

# Dagestani Mullahs Plan to Counter Ideological Challenge of Militants via the Internet

By [Paul Goble](#)

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About this blog

**Window on Eurasia** covers current events in Russia and the nations of the former Soviet Union, with a focus on issues of ethnicity and religion. The issues covered are often not those written about on the front pages of newspapers. Instead, the articles in the Windows series focus on those issues that either have not been much discussed or provide an approach to stories that have been. Frequent topics include civil rights, radicalism, Russian Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church, and events in the North Caucasus, among others.

Author **Paul Goble** is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious questions in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. He has served in various capacities in the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the International Broadcasting Bureau as well as at the Voice of America

and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He writes frequently on ethnic and religious issues and has edited five volumes on ethnicity and religion in the former Soviet space.

VIENNA — Even as Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signaled that Moscow intends to use force to "liquidate" terrorists in the North Caucasus following the murderous attack on the militia post in Makhachkala on Wednesday, Dagestan's Muslim leadership met yesterday to discuss how to counter the ideological challenge that the militants there pose.

In some of the most uncompromising language he has used to date, [Medvedev said](#) with regard to "bandits" in the North Caucasus, "it is necessary simply to destroy them, to do this harshly, systematically and on a regular basis because unfortunately the bandit underground still exists".

Instead of dealing in statistics about the number of bandits destroyed, the Kremlin leader continued, the Russian force structures must "methodically act" against all those who may be linked to terrorists and the underground and if evidence of that appears, "one must find them and destroy them."

That is because, he continued, "our task is to create a normal milieu for life on the territory of our southern republics, "something that will allow for "social-economic development, the creation of new jobs, new firms and the launching of new investment projects. "All of this," Medvedev said, "we will be involved with."

But his tough words about the need to "liquidate" the militants and his dispatch of MVD head Rashid Nurgaliyev to Dagestan suggest that Medvedev and those around him continue to view the application of massive force as the best and most effective response to any terrorist actions.

As many analysts have suggested, that approach, when employed against Islamist groups whose members view death in any battle with their opponents as the path to salvation, may prove counterproductive, because it has the effect of creating an ever larger number of martyrs whose exploits may attract still others to their cause.

That makes the deliberations at yesterday's session of the Council of Imams of the Republic of Dagestan especially interesting because Mufti Akhmad-khadzhi Abdulayev [told those in attendance](#) that they bear responsibility for ensuring the ideological reliability of young people there.

Specifically, the head of the Dagestan Muslim Spiritual Directorate (MSD) said, they must engage in "prophylactic work in educational institutions," using "contemporary information technologies including the Internet, television and radio, and thus reverse the trend in which "students are leaving higher educational institutions in the capital and going into the forests."

"As is well-known," the mufti continued, "the weapon of the imam is the Word. Therefore, it is extremely necessary to sharpen one's speech, to enrich one's vocabulary, and to speak

in a language accessible to all so that all members of the community can easily understand the thoughts of the preacher."

Another speaker, Abubakr-kahdzhi Datsiyev, the administrator of the Svet Islama website, picked up on the mufti's comment that "students of one of the universities have been going into the forests to join the terrorists," often inspired to do so by appeals that appear on radical Islamist websites.

Those who support traditional Islamic values, he said, must thus "devote more attention to work on such discussion spaces" because all too often, he said, "many Muslims today prefer to discuss questions that arise on such forums and in social networks" than in one-to-one conversations with mullahs.

At the present time, he said, "our main task is to involve competent people in work on the site." If that happens, he said, Muslims will receive a great deal of good from it. Other speakers added that the MSD should organize "special courses for imams so that they will be able to use contemporary information technologies more effectively."

These proposals, the report on the meeting said, "found support" among the mullahs and imams of Dagestan, an indication that they view the battle against terrorism to be at least as much an ideological campaign as a law-enforcement matter, regardless of the signals coming out of Moscow.

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