



**Master Class**  
(Transcription extracts)

**Alexey Malashenko**  
**Will Russia become a Muslim Society?**  
(03.05.2011)

**Contents**

Introduction .....	1
Arab Revolutions – Impacts on Central Asia .....	1
Assassination of Bin Laden – Impacts .....	3
Caucasus .....	4
Russian Nationalism.....	5

**Introduction**

I don't know with what I could start, because this is a book about Islam in Russia, this is a book about muslimhood in Russia, but meanwhile after this has been published we had so many events in Arab world and Muslim world – the recent event: the assassination of Bin Laden. So it seems to me it would be better if I try to talk about the actual situation including inside it the Muslim situation, Islamic situation in Russia itself because look: here we wrote "Will Russia Become a Muslim Society?". Of course this is a speculation. Russia is a part of Europe, Russia is a part of Muslim world, because of minorities, some minorities which exists in Russia, Muslim minorities, because of some aspects of its foreign politics, so I don't want to talk about double standards [...] but however indeed Russia partially is included in Muslim World and it means that practically all events that take place, would it be in northern Africa, in Afghanistan, in Iran, in Pakistan, everywhere have some impacts on Russia itself and on Muslims and Russians too.

**Arab Revolutions – Impacts on Central Asia**

By the way I'll start to say a couple of words about what we have at the Moment in Arab World [...]. I don't know if it's necessary to call these events revolutions. I don't believe. I won't believe, because I don't believe in the possibility of emergence in new political and social models would it be in Egypt or in Tunisia, or in Syria, if Bashar al-Assad will be replaced by somebody else. I think that in three or four years, maybe earlier Tunisia, Egypt and so on will receive a new authoritarian leader: an Egyptian general – so practically no big changes in Arab world. [...]



Maybe someday this something, this revolution, this turmoil will come in Central Asia – you may call it as you like – and will be connected with a problem of transition and not with the Arab revolutions. The speculation number two: impact of Egypt and Tunisia on Moscow, on Russia itself. Even Medvedev, who is compared with Putin a more liberal, mentioned that we don't want these events in Egypt. We don't want revolution would it be orange revolution [...] and so on. It seems to me that for Medvedev, as well of course for Putin it is something imaginative. They both don't believe in the possibility of such revolution in

Moscow, in Russia. But they refer [...] for instance at Gaddafi. The resistance in our country will be great and we don't allow to anybody to move us – I mean Putin and Medvedev – aside. From that point of view by the way in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and in Uzbekistan local leaders repeated several times that if you wanted some instability in our countries well you may attempt to revolutionize the situation but don't forget about Gaddafi. We'll resist against all kind of revolution all the time. So in general to summarize the impact, the effect of recent events in Soviet post space was some rather pathetic or negative [...]. It's my private opinion I don't believe that the impact from that point of view was some democratic or positive or as you like.

What about Muslimhood in Russia. What could we say about the impact on behalf of Egypt and Tunisia and so on Russian muslimhood? I think that's a nut. Why? Because as you know Islam is a political tool, Islam is a political movement, Islamism is a phenomenon. Islamic political leaders didn't participate in the revolutions. Of course the situation need certain explanation, but majority of experts would had been in Russia, in the United States and in Europe were sure that once the Muslim brotherhood, or Rachid al-Ghannouchi in Tunisia will come and will be the first in the manifestations in Egypt an Tunisia or somewhere else, by the way in Syria. But they didn't. I call the situation Islamic silent or Islamist silence as you like. It doesn't mean that Islamism as a political and ideological movement disappeared. It doesn't mean even after the death of Bin Laden it's an end of Islamic radicalism as well as terrorism and extremism but I think we had to be ready for some evolution of this movement [...] I don't believe that Islamism will disappear. [...] I'm sure they will become more active in Yemen it's a next problem. It's a next problem, because nobody will sent troops to Yemen, because it's a residence, the second resistance of Al-Qaeda and there are a lot Islamist radical extremist groups. [...]



## Assassination of Bin Laden – Impacts

[...] Just why I mentioned the rumors in Libya that's because of assassination, extermination of Bin Laden. I'm afraid that you will consider me very cynical, but if somebody exterminated Gaddafi two months ago, when he was in Tripoli that could be very successful for everybody. Sometimes, when you deal with dictators like Gaddafi practically every method could be used. That's why I think that Europe, that the United States weren't prepared for such revolution in Libya. [...] Well, about Bin Laden [...] in general my opinion is that it will not change drastically the situation in the Muslim world, it will not change the relation between Europe, America and muslimhood in general because extremism, extreme Islam it's a phenomenon. It's a very deep phenomenon a religious and political and social organ and it will continue even without Bin Laden. I don't know who will come instead it, who will become the leader of Al-Qaeda, or ideological leader, never mind. I think that must be one representative of the young generation, it's a problem of time he will come it will continue.



And besides look in Caucasus: the federal subject exterminated so many charismatic Islamic leaders like Bassajew, like Chattab, like Said Burjatski, [...] but it continues. [...] So it's not a problem of leader, even it's not a problem of leader with such a high level of charisma that Bin Laden had. [...] But I thought this morning about the coincidence of assassination Bin Laden and the crisis in Libya. So America did it in the very convenient moment to show that if it's necessary we nearly do everything even assassinate Bin Laden. I don't insist on it. [...] What is the influence of assassination of Bin Laden on Russian Muslimhood. I don't know, but I remember September 11. These days I was in Moscow and had a chance to go to Caucasus. Even in Moscow some Russians, not Muslims but ethnic Russian they said immediately after September eleven that it was a punishment and so on. In Caucasus, in Dagestan, the biggest republic of Caucasus people were proud, because hey associated September eleventh with the triumph of Islam. [...] I don't know what kind of reaction we'll have among Muslim after assassination of Bin Laden. [...]



## Caucasus

Let's come back to Russia to the Islamic problem of Russia. [...] First of all Russian Muslims, Russians Islamists have no Muslim community – they have something like commonwealth, because Russian muslimhood is divided. [...] Of course there is a competition between two Islams: one traditional, and the second that came from abroad, from Middle East, the so called the new Islam or Arab Islam or Salafi islam and so on. This is one trend and the second trend is a traditional, Caucasian Islam and of course there is a competition between them, but the main roots of instability of presence of Islamic radicalism consists in political and social problems. We'll we spoke about Islamic renaissance [...] since the collapse of the Soviet Union. I think that in Caucasus we observe the so called next wave of Islamization. Before renaissance of Islam, Islamization was a reaction against soviet rule, against communist rule, against atheism that was Islamization and restoration of Islam.



The second wave that started, I think maybe five years ago, consists in the process of Shariatization of society. Dagestan, Ingushetia, [...], indeed they want restoration of Shariat, they wanted to become a shariatized society. Why? Maybe it is not because they incline totally to Islam but that, because of the lack, because of the mistakes made by Kremlin

by Moscow in their politics [...], it's because that federal law, Russian law, law of Russian Federation doesn't work totally. That's because of social problems problem of corruption, unemployment and so on. And people in Ingushetia, Dagestan, [...], say if you cannot give us stability, if you cannot create in Caucasus a normal condition of living let's turn to Islamic alternative, let's turn to Shariat, because in that case it would bring us stability, social justice normal relations. [...] Well I understand that I simplify, but this simplification, in my opinion doesn't mean that I make a mistake.

There are two ideas of shariatization. First is that it's impossible to establish Shariat law in Russian federation as a part of Russian federation. So let's create our Islamic state I mean depended from Russia. This idea is shared by minority; by minority who are in the mountains and so on and indeed they think that it's impossible to create a caliphate. Majority of Muslims think that it's possible to shariatize Russian territory in Caucasus. Why not? And they search their ways, their roads how to do it. There are a lot of examples, but indeed when you cross a frontier between Russia and Dagestan you begin to feel that you are in Muslim country. Just I don't want to criticize, even more I can say that in that situation, in that political situation in the Russian Federation it could be normal, but it creates a strange situation, a very double situation. [...] They want to stay in the Russian Federation, they want to be a part of the Russian Federation more they want to get money from federal budget but at the same time they want to consider themselves of something, well not like Kamtschatka or Dalni Wostok, special subject. This idea, this conception is very



popular in Dagestan, in Ingushetia and in Chechnya by the way. In Chechnya it's a very special situation. The will to establish a Shariat law comes not from Islamic radicals, who still are in the mountains, but from President Ramzan Kadyrov, a very specific guy. He is a secular president and he pushed forward, he proposed all kind of Islamic ideas to Chechen society. [...] The main idea of what I just said to you is that the northern Caucasus is moving toward this state of inner abroad and in Moscow it seems they don't understand it, because [...] local political elites were totally loyal to Putin and some of them even to Medvedev. Among them nobody mentioned the problem of separatism. They say that we are Russian citizens and so on and in Moscow, I think, they don't see this problem. They don't understand the problem of absence of common civilian values. They don't pay attention to absence of all Russian traditions.

## Russian Nationalism

One more point [...]: the raising of Russian nationalism and of xenophobic feelings which are directed against Caucasians. Of course you may read in the Russian newspapers about speculations, provocations and so on. But we observe now the raising of nationalist wave, Russian ethnic nationalists, directed against Caucasians. It's dangerous, because the misunderstanding between Russian and some Caucasian peoples, is becoming more and more big. Putin, in December the last year, understood. A fan of Moscow football team Spartak in Moscow was assassinated by a man from Caucasus. We had all a huge manifestation in Moscow in St. Petersburg in Yaroslavl in Rostov, [...] and Putin, as a prime minister [...] came to the grave of this football fan to show his respect. So why? Because suddenly he discovered, I mean Putin, that there's a problem with Russian nationalists. [...] The December of last year, in my opinion, that was a turning point. [...] The situation becomes more and more serious and xenophobia turned against Caucasian, sometimes it looks like Islamophobia, is very dangerous for such country as Russia. Well, not to summarize but to make a small, a little conclusion I think that problem of Islam of all kind of Islam of radical Islam in northern Caucasus the problem of Islamophobia the problem of relations between some Muslims and Russians is [...] that Putin and Medvedev [...] don't pay real attention – a necessary attention. [...] I don't know what we'll have in the future, but if economic, political and social situation in Russia, in Russian Federation erase it could explode; not to revolution, but to instability. [...]

The last point I forgot to tell it it's funny In Dagestan in one of the cities in Dagestan we spoke to all kind of people and among them there was a student from local university we discussed the problem of Islam and so on he suddenly stood up and said you think that here in Dagestan you will get a situation some like in Egypt. Never. You will get the next Afghanistan. It's not a joke, thank you.