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The Impact of Jihadist Propaganda in the Russian Language: Analysis of Kavkazcenter

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Giuliano Bifulchi

The Co-founder and the Director of ASRIE Analytica giuliano.bifulchi@gmail.com | Orcid: 0000-0002-8448-8212

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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Terrorism and jihadist propaganda are among the primary threats of the contemporary era. Because of the high number of foreign fighters from the post-Soviet republics among the rank of the Islamic State, there is a general concern about jihadist propaganda in the Russian language. Kavkazcenter has appeared as one of the main websites in the Russian language to support Imarat Kavkaz (Caucasus Emirate) and regional militant groups. Firstly, this paper examines scientific literature useful to classify Kavkazcenter as a jihadist portal or a media agency. Secondly, the research focuses on the website Kavkazcenter investigating its structure, ideologies and connection with the Arab-Muslim world and the international terrorist network. Finally, this investigation intends to describe if Kavkazcenter represents a serious threat not only for the Russian national security but also for the entire post-Soviet space and the European Union itself, where North Caucasian migrants and refugees live.

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Introduction

Academia and Intelligence agencies have recently paid substantial attention to jihadist propaganda in the Russian language because of the rise of Daesh, a terrorist group capable of creating a Caliphate in Iraq and Syria and promoting its ideology in the West pushing people to organise violent attacks on the European soil.¹ Since the rise of the Islamic State in 2014, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's propaganda machine has spread its ideology into the post-Soviet space and among Russian speakers using social networks and the magazine *Istok* (Parazsczuk, 2015; Krupnov, 2017).

Terrorism has influenced the Russian Federation since the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Dobaev, 2016). Before the Islamic State set up its propaganda apparatus, numerous websites and social network profiles belonging to the North Caucasian local militancy have promoted jihadist ideology in the Russian language on the Russian soil.

Kavkazcenter,² an Internet portal linked to *Imarat Kavkaz* (Caucasus Emirate), has been one of the most dynamic and famous websites because of its massive impact on the public opinion in the Russian Federation and abroad.³ For more than a decade, this website has disseminated its ideological message against the Russian central authority showing longevity and the ability to survive at Kremlin's counter-terrorism measures (Campana and Ducol, 2015).

Although nowadays this Internet portal has only the Russian version online, in the past *Kavkazcenter* had developed also English, Arabic and Turkish versions to create a network of contacts and followers in the Middle East and Central Asia, notably in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Consequently, the website

lost its international audience because of the lack of multi-language versions limits the impact of *Kavkazcenter's* propaganda, which is more Russian oriented and seems to be deficient in international supporters.

Since the leading role which *Kavkazcenter* has played in Russia and among the Russian terrorist organisations, this research aims at investigating its structure and strategic communication to understand if we can classify what the website reports to the public audience as jihadist propaganda and a threat not only for the Russian national security but also for the entire post-Soviet space and the European Union where several North Caucasian refugees and migrants live. If truth be told, the European Union has several times asserted its commitment in the fight against all form of terrorism and crime, and Europol has underlined the menace of the jihadist propaganda in the Russian language for Europe (Europol, 2015).

The EU-Russia cooperation in counter-terrorism has been slow down because of the Ukrainian Crisis, Brussels's critiques on the Kremlin's management of the North Caucasus, the EU-Georgia partnership, and those representatives of the former Chechen Republic of Ichkeria who live in Europe with the status of political refugees or asylum seekers (The Jamestown Foundation, 2007; Asmus, 2010; Harding, 2012; Marten, 2015; Svarin, 2016.). The geopolitical confrontation between the EU and Russia has also defined the existence of *Kavkazcenter* and involved North European and Baltic countries. Truly, since 2003, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, and Finland have hosted the website on different servers, although the Kremlin has incessantly requested to shut it down. Albeit in July 2011 the United Nations Security Council ascribed *Kavkazcenter* on the sanctions list, the website is still operative and supported by the *Finrosforum*, *Suomalais-venalainen kansalaisfoorumi* (Finnish-Russian Civic Forum) and the Pro-Caucasus in Sweden and financed by the Soros Fund which has vast interests in Finland (Bifulchi, 2018).

Firstly, this paper examines academic literature, NGOs' reports and media articles on *Kavkazcenter* and its strategic communication to understand if the website might be qualified among those Internet portals which spreads terrorist ideologies among the public audience. On the one hand, the Kremlin considers *Kavkazcenter* a terrorist website because of its jihadist propaganda and support to local militant groups in the North Caucasus. On the other hand, *Kavkazcenter* founders have always defined the Internet portal as an Islamic media agency whose primary goal is to report truthful information and news from the North Caucasus and counter Moscow's propaganda and censorship. Secondly, we will investigate *Kavkazcenter's* structure, contents, and social network profiles because all these elements are a substantial part of its strategic communication. Lastly, we will emphasise the impact of *Kavkazcenter* in the post-Soviet republics, especially the Russian Federation, to understand if we might interpret its strategic communication as a threat for Russia and those European countries where North Caucasian refugees and migrants and Russian speakers live.

***Kavkazcenter*: A Terrorist Website or an Independent Media Agency?**

The critical situation of independent media in the Russian Federation has created space for radical ideas to thrive, and *Kavkazcenter* has appeared as one of the leading sources of 'information' in the North Caucasus in this media vacuum. Undeniably, as the Russian journalist Fatima Tlisova has highlighted in her studies and journalistic reports, the Kremlin has controlled regional information and threatened independent media in the North Caucasus, and have also conducted an 'assassination campaign' against those journalists who reported the Russian government's repression in the region (Dameron, 2010). Mikael Storsjö, a Swedish journalist who provided hosting for *Kavkazcenter* but was also accused of being involved in the illegal transfer of potential terrorists from the North Caucasus to North Europe via Turkey, claimed the right to freedom of speech, and since the beginning has supported the website *Kavkaz.org* which Adam Tumsoev, a pseudonym of a Chechen IT specialist and journalist, administered (Malishevski, 2013; Tlisova, 2010).

In 1999, Movladi Udugov, the former Minister of Information of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, established the website *Kavkaz.org* whose goal was to inform on events in Chechnya and provide news and report regarding the local situation in the North Caucasus against the Kremlin's censorship campaign (Dannreuther & March, 2010). The establishment of *Kavkaz.org* coincided with the beginning of the Second Chechen War (1999 – 2009) described by the Kremlin as a counter-terrorism operation in the North Caucasus after a series of violent attacks in Moscow, Volgograd, and

Buynaksk and the Chechen militants' penetration in Dagestan to create an Islamic state in the region (Calzini, 2005; Tsatsos, 2014). Kavkaz.org worked until 2002 when the Russian authorities stole the domain, and the editors created a new website titled *Kavkazcenter*. Therefore, since 2003, this Internet portal has become the principal source of information from the local militia. Albeit the Russian government banned *Kavkazcenter* and approved various cyber operations to hacking the website, Moscow could not shut it down. In 2005, *Kavkazcenter* declared itself as an Islamic news agency.

There is an open discussion whether *Kavkazcenter* is a media agency whose purpose is to contrast the Kremlin's censorship or a terrorist website which aims at promoting the jihadist ideology and helping the North Caucasian terrorist groups to recruit militants among the young generations.

Egdunas Račius (2006) contextualised this open debate on *Kavkazcenter* analysing the Lithuanian case. At the beginning of 2003, when the website's server was moved to Lithuania, the State Security Department spokesperson explicitly said that *Kavkazcenter* was not a threat for national security. Later in the same year, albeit *Kavkazcenter* declared itself to be a product of the Chechen Independent International Islamic Internet Agency, which the Chechen National Center for Strategic Research and Political Technologies created in 1999 in Grozny, Lithuanian Intelligence considered the website a propaganda machine of the Chechen jihadist group *Riṣṣat al-Ṣāliḥīn* (the Meadows of the Righteous) led by Shamil Basayev. This event divided the Lithuanian public opinion between those who supported the national authority's decision of closing *Kavkazcenter* and those who accused the Lithuanian government of succumbing to the Russian pressure. The debate finished when in 2005 *Kavkazcenter's* server was transferred to Finland.

In his research on the rise of *Imarat Kavkaz*, Dmitry Shlapentokh (2008) wrote that Movladi Ugudov was a jihadist and editor of *Kavkazcenter* considered "the best-known online resistance publication". Greg Simons (2010: pp. 184–185) affirmed that we cannot classify all the content on *Kavkazcenter* as being extremist and dangerous, although some material might be related to the terrorism.

Sue Ann Harding (2011: p. 49) studied competing narratives on the Chechen wars focusing the attention on the terrorist attack in Beslan in 2004.⁴ The purpose of Harding's research was to show how Russian state media *RIA-Novosti* and so-called 'independent' media *Kavkazcenter* and *Caucasian Knot* reported the event. The author noted that *Kavkazcenter* had a strong connection with the government-in-exile of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, reported statements of the Chechen *mujāhidīn* and, in the occasion of Beslan's siege, depicted the Russian government as a treacherous regime incline of using excessive force against civilians and children.

Stalinsky, Green and Razafimbahiny (2012) described Kavkaz Center a jihadi news agency which distributed articles promoting and exalting *jihād* in the North Caucasus and elsewhere. Their investigation stressed that the so-called 'media agency' was affiliated with *Imarat Kavkaz*, posted videos and interviews of its leaders and spread exclusive information on the Caucasus Emirate, evidence of a close connection between *Kavkazcenter* and this terrorist organisation. The scholars supported their idea that *Kavkazcenter* was a jihadist website studying its tweets whose primary goal was to discredit Vladimir Putin (at the time of the investigation he was the Prime Minister of Russia) and report on jihadist activities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, the Caucasus (especially Chechnya, Dagestan, and Georgia), and Kazakhstan.

Adrián Tarín Sanz (2017) considered *Kavkazcenter* "the most prominent news agency of the jihadist faction of the Chechen guerrillas" and "the most representative media outlet of the jihadist insurgencies". *Kavkazcenter* categorised the ethnic Russian as the enemy of Islam and compared the Russian military forces which were operating in Chechnya with the Tsarist soldiers who fought the Caucasian War (1817-1864) against the Imamate led by Shamil.

Elena Pokalova (2018: p. 415) investigated al-Qaeda's strategy of using the Chechen rebels as part of its fight against 'the infidel'. She noted that since the beginning of the Second Chechen War in 1999, *Kavkazcenter* published articles that used religious leaders' statements and opinions and the Quran to exhort the Muslim believers to fight in the name of Allāh. Moreover, in its narrative, *Kavkazcenter* echoed al-Qaeda's messages and ideologies spread through Internet forums and its magazine *Inspire*

and emphasised topics such as the Islamic Caliphate, the fight against all enemies of Islam, and the global *jihād*.

Structure and Contents of *Kavkazcenter*

Kavkazcenter bases its counter informative exercise on the publication of exclusive content that ideologically supports the local militancy and terrorist groups and spreads information whose access is difficult for journalists and researchers. Initially, the main core of the project were statements, communiqués, and testimonials from members of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria's government. Since 2007, when Doku Umarov established *Imarat Kavkaz*, *Kavkazcenter* became the propaganda medium of the Islamist guerrillas reporting ideologies and information regarding clashes with the Russian special forces (Tarín Sanz, 2015: pp. 238–240).

From a first glance, *Kavkazcenter* appears to be a well-structured website that uses extensively videos, pictures, articles, and social network accounts with quite a lot of references to Islam and the Muslim community. In reality, on the top right of the website, there is the *basmala* “*bi-smi llāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*” (In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful) which underlines the religious configuration of the website and the will to promote a message for the entire Muslim *umma* (community).⁵ The *basmala* is a distinctive Islamic character which allows *Kavkazcenter* to overcome the North Caucasian ethnolinguistic and national divisions and spread its message to the entire Russian Muslim community.

The website has well-defined sections that highlight the core topics of its strategic communication:

- *Umma*.⁶ The readers can unknowledge the current situation of their Muslim ‘brothers and sisters’ in Russia and abroad through a report activity which everyday releases news, data, and information about the Muslim *umma*. Among the vast number of articles, there is special attention to Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, the Chinese policy against the Uyghur tribes and Beijing’s expansion in Central Asia. This section reveals *Kavkazcenter*’s desire to create a link between the North Caucasus and those Muslim territories where local Muslim believers are fighting against foreign occupation or a strong central regime and religious repressive measures are affecting the everyday life of the other Muslim brothers.
- In the World (*V mire*).⁷ The articles focus on Kremlin’s domestic and foreign policy and US – Russia confrontation. Washington has a double value because it is at the same time an enemy of the Muslim *umma* but also an ‘ally’ in the war against the Russian Federation. The rhetoric in this section highlights that since 2001 the White House has fought the Taliban in Afghanistan, has imposed a Shia government in Iraq after toppling down Saddam Hussein’s regime, and has tried to control through its military power the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia with the aim at diffusing its capitalist philosophy and exploiting the regional natural resources. The core message of these articles was that the White House’s strategy has posed dangerous threats to the Muslim community and Islamist ideology. However, Washington was also the *mujāhidīn*’s supporter during the Russo– Afghan War (1979 – 1989) and the first enemy of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Nowadays, the United States is still facing the expansion of the Russian Federation in the Middle East and North Africa and contrasting the Russian military presence and operations in the post-Soviet space and those territories where there is a consistent number of Muslim believers (Alterman, 2017). *Kavkazcenter* describes alternatively the United States and the European Union as ‘allies’ of the Muslim community when they contrast the Russian Federation and ‘enemies’ of Islam because of episodes of racism and intolerance. In effect, the website amply criticises Western foreign policies which follow the steps of the colonialism or imperialism.
- Russia (*Rossiia*).⁸ Coexistence among different religious and ethnic groups, the action of the *Federal’naja Sluzhba Bezopasnosti* (Federal Security Service or FSB), and special forces’ activities on the Russian soil and abroad, and Putin’s life are the main trends discussed in this section. There is the attempt of emphasising the ‘disrespectful’ Kremlin’s religious policy against the ‘real Islam’ and the Russian will to impose its favourite Muslim clergy to dominate the Russian Muslim *umma*. The description of military operations and FSB activities aim at alarming the entire world about the Russian military threat for international stability and Moscow’s abuses of human rights. The Russian president is an ‘obsession’ for *Kavkazcenter* (2020) that describes Putin as the first

and fiercest enemy for the North Caucasian people and Muslim believers and links the Kremlin with Satanism.⁹

- *Caucasus (Kavkaz)*.¹⁰ In this part, there is a massive emphasis on articles, news, and analysis on contemporary and past events in Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia. Moreover, the editors mostly discuss and report information and news on the Chechen Head of State Ramzan Kadyrov and Chekism¹¹ but they also consider pertinent those events in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia related to the Muslim community or whose relevance might have a connection with the North Caucasus and Russia.
- *Opinions (Mnenie)*.¹² *Kavkazcenter*'s followers can read a mix of analytical reports, commentaries, a historical description of the past events in the North Caucasus, especially the period of the Chechen Wars, speeches and explanation of Doku Umarov, Shamil Basayev, and some of the most influential leaders of the local militancy. Since 2001 the portal has published a high volume of articles in this section even though in the last two years the activity consistently decreased.¹³
- *Press (Pressa)*.¹⁴ A collection of opinions, news, articles, and studies from Russian and international websites and blogs on the Caucasus, Islam, discrimination in Russia, ethnic problems, and conflicts whose purpose seems that of accrediting *Kavkazcenter* to the role of a news agency.
- *Da'wa (Da'avat)*.¹⁵ Religion and the explanation of *sūra* or single parts of some specific *sūra* are central in this area of the website whose purpose is to clarify the meaning of *jihād*, the necessity of being a good Muslim, the duties of the Muslim believers and to contrast what is considered 'false Islam'.¹⁶
- *Feedback (obratnaya svyaz)*.¹⁷ *Kavkazcenter* allows its followers and readers to contact directly the editorial board using the contact form. Thanks to this module, the editors can create a dialogue with followers.
- *Media*.¹⁸ Pictures and videos are essential in *Kavkazcenter*'s propaganda. Visitors and readers can select videos of *Imarat Kavkaz*'s emirs discussing special religious issues such as *jihād* and *mujāhidīn*'s role in the contemporary era.

Kavkazcenter had an official Twitter account @Kavkazcenter launched on July 10th, 2011, and linked to the website (Stalinsky et al., 2012). Although Twitter has contrasted jihadist and terrorist organisations' activities as requested by different governments, since 2017, *Kavkazcenter* has a new Twitter account @newkc14. In September 2020 @newkc14 had more than 12 thousand followers and follows only 38 accounts that cover topics such as the United States, Donald Trump, conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Islam.¹⁹ Re-tweeting and posting articles and news about Afghanistan and the Middle East can be an attempt to create a link with the North Caucasus. Moreover, Afghanistan and the Caucasus have a psychological impact on the ethnic Russians because they recall those battlegrounds where in the past the Tsarist empire and the Soviet Union fought prolonged wars against the locals risking of being defeated as in the Caucasian War (1817 – 1864) or registering one of the worst defeat for the Red Army as in the Russo-Afghan War (1979 – 1989) (Baumann, 1952; Bilev and Degoev, 1994; Gulin, 2014; Cicek, 2015);

Kavkazcenter spreads not only information on the North Caucasus and the Muslim community and jihadist ideology but also contrasts Kremlin's propaganda considered a threat for the Russian citizens and the entire world. The research of the Russian term '*propaganda*' inside the website reveals more than 1800 articles and news which refer to the Russian propaganda described as Kremlin's lies and 'fake news' and Moscow's expansion strategy.²⁰ For instance, in December 2019, the website published an article titled 'Information War. Seven factors, that the Russian propaganda exploits for its lies' (Kavkazcenter, 2019) translating and using the post of the website *EU vs Disinfo*, a project managed by the European Union.²¹ This article shows how *Kavkazcenter* uses investigations and publications released by EU and US agencies and think tanks to cover and contrast the Russian strategic communication and support its anti-Kremlin propaganda.

Conclusion

We can consider *Kavkazcenter* an aggressive, pro-Islam, anti-Russian website which reports news on the North Caucasus and the Muslim *umma* promoting at the same time jihadist propaganda. In fact, according to this preliminary investigation, *Kavkazcenter* is more a jihadist propaganda website than an information news agency against Russian censorship as Adam Tumsoev and Mickael Storsjo

declared. Its purpose is to have a significant impact on the readers using Quran and Muslim terminology and articles and reports from distinguished personalities in the West. Without an English version, *Kavkazcenter's* international dimension has been mitigated and nowadays the website targets Russia, the Russian speakers, and the post-Soviet space contextualising its propaganda inside the contemporary conflict which opposes the Russian Federation and the West against the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and local militant groups.

It is possible to state that the transformation into an Islamic media agency makes *Kavkazcenter* and its propaganda a threat for the entire Eurasian continent because the portal exhorts its followers to look at the local militancy or the political Islam as the solution to their problems exploiting the sense of belonging to the Muslim *umma*. The chief targets are those ethnic groups and Muslim believers whom the State central authority has oppressed with anti-religious or discrimination campaigns.

The jihadist propaganda of *Kavkazcenter* endangers the Russian national security because the website admonishes its followers and readers to interpret the Kremlin's activity as a menace to their lives and for the Muslim community. The exaltation of Caucasian personalities and leaders who fought against the Russians in the past (i.e., Imam Shamil, Dzhokar Dudaev, Shamil Basaev, Doku Umarov) serves to drive the attention of the Russian Muslim young generations and recruit supporters and future militants.

The European Union is not immune to the jihadist propaganda in the Russian language and *Kavkazcenter* might pose a serious threat to the European stability considering the noteworthy North Caucasian diaspora in the continent, first among all the Chechens. Undeniably, during the First and the Second Chechen Wars, the European Union was a desirable destination for North Caucasian people seeking refuge from the local conflicts or the Russian repression (Petrovich and Ostaptschuk, 2013). Chechens are the majority of the North Caucasians who escaped from Chechnya under Kadyrov's leadership and their number has been increasing since 2003 as highlighted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, academic investigations, and media (Vatchagaev, 2008; Kirilenko, 2017). *Kavkazcenter* might affect the North Caucasian diaspora in the European Union through its jihadist propaganda and, in general, terrorist ideologies disseminated in the Russian language. Indubitably, in the recent years, security forces in Europe have arrested Chechen people because of their connection to the Islamic State or other terrorist organisations bringing to light the problem of security connected to the North Caucasian diaspora and the jihadist propaganda in Russian (Deutsche Welle, 2010).

To sum up, *Kavkazcenter* is a pro-jihadi website whose aim is theoretically to be recognized as an Islamic news agency even though in reality it is an online portal which has a connection with the North Caucasian local militancy and foreign terrorist groups. Due to its propaganda activity in the Russian language and the consistent presence of North Caucasian refugees or citizens in Europe, Brussels should strive to manage this problem and tried to cooperate with Moscow to avoid the rise of new terrorist groups or the organization of terrorist attacks on the European soil.

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¹ Daesh is the Arabic acronym of the *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l-'Irāq wa-sh-Shām* well-known in the West as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and after the 2014 as the Islamic State (IS). The United Nations as well as my international organisations and individual countries (among them the Russian Federation) declared the Islamic State a terrorist organisation.

² The website www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/ was accessible during the collection of data of this investigation for the period September – October 2020.

³ *Imarat Kavkaz* (Caucasus Emirate) is a terrorist organisation created in October 2007 which wants to set up an Islamic state in the North Caucasus based on *shari'a* law. Doku Umarov abolished the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria resulted from the First Chechen War and founded *Imarat Kavkaz* declaring himself an emir. The creation of the Caucasus Emirate changed the confrontation between the Russian military forces and the local militant groups and transformed the ethno-nationalist cause into an Islamist program. Since 2007 *Imarat Kavkaz* has organised several terrorist attacks on the Russian soil. After 2013, when the Russian forces managed to eliminate Doku Umarov, this terrorist organisation started losing its regional appeal and vitality. After the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq different leaders of the Caucasus Emirate pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Nowadays, the Russian government still considers *Imarat Kavkaz* a threat for the national security, there are only few information about the existence of this terrorist organisation. Cf. Hahn GM (2011) Getting the Caucasus Emirate Right. Available at: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/110930_Hahn_GettingCaucasusEmirateRt_Web.pdf (accessed 22 October 2020); Jasutis G (2016) The Rise and Decline of the Caucasus Emirate. Zurich: Center for Security Studies ETH.

⁴ On September 1st, 2004, a group of Chechen militants and Islamic fundamentalists assaulted the school number 1 located in Beslan in North Ossetia-Alania and kidnapped about 1200 adults and children. After two days of negotiates the Russian military forces decided to raid the school. At the end of the operation more than three hundred people died, including 186 children, and over 700 were wounded.

⁵ The *basmala* (in Arabic: بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ) is used extensively in everyday Muslim life and said as the opening of each action to receive blessing from God.

⁶ <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/ummah>

⁷ <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/world>

⁸ <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/russia>

⁹ There are more than 11 thousand articles related to the Russian President Vladimir Putin as the following link shows <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/search/all/all/Путин%20>.

¹⁰ <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/caucasus>

¹¹ Chekism (from the Russian word *Cheka*) refers to the period of the Soviet Union when the secret police strongly controlled all spheres of society. In contemporary Russia, Chekism is also used to criticise Kremlin's policy and the unlimited power of the Russian law-enforcement. Cf. Anderson J (2006) The Chekist Takeover of the Russian State. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 19: 237–288; Anderson J (2007) The HUMINT Offensive from Putin's Chekist State. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 20(2): 258–316; Galeotti M (2016) Putin's Hydra: Inside Russia's Intelligence Service. Report for the European Council on Foreign Relations.

¹² <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/opinion>

¹³ Since 2018 there is a vacuum of articles in conjunction with the fall of *Imarat Kavkaz* and the rise of Islamic State. In fact, in the period 2013 – 2016 the Russian special forces killed some of the most influential leaders of the Caucasus Emirate (among them Doku Umarov) while other regional leaders preferred to swear allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Cf. Youngman M (2016) Between Caucasus and Caliphate: the splintering of the North Caucasus insurgency. *Caucasus Survey* 4(3): 194–217; Holland EC and Witmer FDW and O'Loughlin J (2017) The decline and shifting geography of violence in Russia's North Caucasus, 2010-2016. *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 58(6): 613–641.

¹⁴ <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/press>

¹⁵ <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/daawa>

¹⁶ *Da'wah* (also daawa, dawah, daawah or dakwah, from the Arabic term: دعوة "invitation") is the proselytising or preaching of Islam. In Islamic theology, the purpose of *da'wah* is to invite people, Muslims and non-Muslims, to understand the worship of God as expressed in the Quran and the Sunna and to inform them about the Prophet Muhammad. Cf. Salam A (1996) *Dawah Guide (Towards Perfectioning Dawah)*. Students Islamic Publications, pp. 1-3.

¹⁷ <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/feedback>

¹⁸ <https://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/media>

¹⁹ For instance, among the 'following' there is the official Twitter account of the spokesperson of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Zabihulla Mujahid.

²⁰ <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/search/all/all/пропаганда%20>

²¹ The website EU vs Disinfo <https://euvsdisinfo.eu> is a project of the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force started in 2015 to counter what they consider the Russian disinformation campaign.

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