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I don't think Islam is more intolerable than any other religion

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Galina Yemelyanova (/staff/profiles/government-society/yemelianova-galina.aspx) talks about Islam in Russia and in the world in a recent article for Pulse UK a weekly Russian newspaper. Read the article here: **http://pulse-uk.org.uk/interview/ya-ne-schitayu-islam-bolee-neterpimyim-chem-lyubyie-drugie-religii/ (http://pulse-uk.org.uk/interview/ya-ne-schitayu-islam-bolee-neterpimyim-chem-lyubyie-drugie-religii/)** . Extract from **Pulse magazine (/Documents/college-social-sciences/government-society/crees/news-events/pulse.pdf)** .

English translation

1. Firstly, I would like to express my uneasiness with the term 'Islamic terrorism' which I consider to be wrong in academic terms and divisive in political and cultural terms. Islam, which translates as 'submission', is a religion of peace and therefore cannot be associated with terrorism. What we have been witnessing in the last decade has been the rise of Islam-, or wider religion-motivated movements and violence. This relates not only to Islam, but to Christianity (for example, a political resurgence of the Christian Right in the US), to Judaism (an increasing political assertiveness of Orthodox Jews in Israel), etc. The root causes of Islam-motivated violence in Russia and the wider world are similar. They are largely linked to changing political and societal circumstances. Thus, in the West Islamic movements have developed as a reaction to the dominance of secularism, the destruction of traditionalism and the failure to integrate considerable sections of Muslim population into Western society. In Russia, as well as in other ex-Soviet territories the rise of Islam and Islam-motivated movements, including those of extremist and terrorist nature, have occurredon the background of the break-up of the Soviet centralised system and the Soviet mode of socialisation which pushed the traditional forms of identity and affiliation to the forefront of politics.

2. I have already partially replied to this question earlier. I do not consider Islam more 'intolerant' than any other religions. The terrorist attacks in Norway in July 2011 by right-wing 'Christian' Breivik is a good example of this.

3. Historically there are numerous examples of peaceful co-existence of representatives of different faiths on the territory of the same state. Most obvious examples are the Arab Caliphate and the Ottoman Empire , both of which were Islamic states, where Christians and representatives of other religions maintained a sort of cultural autonomy provided that they complied with tax regulations. Russia provides yet another example of such productive and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims. The roots of such co-existence go back to the pagan period when proto-Russians and various peoples and Caucasian and Turkic origins were involved in trans-Eurasian trade between the East and the West (along the Silk road) and between the north and the south (the road from the Varangians (Vikings) It is symptomatic that compared to Western Christian Europe which went through centuries of Crusades against Muslims Russia was spared religious wars of the same magnitude.

In present-day Russia Islam-motivated political movements and violence are generated by continuing failures of local and central governments to tackle vital economic and political issues and the pervasive corruption of law-enforcement agencies which force young angry people to seek justice through alternative routes, including an armed *jihad.* So, more efficient and accountable central and regional policies towards and in Muslim-populated regions, as well as the creation of an independent and fair judiciary would create a viable basis for inter-ethnic and inter-confessional dialogue.

4. This question has political and cultural dimensions. In political terms it is very unlikely that the North Caucasus will break away from the rest of Russia for economic and geopolitical reasons. Thus, the region is strongly dependent on subsidies from Moscow. In the past due to its extreme multi-ethnicity it proved to be politically unviable unless it was part of wider empires/states (the Genghizid empire, the Ottoman empire, the Safavid empire, the Russian/Soviet empires). However, since the collapse of the Soviet system the region has been deviating from Russia in cultural terms. Important factors have been mass Russian emigration, increased cultural and information influence from Turkey and the Middle East, as well state re-Islamisation of Chechnya under its current leadership.

5. Islam has numerous regional variations which developed as a result of centuries-long synthesis of Islam and pre-Islamic customary norms and practices of different peoples. In other words, there is no one Islam, but many. In addition there doctrinal divisions within Islam into Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well multiple subdivisions within Sunnism and Shiism. Iran is a Shia country while Saudin Arabia adhere to the most strict scholl with Sunni Islam. This is one of the main reasons behind historical animosity between rulers of Iran and Arabia (Saudi Arabia since 1932). The so called 'global Islam' is a new phenomenon reflecting the emergence of cyberIslam connecting Muslim people across state and ethnic divide. The existence of hot spots where there is a non-Muslim military and political involvement (Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and to some extent Russia's North Caucasus) provides opportunity for practical internationalisation of so called *jihadist* movement. However, those who are involved in global *jihad* against the *other* constitute a small minority within the world Muslim community. They also do not have a unified global Islamic agenda. Furthermore, the fact that the recent 'Arab spring' in the Middle East developed under non-Islamist slogans shows that political and ideological aspirations of Muslims differ significantly from country to country and that they are not necessarily of an Islamic nature. Therefore any talk of a possibility of a world war against Islam is implausible.

Thank you
Galina Yemelianova

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