

Some of Russia's Muslims Seeking to Define a Place between 'Dar ul-Islam' and 'Dar ul-Harb'

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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.

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Muslim theorists traditionally have divided the geography of the world between the *dar ul-Islam*, or "abode of peace," in which Muslim governments rule over Muslim peoples, and the *dar ul-harb*, or "abode of war," in which Muslims find themselves in places with non-Muslim governments and are urged to practice jihad to change that.

But some Muslim writers now argue that Muslims living in non-Muslim areas must make a distinction between countries where Muslims can practice their religion freely and whose governments have good relations with Muslim countries and those where Muslims remain subject to discrimination and whose governments are hostile to the world of Islam.

If Muslims in the latter must continue to view themselves as living in the *dar ul-harb* with all the religiously-based demands for struggle that entails, these writers say, Muslims living in the former need to revise that approach and recognize that they live in a third space, the *dar ul-akhid*, which might be rendered as "abode of coexistence."

This idea has been at the margins of a broader discussion on Muslim minorities, and to this day, a large majority of the world's Muslims appears to reject the whole idea either because it represents the kind of innovation of the faith that traditionalists reject or because it appears to be a tool by non-Muslims against the faithful.

That makes any treatment of the subject particularly important. The appearance of a sympathetic treatment of this idea by Ruslan Kurbanov, a leading Moscow expert, in an article on the Russian Federation's largest Islamic web portal, and, even more, his promotion of such ideas on a Muslim Internet television channel, are thus especially intriguing.

Kurbanov, a senior specialist at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, [reviews the works of those Muslim writers who have suggested that modernity requires the unpacking of the concept of dar ul-harb](#), given the number of Muslims who live in states governed by non-Muslims and the diversity of those states.

Many of these authors, he notes, suggest that Koranic requirements for conducting jihad should be adjusted depending on whether these countries protect the rights of Muslims and seek friendly relations with Islamic countries or fail to protect the rights of the Islamic community and are hostile to the worldwide umma.

In the former category, Kurbanov suggests on the basis of the writings of these authors, are European countries, and there Muslims should work within the political system that protects them. In the latter category, the Moscow investigator says, is Israel, and there, these writers agree, the requirements for jihad remain unchanged.

But even more important perhaps than his article is Kurbanov's [more forceful presentation of it on Internet television](#). That broadcast is likely to reach a larger audience, simultaneously attracting support and generating opposition in the coming weeks and months.

This search for a middle ground between dar ul-Islam and dar ul-Harb may be a harbinger of further changes in the relationship between Russia's Muslims and the Russian state, either prompting a strengthening of the traditional deference of that community to the authorities or alternatively sparking dissent to this reformist approach.

At the same time — and this is implicit in both Kurbanov's article and his television presentation — at least some of the Muslims of the Russian Federation may use this argument to demand that Moscow protect their rights more than it has in the past or possibly face a more open challenge from the increasingly numerous community.

This idea could also have some international resonance by providing the Russian government with a new argument in its campaign to join the Organization of the Islamic Conference and other institutions in the Muslim world — although in this case too, the argument could have exactly the opposite effect.

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