

# Russian Officials Inadvertently Aid Radical Islamists in Russia

by [Anna Borshchevskaya \(/experts/anna-borshchevskaya\)](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Anna Borshchevskaya \(/experts/anna-borshchevskaya\)](#)

Anna Borshchevskaya is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East.

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On 10 November, *Moskovsky Komsomolets* published an interview with Alexei Grishin, an Islam specialist who previously worked in Russia's presidential administration and is currently president of the Religion and Society Information and Analysis Center in Russia. The paper cites his current affiliation and describes Grishin as one of Russia's leading Islam researchers. Grishin asserts that local Russian officials are often ignorant of Islam and therefore oftentimes inadvertently aid radical Islamists spread their propaganda.

*Moskovsky Komsomolets* is a tabloid which has a reputation for leaning towards sensationalism in its reporting. Still, the interview raises important issues related to the spread of radical Islam in Russia that are worth considering. Grishin describes a situation where local officials who are so ignorant of Islam they "cannot distinguish Sunnis from Shias" look for easy ways to score points with their superiors. When an Islamic leader comes to them and offers cooperation, they do not look carefully, nor do they have the ability to fully understand the literature they use, and inadvertently end up supporting those who spread radical messages. "I can provide a particularly unfortunate example of such interaction with Islamist officials at the federal level in our country, the International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS), whose leader, Yusuf al-Qardawi, once declared Russia the number one enemy of the Islamic world, and a month ago announced jihad against our country because of actions in Syria," said Grishin, "The IUMS, with support of just such incompetent officials, held in our country a number of major Islamic conferences, and actively infiltrated and is now working in Russia's penitentiary system."

In the last two years ISIS has grown increasingly active in recruiting Russian citizens. Russian has emerged as the third most popular language for ISIS propaganda (after Arabic and English). Russia's intervention in Syria is only likely to increase the influence of radical Islamists in Russia, both from ISIS and other radical groups. Meanwhile, the Russian government has done little to reduce the pool of potential recruits for these organizations, the majority of whom are in the North Caucasus—a region plagued with disproportionate unemployment, poor education, and a largely young and growing population, compared to the rest of Russia, that feels disenfranchised and hopeless, largely because of habitual abuse and discrimination by the Russian authorities and general nationalist feelings in Russia, such as protests under slogans "Russia for Russians" and "Stop feeding the Caucasus." In addition, some reports indicate that Russia also struggles to reintegrate those who return home after joining radical groups. ISIS

influence in Russia and, more broadly, the influence of radical Islam in Russia are certainly worth watching in the months ahead.

*Anna Borshchevskaya is the Ira Weiner Fellow at The Washington Institute. This item was originally published in the December 2015 edition (<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/OEWatch/201512/201512.pdf>) of OE Watch.* ❖

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