Religion and Politics Under the Putin Administration: Accommodation and Confrontation within "Managed Pluralism"

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Russia has always been the most faithful, reliable and consistent defender of the interests of the Islamic world. Russia has always been the best and most reliable partner and ally. By destroying Russia, these people (terrorists) destroy one of the main pillars of the Islamic world in the struggle for rights (of Islamic states) in the international arena, the struggle for their legitimate rights.

Russian President Vladimir Putin
opening address to the newly-elected
regional parliament in Chechnya
12 December 2005

On 11 January 2006, a knife-wielding youth entered a synagogue in Moscow and wounded eight people. This event sparked calls from the Jewish community in Russia for increased government action to prevent similar acts from occurring. Not long afterward, in a meeting with Russia's chief Rabbi Berl Lazar, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov offered that "This is a phenomenon [xenophobia] that requires the government, religious groups, and public organizations to pay more serious attention to the education of society," and indicated a perception of growing sentiment against Jews and other minorities in

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Russia.[1] Unfortunately while hardly the first or most notorious manifestation of anti-Semitism in Russia, the January incident has been noted as perhaps emblematic of the increase in xenophobic sentiments in a country in which there is "more anti-Semitism than there are Jews."[2]

With the escalation of terrorist violence in Russia since the collapse of the USSR, relations among sub-national communal groups have come under increasing strain. The Putin administration thus finds itself confronted with a set of problems having a different character, in many important respects, from the set of problems faced by President Boris Yeltsin in the immediate wake of the collapse of the Soviet regime. These problems in all likelihood do not portend the eminent demise of the Russian Federation as a territorially discrete political entity. They are nonetheless shaping the character of the political system as it finds itself inevitably compelled to address them and probe for resolution. This essay explores the nature of the increasingly strained relations among major sub-national communal groups (particularly the Orthodox-identifying and Islamic-identifying communities), the factors apparently responsible, and most importantly considers the political responses evoked by the Putin administration toward their management and possible resolution. I begin by considering the rise in terrorist violence in Russia since the collapse of the USSR as a backdrop for exploring the complex relationship of the Putin regime with major communal groups, particularly religiously-based ones.

The incidence of terrorist violence in Russia has generally increased since the early-to-mid 1990s. Table 1 below indicates the number of incidents through 2003.[3]

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1. "Russian Minister Says Can't Stop Xenophobia Alone," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Friday, 20 January 2006. Available online at: http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle-/2006/01/4C1EF3-F6-8A14-407F-88A2-0970674C1EE9.html. Foreign Minister Lavrov reiterated these sentiments at the outset of the Muslim new year, 19 January 2007, offering that "We [Russia and the Islamic world] are allies in fighting international terrorism, manifestations of political, religious and other forms of extremism. We are allies in fighting modern threats and challenges." *Interfax*, "Russia, Islamic World are Allies in Fighting Terrorism—Lavrov," 19 January 2007; available online at: http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=2493.

2. *Izvestiia*, "Ideologia druzhby protiv ksenofobia," 20 January 2006; available online at: www.izvestia.ru/russia/article3057991.

3. For coverage of the chronicle of terrorism in Russia, see *the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* "Specials: Terror in Russia," available online at: http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia-terror/Default.aspx. For a timeline, see "Russia: A Timeline Of Terrorism Since 1995," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 30 August 2006, and "Factbox: Major Terrorist Incidents Tied to Russian-Chechen War," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 6 September 2004, available online at: http://www.rferl.org/features-article/2004/09/d981dd2d-8b08-41ffa2e2-ada-25338093c.html.

Table 1: Increase of Terrorism in Russia

Year	Acts	Arrests
1997	32	10
1998	21	7
1999	20	0
2000	135	24
2002	360	n/a
2003	561	n/a

Source: *Russian Regional Report*, vol. 9, no. 17 (17 September 2004)

Further, since 2004, Russia has experienced not only a continuation of terrorist incidents, but also a spreading of the conflict in Chechnya to surrounding areas in the Caucasus mountain region.[4] Over 400 people were killed in Russia by terrorist acts in 2004 alone, with 40 killed in a Moscow subway in February, more-or-less simultaneous sabotage-attacks on aircraft that killed 89 people on 24 August, and worst of all, the Beslan school horror in September that killed over 300 people, many of whom were children. Additionally, nearly 90 people were killed in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria in October 2005. Thus, numerous questions present themselves as not only germane but critical for understanding the nature of the Russian political regime that has emerged under President Vladimir Putin. How has the "reassertion of vertical authority" affected relations among communal groups, especially religiously-based groups? Has the centralization of power had the effect of reducing or exacerbating tensions among those groups? What is the relationship of the increasing centralization of power and the citizens' involvement in public affairs? And finally, what has been the disposition of the Putin regime toward the two major religiously-oriented communal groups: the Orthodox majority and the approximately 20 million Muslim community in Russia?

The last question had become increasingly important during Putin's second term of office, with the Kremlin's official view that much of the political resistance and militarized separatist activity in the Caucasus region is very much connected to international Islamist terrorist groups, particularly Al-Qaeda.[5] Although the Russian Orthodox Church

4. "Radical Islamic Group Names Itself Legitimate Authority of Russia's Dagestan," *Moscow News*, 9 November 2005; available online at: www.mosnews.com/news/2005/09/11-/dagestanpower.shtml. See also Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Russia: North Caucasus Republics Enter Circle of Violence," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 23 February 2005; available online at: http://www.rferl.org/fea-turesarticle/2005/02/021f2f06-0c2e-41cb-be1e2fe3d61e-505d.html.

5. See for example "Security Forces Claim Top Al Qaeda Agent Killed in Russia," *Moscow News*, 13 December 2005; available online at: www.mosnews.com/news/2005/12/13/alqaeda-russia.shtml, and *Interfax*, "Sergei Lebedev: No Reason for Russian Foreign Intelligence Service to Relax," 20 December 2006, available online at: http://www.interfax.ru/e/-

has understandably and predictably condemned violence and terrorism, it has demonstrated little if any public inclination to pose difficult questions about the Putin administration's policies that may be contributing to the deepening knot of violence. While part of this might be explicable from the long-standing tendency of the church to forbear directly challenging state power, it must also be considered in light of the terrible predicament faced by the Putin administration in the wake of the horrors of the Beslan school hostage massacre in North Ossetia in September 2004.[6]

Autumn 2004 witnessed a new stage in the determination of the Putin administration to further centralize authority, and to do so in the name of protecting, but not obliterating, civil society from the scourge of terrorism.[7] This intensified centralization of power had significant ramifications for church-state relations, as we shall see below. On 16 February 2004, President Putin issued a decree establishing the *National Counterterrorism Committee* (NAK), after which the Duma passed a bill expanding the powers of the Russian state to counter terrorism; both of these had followed a call by Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov for an international front to combat terrorism.[8] Further, during 2005, and evidently in response to the perception that foreign NGOs played a substantial and significant role in the "color revolutions" of Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004-05), and Krygystan (2005), the Duma passed legislation designed to control more closely foreign organizations working in Russia. Since many of these NGOs presented themselves as working in the area of minority rights protection, a constriction of their activity is certain to affect the political climate in Russia; their exclusion altogether, of course, would do so even more. Some have viewed these centralization maneuvers as part of a larger plan conceived well before the dramatic increase in terrorist violence of 2003-2004: Peter Baker and Susan Glasser's *Kremlin Rising*, for example, dubbed this "Project Putin"; Allen Lynch in *How Russia is Not Ruled* (2005), calls this transition from the chaos of the Yeltsin years the "Consolidation of Russia's Neopatrimonial System" (p. 159), and warns against confusing it with a "stabilization" of the political system. I am inclined to concur with Lynch on this point, and seek to demonstrate below that, regarding relations among communal groups, the increasing centralization of power may be working at cross-

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B/0/0.html-?id_issue=11650484.

6. Robert Coalson, "Analysis: Kremlin's Reaction: Stay the Course," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 10 September 2004; available online at: http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/09/CB8AA0F8-CB6F-4FA5-84CE28B9B7D32C-33.html.

7. Daisy Sindelar, "2004 And Beyond: In Russia, Tragedy Furthers Kremlin Vision Of Centralized State," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 17 December 2004; available online at: www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/12/23AD11B7-94E1-4564-A61F-533B4F4FD86E-.html.

8. See recent reports on these activities in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: Terror in Russia*, http://www.rferl.org/specials/russia-terror/.

purposes with a political stabilization, particularly one deriving from a democratic consensus.[9]

How have these recent political changes by the Putin administration altered the landscape of church-state relations in Russia? Common sense among Western observers holds that the climate of religious freedom in Russia, reflecting the larger social and political climate, has become increasingly chilled since passage of the 1997 legislation "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations."[10] Lawrence Uzzell, a close observer of Russian religious and political affairs and head of International Religious Freedom Watch, offered in Autumn 2004 that the Kremlin was "getting more skillful" at using the Russian Orthodox Church for political advantage, as well as demonstrating a "growing ability to manipulate all religions."[11] John Basil is perhaps more careful in characterizing church-state relations under Putin, offering that:

> since his election to the presidency in 2000, Vladimir Putin has been cautious and at times even standoffish in his relations with the Orthodox Church. For a time during the summer of 2000 stony silence between the president and the patriarchate even attracted the attention of the media. Although relations between the two have improved recently (especially after the president's reelection in March 2004), there is still a good deal of tension, particularly on questions of taxation and the control of property confiscated from the church for secular purposes by the Soviet regime.[12]

Yet others see the current church administration seeking an increasingly active voice, if not direct role, in the foreign and domestic policies of the Russian state.[13] In domestic religious affairs, one might describe the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church as *hegemonic ecumenism* because of its ecumenical spirit regarding public affairs, yet persisting emphasis of the leading role of Orthodoxy in Russian culture and society. The church's shift between *hegemony* and *ecumenism*, depending upon the particular group in question is noteworthy: in the ongoing conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox hegemony is insisted upon; with the various Islamic communities and their leadership, and with some but not all protestant communities,

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9. Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution* (New York: Lisa Drew/Scribner, 2005), 39-62. See also Allen C. Lynch, *How Russia is Not Ruled: Reflections on Russian Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 159-65.

10. Derek H. Davis, "Russia's New Law on Religion: Progress or Regress?," *The Journal of Church and State* 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 645-55.

11. "Manipulating Religion for Politics," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: Religion and Tolerance,* 14 October 2004; available online at: http://www.rferl.org/specials/religion/archive/14102004.asp.

12. John D. Basil, "Church-State Relations in Russia: Orthodoxy and Federation Law, 1990-2004," *Religion, State, and Society* 33, no. 2 (June 2005): 155-56.

13. Valentine Mite, "Russia: Orthodox Church States Its Case for More Involvement in Foreign, Domestic Policies," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 6 February 2004.

ecumenism is more characteristic.[14]

In the more specifically political sphere, Nikolas Gvosdev has argued that there existed an important connection between the post-Soviet Russian regime of "managed pluralism" and the critical role of religion, particularly Russian Orthodoxy, in Russia's identity, at least through the first term of the Putin administration.[15] In Putin's second term, this "management" of Russia's ostensible pluralism has become increasingly *dirigiste,* and rather than abating, shows increasing signs of intensifying.

While creating a questionable appearance of stability, this dirigisime has raised numerous questions of crucial political importance. Can the ecumenical hegemonism work in the long run in such a deeply divided country? How does this general political trend fit in with the fact that Russia is not only multi-ethnic, but also multi-religious? In what manner has the Orthodox Church operated with, and reacted to, Putin's regime? And how have popular attitudes among Russians changed, if at all, towards non-Russian ethnic minorities, and toward religious minorities, particularly Muslims? The resolution of such questions have already begun shaping the nature of the Russian political system, and perhaps have done so most powerfully by raising again in bold relief the age-old question of Russian identity, and to that we now turn.

The perennially problematical question of Russia's identity has resurfaced in the early twenty-first century in an especially ominous form regarding religious tolerance and civility among communal groups. Perhaps symptomatically, the Duma considered a bill in 2006, to define Russian national identity. The immediate effect of the bill, however, exacerbated tensions with society, and particularly between

14. Roman Catholic Archbishop Thaddaeus Kondrusiewicz (Apostolic Administrator for European Russia) characterized the ecumenical situation in 1998 as "quite difficult. But in spite of many problems I do hope for a better future. . . . The future of the Church in Russia will depend very much on the political situation and on relations between Catholics and the Orthodox. Nonetheless whatever problems we may have to face, the Catholic Church in Russia faces them as an integral part of Russian society. The Government, the Russian Orthodox Church and other confessions and religions recognize us as such. This gives us real hope for the future." "The Catholic Church in Russia: Its History, Present Situation and Problems, Perspectives," *Catholic Faith*, March-April 1998; available online at: http://-www.catholic.net/RCC/Periodicals/Faith/1998-03-04/russia.html. Under the Putin administration, little progress has been made in development of deeper, more trusting, and cooperative relations between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches.

15. Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "'Managed Pluralism' and Civil Religion in Post-Soviet Russia," in Christopher Marsh and Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *Civil Society and the Search for Justice in Russia* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2002), 75-88. For a rather different view, and one considerably more critical of the ROC's role in contemporary Russian society and politics, see K.N. Kostiuk, "Russkaya Pravoslavnaia Tser'kov' i obshchestvo: nravstvennoe sotrudnichestvo ili eticheskii konflict?," *POLIS [Politicheskie issledovaniia]*, no.1 (2002): 105-17.

Russians and Muslims.[16] It is also noteworthy that in January 2006, President Putin called upon the *Public Chamber* in its very first meeting to engage in a "fight against ethnic hatred."[17] (This body was established in the spring of 2005 to augment the formation of civil society, according to Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov.[18]) The problematical nature of Russia's identity is especially pronounced regarding relations among ethnic Russians (of whatever disposition toward Orthodoxy or Christianity in general), and Muslims, who of course in Russia exist in scores and scores of different ethnic and ethno-national groups.[19]

The Putin regime has in fact concerned itself for some time with the problematical nature of Russia's identity. Shireen Hunter, director of the *Islam Program* of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, has argued that the Putin administration is prodding Russian society toward some type of *monocultural Russocentrism:*

> the basic contours of a new Russian identity have been gradually emerging. In this process, interaction with the West and the challenge from the Muslim South, both within the borders of the Russian Federation and on its periphery, have played important roles in shaping this new identity, as they have done throughout Russia's history. This identity is largely ethnocentric and monocultural, as illustrated by the Russian Ministry of Education's decision in November 2002 to develop a course on Orthodox culture for the Russian public school system.[20]

16. "New Bill on National Identity Generating Protests," Robert Parsons, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 10 March 2006, vol. 6, no. 6; available online at: http://www.rferl.org-/reports/rpw/.

17. Anatoly Medetsky, "Putin Gives Public Chamber a Warning," *Moscow Times*, 23 January 2006; cited from http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2006-22-7.cfm.

18. "We are creating an additional opportunity for the development of civil society in the country," offered Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov, as the Duma voted 345-50 in favor of establishing this body in March of 2005. Others, however, have not been so accepting of the utility of the body, nor of the motives of its architects; see: Jeremy Bransten, "Russia: New Public Chamber Criticized As 'Smokescreen,'" available online at: http://www.cdi.org/russia-/346-5.cfm (18 March 2005).

19. See also Alexander Agadjanian, "Public Religion and the Quest for National Ideology," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 40, no. 3 (September 2001): 351-65.

20. Shireen Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 203. The theme of increasingly great pressures toward "mono-culturalism" are repeated and reinforced on pp. 242-43 and particularly p. 277, the latter offering that: "The disappearance of any opportunity for Muslims to participate directly in the political process on the basis of ethnic or religious identity will lead to the disenfranchisement of many. Combined with the restrictions of the activities of religious groups contained in the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, the elimination of Muslim parties will significantly curtail Muslim political and social activism. This could enhance their sense of alienation—already encouraged by Russia's renewed emphasis on political centralization and moves toward monoculturalism—and encourage many to opt out of the political process or find alternative means of expressing their political and other concerns." See also her "Focus on the Russian Federation," in CSIS: *Briefing Notes on Islam, Society, and Politics* 5, no. 1 (December 2002), 10ff., in which she offered, rather presciently, that: "The Chechen war and the fears generated by it

This may all be true, but to the extent that such a *monoculturalism* might be emerging, it is proving to be deeply problematical across numerous axes of conflict given the events of the past several years.

Numerous questions immediately arise; what role has Russian Orthodoxy played in this process, both as an institution and as a cultural and intellectual force within the Russian Federation? Is it possible to manage Russia's highly multinational and religiously heterogeneous character without descending any further into authoritarianism? And perhaps most vexing, what role do the major religious institutions and ideas in Russia play in making the difficult but inevitable decisions attempting to establish a balance between citizens' rights and fending off credible, bona fide threats to the common good from religious and political extremists? In this respect, it was certainly understandable that President Putin would find it appropriate to begin massing the political power of the state to enable the governance of Russia; after all, even Western observers had noted that one of the key problems of the Yeltsin administration was not that the Russian state was too strong, but rather that it was not strong enough to effectively govern.[21]

The complex nexus of religious identity, national identity, social values, and practical problems of governance can be seen to converge in Russia under Putin in the revealing but deeply controversial matter of religious content of school curricula, and specifically the fate of the Russian Orthodox Church's proposal for mandatory courses on "Basics of Orthodox Culture."[22] As of late 2006, this matter had generated such sharp disputes between the church and the Ministry of Education and Science that the matter was remanded to the Public Chamber in late November (this 127-member appointed body was established by the Putin administration in 2005 to help build civil society in Russia). The Public Chamber adopted a compromise position, but one that generally favored the position of the Russian Orthodox Church.[23] Interestingly, the church also announced support for secondary school courses on

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regarding Russian territorial integrity have strengthened the long-standing Russian tradition of a strong and centralized state. A degree of recentralization and reassertion of Russian nationalism and culture at the expense of minorities were to be expected following the chaos of the early post-Soviet years. *But the turn the Chechen war has taken has pushed these tendencies to a level that could prove very damaging both to Russian democracy and its social and political stability.*" (italics added)

21. This theme is addressed throughout in Lynch, *How Russia is Not Ruled.*

22. G.E. Zborovski and N.B. Kostina, "On the Interaction Between Religious and Secular Education Under Current Conditions," *Russian Education and Society* 46, no. 9 (September 2004): 63-75; see also "Russia: Introduction of Religious Curriculum Studied, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 7 September 2006; available online at: www.rferl.org/featuresarticle-/2006/09/e021de9a-947a-424d-ad46-0,825a39a8c3.html.

23. "The Public Chamber adopted a compromise resolution on the issue of teaching religion at school," *Informatsionno-analiticheskii tsentr "SOVA,"* 4 December 2006; available online at: http://religion.sova-center.ru/publications/194EF5E/85AA89C.

"Basics of Muslim Culture," to be taught by Muslim clerics in the North Caucasus region. The reasoning seems to be to undermine critics of the "Basics of Orthodox Culture" courses, and to counterbalance the claims of Chechen separatists and other radical Muslims against the Orthodox Church.[24] In short, the disposition of the Russian Orthodox Church to the issue of religion in the public schools is rather complex, but in the final analysis exemplifies its preferred position of ecumenical hegemonism. In so doing, the church has had the general effect of buttressing the Putin regime's increasingly "managed" pluralism, at least in the realm of church-state relations. In the realm of Orthodox-Muslim relations, however, such an approach may be useful and helpful from the perspective of the church and of the Kremlin, but may not ameliorate the growing tensions and problems. We turn now to those.

The threat of politicized Islam in the former USSR-turned-Russian Federation turned out to be a particularly vexing problem for both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Putin administration, causing the church's *ecumenism* to be severely tested and causing the Putin adminstration's *pluralism* to becoming increasingly "managed." Anna Matveeva offered the following in 1999:

> Looking back upon the conflicts in the 20th century in Eurasia, one might conclude that they were predominantly of an ethnic nature. Although Islam as a faith and a cultural force has had a continual influence on Muslim parts of the USSR, its political role was virtually non-existent until the 1990s. Its revival, however, since the foundation of the Islamic Renaissance Party in 1990, was rapid, and its desire to influence political developments was apparent from the start.[25]

A particularly sharp inclination toward a politicization of Islam has resulted from the Chechen war (cf. the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty "factbox" noted above). Yet what can be said of the nature of popular attitudes among Russians (of whatever disposition toward Orthodoxy) toward Muslims (of whatever ethno-linguistic orientation)? Here again it is useful to consider that *the psychological structure of identity appears to be qualitatively different among ethnic Russians (of varying dispositions toward Christianity, both in terms of confessional allegiance and in terms of actual practiced religiosity), and Russian Federation-citizens who are Muslim.* Russian Federation Muslims, of

24. *Interfax*, "Basics of Islamic Culture Should be Taught in Schools—Council of Muftis," 31 August 2006. See also *Interfax*, "Russia witnessing second wind in its spiritual revival," 20 April 2006, and "Совет муфтиев России высказывается за изучение в школах истории мировых религий," 18 January 2007; available online at: www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=-news&div-=16171. The author gratefully acknowledges having these points made by an anonymous reviewer.

25. Anna Matveeva, "The Islamist Challenge in Post-Soviet Eurasia," in *Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia*, eds. Lena Jonson and Murad Esenov (Stockholm: Utrikeespolitiska, 1999); available online at: http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/00.political_is-lam_and_conflicts.shtml.

course exist as multiple ethnic groups, but share an Islamic identity whose political significance, it seems, is becoming increasingly evident.[26]

Sociological evidence indicated that anti-*Islamic* sentiments were not particularly widespread in the Russian Federation up to the time of the Putin regime, and this despite the Chechen conflict of the 1990s, the USSR's involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and the highly selective but substantial engagement of Russia with the Bush administration's U.S.-led "war on terrorism." In fact, the research by Dmitrii Furman and Kimmo Kaariainen indicated that over 60 percent of the Russian population expressed a "good" or "very good" assessment of Islam, despite an "Orthodox consensus" of values and identity across nationality groups and across religious orientations (Baptists, Lutherans, Buddhists, etc.).[27] For the most part, other religious orientations tend to be either positively assessed, or are regarded on balance rather neutrally, as Table 2 indicates below.

Table 2: Russian* Attitudes Toward Different Religions

Attitudes Toward:	***Very good***	***Good***	***Bad***	***Very bad***
Orthodoxy	44	50	1	0
Islam	8	51	16	5
Catholicism	5	53	9	3
ROC Abroad	4	39	13	6
Buddhism	3	35	15	7
Old Believers	4	33	21	7
Judaism	2	28	19	8
Lutherans	2	27	12	6
Baptists	2	23	33	12
Krishnaism	1	20	20	13
Methodists	1	16	15	7
Pentecostals	1	15	24	12

26. As a broad characterization, it might be argued that ethnic Russians tend to be *ethno-linguistically homogeneous but religiously quite disparate* in terms of confessional orientation (Orthodox, Baptist, etc.) and in terms of the nature and degree of practice of religiosity [as are all nations, of course]. Muslims in the Russian Federation, by contrast, are ethno-linguistically diverse (although predominantly Turkic) but religiously more or less homogeneous. Both ethnic Russians and Russian Federation Muslims tend to be rather theologically ignorant, however, of even some of the most basic concepts and ideas of their respective religious faiths; see Aislu Yunosova, "Islam Between the Volga River and the Ural Mountains," in Johnson and Esenov, *Political Islam*; available online at: http://www.cac.-org/dataeng/07.yunoso-va.shtml).

27. Dmitrii Furman and Kimmo Kaariainen, "Orthodoxy as a Component of Russian Identity," *East-West Ministry and Church Report* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 20-21. It is noteworthy that ROC Patriarch Aleksi II received, among many other commendations, an award for "outstanding service in the consolidation of the Russian peoples."

Adventists	1	14	17	10
Jehovah's Witnesses	1	13	26	21
Munism [Moonies]	1	10	18	15

Source: Kimmo Kaariainen and Dmitrii Furman, "Orthodoxy as a Component of Russian Identity," *East-West Ministry and Church Report* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2002); available online at: http://www.samford.edu/groups/global/ewcmreport/articles/ew10109.html) ("Russian" refers to all citizens of the Russian Federation, and not exclusively to ethnic Russians per se).

These data suggest that an attitudinal basis for peaceful coexistence within Russia certainly exists in the realm of religious tolerance and acceptance. The fact that some religious groups (such as Baptists or Jehovah's Witnesses) tend to be viewed rather negatively does not necessarily signify a culture of intolerance or even disrespect of fellow citizens' religious orientation, but suggests the possibility of tension. In this respect, the prospect of deepening xenophobia, alluded to in the opening of this essay, is particularly ominous.[28] In any case however, Russia has a wide array of religious associations among scores of religious denominations, numbering well over 21,000; among these, inter-confessional conflict has hitherto been rather minimal. However, as the research and observations of Lawrence Uzzell demonstrate, the Russian state under Vladimir Putin has not always been so tolerant.[29] Further, the relative strength of various groups—including first and foremost the Russian Orthodox Church—varies substantially across the 89 regions of Russia. Christopher Marsh and Paul Froese have observed and demonstrated a highly significant pattern:

> where the Orthodox Church is strong and active, local governments place severe restrictions on minority religions. As argued by Fagan and by Homer and Uzzell, the drive for restrictive religious policies emanates from the Orthodox Church itself, which puts pressure on state and regional leaders to pursue policies that either restrict the activity of other religious groups or provide the Orthodox Church with special privileges.[30]

This tendency to strongly favor the Orthodox Churches at the expense of others has been an ongoing complaint of Roman Catholic officials and believers, who are said to number from 300,000 to over

28. Significantly, Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksi II sounded a note of caution in September 2006 concerning the prospect of increased tensions along ethnic and religious lines: "We should show respect for one another's religious traditions and exclude any outrages against shrines, texts, names and symbols. The recent developments in the world have shown how fragile the interreligious peace is." *Interfax*, "Aleksii II urges Muslim leaders to oppose inter-ethnic hostility together," 9 September 2006; available online at: http://www.inter-fax-religion.com/print.php?act=news-&id=2031.

29. Lawrence Uzzell, *International Religious Freedom Watch*; see also Geraldine Fagan, "Russia: Religious Freedom Survey, February 2005," *Forum 18 News Service*, 14 February 2005; available online at: www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/9061-33.cfm.

30. Christopher Marsh and Paul Froese, "The State of Freedom in Russia: A Religious Analysis of Freedom of Religion, Media, and Markets," *Religion, State, and Society* 32, no. 2 (June 2004): 144.

700,000.[31] The disposition of the Orthodox Church toward the Roman Catholic community, and the Roman Catholic Church itself in Russia, may be viewed as particularly emblematic of a hegemonic orientation.[32]

But the Russian Orthodox Church must share Russia, so to speak, with a multitude of other communal groups, among which Islamic believers are the most significant, for numerous reasons. The general consensus is that Muslims number anywhere from 10 to 30 million, although various factors may be cited to account for this wide variation in estimate.[33] Hunter considers that "a realistic range for Russia's Muslims is between 16 million and 20 million, with the latter closer to the mark."[34] In any case, even though a clear minority in Russia, the proportion of Muslims is sufficiently large that their presence and disposition will be a major factor in the governance of Russia. This is especially so given the context of internationally-connected contemporary Islamist movements.

Further, it is clear that serious, complex lines of division exist among Muslims in the Russian Federation, with much of the animating energy beneath these divisions deriving from the question of how to deal with Moscow. The necessity of dealing with Moscow makes their connection with the Russian Orthodox Church more or less inevitable,

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31. Claire Bigg, "Russia: Orthodox and Catholics—Heading Towards Reconciliation?," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 22 December 2005; cited from Johnson's Russia List, #8 - 9326; available online at: http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/9326-8.cfm.

32. See, for example, *Interfax*, "Alexy II calls on Vatican to stop unfriendly policy toward canonical Church," (5 December 2006); available online at: http://www.interfax-religion.com/?-act=news&div=2339; "Russian Church wants coordination of steps with Catholics," (9 November 2006); available online at: http://www.interfax-religion.com-/?act=news&div=2238; "Moscow Patriarchate official thanks Cardinal Tettamanzi for clear denunciation of proselytism," 9 October 2006.

33. See also "Fact Box: Muslims in Russia," compiled by *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 25 July 2005; available online at: http://www.rferl.org/features/features_Article.aspx?-m=07&y=2005&id=B7D5E783-749F-4E6A-B77E-8932ECE7AD53.

34. According to Shireen Hunter, these three factors are: (1) The lack of nationwide census data on the religious affiliation of Russian citizens. Neither the last census of the Soviet period in 1989 nor the first census of the Russian Federation in 2002 contained questions regarding religious affiliation. Thus, those who quote the number of 3 million for Russia's Muslim population have in mind totally observant Muslims. (2) The lack of consensus regarding the criteria by which religious affiliation should be determined, namely whether the level of religious observance or cultural affinity and self-identification are the best criteria. (3) Politically motivated estimates and manipulation of data regarding the number of Muslims. To illustrate, the figure of 30 million is quoted both by those who want to magnify the significance of Russia's Muslim community and by those who want to intensify popular fear of an increasing presence of Islam in Russia. . . . Nevertheless, once various estimates are considered, a realistic range for Russia's Muslims is between 16 million and 20 million, with the latter closer to the mark. Shireen T. Hunter, "The Evolution of Russia's Post-Soviet Identity: The Impact of the Islamic Factor," *CSIS Briefing Notes on Islam, Society, and Politics* 5 no. 1 (December 2002); available online at: http://www.cs-is.org/islam/BriefNotes/v5n1.pdf.

even if the linkage among these various actors is indirect or oblique. Paul Goble has identified a "three-way struggle for Chechen Islam," and others have discerned significant divisions within Volga-region Muslim communities over the matter of how to deal with Moscow, even if that means competing with each other for favor from the center. [35] Aleksei Malashenko, a leading figure in studies of Islam in Russia, notes that "the Islamic renaissance, which started in the late 1980s, has failed to unite Russia's Muslims into a single *umma*, or community of believers," and that "Russian Muslims, except in the Caucasus, have displayed a consistent immunity to a radical brand of Islam the authorities label as 'Wahabbism.' It has not spread among Tatars and has not transformed into a regular ideological or political movement." He concludes, at least as of November 2004:

> Islam remains an important factor in Russia's political life, and there are enough reasons to worry. Religious radicals appeal to Islam; internal conflicts remain unresolved; foreigners continue to interfere across the borders; and that the ruling establishment is incapable (or unwilling) to understand Islam's impact on Russia's internal affairs. All these factors cause instability in the south of the Russian Federation. This instability, in turn, negatively affects the situation in the whole country.[36]

Regardless of whether one agrees or disagrees with the above sentiments, it appears difficult if not impossible to challenge the analysis offered by *Radio Free Europe /Radio Liberty* that most of the terrorist activity in Russia since the breakup of the USSR has been tied to the conflict in Chechnya.[37] Since the epicenter of the Russian-

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35. Paul Goble, "Russia: A Three-Way Struggle for Chechen Islam," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 22 August 2005; available online at: http://www.rferl.org/features-article/2005/8/6540D02E1FCA-45AF-9D89-7952C6C1F409.html. Concerning the various groups within the Muslim community competing with each other for Moscow's favor, see Arbakhan Magomedov, "Official Islam Plays Destructive Role at the Local Level," *Russian Regional Report*, volume 10, no. 13 (27 July 2005). See also Aleksei Malashenko, "Muslims in Russia: A Complex Picture," *Frontier*, no. 2 (Autumn 2003): 24-26; and his "The Islamic Factor in Russia," *The Carnegie Moscow Center*, 15 November 2004; available online at: www.carnegie.ru/en/print/71555. Major institutional groups include *the Council of Muftis of Russia*, headed by Ravil Gainutdin (an ethnic Tatar), the *Central Muslim Board of Russia*, headed by Talgat Tajuddin, and the *Muslim Coordinating Center for the North Caucasus*, chaired by Ismail Berdiev; *Interfax*, "Alexy II urges Muslim leaders to oppose inter-ethnic hostility together," 21 September 2006.

36. Malashenko, "The Islamic Factor in Russia," 4. See also Alexey D. Krindatch, "Patterns of Religious Change in PostSoviet Russia: Major Trends from 1998 to 2003," *Religion, State, and Society* 32, no. 2 (June 2004): 115-36. Noting the divisive element of personal political ambition and opportunism, he offers: "The examples of numerous splits and intra-Islamic tensions in Dagestan reflects the general contemporary situation within the Islamic community of Russia. The repeatedly declared aspiration for the unification of all Russian Muslims is still overwhelmed by disintegrative tendencies based not on religious but rather on ethnic tensions and the political ambitions of various Islamic leaders. Consequently, there is at the moment no single Islamic religious organisation or leader that can claim to speak on behalf of a majority of Russia's Muslims," 125.

37. See *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, "Factbox: Major Terrorist Incidents Tied to Chechen War," available online at: http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/09/d981dd2d-

Muslim divide is increasingly coming to focus on Chechnya and the southern flank of Russia more generally, we turn now to that theme.

As noted above, the Putin regime's drive to centralize power and authority has been pursued with a shrewd relentlessness but has complicated the matter of relations among communal groups, albeit probably unintentionally. As such, it has direct and significant consequences for the realm of church-state relations. Major indicators include the rise of *Unified Russia* to a position of dominance, the creation of the *Public Chamber*, with all evidence that it will be controlled by the presidential administration; persisting constriction of the media; and others. [38] The role of the Russian Orthodox Church in this centralization drive has been either one of positive cooperation or muted disengagement.[39] Particularly with respect to the Chechen conflict, there has been little except general and rather politically antiseptic calls for peace and national unity.

By late 2005, it had become increasingly clear that the problem of intensified centralization of power by the Kremlin would hardly answer Russia's growing problem with terrorism. As noted above, a rising number of observers and commentators are concluding that it represents rather a compounding factor. Concerning the outbreak of violence in Kabardino-Balkaria in October, Masha Lipman suggested that the Moscow theater seizure of October 2002, in which 120 hostages died was followed by a quickening succession leading to the even worse schoolhouse tragedy in Beslan, North Ossetia, in September 2004. The terrorism problem was thus:

> no longer confined to Chechnya; it had spread all over the north Caucasus and was making plain the need for a major rethinking of policy. . . .
>
> When Putin took over as Russia's president, Kabardino-Balkaria was quiet. But Putin's use of brutal force in Chechnya has backfired, producing growing numbers of revenge-seekers. Further centralization of power has led to deeper problems of the kind inherent in a heavily bureaucratic system: poor performance, lack of accountability, failure to coordinate efforts because each official seeks first and foremost to avoid responsibility at any cost. A local leader with an independent source of authority is regarded with suspicion—loyalty to the Kremlin is valued above all. This breeds incompetence and powerlessness among local officials.[40]

Thus, far from contributing to the unity and stability of the country, the policies resulting from the general centralization orientation of the

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8b08-41ff-a2e2-ada25338093c.html.

38. For a succinct outline of this trend, see Lynch, *How Russia is Not Governed*, 152-65. See also Baker and Glasser, *Kremlin Rising*, particularly 230-71.

39. See Mite, "Russia: Orthodox Church States Its Case For More Involvement in Foreign, Domestic Policies." See also Andre Zolotov, "Moscow's Patriarch Accuses West of Double Standards Over Chechnya," *Christianity Today*, 10 April 2000.

40. Masha Lipman, "Putin's Spreading War," *The Washington Post*, Monday, 17 October 2005, A15; available online at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005-/10/16/-AR2005101600801.html. See also "Russia's Anti-Terrorism Policies Boost Insecurity, Experts Say," compiled by *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 20 June 2005; available online at: http://www.rferl.org/releases/2005/06/345-230605.asp.

Putin regime have an arguably fracturing effect. They are doing so directly in the critically important southwestern flank of Russia, and to some degree elsewhere, if only indirectly. From this perspective, it hardly makes sense to continue speaking of Russia as moving positively in the direction of a *monocultural* political orientation, despite the intentions or preferences of the national leadership. But how do popular attitudes fit into this picture?

According to data from the Levada Center (September 2005), most citizens are not particularly supportive of President Putin's policies regarding Chechnya, even though they are broadly and consistently supportive of him as president. To resolve the Chechen conflict, 68 percent prefer to enter into negotiations, 20 percent favor continuing military operations, and 12 percent "don't know" (Table 3). These data have been rather consistent for the past several years, continuing even as general popular support for Putin remains quite high, at generally over 70 percent of the public.[41]

Table 3: Popular Attitudes toward Chechnya

Question: Do you Consider it necessary to continue military action in Chechnya or begin peaceful negotiations with the Chechen leadership?	% of respondents
Continue operations	20
Enter negotiations	68
Don't know	12
(Levada Center, Moscow, nationwide survey, 16-19 September 2005, n= 1600)	
Question: How do you relate to the possible separation of Chechnya from Russia?	% of respondents
It has already happened in fact	10
I would be delighted by such a turn of events	30
It wouldn't make any difference to me	17
I'm against such a turn of events but could accept it	16
We must prevent that by any possible means, including military	17
Don't know	10
(Levada Center, nationwide survey, 24-27 September 2004, n=1601)	

Source: www.russiavotes.org ("international security: chechnya")

President Putin's April 2005 address before the Federal Assembly

41. "Putin's Performance in Office," at www.russiavotes.org.

addressed the matter directly, promising greater security, democracy, and stability in Chechnya and for the region.[42] However, little or no coherent policy has emerged to deal with the increasingly troubled southwestern flank of Russia.[43] Noted Russian ethnographer Emil Pain, Minister of Nationalities under Boris Yeltsin from 1996 to 1999, offered the following at the end of summer 2005, even before the violence during September and October had broken out in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria:

The "war against terrorism" being waged on Chechen battlefields has only caused terrorism to spill over from that embattled region into the whole of Russia. Neighboring Ingushetia has been a permanent front of the Chechen war since 2004. Other neighbors of Chechnya—Dagestan, Karachai-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria—are increasingly becoming battlefields in the struggle against armed terrorism . . . *The "war against terrorism," and the consequential state reforms it has prompted, has not brought any more order to Russia.* The Kremlin has made its choice—instead of authoritative but inconvenient regional leaders, it has begun to place them with weak but obedient ones. However, such leaders cannot ensure stability in their regions. . . (italics added).[44]

It has been suggested that Muslims in the Russian Federation generally accepted post-Soviet conditions. Jeffrey Thomas noted in late 2002 that "[w]ith few exceptions, Russia's Muslim Republics have

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42. President Putin offered the following in that address:

Рассчитываю на энергичную работу по укреплению безопасности на Юге России и утверждению там ценностей свободы и справедливости. Условиями этого являются развитие экономики, создание новых рабочих мест, строительство объектов социальной и производственной инфраструктуры. . . . . И в то же время здесь гораздо более высокая доля теневой экономики, криминализации хозяйственных отношений в целом. В этой связи органы власти должны не только укреплять правоохранительную и судебную систему в этом регионе, но и содействовать развитию деловой активности населения.

Available online in text and video format at: http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/-1223_type63372type82634_87049.shtml.

43. Liz Fuller, "North Caucasus: No Clear Strategy in the Region," RFE/RL, 2 October 2005; available online at: http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/3BFDDE02-FBD1-42A3-90002AFBB-222E82A.html. See also "Nalcik: Another Sign that the Center Cannot Hold," *Chechnya Weekly*, vol. 6, issue 39 (20 October 2005), available online at: www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=409&issue_id=3500&article_id=2370370. See also Liz Fuller and Julie Corwin, "Analysis: Putin Reinvents the North Caucasus Wheel," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 14 September 2004.

44. Emil Pain, "Will Russia Transform Into A Nationalist Empire?," *Russia in Global Affairs* 3, no. 2 (April-June 2005); available online at: http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/docs-/2005_english2.pdf. See also his "Current Russian Policy in the North Caucasus," *Chechnya Weekly*, vol. 5, issue 45 (8 December 2004); he notes,

"The war caused an unprecedented surge of xenophobia in Russia. Anti-Chechen sentiment has been growing since 1994, and in 2004 over three fourths of those surveyed expressed feelings of resentment toward the Chechens. . . . The war in Chechnya continues to be the main politically mobilizing issue in Russian society, which explains why president Putin pays constant attention to it. . . . *The Chechen war, more than any other factor, has led to the rise in traditionalist and state-centric attitudes in Russian society*, and increased popular hope for the rule of a "strong arm." (p. 3, italics added)

acquiesced to Putin's recentralization initiative. Although insurgents in Chechnya continue to resist Russian forces, the Russian military has retaken most of Chechen territory." By Autumn 2005, abundant evidence demonstrated this was simply no longer true. However, Thomas was surely on target in offering that the Putin administration's handling of ethnic and religious minorities would become increasingly emblematic of the nature of the political system:

> . . . . The treatment of Islam and Russia's predominantly Muslim ethnic groups will serve as an important barometer of whether the reassertion of central authority devolves into intolerance and repression of national minorities. The dominant role of some Muslim nationalities—most notably Chechens and Tatars—in pursuing self-determination and the rise of militant Islam among a small but dedicated cadre of Muslims have placed Islam and those associated with it—religiously, ethnically, and culturally—among the most likely targets of ethnic or religious intolerance. The Russian leadership's willingness and ability to resist this trend and protect the rights of Muslim ethnic minorities and to guarantee the free expression of Islamic religious and cultural practices—while suppressing the extremist elements—will be crucial determinants of how the Russian political system evolves.[45]

As noted above, terrorism steadily increased in Russia since the onset of the first Chechen war in 1994, into the second Putin term of office; more recently, evidence began to mount that tolerance and mutual civility are suffering setbacks.[46] Mounting evidence also illustrates that repression and brutality of Moscow's policies are the catalyst for the spreading resistance, but underlying socio-economic conditions of poverty and unemployment also create fertile soil for political radicalism. The Putin administration tends to point to this factor as the primary cause. While such claims should be viewed with skepticism, the self-serving nature of this explanation does not negate its partial validity. Both sets of factors—the Kremlin's policies and practices *and* the general socioeconomic conditions—contribute to the overall impasse:

> The socioeconomic situation, the influence of radical Islamic organisations from abroad and the second Russian invasion in 1999 consequently all helped the growth of fundamentalism in Chechnya. These factors contributed to the fact that the dynamic that was started because of the first Russian invasion in 1994 ended up in a call for 'jihad' against Russia. . . . the Russian invasion is certainly not the only reason for the consequent radicalisation and politicisation of Islam in Chechnya, but it definitely lies at the roots of it. Although the dynamics that developed on the Chechen side because of the war definitely had specific characteristics, *the Chechen example shows clearly how a war plants the seeds of religious extremism in a society that would not be inclined to this otherwise.* Injustice and violence all too often transform moderate

45. Jeffrey Thomas, "Russia's Evolving Political System: The Impact of Muslim Minorities' Drive for Self-Determination," in *Briefing Notes on Islam, Society, and Politics*, vol. 5, no. 1 (December 2002).

46. "Terrorism growing more frequent, extreme in Russia," *Russian Regional Report*, vol. 9, no. 17 (17 September 2004). See also Paul Goble, "Russia: Authorities Seek to Convert Beslan's Muslims," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 7 September 2005, available online at: www.rferl.org/featuresarticleprint/2005/09.

believers into extremists: the "self-fulfilling prophecy."[47] (italics added)

The research of Valery Tishkov tends to support this view. He presents the Chechen conflict, as perceived and experienced by Chechens themselves, as less a product of deeply-rooted mutual distrust and hatred between Chechens and Russians than as a product of Moscow's policies themselves; the results of those policies are then exacerbated by the psychological and material conditions created by those policies in the first place.[48] Thus, there is not much evidence that Russia is becoming *monocultural* in any sense that accords with the view of political culture as the "beliefs, attitudes, and values" of a given population. If anything, those beliefs, attitudes, and values in Russia under Putin have been showing more and more signs of fragmentation.

Sociologist Igor Yakovenko recently considered the range of possible scenarios concerning the unity and identity of Russia, up to and including the viability of its current territorial integrity. While recognizing the deep, nagging, and differentiated problems of certain regions, he nonetheless concludes:

> Russia is entering an epoch of national existence. A new European nation is being formed inside it, which the authorities designate as Rossiyane (Russian people) although this has not yet become a customary name for the Russian people. History alone will tell where the stable frontiers will lie for this new whole which is coming into being before our eyes.[49]

Perhaps this is so, but even if true, does not negate the problematical character of the religious element of Russian identity. In October 2005, the federal Ministry of Regional Development issued a draft *Concept Paper* on Russian nationalities issues, putting forth

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47. Katrien Hertog, "A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: The Seeds of Islamic Radicalism in Chechnya," *Religion, State, and Society*, 33, no. 2 (September 2005): 249, 250. This view is expressed also by Lawrence Uzzell: "Russia does face a genuine threat from radical Islamic terrorism, no less genuine for the fact that it is a threat created largely by the Kremlin itself as a result of its brutal tactics in Chechnya. But the suppression of all Muslim groups not effectively controlled by the state only aggravates that threat: independent-minded Muslims find themselves with almost no channels of action except extremist groups." "Bringing Muslims in From the Cold," *International Religious Freedom Watch*, 20 September 2005.

48. Valerie Tishkov, *Chechnya: Life in a War-Torn Society* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2004). P. Lentini's review in the *Slavonic and East European Review* 83, no. 3 (July 2005) offers that:

> "[Tishkov] draws attention to the fact that before the war Chechens were very happy to consider themselves citizens within a broader multi-ethnic state. Tishkov's study's participants overwhelmingly demonstrate that when those Chechens who decided to take up arms made their choices, they did so when they were threatened directly. History was of lesser importance. Therefore, he establishes a credible challenge to scholars and activists who contend that the conflict has long-standing roots which will make establishing peace between Russians and Chechens nearly impossible."

49. Igor Yakovenko, "Russia's Disintegration: Factors and Prospects," *Russia in Global Affairs* 4, October-December 2004; available online at: http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers-/9/-707.html.

something of a renewed version of the Soviet-era notion of a "new historical community of peoples." This was evidently prompted by presidential advisor Vladislav Surkov's deepening concern with national unity and territorial integrity. The tone of the document and the ensuing commentary in Russian and Western media suggested the Putin administration's keen interest in pursuing a sense of united nationhood for Russia, perhaps akin to Ataturk's concept of "populism," (*halkĉilik*) to form the basis of the sense of identity for the Turkish Republic in the 1920s, after the collapse of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Such an approach is, of course, highly problematic for Russia, especially given Russia's self-acknowledged multi-nationality. (The more or less official view of the Turkish government is that there is "one Turkish nation," without national minorities per se; the Russian Federation is self-professedly multi-national.) But such an approach might be very amenable to the Russian Orthodox Church's preferred role as *ecumenical hegemon* over Russian culture, and thus over Russian society.[50] Nevertheless, according to *Kommersant*, "The main linchpin of the [*Concept Paper*] is the idea of "the formation of a single multinational society" with "the consolidating role of the Russian people," that is, in practice, the latest "new historical community," that, according to the 1977 Constitution of the USSR, was the Soviet people."[51] Paul Goble offered that the *Concept Paper* should not be taken as definitive, but rather as symptomatic of the open nature of the question of President Putin's nationality policy (such as it is).[52] Perhaps this is so, but the fact that such a "concept paper" had emerged indicates some measure of official concern with this aspect of national unity.

But the likelihood of an actual breakup of the Russian Federation seems particularly remote, as does the prospect of an ongoing civil war, despite warnings by Ravil Gaynutin, chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, that "without peace and accord between nationalities, our country faces inevitable disintegration."[53] While this

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50. See James W. Warhola, "Religiosity, Politics, and the Formation of Civil Society in Multinational Russia," in *Burden or Blessing? Russian Orthodoxy and the Construction of Civil Society and Democracy*, ed. Christopher Marsh (Boston, Mass.: Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs, Boston University, 2004), 91-98.

51. Natalia Gorodetskaia, "The Russian People Consolidate," *Kommersant*, 11 October 2005; available online at: www.kommersant.com/doc.asp?id=616563.

52. Paul Goble, "Russia: Russians Up, Non-Russians Down, Federalism Out In New Concept Draft," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Report*, 12 October 2005:

Because of these contradictions, both the Russian authorities as well as Russians and non-Russians alike will probably view this document less as a final decision about the direction that their country should take than as an indication of where that debate about that now stands; available online at: http://www.rferl.org/features-article/2005/10/f1054a07a5e9457286cd7ad5dc3b677e.-html.

53. "Chief Muslim Cleric warns Russia will fall apart without interethnic accord," RIA Novosti, 23 October 2006; available online at: *Johnson's Russia List*, #34-237,

statement seems hyperbolic, the fact remains that almost immediately after the collapse of the USSR, serious questions arose about the ethno-territorial viability of the Russian state. However, by late 2006, unless the Putin administration effected an abrupt about-face and opened the door for a negotiated political settlement of the Chechen conflict (which well over 60 percent of Russians recently favored, as noted above),[54] the formal territorial integrity of the Russian Federation seems quite solid. Nevertheless, the question of the geographical locus of *Rossiia* still commands an array of varying opinions: the final sentence of O'Loughlin and Talbot's recent study of Russian popular views of this matter is quite revealing: "[T]he question of where Russia's borders lie persists, complicated by the large Russian diasporas in neighboring states and the long history of expansion and contact with Slavic and Islamic populations."[55] The Russian Orthodox Church's faithful reflection of the state's answer to this question may be prudentially useful to both church and state, but may do little in and of itself to resolve the deeper issues of communal conflict that have become all too evident during the Putin years. In this respect, Russia's increasingly authoritarian "managed pluralism" of society by the Kremlin, replete with an evolving "ecumenical hegemonism" by the Russian Orthodox Church in the realm of interaction among religious communities and the larger society governed by that state, may be spawning more and greater problems that it can resolve.

CONCLUSION

Russia under Putin has been presented in both scholarly and popular Western discourse as having moved into an increasingly authoritarian, state-centric political system, particularly since the Beslan tragedy of September 2004. The Kremlin has generally responded by refuting this characterization as unfair, given the problems Russia faces, certainly including the imperative of maintaining the country's territorial integrity in the face of escalating terrorism and the broadening of separatist movements.[56] In any case,

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http://www.cdi.org/russia/john-son/2006-237-34.cfm. This perhaps echoes the Orthodox Church's concerns with the growing demographic imbalance in Russia, with population growth rates much higher among Muslims than among Orthodox Russians; see Jeremy Page, "The Rise of Muslims Worries Orthodox Church," *The Times,* 5 August 2005; available online at: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,3-1721508,00.html.

54. See www.russiavotes.org., "National and International Security: Chechnya."

55. John O'Loughlin and Paul F. Talbot, "Where in the World is Russia? Geopolitical Perceptions and Preferences of Ordinary Russians," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 46, no. 1 (2005): 47.

56. "Dogs bark, but the caravan rolls on," was President Putin's response to criticism of his regime's tightening of control on NGOs in Russia, and to related criticisms of similarly authoritarian regimes in the region; "Putin Defends Ties with Uzbekistan, Belarus, Iran," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 31 January 2006.

the Russian Orthodox Church will inevitably continue to be a significant actor in defining Russian society and thus in shaping the character of the political regime, for good or for ill, despite the low levels of public religiosity displayed by Russians. The church could conceivably become an important force in restraining the state from descending into a full-scale reversion to a form of governance [57]simply not accountable to the public, nor to any social group, movement, or force. Given the historical role of the Russian Orthodox Church in actually carrying out such a function, however, hopes should not be too high. Perhaps to do so would expect too much. But in any case, to the extent that Orthodoxy is used as a buttressing device to shore up support for the regime's attempts to bring about an Orthodox-oriented "monocultural" Russia, it risks losing credibility as the knot of violence and repression, particularly on the southern flank of Russia, grows increasingly tight.

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