

ISLAM, ISLAMISM, AND POLITCS IN EURASIA REPORT

No. 5

December 18, 2009

Buryatskii, *Istishkhad*, and the Riyadus-Salikhin Suicide Martyrs' Battalion

By Gordon M. Hahn

Introduction

With winter setting across the Caucasus, the Caucasus Emirate (CE) mujahedin are hunkering down in the mountains and forests. The weather will force them to concentrate less on operations, and consequently they will turn towards the planning and internal politicking that routinely sets the stage for the next year's spring-summer-fall jihadi campaign. Leading mujahedin will turn to political, ideological and theological propaganda, and there is perhaps no one CE mujahed whose pen is as might as his sword as Sheik Said Abu Saad Buryatskii (Aleksandr Tikhomirov). Buryatskii's articles, along with those of a handful of others, are an invaluable source for those interested in the CE jihad or jihadism in general, including important details about the CE's organization, ideology, operational tactics, and grand strategy.

In a recent IIPER (No. 1, November 3, 2009), I speculated on the basis of a close reading of tea leaves in articles published by Buryatskii that he may be the amir of, or at least a driving force in the resurgence of the Riyadus Salikhin (RS) suicide martyrs' battalion revived by CE amir Doka Abu Usman Umarov in April 2009. A more recent article from Buryatskii confirms the latter hypothesis and strengthens the former; Buryatskii explicitly states that he is deeply involved in recruiting for the RS.

Background

As noted in IIPER No. 1, Buryatskii is perhaps the CE's leading operative and ideologist. He played an instrumental role in a series of operations in recent years, including this past summer's suicide bombing campaign. Most notably, he organized the August 17th suicide truck bombing of the ROVD headquarters in Nazran that killed 24 and wounded 260. Buryatskii has supported the idea of bringing jihad to the U.S., Britain and Israel, as has CE amir Doka Abu Usman Umarov, and has been featured in an inspirational video clip on Hunafa.com along with Osama bin Laden. He has previously revealed his deep involvement in preparing suicide bombers. In the recent article detailed below he explains the need for suicide martyrdom (*istishkhad*) or "self-sacrifice" (*samozhertvovanie*) operations.

Buryatskii on the Causality of Martyrdom Operations

On December 9th, 2009 Buryatskii published a relatively brief but nevertheless revealing article about his vision of the place of martyrdom operations in jihad and his own experience in, and justification for such operations. (Said Abu Saad Buryatskii,

Istishkhad mezhdū pravdoi i lozh'yu," Hunafa.com, 9 December 2009, 1:01, <http://hunafa.com/?p=2514>.) Buryatskii states explicitly that he "has had to undertake direct participation in the preparation of these (suicide martyrdom) operations."

The article appears to be intended in part to address charges made by Chechen President Ramazan Kadyrov and, according to Buryatskii, analysts of the special services that Buryatskii uses narcotics to induce mujahedin to go on martyrdom operations. Buryatskii assures Kadyrov, Ingushetia President Yunus Bek Yevkurov and intelligence analysts alike that suicide shakhids go to their deaths "with sober calculation and cold reason not shaking zombies." Later in the article Buryatskii answers this question. While delving into Islamic history to demonstrate the essential role of martyrdom, Buryatskii introduces the Ismailis assassins, who plied their suicide martyrs with hashish in preparing them and their operations, as a negative example. Buryatskii charges the *hashishin* had a "distorted understanding" of *istishkhad* and this "mutation of *istishkhad*" "terrorized the Islamic world." Similarly, he warns the Russian infidels and the Caucasus apostates that they suffer from a distorted perception and are "mistaken" to apply the history of the *hashisin* to explain the rise of suicide martyrdom in the region.

To his own series of rhetorical questions as to how one might influence a person to sacrifice his life, what the state of mind and psychology of suicide martyrs is, etc., Buryatskii answers that the solution to such queries from "infidels" and "mankind" is "elementary."

Buryatskii's first answer to the question falls within what might be regarded as the canon of Russian historical and political science, reflecting his upbringing in the Russian milieu. he notes that this process corresponds to Russian Eurassianist ethnographer and historian Lev Gumilev's conceptualization of the rise and fall of nations and civilizations, in particular the peak stage of national or civilizational mobilization and development, '*passionarnost*'. Buryatskii cannot resist criticizing the infidel historian's "unproven and groundless opinions about Islam and the Prophet Mohammed" but agrees with Gumilev's view stressed a group's willingness for self-sacrifice (*samozhertvovanie*) was the essential characteristic of a community in the peak stage of *passionarnost*' and that without self-sacrifice's infusion into foundation of the state and ethnos, their further existence is practically impossible." It is worth noting that many observers regard some of Gumilev's Eurasianism as national chauvinist, even neo-fascist in nature or at least in its sensibility and implications. [See, for example, Stephen Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), pp. 11, 16, 29, 33, 37, 43-46, 52, 195-6, 209, and 255-6.] In this case, Gumilev's work shapes the CE's Islamo-fascism.

Buryatskii extrapolates Gumilev's theory onto the history of religions, especially that of Islam and the life of the Prophet Mohammed. Thus, Buryatskii's second answer to the question of the genesis of martyrdom operations lies in the tradition of Islamic warfighting as modeled by Mohammed and his companions: "In Islam *istshkhad* (martyrdom) became something so natural for the Prophet's companions that Al-Bara and

Abu Dujan jumped the wall of the 'Garden of the Death' in Akrah in battle with Muslim knowing that they were heading to certain death from hundreds of swords and spears. It was Allah's messenger who laid the foundation for this by taking the oath to die with his companions under the tree in Hudebia, as Salyama ibn ai-Akva passes down (to us)." He places extra emphasis on the role of martyrdom in the formation of the first Caliphate: "When the companions of Allah's Messenger threw themselves alone against thousands of Byzantine and Persian troops, when death on the path of Allah seemed a natural phenomenon, on this soil of *passionarnost'* the foundation of the Caliphate was laid. And by contrast, when Muslims dirtied themselves in luxury and war on the path of Allah seemed as suicide, from this moment *passionarnost'* fell into decline."

Buryatskii's third answer is that the Islamic world, of which the largely Muslim-populated parts of the North Caucasus are an inextricable part, is undergoing a period of communalist revival and re-establishment of the Caliphate. He warns the Russian infidels that the situation in the North Caucasus is different from one of decline, resembling instead the stage of *passionarnost'*: "(I)n the hills with Doka Umarov there are no palaces with gardens and concubines, and none among the mujahedin on jihad have even heard of hashish." The recent spate of martyrdom in the North Caucasus is "the flash of *passionarnost'*, reaching the peak's summit, and is where in our case the creation of the emirate of the Caucasus begins."

His fourth answer lies in the effectiveness of such operations. He invokes a conference of Western intelligence analysts in Israel which ostensibly concluded "it is impossible to stop a person who is prepared to explode himself together with the enemy."

His final answer is that mujahedin are made ultimately by Allah: "You can talk about this for hours, but as long as Allah does not give him (the prospective shakhid) the strength and decisiveness, he will never voluntarily press the button." This seems to be an unwitting admission that Buryatskii has talked about this for hours with prospective suicide shakhids.

Buryatskii on the Mentality of Suicide Martyrs

Claiming that he did not originally intend to write about this, Buryatskii states: "I cannot help myself from noting what I myself saw and my observations of those operations in which I took part in preparing." He invariably describes CE/RS suicide martyrs going to their fates with a clear mind, referring to their videotaped martyrdom declarations as evidence. He asks, for example, if the "two brothers, who last year exploded the headquarters of the apostates of the Southern (*Yug*) battalion in Vedeno with an aviation mine were under hypnosis." Buryatskii answers: "The video clip of their (martyrdom) declaration went around the entire Internet, and in their conduct not one psychiatrist or hypnotist sees potential clients." Similarly, he notes that the shakhid Kharun (real name - Beslan Savarbekovich Chagiev), whom he described in detail in a previous article, "went to martyrdom at the age of 43 and in sober mind, as we can see fully from his video appeal before (his) death."

Buryatskii then describes the state of mind of several suicide shakhids with whom he worked directly. He contrasts these martyrs, who went on their death missions contentedly and with determination rather than confused, drugged or in fear. He cites the conduct of a prisoner before his execution in the U.S. which he observed in a video, emphasizing how he went to his death in fear and sweating profusely. He notes that the majority of mujahedin go on suicide missions “not from the forest and do not come dirty, ragged, and wasted from starvation, but they from their beds, having left their wives and children for the sake of Allah. They, more than the others, inquired about being included in the ranks of the ‘Riyadus-Salikhin’ so that the most difficult operations were placed on their shoulders.”

Buryatskii, who asserts explicitly for the first time that he participated in the June 2009 attempted assassination of Ingushetia president Yevkurov, describes the suicide shakhid who commandeered the car bomb that exploded next to Yevkurov’s motorcade badly wounding him and killing his driver and two passengers. Buryatskii notes that the shakhid felt “nothing but calm since he was going to meet Allah” and confesses: “(T)hen I understood how strongly the believer differs from the infidel at the moment of death. That brother, who sat in the vehicle and headed to Yevkurov, was as calm as ever, and his appearance, complete resoluteness, confirmed this. When he sat in that car we hugged and prayed that we will meet in Eternal Life. I glanced in his eyes and did not see a hint of fear. There was confidence in the near meeting, as if he was leaving for another country, knowing surely that it exists.”

Buryatskii admits that some people join RS because they are wanted by the authorities but claims, without argumentation, that this is not the cause of their martyrdom. He also acknowledges that there are some differences of secondary importance in the conduct of various suicide martyrs. Some go with trepidation because they fear the answering Allah for their sins in the world. The suicide martyr who commandeered the truck bomb that destroyed entirely the Nazran ROVD building, one Ammar, was concerned whether he could handle the truck well enough to break through the front gates of the ROVD premises. The only video of that attack showed Buryatskii sitting in the truck on the bomb, which misled many to believe that Buryatskii had martyred himself. On September 5th, Buryatskii appeared in a video explaining the misup and the attack, but said he would refrain from naming the suicide shakhid who actually drove the truck and detonated its cargo (see IIPER, No. 1). Here, Buryatskii, perhaps forgetting his promise, reveals the name or at least the jihadi nickname of the perpetrator and that he and Ammar did the reconnaissance for planning the attack.

Buryatskii sums up the suicide martyrs’ disposition as such: “Some went on martyrdom only for the sake of Allah. Others also for this but with a secondary intention to attain forgiveness for their sins... If you ask me my opinion about what unites all those who committed martyrdom, then I answer: it is the firm intention to die on the path of Allah; I saw nothing more in their eyes than the thirst for death, and they already did not live in our dimension.”

Buryatskii and His Role in Recruiting and Preparing Suicide Martyrs

Buryatskii closes addressing the “infidels who think he is “the ‘ideologist’ of the suicide bombers” and that by his teachings he “pushes” people into martyrdom operations: “Remember one simple fact: Everyone who went on martyrdom took the decision without my teachings or some indirect influence. ... Even if someone is artificially energized by this impulse, it soon extinguishes, and nothing remains. This decision comes from the depths of the soul, there, where a person begins to meet with Allah, and he gives him the opportunity to do this. And today those who are ready to go to martyrdom, have come to this decision themselves. Of course, I agree that to a certain extent, prayers and works of scholars influenced them, but the final decision always remains for the individual himself. ...

“(B)ut with all this, no one can do this himself as long as Allah does not give them the opportunity.”

Thus, at the same time he denies he has been involved in convincing mujahedin to become suicide martyrs, he acknowledges that Islamic writings on the subject can incline mujahedin towards suicide martyrdom. In this regard, it should be noted that Buryatskii himself has been perhaps the most prolific CE mujahed when it comes to writings calling the Muslims of the Caucasus and Russia to the “sweetness” of jihad and istshkhad or martyrdom. (Said Abu Saad Buryatskii, “Vzglyad na Dzhikhad iznutri: Geroi Istiny i lzhi,” *Hunafa.info*, 30 May 2009, 1:01, <http://hunafa.com??p=1534>; Said Abu Saad Buryatskii, “Vzglyad na Dzhikhad iznutri: Geroi istiny i lzhi, Chast’ 2,” *Hunafa.info*, 24 June 2009, 4:04, <http://hunafa.info/?p=1715>.) Moreover, Buryatskii closes the article pledging: “I am left only to promise the infidels that while I am alive I will do everything possible so that the ranks of Riyadus-Salikhin are broadened and new waves of mujahedin go on martyrdom operations.” The assertion that he will do everything possible to get more mujahedin to join a suicide martyrs’ unit and carry out suicide operations, directly contradicts his claim that he is not pushing mujahedin to suicide martyrdom operations.

Conclusion

There can now be no doubt about Buryatskii’s involvement with the RS; a role that solidifies even more his status as the rising star withing the CE – its new Basaev. Given Buryatskii’s study abroad in Egypt, Kuwait and perhaps Saudi Arabia, his strong commitment to suicide martyrdom operations, and the fact that the CE returned to this form of activity shortly after he joined the jihad, it might be that it was Buryatskii and/or his recruiter the Kuwaiti Abu Abas Muhannad who convinced amir Umarov to revive suicide bombings.

We will hear more from Buryatskii both in the winter and summer to come. Although his pen will be more active than his sword in the confinement of winter, there can be no

doubt he will be doing everything possible to maintain as fast a pace of martyrdom and other operations as possible. Therefore, we are likely to see suicide shakhid attacks continue across the North Caucasus – some in Ingushetia – throughout the winter but more sporadically than during this past summer's suicide campaign.