

# **Is Putin really using conservatism and playing the religious card in the war between Russia and Ukraine to intimidate the NATO?**

## **Repercussions on the Russian war in Ukraine**

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### **Introduction**

Apart from the fact of Putin-bashers or Putin-lovers , we can clearly see how Russia's antagonistic policy in various regions is marking more and more and especially after its Modus Vivendi on the world stage is shrinking and how he takes his own policy ( cfr. Syria ) and continuing doing so unaffected and without any kind of resistance . For three months now, the US kept warning that Russia would send its troops to the border of Ukraine to restore Russia's supposedly historic territorial integrity , just as it was able to carry out the annexation of Crimea in 2014 against all treaties , and against international law , with impunity<sup>1</sup> . The Pentagon spoke about more than 100 000 / 127 000 Russian soldiers spotted in the last few weeks via satellite images and clearly with a lot of military equipment - allegedly for military exercises - advancing towards the border of Ukraine .

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<sup>1</sup> Zie schending van het internationaal recht , artikel 2 lid 4 van het VN-Handvest, op het verbod van geweld jegens een andere staat , behalve bij toestemming van de VN-Veiligheidsraad– dat is het niet – of uit zelfverdediging en dat is het ook niet. <https://unric.org/nl/verenigde-naties/vn-handvest/>

Actually, it was clear to many analysts that this was a premeditated operation and planned invasion that had been prepared for months to invade Ukraine from its northern border and white Russia. The most annoying thing in a war is that one knows when it starts, but afterwards no one can say for sure, in what direction it will evolve? Should we assume that it is a scenario , of pure Putin's intimidations that will test the borders of the west and NATO ? <sup>2</sup>or is there really an unconscious third world war going on , causing the EU and NATO to fall into the trap by unforeseen provocations ? What about the massive asylum seekers and migration wave, that will bring at least 1 to 5 million people to Europe ?



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<sup>2</sup> De NAVO,( Noord-Atlantische Verdragsorganisatie ) werd in 1949 opgericht , telt 30 lidstaten en heeft als doel de vrijheid en veiligheid van haar lidstaten te garanderen met politieke en militaire middelen.  
[https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index\\_nl.html](https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index_nl.html)

The Russian argument for the invasion is not only the preservation of Russian identity, but also the threat to the West posed



by the expansion of NATO reaching Russia's external borders, they say.

It has long been apparent that Putin's conservatism - inspired by the Kremlin ideologue and adviser of Putin ; Alexander Dugin , to give Russian identity a place - his support for certain European populist parties is purely by the fact that they propagate conservative values and because they oppose the elite. <sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bosman J.en Van Prooijen E. , conservatief ideoloog Alex, Een Vandaag, 2017.  
<https://eenvandaag.avrotros.nl/item/conservatief-ideoloog-alexander-doegin-over-nederland/>

For that, all possible means are legitimate to use them against the West , even if he seems to " enter into an alliance with all the conservatives all over the world " to fight not against Europe as such , but against the universalism that the West pretends to propagate and to supposedly protect traditional values . We also note today, that besides the ideological , political , economic motivations , also the religious card is drawn by enabling the leader Kadyrov and his 12 000 militias from Chechnya in this dirty war.

### **Who is Kadyrov?**



Ramzan Achmadovich Kadyrov, is a hard-line Sufi, formerly one of the Chechen revolutionaries and fighters against the Russians, is the son of former Chechen President Achmad Kadyrov, a warlord in Chechnya who was assassinated in May 2004. Ramadan came to power in February 2007 shortly after he turned 30, the minimum age for being president in Chechnya.

The Chechens, like other mountain peoples in the North Caucasus, divide themselves into sub-units based on geographical location, land and heritage; there are nine 'great alliances of clans' (Tukkhum), and a total of about one hundred individual clans (Teip).<sup>4</sup>

The reciprocal reaction of the Russian state, in its many forms, has been to subsidize and support the specific Islamic movements they deem to be in line with their political goals in the North Caucasus, and to crack down on counter-movements and opponents.

### **Dangerous and irresponsible**

In this conflict too, religion has nothing to do with what is happening there. In Ukraine has more than 400 000 Muslims ( 100 000 are from Uzbekistan , Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan ) and Muslims and Christians and other religions and philosophies of life who have lived together peacefully for decades. There are 160 mosques and 90 Islamic schools and 7 Islamic universities.<sup>5</sup> Kadyrov has filmed praying Muslim fighters in order to roll it out as propaganda in the social media .

That, obviously is to give a global dimension to the war , both countries are trying to fight a proxy war and create new Foreign Fighters .<sup>6</sup> It is disturbing to see how in many embassies already now, voluntary fighters are tried to be recruited and called to join an international battalion and fight

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<sup>4</sup> Sufi-Salafi Institutional Competition and Conflict in the Chechen Republic? 21 September 2016

<https://geohistory.today/islamic-conflict-chechnya/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ukr-prokat.com/en/blog/mosques-in-ukraine.html>

<sup>6</sup> [www.bbc.com/arabic/world](http://www.bbc.com/arabic/world)

along. We saw the same thing on the BBC when the Foreign secretary Liz Truss has said , that she support individuals from UK who might want to go to Ukraine to join an international force to fight.<sup>7</sup>

### **Good to know**

A religion can and may never be used( mis)used for political purposes, that is why we have always strongly condemned the danger of politicizing Islam in our earlier critical articles. A religion must serve the constant God and not the changing politics. Certainly not, in the event that politics would opt for war and destruction - such as the current war, at least, of Russia in Ukraine - instead of peace and stability.

I also don't know if it's a sign of weakness or prudence that the west doesn't react decisively and act swiftly ( stricter economic and political sanctions ) against all kinds of irregularities and especially when violations of the UDHR occur from both state and non-state actors. We saw this in a lot of conflicts , also specifically with Russia , after the annexation of Crimea in Feb/March 2014 , what five months later the Malaysia Airlines plane carrying flight MH17 and all 295 occupants ( of which 193 were Dutch ) died after being hit by a missile on the border of Ukraine/Russia by Russian-backed separatists . After that there were several Russian cyber attacks, including from March 2020 and 7 May , 27 May 2021 on colonial pipeline ( damage of 4.4 billion dollars )<sup>8</sup> . Also when a Russian company ( internet Research Agency ) bought more than 3517 Facebook ads between 2015 and 2017 , reaching 126 million Americans to manipulate the elections etc . Today , we see the result of weakened deterrence strategy that led to an aggressive invasion on a neighbouring country like Ukraine . On 16 June 2021, was it still appropriate for Joe Biden to give his Russian counterpart in Geneva a list of 16 types of infrastructure that should never be the target of cyber attacks?

### **The instrumentalisation of political Islam is not only of this time**

Jihadism, Islamism and today political Sufism as practiced by Russia (in short, a view in which facets of the religion are (mis)used to get as many followers behind them as possible in order to ultimately achieve a worldly cause and goal. Studying these dynamics is especially important for theoretical analyses and to better understand the competition between different Islamic religious/political entities in our society. Many studies of political Islam focus on the original split in Islamic legal thought and theology and practice that resulted from the divide between Sunni and Shia Islam and later between those who ideologise Islam to push their agenda . On a larger scale, this divide is important for assessing the trajectory of conflict between different Muslim communities. However, the division between "traditionalists" and "conservatives" has led to increased tensions within Muslim communities.

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<sup>7</sup> Ukraine conflict: Liz Truss backs people from UK who want to fight? 28 Feb 2022.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk>

<sup>8</sup> <https://blog.devolutions.net/2021/02/solarwinds-solorigate-what-happened-why-it-matters-what-happens-next>

In the 1980s, the Afghan jihad leader; Abdallah Azzam<sup>9</sup>, gave a speech at a training camp in Afghanistan and said :

" Oh, you Mujahidun ( read; soldiers and fighters ), are the most dangerous people because suddenly you may turn into criminals and thugs".<sup>10</sup>

As an example, we can refer to the emergence of a large-scale transnational mobilisation movement of Islamic jihad fighters during the Afghan War of 1979-1989 by the Americans against the Russians . Also the Sufi -Islam was organized by USA in the congress by Nixon centre on 24 October 2003 to strengthen the US to foreign policy and systematically engage them ( both Vice -president Dick Cheney ( 2001 -2009) and the president of IMF . Paul Dundes Wolfowitz were then personally present.<sup>11</sup>

Over the past 25 years, the ideological conflict between Muslim organizations in the Chechen Republic has led to 'traditionalists' and 'Wahhabists'.

These terms are not easy to define, but they can be a useful heuristic to examine the field of competition between institutions. "Traditionalists" seek to restore Islam in Chechnya to what it seemed before the Russian conquest, mostly through the practice of tasawwuf (Sufism), which combines Islamic practices and beliefs with systems of Chechen national laws, traditions and superstitions. They draw political influence from the Sufi -Tariqa (mystical brotherhoods).

Many use the term 'Wahhabi' or 'Wahhabist' to refer to the highly orthodox and literalist teaching of Islam in the North Caucasus. There are critical differences between the Wahhabi/Salafist tradition as practised in the North Caucasus and the school of thought derived from the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd 'al Wahhab (1703-1792). see Wiktor-Mach, 63-65.

In that context, in Grozny and under the leadership of Putin and Kadyrov, a major three-day congress was held with more than 200 Muslim scholars<sup>12</sup> from different countries and from leading universities such as Al -Azhar University in Egypt , al- Qarawiyyin in Morocco and EZ- Zitouna in Tunisia in 2016 with the title " Who are the people of Sunnah and community ? " and the Saudis were not invited and the Wahhabi doctrine was excluded to belong to this term with a lot of displeasure within Salafist circles.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Both state and non-state actors must unconditionally respect international treaties and international law in order to preserve world peace.

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<sup>9</sup> Abdallah Azzam was een Palestijn en de grote ideoloog van de Afgaanse jihad in de jaren '80 , sommigen beschouwen hem , - gezien zijn tientallen jihad literatuur - de vader van de jihadisten onder meer Al QAIDA .

<sup>10</sup> Daarmee waarschuwend dat hun machtspositie en mogelijks om wapens terecht en onterecht op te nemen, zonder deontologisch en ethische code risicovol is..

<sup>11</sup> Baran Zeyno, Understanding Sufism and its potential Role in US Policy , Nixon Center Conference Report, 2004. [https://www.islamawareness.net/Sufism/sufism\\_us\\_policy.pdf](https://www.islamawareness.net/Sufism/sufism_us_policy.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <http://fcds.com/polotics/534>

European Muslims are citizens of Europe who are fully committed to peace and stability, and under no circumstances should religions deployed in conflicts be tolerated in a dubious manner; it is inadmissible to impinge on human dignity for political ends and is considered a gross violation of human rights.

Global challenges today require all the more strong joint action in the EU, NATO, UN and OSCE to safeguard world peace.

Diplomacy, economic and political mechanisms must be applied collectively and consistently to all those (state and non-state actors) who flout and fail to respect the conventions.

Revision of states to sit on the UN or UN must be possible in order not to veto violations committed by them.