclear weapons), Russia's prestige among the Muslim countries will decline. First, its nuclear power status will have less clout, and second, there will be less need for it as a counterbalance, even if illusory, to the United States. Russia would also lose out if Iran got nuclear weapons, in that Teheran would gain even greater confidence and become even less willing to compromise on issues such as the demarcation of the Caspian Sea.

The United States resolutely opposes Russia's military-technical cooperation with Iran and Syria and has made repeated efforts to stop it. In May 2002, the U.S. State Department's annual report named Iran as the most active sponsor of terrorism. Washington banned Russian companies, Tula-based Instrument Design Bureau in 2003 and then Rosoboronexport and Sukhoi in 2006, from operating in the USA, citing the U.S. law, adopted in 2000, on nonproliferation measures against Iran, which prohibits the sale of certain types of arms and related technologies to that country. True, the sanctions against Sukhoi were lifted after a meeting between presidents Bush and Putin, but in 2007, sanctions were re-imposed on Rosoboronexport and the Instrument Design Bureau.

Russia's military-technical contacts with Damascus are also being kept under watch. A contract for the delivery of Igla anti-aircraft systems in 2005 was cancelled after Russia and the USA signed

[65] See: Military Spending and Armaments: SIPRI Year Book. — [S. l.], 2007. — P. 410.

[66] Export Vooruzhenii. — 2005. — No 5. — September-October. http://www.cast.ru/journal1/2005/5_2005_2/?form=print.

[67] *Kanayev P.* SShA zapretili rossiiskoye oruzhiye // Vzglyad: Delovaya Gazeta. — 2006. — August 5 http://www.vz.ru/economy2006/8/5/44155.html.

[68] *Baxter S.* Pentagon "three-day blitz" plan for Iran // The Sunday Times. — 2007. — Sept. 2.

[69] http://www.islamnews.ru.

[70] SShA obespokoyeny voyenno-tekhnicheskim sotrudnichestvom Irana i RF (published on the site Strana.Ru, December 8, 2005).

an agreement on limiting arms sales in parts of the world where there are conflicts. As director of Rosoboronexport Sergei Chemezov admitted at one point, the Igla system has been dubbed "the terrorists' weapon", because it is "easily moved from place to place and can be used effectively."[71] A contract to sell Syria the S-300PMU2 "Favorit" anti-aircraft system, which has a radius of up to 300 km, and the Iskander-E tactical operations missile system also did not actually go ahead. The same was true of a contract for Su-30MKI and MiG-31E aircraft. The USA and Israel opposed this contract and Moscow abandoned it.

This intervention in Russia's already far from straightforward relations with its Muslim partners irritates Moscow, which tries to limit it. Yury Khozyainov, state secretary and deputy chairman of the Committee for Military-Technical Cooperation with Foreign States, thinks it is important for Russia to "prevent so-called blacklists of arms importers from being drawn up and given official recognition, as they can include Russia's traditional military-technical cooperation partners, countries such as Syria, Libya and Iran."[72] Russia's persistence, which sometimes runs the risk of going too far, does however bring results, and military cooperation continues. But Moscow is aware that military cooperation with Iran and (to a lesser degree) with Syria has its limits – limits resulting from not only U.S. pressure, but also the adventurist actions of these countries themselves.

Arms sales to the other Muslim countries are an apolitical and purely commercial business. The biggest purchaser of Russian-made aircraft in the Middle East in the mid-2000s was Yemen, which bought 16 MiG-29 aircraft of various modifications in 2002 and signed a contract with Russia for their modernization in 2004.

Yemen has now been overtaken by Algeria, which purchased 42 combat transport helicopters for a total of $180 million in 2004. There were plans to sell Algeria 49 MiG-29 aircraft (for $1.8 billion) in 2005-2006. During Vladimir Putin's visit to the country in March 2006, several contracts were signed for a total of $6.3 billion,[73] making Algeria Russia's third biggest arms buyer at that moment, after China and India. But after Algeria decided to return 15 MiG-29 fighter planes to Russia in 2008 on the grounds of their poor quality (several of the planes delivered had old, second-hand fuselages), military-technical cooperation between the countries came to a standstill. Algeria effectively denounced the contract, which would have seen the delivery of this type of plane. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Russian aircraft-manufacturing corporation MiG had already received $250 million as an advance payment for the contract.

Moscow tried to portray the affair as being a case of Algeria changing its mind under external pressure, in particular from France, which competes against Russia for the Algerian market, and also from NATO. But it was clear that it was not competition (though it really does exist) that motivated Algeria's change of heart. The problem actually had to do with the quality of the goods supplied. A compromise was found in the end when Algeria proposed replacing the poor-quality MiGs with 14 (or 16) more reliable Su30MKI (A) planes. Earlier, Algeria had already signed a contract with Irkut Research and Production Corporation for 28 planes of this type for a total of around $2.5 billion.[74]

The misunderstanding with the planes was the second such episode in Russian-Algerian relations. In the 1990s, the two countries signed a contract worth $100 million for the modernization of two naval vessels. But the quality of the work performed was so low that the Algerians refused to pay the last installment of $26 million.

The "Algerian scandal" was unfortunate for Russia, in that problems arose at the same time with supplies of military hardware to India and China. All of this inevitably affected attitudes towards Russian weapons in general. The result was that arms sales issues frequently ended up being dealt with at the highest – presidential – level in 2008.

Signals that military-technical cooperation with Libya might revive were confirmed during foreign minister Sergei Lavrov's visit to Tripoli in December 2007. Confidence increased even further after Vladimir Putin visited the country. From then on, negotiations took a familiar road: Libya recognized its debt of $4.6 billion, which Russia immediately wrote off in exchange for greater economic cooperation. Moscow hoped for military-technical cooperation deals worth $4 billion.[75] The ambitious Libyans show interest in the latest weapons (perhaps taking Algeria's experience into account) – Su-35

[71] Vesti+ (RTR) — November 2, 2005.

[72] Export Vooruzhenii. — 2002. — No 4. — July-August. http://www.cast.ru/journal1/2002/4_2002export/?form=print.

[73] *Kudelev V. V.* O nekotorykh itogakh vizita prezidenta Alzhira Abdelaziza Butefliki v Moskvu / Institut Blizhnego Vostoka. // http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat2008/26-02-8c/htm.

[74] *Lantratov K., Grishkova A.* Alzhir peresazhivayetsya na "Su" || Kommersant. — 2008. — May 15.

[75] *Murtazin A.* V shatre beduina: itogi vizita Putina v Liviyu // RIA-Novosti. — 2008. — April 17. http://www.rian.ru/analitycs/20080417/105340522.html.

fighter planes, Ka-52 helicopters, and the S-300 and Top-M1 air defense systems. During Putin's visit there were also discussions about buying Yak-130 training planes and repairing three naval vessels. Contracts were signed for the modernization of arms purchased earlier from the Soviet Union – T-72 tanks, Pechora and Osa-AKM air defense systems, and three naval vessels. But the Libyans decided at the last moment to try to save money and not spend more than $2.3 billion.[76] Some sources put the total value of the contracts at $2.9 billion.[77]

At the start of the decade, Russia tried to return to Egypt's arms market. The Soviet Union had been Egypt's main ally for almost 20 years (1954-1972). In 1999, Egypt bought 20 Russian Mi-17-1B helicopters and signed a small contract ($150 million) for the modernization of S-125 Pechora and ZRK Kvadrat anti-aircraft weapons, part of which were replaced by the more modern Buk-M1-2 system. In 2007, an agreement was concluded for delivery of ZSU-23-4-M4 Shpilka-Strelets anti-aircraft weapons. At the same time, a big contract, worth $1.5 billion, for the purchase of 40 MiG-29SE planes did not go ahead. American competitors got in the way. In military terms, Egypt is the most powerful country in the Middle East and it has great authority throughout the Muslim world. Reviving military-technical cooperation with Egypt could therefore also give a boost to developing relations in this area with other Arab and Muslim countries, but so far this has not happened.

Russia sold 12 MiG-29 planes to Sudan, but delays in payments have held up cooperation with the Sudanese. Total contracts with Sudan come to $549 million.

Of the Persian Gulf countries, Russia developed relations in the military-technical field with Kuwait in the 1990s, selling 122 armored personnel carriers to that country in 1995-1996. The United Arab Emirates bought 50 Pantsir-S1 missile systems from Russia in 1999. There was talk of Saudi Arabia buying a large number of fighter planes from Russia in the beginning of the decade, but this remained no more than a rumor, and in the end Saudi Arabia signed a $15-billion contract with Britain in 2006 for the purchase of 72 Eurofighter Typhoon fighter planes (much to the chagrin not only of Russia, but also of the United States, which had hoped to sell the Saudis its F-15 planes). In 2007, during a visit to Saudi Arabia, Vladimir Putin discussed the sale of 150 modern T-90 tanks for a total of $1 billion. This contract looked like it could go ahead, but talks on the sale of armored personnel carriers and also 135 Mi-17 and Mi-35 helicopters ran into difficulties. A contract for the sale of 20 Buk-M2E air defense systems also has unclear prospects.

Military-technical cooperation with Oman is minimal. According to current data, the country bought a few 9K129 Kornet-E anti-tank missile systems in 2000, and there was talk of the possible purchase of the Bastion anti-ship missile system.[78]

Armored personnel carriers, tanks and anti-tank missiles, and helicopters are still Russia's most popular products on the Muslim arms market. The renowned Kalashnikov is also popular, but supplies of the weapon are coming now not just from Russia, but also from the CIS countries – Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan,[79] as well as from China.

In the past, only China and India purchased the most advanced Russian-made weapons, but in 2003 this monopoly was broken when Malaysia signed a contract with Russia for 18 state-of-the-art Su-30MKM planes. Moscow intends to work actively on expanding this cooperation with Malaysia.

Space cooperation is also developing gradually. Saudi Arabia launched seven satellites with Russia's help and a small Iranian satellite was launched in 2005. An agreement was signed with Malaysia for a Malaysian cosmonaut to go into space, and a Turk and an Egyptian could be the next Muslim cosmonauts in line to go into space.[80]

Data on arms sales are not always accurate because military-technical cooperation is a delicate area surrounded by secrecy and easily subject to mystification. To give just one good example: during an arms fair in Abu Dhabi in 1995, then Russian defense minister Pavel Grachev declared that Russia had signed deals worth $11 billion, but in reality Russia signed contracts for $1.9 billion.[81]

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[76] *Petrov N.* Tikhii biznes po-liviisky // Rossiiskoye agentstvo mezhdunarodnoy informatsii. — 2008. — April 18.

[77] *Volkova A.* O vozmozhnykh problemakh rossiisko-liviiskogo voyenno-tekhnicheskogo sotrudnichestva // Export Vooruzhenii. — 2008. — March-April. — P. 2.

[78] *Aliev R.* Kharakteristika rynka vooruzhenii Omana // Export Vooruzhenii. — 2008. — March-April — P. 12.

[79] Almost all of the former Soviet Republics began selling surplus outdated weapons, including fighter planes, after the collapse of the USSR.

[80] Rossia i Musulmansky Mir. — 2005. — № 59. — P. 41.

[81] *Baranets V.* Yeltsin i ego generaly. — M, 1997. — PP. 214-215.

In 2006, Russia became the world's second-largest[82] arms exporter after the USA, and it now faces the question in its military-technical cooperation with the Muslim countries of being guided by political considerations or putting the emphasis on commercial benefits. Purely economic benefits and foreign policy considerations are still in harmony for now. Russia's "protection" of Iran brings it financial benefits at the same time. Military supplies to Syria symbolize Russia's independent position in the Middle East conflict. The sale of modern planes to Malaysia can be presented as Russia's intention to help one of the most influential Muslim countries bolster its independence from the West.

In most cases, Russian arms sales do not affect the strategic balance of power within the Muslim world or between the Muslim countries and their non-Muslim opponents. At the same time, arms sales to the Middle East and Iran give some regimes and Muslim radical groups an increased sense of their own strength and greater feeling of invulnerability; in some cases it pushes them into taking a more hard-line position.

CONCLUSION

Overall, Russian policies towards the Muslim world remain ambivalent. Despite official efforts to woo Islam, rapprochement with the Muslim world is, to use the words of retired Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, "a tactical move."[83]

It is telling that the parliamentary groups mentioned above, "Russia and the Islamic World" and "Strategic Vision: Russia and the Islamic World," have not put any real substance into their activities, doing nothing more than issuing declarations and receiving delegations.

Russia's interest in cooperation with the Muslim world is determined by political considerations and to a lesser extent by economic factors. The calls for cooperation are opportunistic and instrumental in nature. Between 2005-2008, seeking to speed up the development of relations with the Muslim countries, Vladimir Putin decided that his personal meetings with Muslim leaders would help achieve this objective. In a sense, he was using the tactic he had already tried out with some success in the West. But his vigorous style and personal charm did not make the desired impression on Muslim politicians. Putin tried to be a politician and a "merchant" at the same time, lobbying for Russian business interests. His proposals for cooperation in the gas sector met with a cool response, however, and military-technical cooperation has not always been backed up by the Russian defense industry's real capabilities.

Just before Putin's visit to the region in 2007, the Kremlin proposed establishing a regional security system. This idea ran counter to Moscow's pro-Iranian position. These contradictions came through (indirectly) in an interview that Kuwaiti foreign minister Sheikh Mohammed al-Sabah gave to Russian journalist Yelena Suponina, in which he said that "Kuwait is against Iran having nuclear weapons."[84] The Arab countries are seriously worried that Iran could reach the finish line in the end and make its own nuclear weapon, all the more so as the country already has short-range and even mid-range missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. The United States' plans to expand its missile defense shield and place components of the system in Eastern Europe only further convince Iran's Arab neighbors that this scenario is a serious possibility.

Russia has not yet found a new, non-Soviet approach to the Muslim world. The Muslims still have a distrust of Russia, which remains both politically and culturally alien to them. Both Moscow and the Muslim capitals take the view that mutual sympathy is most often "just for show" as a way to arouse confusion and jealousy in the West, with whom neither Russia nor the Muslim countries have ever had a very successful "affair".

Contacts with the Islamic radicals from Hamas have also failed to produce the desired results. The Arab countries themselves have had better success as mediators, and in the view of some Russian analysts, the USA could "turn Hamas into something like Arafat's Fath as it was in the mid-1980s,"[85] making most of its leaders more acceptable as negotiating partners. Russia has not

[82] The Stockholm International Institute for Peace Studies thinks that Russia has even reached first place in the world, though Russian specialists have their doubts on this point. Konstantin Makienko, deputy director of the Center for Analysis of Strategy and Technology, for example, thinks that one should not "take the Scandinavians at their word concerning the flattering conclusions for Russia's defense industry… because the Swedes are counting not actual money… but the value of weapons and military hardware at world prices." http://www.rutoday.ru/news/4801/.

[83] Udar po Rossii skoro mozhet stat' realnostyu: Exclusive interview with Colonel General Leonid Ivashov // http://www.utro.ru.

[84] V sluchaye yadernoi katastrofy v Persidskom zalive nam nechego budet pit' // Vremya Novostei. — 2006. — May 24.

[85] Mir vokrug Rossii. — M., 2007. — P. 143.

yet managed to clearly define its niche in the Middle East conflict. The start of this century's second decade could see Iran take a more moderate approach and bring gradual change in the Syrian regime.

Russia's cooperation with the Muslim oil and gas business is situational, sporadic and not very effective overall. Muslim exporters give de facto support to diversifying transport routes and reject the idea of a "gas OPEC." A breakthrough in the coming years looks unlikely in the oil and gas sectors.

The overall impression is that the "push" in the Muslim direction over the last two years has brought only modest results.

Russia's relations with the Muslim world depend on many factors:

- The general foreign policy doctrine, which is linked to the domestic situation in the country;
- Russia's choice of foreign policy priorities;
- The political and ideological trends shaping the face of the Muslim world;
- Developments in the Muslim countries' relations with the West.

In the end, Russian-Muslim "friendship" will depend on Russia's political and military strength and its economic power, and ultimately on its real competitiveness. These are the factors that will determine its attractiveness as a partner from a Muslim point of view.

The Muslim world is also paying close attention to the demographic situation in Russia. Some Muslim leaders seriously think that their grandchildren will be dealing with a "half-Muslim" Russia and that in turn, their grandchildren's grandchildren will know a Muslim Russia.

Increasing religious radicalism and a rise in anti-Western feeling in the Muslim world could also be a circumstance that could force the Muslim world to turn to Russia as an ally and seek closer relations.

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