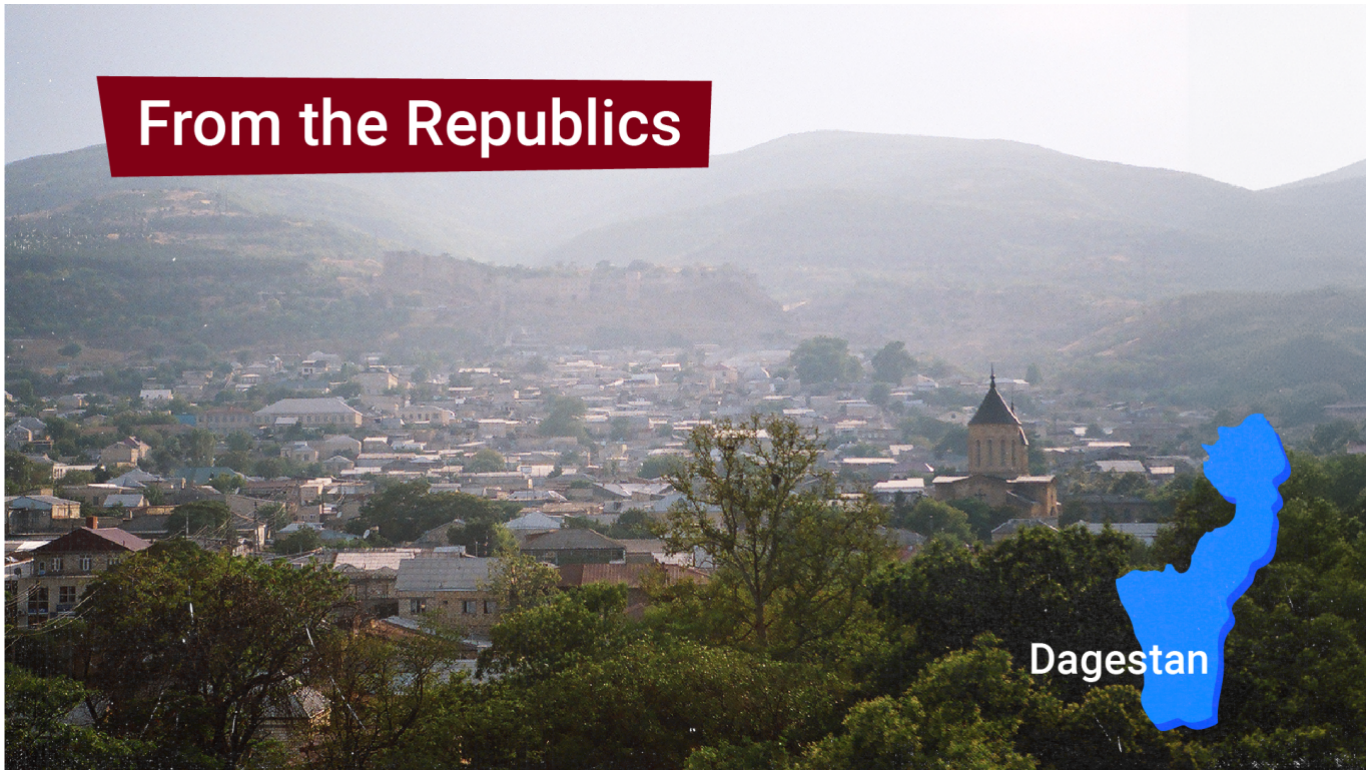
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Attacks in Dagestan Will Marginalize and Endanger Russia's Muslims. Further.

By Leyla Latypova

June 25, 2024



Derbent, Dagestan. **MT**

From the Republics is a new weekly column from MT reporter Leyla Latypova that focuses on the latest political and social developments in Russia's ethnic republics. This week's edition looks at how Russia's latest security failure in Dagestan will harm Muslim communities.

"Russia is different now," shrugged Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov when journalists asked him whether Sunday's deadly events in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan signal that the country is sliding back into the 2000s, a time marked in Russians' collective memory by terrorist attacks including the 2002 Nord-Ost hostage crisis and the 2004 Beslan school siege.

"Society is strongly consolidated and criminal terrorist acts like the one we saw in Dagestan yesterday are not supported by society in Russia or Dagestan," Peskov added.

Twenty-three people were killed and at least 50 injured in coordinated attacks on two Orthodox churches, two synagogues and a traffic police stop in Dagestan's capital Makhachkala and the coastal city of Derbent.

Russia's top investigative body deemed the events "acts of terror" and experts at the U.S.-based Institute for the Study of War linked the attack to members of Wilayat Kavkaz, the North Caucasus branch of the Islamic State (IS) extremist group.

Embed:

The attacks are the latest failure by the special services, whose attention has long been focused on the opposition and the invasion of Ukraine, to stop domestic security threats.

Contrary to what Peskov claims (yes, this wouldn't be the first time that the presidential spokesman was caught distorting facts), independent researchers have long warned of radical militant groups like IS enjoying increasing levels of support from youth across the North Caucasus, including in Dagestan.

Studies have said that Russia's radicalization prevention policies, which focus heavily on producing counter-propaganda materials, have failed to address the many underlying causes of youth radicalization in the North Caucasus.

These core reasons are varied and plentiful, though many of them are linked to unresolved ethnic grievances, historical traumas — including those inflicted by Russia's violent colonization of the region and mass deportations under the Soviet regime — as well as prevalent xenophobic and Islamophobic sentiments that are rising across the country.

In short — and contrary to Mr. Peskov's claims — it is precisely *the lack of consolidation* among the Russian populace that was the underlying cause of the attack in Dagestan. Opposition to the war in Ukraine is not the only source of deep divisions among Russian nationals, as differing religious affiliations and ethnic backgrounds — and the unaddressed baggage of systemic discrimination that comes with them — also render polar opposite views on the country's past, present and future.

The attack's wider consequences will be a further deepening of societal divisions and repressions against Muslim communities.

Islam is the second-most practiced religion in Russia after Orthodoxy with around 20 million residents identifying as Muslim, many of whom come from the Indigenous, non-Slavic communities of the Volga-Ural region and the Caucasus, including Dagestan, where 95% of residents identify as Muslim.

When I spoke to Dagestani lawyer Fatima Abdulkarim in the wake of the anti-Israeli mob attack on Makhachkala Airport in November last year, she warned that the event would contribute to growing Islamophobia in Russia and abroad.

"Newspapers are already calling us 'crazy,' 'savage,' 'mad' and 'dangerous'," she told me then.

Abdulkarim's worst fears did materialize, albeit a few months later, following the massacre at the Crocus City Hall concert venue in Moscow, which was claimed by an IS branch active in South-Central Asia.

Related article: What We Know About the Church and Synagogue Attacks in Dagestan

The attack, which Russian authorities say was perpetrated by Tajik nationals, ramped up discrimination and raids against migrant workers hailing from Central Asian states. But Russia's Muslims and members of Indigenous ethnic groups of North Caucasus and Volga-Ural regions also sounded the alarm over growing discrimination.

"Every time something like this happens, people demand a public statement of condemnation from me, as if it is unclear that any normal person is against things like this," Abdulkarim wrote on Instagram in the wake of Sunday's attack in her native Dagestan.

For some in Russia, Muslims and ethnic minorities are becoming useful scapegoats for channeling frustration and anger fueled by the war in Ukraine, bearing collective responsibility for tragedies that should, rather, be blamed on the ineffectiveness of the Russian government.

As an Indigenous Muslim woman I look at this trend with great worry, but what concerns me most is knowing that Sunday's attacks will give the Kremlin and Russia's security services even more freedom to repress Muslim dissidents.

In Russian-occupied Crimea, scores of Crimean Tatar activists and independent religious leaders have been arrested and sentenced to lengthy jail terms on charges of "extremism."

Their real crime? Refusing to bow down to Russian occupational authorities, including by joining Kremlin-controlled religious establishments.

Similar patterns of repression have been used against activists in Russia's ethnic republics, including in Ingushetia and Bashkortostan.

As the fear of "Islamic extremism" is drilled further into the Russian public's conscious — and the two words continue to dominate media headlines with little quality analysis of the events — I worry that new arrests and new falsified criminal cases against Indigenous Muslim activists will draw less condemnation and attention from Russians, even the most liberal ones.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/06/25/attacks-in-dagestan-will-marginalize-and-endanger-russias-muslims-further-a85511