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The Islamic Threat to Eastern Central Asia

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Utilizing the works of Uzbek scholars and journalists, the authors offer an analysis of the emergence of a culture of violence in post-Soviet Central Asia. This violence has been expressed in the form of terrorist strikes against security personnel as well as suicide attacks on civilian targets. What began as a cultural reawakening throughout Central Asia is evolving into a jihadist campaign to undermine secular authority. Thus, regional violence has been steadily increasing over the past five years.

Key Words: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU); Hizb-i-Islami Turkestan; Juma or Jumma Namangani; Tahir Yuldashev; Hizb ut-Tahrir; Adolat; Islam Lashkarlari; Tovba or Tauba.

In 2004, suicide terrorism came to Central Asia when, during a police roundup of suspected terrorists in Tashkent, two female suicide bombers jumped from their car and ignited explosive-laden belts. Shortly thereafter a second suicide bombing took place in Tashkent and an apartment building in Bukhara was bombed. Four days of violence left twenty-six people dead and strengthened perceptions that Uzbekistan is on the front line of a jihad inspired by factions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.[1] Jihad-related violence is not confined to Uzbekistan but is seen throughout Central Asia. Reports that the Islamic terrorist Rafik Kamalov was killed in a Kyrgyz border town in August, 2006, served as a reminder of the fact that this is regional violence rather than simply an Uzbek problem.

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[1] Jonathan Fighel, "Suicide bombings spread to Uzbekistan", www.ICT.org, 30 March 2004

While the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was a product of the internal dynamics of politics in Uzbekistan and initially had a local role, it eventually came to represent a threat to regional security rather than only to Uzbek security. Even before the September 11 terrorist attacks, radical Islamic leaders Dzhuma Namangani and Takhir Yuldashev boasted of an affiliation of all the radical Islamic groups and parties of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Republic. On May 25, 2001 the IMU proclaimed itself as the "Khezbi Islomi Turkiston" (KheIT) or "Islamic Party of Turkestan".[2] With this, the movement's original goal of overthrowing the government of Uzbekistan and creating an Islamic state in its place had been replaced by a pledge to create a radical Islamic caliphate extending from the Caspian region to western China. By the summer of 2001, IMU leader Namangani was leading an Afghanistan-based force of as many as 3,300 armed militants.[3]

Emergence of an Islamic Threat

Following the terrorist attacks of 2001, most observers were forced to recognize that religious extremism was a mutual concern for all of the Central Asian states. An examination of the origins and activities of the IMU and of the rise of religious political organizations such as "Khezbi Takhrir" (Hizb ut-Tahrir) demonstrates how religious extremism has come to occupy this position.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of the Central Asian states sparked an active campaign for a cultural reawakening throughout the region. This led to an increased interest in Islam, a belief system that had played a fundamental role in the history, culture, and consciousness of the peoples of Central Asia. The demise of the Communist ideology and the absence of a new vehicle to advance spiritual goals and ideas forced many former Communists to turn to the teachings and educational aims of Muslim clerics, many of whom had recently arrived from various Middle Eastern states. According to adherents of traditional Islam, the teachings of these unregistered

[2] At the popular level, the organization is also known as Jamaot.

[3] Phillip Ruddock, "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan", Australian Security Intelligence Organization, 23 March 2005, www.law.gov.au/ag

Muslim clerics were contradictory and created confusion among the Muslim faithful. Their radical doctrines, the traditionalists maintain, distorted the very essence of Islam and its place in the life of the country. The Central Asian youth are especially susceptible to these pseudo-scholars and the ambiguous aims of the Mullahs. The result of this development has been the emergence of numerous radical groups, all of which are united by their adherence to a militant politicized version of Islam.

During the first post-Soviet years, the Ferghana Valley and the city of Namangan experienced a proliferation of informal Islamist unions like "Tovba" ("Repentance"), "Adolat" ("Justice"), and "Islom Lashkarlari" ("Warriors of Islam"). These groups enjoyed the generous financial support of religious groups from several Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The basic objective of these unions was the creation of a theocratic Islamic state, a goal that was to be accomplished by a violent jihad that would bring about overthrow of the secular constitutional system. The Islamic militants created an illegal network of supporters and actively recruited both young people and women into this network.

The early successes of the IMU were, in large measure, the result of a strategic mistake the authorities made during this period. Security forces were almost completely absorbed in the struggle with the illegal opposition party "Birlik" and were determined to stem the growth of known national movements. Therefore, the Uzbek leadership did not consistently address the issue of Islam and the expanding activity of Islamist groups such as "Tovba", "Adolat", and "Islom Lashkarlari".

"Adolat", generally regarded as the precursor to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, first appeared in Namangan in 1991, and was successful in exposing the inadequacies of local authorities and law enforcement agencies. "Adolat" members, acting as self-appointed keepers of public security and order, began their own war on crime by exposing petty lawbreakers. The methods of punishment used by "Adolat" were developed in accordance with Islamic law and involved measures totally outside the scope of western jurisprudence. According to an account by Igor Rotar, culprits might be "...seated on donkeys, face to tail, and paraded all over the city; others were tied to poles for

passers-by to spit in their faces or were flogged in mosques." Russian women, if not dressed in accordance with Islamic dictates, might be taken to mosques to have their heads shaved.[4]

Another group, "Islom lashkarlari," created in Namangan at the same time and under the leadership of Takhir Yuldashev, organized mass meetings, sparked street riots, and led mobs which seized administrative buildings. The ideological tenets of this organization differed little from those of "Adolat".

The origin of "Tovba" is especially interesting. As early as 1987, emissaries from Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan settled illegally in Namangan. They held secret meetings with representatives from the local clerics and discussed issues concerning the foundation of a group known as "The Rebirth of Islam," the goal of which would be the creation of an Islamic republic that would occupy the entire area of the Ferghana valley, including those regions that were part of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. By a surprising and perhaps intentional coincidence, at roughly the same time in the Namangan mosque "Gumbaz" there was a meeting with emissaries from Azerbaijan. Among them was the Kyrgyz human-rights activist Tursunbai Baker, a deputy in the Kyrgyz parliament and a one-time candidate for President of Kyrgyzstan. He presented formal statutes for the creation of a militant group that came to be known as "Tovba." From its inception, the goal of this group was the creation of an Islamic republic in the Ferghana valley, one that would live in strict accordance to Islamic law. There were 95 original members in "Tovba," one of whom was Abduvali Yuldashev, who was later killed in fighting in Batkent in 1999. What is unique about "Tovba" is that its radical, violent nature was apparent from its very first days. Unlike other groups, it did not undergo a gradual transformation toward violence. "Tovba" members committed a series of serious crimes, including armed robbery, which was one of their principal methods of supplementing outside funds in order to buy weapons.[5]

In 1992 "Tovba" went underground and most of its activists left the

[4] Igor Rotar, "The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan: A Resurgent IMU?," *Jamestown Foundation: Terrorism Report,* Volume 1, Issue 8, 18 December 2003

[5] This undermines the common assertion by leftist intellectuals who insist that peaceful groups have been transformed into terrorists as a rational response to oppression.

country. At this time, its adherents undertook subversive work against Uzbekistan from the relative safety of the neighboring states of Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a more active phase in the process of politicizing Uzbekistan's extremist forces and extending their reach throughout the region. The difficulties of life in post-Soviet Central Asia enabled the extremists to concentrate on strengthening the negative tendencies in society by the practical expedient of simply resisting reformist efforts. There were thousands of young people who, being unemployed and bitter, were capable of unpredictable, unlawful, and anti-social acts.

Because the government was unable to respond to societal difficulties, these young people reinforced the social base of the extremist movements. Many young men and even young women were attracted by the novelty of radical Islam and its heroic slogans about selflessness and a Jihad against Central Asia's widespread corruption and poverty.

The fact that most young people had limited work or educational experience and few prospects for enjoying the expected fruits of post-Communist society made them vulnerable to religious extremism and its ideology of violence. The vacuum created by the discrediting of Marxism-Leninism gave the apostles of Islamic fundamentalism unprecedented opportunities for recruitment.

The poor conditions faced by most people in Uzbekistan, especially in the Ferghana Valley, stimulated the recruitment process. Many of the recruits had to leave their native communities because of their involvement in criminal activities. The recruits illegally crossed over to the military training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many of them were enticed into joining the "Namangan Battalion," which was under the command of Dzhumabai Khodzhiyev or, as he was better known, Dzhuma Namangani.

For years, Islamic groups have been dispatching to Uzbekistan militants who have had special diversionary training designed to enable them to destabilize Uzbek society and generate popular panic. Their numbers filled the ranks of the "Namangan Battalion." They employed robbery to fund their activities and murder to spread fear among the

citizenry. One of the first incidents that helped build the reputation of such groups took place in December, 1996. During the robbery of a Namangan traffic official named Mirzayev, the militants tortured the victim and then murdered his mother, wife, and two children before killing him.

The "Islamic Revival Movement of Uzbekistan" (IRMU) was formed in 1995. Three years later this organization changed its name to the "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan" (IMU). Under this name and with an emir in the person of Takhir Yuldashev, the IMU became well-known in connection with the tragic events of 1999 and 2000. The terrorist acts in Tashkent on February 16, 1999 resulted in the deaths of 16 people and the destruction of considerable property. When armed Islamic militants from the same group invaded the Batkansko region in July-October 2000, sixty Kyrgyz citizens were killed.

The Leadership of Central Asia's Radical Movement

In order to present a complete picture of this "Islamic army" and understand the pathological nature of its philosophy, it is necessary to study those who constitute the leadership of this movement.

Takhir Yuldashev, a high school dropout who transformed himself into an Islamic fundamentalist activist, became the self-proclaimed emir of the IMU. Yuldashev had been an active member of "Tovba" and helped in the creation of "Adolat" and "Islom Lashkarlari." According to Ismail Dadajanov, the leader of the coordinating council of democratic forces in the Ferghana Valley, "...Yuldashev possessed a unique ability to influence a crowd, a mastery of oratory skills, and knowledge of Islamic teachings. As a tactician, he understood the necessity for audacity in his planning. These qualities helped him move up in the ranks of religious extremists. They also attracted the attention of law enforcement officials and in 1992 he was indicted for a variety of crimes related to his radical activism. He was charged with direct involvement in a series of robberies carried out in 1991-1992. Among his most frequent targets were the apartments of prosperous citizens. Yuldashev's violence was demonstrated by his use of firearms and explosives in carrying out these criminal acts. In spite of the charges leveled against Yldashev, the criminal justice system failed to secure the

convictions necessary to end his activities.

During the Tajik civil war, Yuldashev played an active role on the side of the Islamic opposition. As justification for his actions, Yuldashev repeatedly emphasized that his crimes were not terrorism but rather part of an "Islamic Jihad." Yuldashev declared "we spill blood but the foundation of an Islamic republic is our goal". The consistent hallmark of Yuldashev's strategy was violence, and the murder of innocent people was a routine tactic. Almost a thousand years ago, the Islamic philosopher al-Gazali described people like Yuldashev as little more than "highwaymen attacking people in the name of religion." As a result of anti-terrorist efforts undertaken by Uzbek authorities and the continuing anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan, by 2006 Yuldashev had been forced to take refuge in western Pakistan.

Namangani, by contrast, had the benefit of a formal education and enjoyed the distinction of having fought both for and against Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan. He was a graduate of the Soviet Army's Ryazan Academy and served with distinction in combat against the Afghan resistance from 1987 until 1989.[6] After the collapse of the USSR, Namangani journeyed to Peshawar to study with Pakistan-based Islamic militants and played an active role in Tajikistan's civil war, a fact that gave him a dramatic, heroic aura. The "Namangan Battalion" was formed with the aid of the special services and ideological centers of a number of foreign countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan.[7]

In military affairs Namangani was considered a leader without equal. He was born in 1969 in the Namangan region of the Ferghana Valley and it is this region from which his eventual alias was drawn. After his conscription into the armed forces of the USSR, he served in an elite contingent of Soviet troops in Afghanistan as a paratrooper. Returning to his homeland in 1989, he acquired a reputation as a religious, daring, and bellicose young man. Around this time he became acquainted with Yuldashev and was recruited into "Tovba."

In 1992 Namangani became a fugitive from the Uzbek police authorities because of his participation in a series of crimes ranging from

[6] Cali Ruchala, *Sobaka Dossier*, 22 July 2002

[7] Interviews in Tashkent and Dushanbe, July, 2004

robbery to contract killing. In order to avoid prosecution, he fled to Tajikistan and joined the militants in the United Tajik Opposition. In this capacity, he was a close Yuldashev associate. In February 1993 he was reportedly in Afghanistan with the so-called Tajik government-in-exile, which was under the leadership of the Islamic radicals Said Abdullo Nuri and Akbar Turazhonzoda. As Yuldashev's formal representative, he was appointed an emir in the exile government. While in Afghanistan he received special training in camps located in the Takhor and Kunduz provinces and gained a reputation as a master of guerrilla warfare and tactical military operations. Upon his return to Tajikistan, Namangani became the commander of a terrorist training camp in the Karategen Valley. This camp had been founded by the notorious Jordanian-born terrorist known as Khattab, an individual who later died in combat in Chechnya.

By 1997 Namangani had gained control of a sizeable region in Tajikistan and established himself as a powerful drug baron. He enjoyed great influence among his former comrades-in-arms in the United Tajik Opposition. According to several Tajik officials, during this time he maintained close ties with Islamic radicals in Pakistan. These relationships, combined with the support he received from the Taliban, enabled Namangani to become a prominent figure in Osama bin Laden's Afghanistan. In 1999, he established a base of operations in Mazar-i-Sharif, a location that enabled him to join forces with multi-ethnic contingents who were joining the ranks of Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters.

Development of a Broader Agenda

The first indication that the IMU was expanding its agenda was its changing recruitment patterns. Before the US military move into Afghanistan, the IMU was recruiting radical Muslims in the Ferghana Valley, where the Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks live in uneasy proximity. After the US entry into Afghanistan, the IMU broadened its recruitment base to include a wider Central Asian audience as it emphasized its objectives outside Uzbekistan. Central Asian scholars began to describe the IMU as a "Pan-Central Asian movement."[8]

[8] K.N. Pandita, "Radical Islam in Central Asia," *Kashmir Herald*, Vol. 4, No. 4, October

Together, Yuldashev and Namangani transformed the IMU into the "Islamic Movement of Turkestan" or the "Khezbi Islomi Turkiston" ("KheIT") in May 2001. This transformation gave their organization a goal that extended far beyond the frontiers of Uzbekistan. Yuldashev and Namengani boasted that all of the radical Islamic movements and parties of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and the Xinjiang-Uygursk region of China had become affiliates of their group. Together, their more ambitious goal was to create an Islamic state covering all the territory of Central Asia and Eastern Turkestan. The IMU/KheIT claimed that the Islamic state would enjoy economic prosperity and be governed by an Islamic code that was not tainted by modern impurities.

The strategic plan of the leaders of the IMU was to take power by force, to repudiate Uzbekistan's secular constitution, and to spread the Islamic revolution to the neighboring states of Central Asia. After the foundation of the Islamic Party of Turkestan, Namangani announced its intention of "liberating" not only Uzbekistan, but all of Central Asia. These goals and action plans were consistent with those of Osama bin Laden, who had pledged to create a "pure Islamic state" or Caliphate throughout the post-Soviet Central Asian states, Afghanistan, and the Islamic regions of the Northern Caucasus. The attacks against Uzbekistan were simply the first steps in what was to be a wider Islamic revolution.

Funding for Radical Islam

This broader agenda failed to ignite the support that Yuldashev and Namengani envisioned. They enjoyed the support of few established states other than bin Laden's Afghanistan. While Pakistan and Saudi Arabia provided significant, albeit unofficial, support, the IMU/KheIT was unable to provide the revolutionary spark needed to bring radical Islam into power throughout the region.

Yet there was powerful support for the IMU/KheIT which came from many Islamic organizations throughout the world. Below is a list of all the Islamic organizations frequently cited in Central Asia as among the most likely IMU/KheIT supporters:

Afghanistan: "The Worldwide Front of Jihad" under the leadership of Osama bin Laden and the "Taliban" movement under Mullah Omar

Egypt, Jordan: "Muslim Brotherhood" represented by Saad Takha El-Laban

Pakistan: "Al Qaeda," "The Philanthropic Fund," the organizations "Dzhamaat-s Islama," "Davat Ul-Irshad," "Dzhamaat at-Tablig vad Daua," "Jihad in Motion," "The Society of Islamic Ulemas of Pakistan," "Kharakat ul-Ansor, "Kharakat ul-Muzheddin," "Khezbi Islami," "Khezbi Kharakati Jihad"

Saudi Arabia: "Worldwide Islamic Revival," "Ibraim bin-Abdulaziz Ibratm," the philanthropic society "Katar," "The International Islamic Aid Organization"

Tajikistan: The United Tajik Opposition, the Party for Islamic Revival in Tajikistan led by Khimmatzada

Turkey: "The Great Islamic Front," "The Islamic Party of Prosperity," "Milliy Gurush" ("National View") (Secretary Muhammad Kuchaka), "Nizami alem Ojakly," "The Seat of Islamic Order," the party "Refax" (Prosperity), "The Gray Wolves," The Middle Eastern Turkic Union"

Uygur organizations: "Islom Diniy Kharakati" ("The Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan"), "The Lobnor Tigers"

International Islamic organizations: "The Worldwide Islamic Bank", "Ikhwan al-Muslimun" ("The Association of the Muslim Brotherhood"), "Khizbut Takhrir," "Islamic Relief Worldwide" (Birmingham, Great Britain), "The Worldwide Assembly of Islamic Youth"

Of the external sources of support cited above, the most significant were Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda, the leadership of the Taliban movement, and Al Jihad. Funds generated by these three organizations have consistently passed through Pakistan's Fiesal Bank Limited. This is a pattern that began to emerge in the late 1990s.

The aid these organizations gave to the IMU consisted primarily of hard currency, weapons and narcotics. Yet, in what has become their typical fashion, the leaders of the IMU have never admitted receiving such support and have always maintained that they did not need the assistance of other groups or countries in the region. On May 17, 2001,

in an interview on the radio station "Ozodi," Yuldashev proudly proclaimed, "We are not in need; our sources are secret and will remain a secret."

As can be seen from the above list, the sources of financial support for the IMU did not remain secret for long. According to Bolt Zhanuzakov, Secretary of the Kyrgyz Security Council, at the peak of his power Namangani controlled about 70% of the narcotics moving along the northern sector of Central Asia. The processing, trade and transport of narcotics in Central Asia involves several million people, and the yearly turnover of all the narcotic industries is 14 billion dollars.[9] Studies conducted by the Central Asian Agency for Political Research maintain that one of the fundamental reasons for the intrusion of extremists on the territory of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was their desire to take control of the transport of narcotics from Afghanistan across the territories of these countries.

While the drug trade has ranked first in importance for funding, the IMU also developed lucrative ventures based on robbery, racketeering and hostage taking. In this respect, the group benefited from the services of many terrorists who began their professional lives as criminals with no religious orientation at all.

The Uzbek diaspora is another source of IMU funding. Numbering hundreds of thousands, the Uzbek emigrants are found throughout the Middle East and have enjoyed considerable economic success over the generations. Approximately 700,000 third or fourth generation emigrants from the Ferghana Valley live in Saudi Arabia while another two million Uzbeks live in Afghanistan.

Popular Support for the IMU Agenda

It is important to note that the extremists of the IMU have found sympathy among a significant minority (see the polls results mentioned below) in parts of Uzbekistan and southern Kyrgyzstan. This development is the result of the Muslim population's weak knowledge of Islam and its history and an inadequate, at times even perverted, perception of its norms, orders and rites. Restrictions on Islam during

[9] Olkott M.Brill and N. Udalova-Evart, Drug Trafficking on the Great Silk Road: Security in Central Asia. Volume 2, 2000. Moscow. 2000, p. 13

the Soviet era created difficulties in the development of Islamic instruction and, with the infiltration of radical Islamic elements from turbulent regions in the Middle East, it is not surprising that the population suffers from such educational deficiencies.

Public opinion polls conducted on the basis of random sampling in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan demonstrate that there is a small core of citizens who support the basic propositions of the Islamic fundamentalists. Those surveys show the following:

- 18.8% of respondents in Uzbekistan believe that religious activists should be involved in politics as a matter of necessity.
- Almost a third of respondents in Kyrgyzstan expressed agreement with the idea of giving the Shariat the status of fundamental law.[10]

An examination of the ideological positions of the IMU demonstrates their complete commitment to the goal of creating a Central Asian Caliphate. Yet, the IMU's actions have supported the conclusion that their Islamic rhetoric is merely a façade for justification of violent criminality. Many local Muslims see them as detrimental to the peace-loving humanistic essence of the Islamic religion. The IMU activists portray Jihad as a holy war in the name of establishing "a just society in accordance with Islamic traditions." In this, the IMU is playing on the age-old aspirations of Muslims for justice. They employ a slogan that is attractive to the religious feelings of devout Muslims: "The way of Allah is the truest way out of the current social economic crisis." Through their violent, criminal actions, however, the IMU activists betray their insincerity.

The IMU's Islamic rhetoric, by itself, would be a weak draw and it is undoubtedly the difficult social trends and demographic conditions that have done the most to exacerbate the situation in the Ferghana Valley region. Furthermore, local officials are not able to meet even the most elementary needs of the younger generation. These problems will lead to an increase in the number of IMU supporters. In such an environment the IMU has been able to recruit representatives of different nationalities and to use women for maintaining links with their supporters throughout Central Asia.

[10] Public opinion polls conducted by co-author Bakhodir Musayev, 2002

"Khezbi Takhrir" and the Manipulation of Ideas and Images

The IMU is by no means the only organization that is utilizing rhetoric and social difficulties to advance the radical cause. Increasingly influential is the organization "Khezbi Takhrir" ("Liberation Party" in Arabic) or Hizb ut-Tahrir, as it is also known, which is committed to the creation of a regional Caliphate. Since September 2001, there has been a widespread assumption that while the IMU was losing influence within Central Asia, "Khezbi Takhrir" was enjoying an increase in its popularity and authority. According to Dr. Vitaly Naumkin, the head of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the post-Soviet regimes are responsible for this development. "Persecution of Islamist activists by Central Asian governments," Naumkin writes "...creates new martyrs, increasing Hizb ut-Tahrir's popularity and broadening its social support."[11]

Despite their proclaimed opposition to violence or unification with other Islamic movements, including the IMU, the current members of "Khezbi Takhrir" are actually the main recruiting contingent for the emissaries of the Islamic movement throughout Central Asia. According to the leaders of the Islamic Movement of Turkestan, the members of "Khezbi Takhrir" would represent a "fifth Column" should there be an armed conflict with government forces in the Central Asian states. In essence, the ideological activity of "Khezbi Takhrir" generates support for creation of the Caliphate and provides explanations about its construction. Such instruction supports the creation of internal underground supporters of a Caliphate. In a speech on *Radio Meshkheda* on January 18, 2001, the leader of the party announced that it already had 60,000 members in Uzbekistan and 20,000 in Tajikistan.

The activity of the Islamists of "Khezbi Takhrir" represents an imposing threat if one views it within the context of a deteriorating nation-state system. Widespread indications of growing poverty throughout the region highlight suggestions that some of the post-Soviet states are "failed states." According to numerous international

[11] Vitaly V. Naumkin, "Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," University of California: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Papers, Spring, 2003, pp. 4-5

specialists, there are 28 million Central Asians living in poverty. In Uzbekistan 30-35% of the population lives below the poverty line, while Turkmenistan faces a 50% poverty rate. Kyrgyzstan, with 60% impoverished, is even worse and Tajikistan is struggling with a 70% poverty rate.[12] Such conditions cannot fail to increase the attraction offered by groups like "Khezbi Takhrir."

The success of the Islamists is harder to assess when it concerns working with young people, many of whom fall outside the systems for recording and reporting of political or social activism. It is significant that "Khezbi Takhrir" energetically recruits young men from the ranks of the intelligentsia and university students.

Their unstable situations and the difficult conditions of a transforming society have made such recruitments easier. Social and psychological instability and a heightened emotional perception of the burdens of ones life constitute an infallible recipe for discontent. The "politically homeless," an increasingly significant segment of post-Communist society, find it difficult to resist the call of a radical Islam that promises to restore the sense of justice they once associated with the Soviet promise.

For Central Asia, the Soviet experience and the post-Soviet transformation have had a combined effect of isolating much of the population from the ethnicity and culture that could have preserved a sense of identity. In other words, the Soviets cast out the demon of cultural identity only to have others rush into the vacuum as the Soviet system decayed. The resultant nihilism has a morbid side which characterizes those young people who find themselves in a marginal social position. For them nihilism is a spiritual condition characterized by belief in neither God nor the devil, neither the present nor the future. This spiritual vacuum represents an irresistible opportunity for Islamist recruiters who want to inculcate the spirit of religious extremism associated with violent fundamentalist movements. Destructive instincts of Central Asian youth in this category are unlimited.

"Khezbi Takhrir" was founded by the theologian Takiyud Dinom al-

[12] Central Asia 2010: Perspectives of Human Development. p. 10, Moscow: Novosti Press, 2002

Nabkhani, a Palestinian, in the early 1950s. Its literature began appearing in Uzbekistan in the 1980s. More recently, beginning in the first years of independence, the flow of literature into Uzbekistan has steadily increased. It is noteworthy that the publications, translated into Uzbek and Russian, are spread throughout the country jointly with underground leaflets. One of the coauthors of this paper had the opportunity to acquaint himself with these books, brochures, and leaflets when they were stuffed into his mailbox in Tashkent. The contents of these publications create a strong, disturbing impression. The themes of these publications are evidence of the fact that the threat of religious extremism is not the leisurely fear of certain political scientists but an actual threat to the region and to all civilized people of the world. Those who warn that these cultural and historical displacements are a force for the destruction of human individuality and human community are correct.[13] Organizations such as "Khezbi Takhrir" and other political structures associated with Uzbekistan's religious extremists, all of which are distinguished by destructive social arrangements and actions, represent pathological thinking at its worst. Paul Berman has categorized such Islamic tendencies as totalitarian reactions against Western liberalism just as Nazism and Communism represented anti-liberal totalitarianism.[14]

The ideological credo of "Khezbi Takhrir" is clearly presented in the assertions of the group's founder. "In Islam," writes Nabkhani, "doctrine is meant to be the foundation of the society, including all thought, tempers, opinions and systems flowing out of this doctrine. Moreover, Islamic society appears in the world when Islamic thinking and temper is predominant and the Islamic way of life is spreading widely among people, that is, an Islamic system organizing the life of society."[15] Maintenance of the Islamic system, he argues, will require "a

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[13] Rashkovskii E.B., Zhuravskii A.B. Muslim Legal Consciousness in the Modern City: The Problem of

Perceiving Western Political and Legal Norms// *Cities in the East, Guardians of Tradition and Catalysts of Change*. Moscow: Novosti Press, 1990, p.260

[14] Paul Berman makes a connection to historical fascism in his analysis in *Terror and Liberalism*. (W. W. Norton, 2004)

[15] Nabkhani T. "System of Islam". 1953, p. 45

clearing of physical obstacles on this path"[16] and the use of force will likely be necessary in this connection.[17] It is in this context that Nabkhani declares that the creation of a global Islamic state is the long-term goal of his organization.[18]

In *The Propaganda of Islam*, a book written by "Khezbi Takhrir" functionary Muhammad Uvaiz, there is a passage that reveals the essence of the movement's strategies and techniques: "In the original stage the party worked with the properly religiously trained individuals, who in the future would be able to spread its ideas. After the consciousness and acts of these people began to reflect the spirit of Islam they would be called upon to spread these ideas among the people. As a result they edge their way into a spiritual and political struggle in the society. And then the heads of state would start a war against the party, during which many of the followers would be thrown in prison. But in spite of this, the party, relying on Allah, will continue its work."[19]

"Khezbi Takhrir" first appeared in Uzbekistan as an underground organization in 1992. They constructed an affiliated Uzbek party and regional departments of that party. In the years 1999-2000, nearly 200 emissaries of the party were detained and police confiscated thousands of leaflets which called for jihad and the overthrow of secular government in Central Asia. Two years later similar leaflets were being distributed in the cities of Osh, Uzgen, and Karasu in southern Kyrgyzstan. A standard theme of the leaflets was expressed in the slogan "The world is full of evil. Only the caliphate, built on the foundation of Islam, can save it."

Radical Islamic leaflets were distributed throughout Uzbekistan. The leaflets called for a holy war against all unbelievers, the destruction of western states and pro-western Arab states. It is important to note, however, that "Khezbi Takhrir" is careful to disavow explicit calls for violence. In a *Radio Ozodlik* broadcast on January 18, 2002, Abdullah Yuldashev, a member of this religious organization from the city of

[16] Nabkhani. "Decrees, Essays". p. 61.
[17] *ibid*
[18] Nabkhani. "The Concept of Khezbi Takhrir". p. 78.
[19] Quotations are taken from the pamphlets.

Karacu in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan, maintained that "the party considers armed seizure to be the wrong path to power—most important is the political and ideological struggle. We will never take up arms because we have a clear program."

The "Khezbi Takhrir" leaflet campaign demonstrates a sophistication lacking in IMU appeals. A careful study of some of the most common of these tracts, including "The System of Islam," "The Concept of Khezbi Takhrir," and "Party Unity," reveals that the Islamists have a keen sense of how to use popular stereotypes. They have taken into account the powerful influence of imagery on popular thinking in Central Asia. In fact, this influence creates a deep association of the stereotype with the traditionalism of the myth-oriented consciousness so common in this region.

The stereotype is a basic part of the emotional ammunition of radical Islam and has been effective in advancing the Islamists' struggle to control popular feelings and values in Central Asia. Militant Islam has skillfully advanced the stereotype of the post-Soviet entrepreneur as Jewish, westernized and criminal. The efficacy of this image was demonstrated by a public opinion poll conducted by Bakhodir Musayev

in Uzbekistan in the fall of 1996. According to the survey, 27% of the respondents view the post-Soviet changes as detrimental to their welfare. Popular dissatisfaction with change is, at least in part, a consequence of the activities of Islamic radical attribute current difficulties to what they describe as misplaced reforms. the presence and perhaps the explicit directives of a powerful conservative political counterweight to the post-Soviet reformers. The radical Islamists have made common cause with those people who embrace a Soviet/Islamist conception of the world. Given the size of this group, it is not surprising that societal changes may be viewed as a violation of the fundamentals of the universe. It is not difficult to understand such people and the losses they have experienced in the post-Soviet era. The "Khezbi Takhrir" leaflet campaign has contributed to negative popular images about changes since 1991.

The "Khezbi Takhrir" philosophy represents a response to popular sentiment and offers the prospect of a strategy that will translate popular frustration into policy. In their denunciations of "enemies,

infidels, national-enemies, imperialism, and even communism, the disciples of "Khezbi Takhrir" embrace the hackneyed stereotypes that fuel the widespread dissatisfaction with the post-Soviet system. Many Central Asian intellectuals believe that such stereotypes have become a guide for action by an "army of Islamist-zombies" who are being directed by organizations such as "Khezbi Takhrir", the IMU and affiliated groups driven by their "energy of evil." Central Asian students of radical Islam believe that "Khezbi Takhrir" is dependent on the material and financial support of the leaders of the violent organizations from which they often distance themselves in public.[20] "Khezbi Takhrir" leader Abu al-Kadim Zallum, who was born in 1925 in the Palestinian city of Al-Khalil, now lives in Jordan but the main coordinating center of his organization is not located in the Middle East, where the party is banned, but in London, far from the Muslim world. Here may be found the Internet server that maintains their web site and disseminates its materials that are published in Arabic, Turkish, English, German, Urdu, Malay and Russian. The London party is headed by a Syrian, Sheik Omar Bakri Mohammed.

The Future of Radical Islamic Movements

Future prospects for radical Islamic movements in Central Asia rest on two factors. The *first* is the state of the IMU and allied movements in the aftermath of the US-led military operations in Afghanistan. In the first years following the American military intervention there was a general assumption that the IMU was a "spent force." Because it had concentrated its forces in the northern part of Afghanistan, the IMU endured devastating combat losses throughout 2002 and found itself without support from Al Qaeda and the Taliban.[21] However, the terrorist attacks in 2004 were evidence of the persistence of an active component of terrorists willing to die in order to fulfill the IMU agenda. In the final weeks of 2003 there were reports that military operations in Afghanistan had not, in fact, destroyed the IMU forces. In September 2003, Kyrgyz military authorities claimed that shepherds had seen armed

[20] This assumption is based on conversations with numerous scholars, journalists, and researchers in Tashkent and other Central Asian capitals.

[21] "Islam in Central Asia: Religion, Politics, and Moderation", *The Economist*, May 17, 2003

groups, presumably IMU fighters, in remote areas. Those same officials maintain that in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan there are over five hundred people who have ties with the IMU. Uzbek officials have cited evidence that there is an IMU presence in mountainous areas of Uzbekistan's Surkhandarya administrative region. Moreover, Bahtier Uzakov, a former IMU fighter who is Namangani's nephew, upon receiving amnesty from the Uzbek government after his return from Afghanistan, claimed that the IMU has an Afghan-based force of over two thousand men and is well-organized in spite of Namangani's death.[22]

In 2004, reports from Pakistan noted a growing presence of IMU fighters as well as Islamic terrorists from allied groups. In October, the kidnapping of two Chinese engineers working in an irrigation project in South Waziristan called attention to an increasing Islamic threat. Most of the Pakistan-based activities late in 2004 were directed against Chinese interests and were conducted in cooperation with Uighur groups which have long benefited from IMU support. The South Waziristan area has increasingly been recognized as a base for the terrorist infrastructure of numerous Chechen, Uzbek and Uighur organizations operating out of Pakistan. Pakistani journalists have reported that the Uzbek contingent numbers no fewer than two hundred heavily armed fighters.[23]

While there may be disagreement about the size of remaining IMU cells, there is widespread agreement that the IMU is regrouping in the aftermath of what was clearly a difficult experience in combat against US forces in Afghanistan. In 2006, the Central Asia Project of the International Crisis Group reported that there is significant support for the IMU in the Ferghana Valley and that individuals and groups sympathetic to the IMU are active throughout Central Asia. Yet, many of the IMU fighters have merged with the Taliban and are being drawn into combat in Afghanistan. Specialists such as Ahmed Rashid, however, maintain that the global war on terror has destroyed the IMU as a

[22] Igor Rotar, "The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan: A Resurgent IMU?," *Jamestown Foundation: Terrorism Report,* Volume 1, Issue 8, December 18, 2003

[23] B.Ramen, "Another Terrorist Attack on Chinese Engineers in Pakistan," Paper No. 1145, *South Asia Analysis Group,* October 18, 2004

credible military threat.[24]

The *second* concern is the Central Asian social environment. It is vital to determine if present conditions constitute the social foundations for radical Islam. The actions of the religious extremists, as seen in the example of the IMU and "Khezbi Takhrir," are assuming a large scale, geo-strategic character and present a threat to both Central Asian and European nations. In all likelihood, Russia is their first target.

Therefore, it is appropriate to note S. L. Frank's words of caution: "We need urgent efforts not to lose the accumulated resources of knowledge and moral skills in the turnover of the generations... But the political experience of our generation teaches that, more than this, intense energy is needed to guard the resources and level of culture we have achieved from the powerful forces that seek their destruction...."[25]

In the present situation the exponents of such tendencies, be they "ideological" or practical, cannot provide intellectual justification for their actions. Their pathological group thinking and their violent acts are signs of coming anarchy and anti-governmental agitation. Consequently, governmental officials have found themselves involved in discussions about who is to blame for this situation. Scholars explore the question of what it takes to drive people toward political extremes that will evolve into armed conflict. Even more troubling is the debate about whether this journey is motivated by thoughtlessness or by cunning.

The journalist Halami Bukharbayev has observed that Uzbekistan entered the 21st century during a cruel secular-religious conflict in which religion became an instrument for an opposition committed to religious objectives that were transformed into a political agenda.[26] Yet, such pessimism need not constitute the cement that will lock the nation into permanent violence. There is a chance to stop what N. Rerikh has referred to as the "sword of destruction."

In order to avoid such a future, it is essential to end the unnecessary arguments about who is to blame. It is possible to find a constructive way

[24] "Central Asia: Focus on Security Threat From Radical Islamic Groups," www.IRINnews.org, (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), February 2, 2006

[25] S. L. Frank, *Spiritual Foundations of Society*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1992, Pp. 440-41

[26] Is the Local Conflict Growing into a Regional War?, Bishkek, 2001, p. 25

out of this conflict only by avoiding bitter recriminations. In fact, if we recognize the depth of social tensions and conflicts, it is not surprising that radical forces are trying to bring about change through the processes of confrontation. The executive authorities, on the other hand, are employing legitimate methods of force but are unwittingly provoking retaliatory actions by the extremists as well as others who have been forced into the margins of society by difficult economic circumstances. The emerging situation in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries exposes the futility and destructiveness of violent methods. While police and military activities are essential, broad social actions need to be employed in addition to the responses of the security services.

According to the scholarly researcher B. Babajanov, "our government, it seems, is beginning to realize that fundamentalism is one of the radical forms of protest against economic disorder, against hidden and direct pressures. The fact that measures have been outlined by the republic for liquidating the social and economic problems that contribute to the popularity of the fundamentalists does inspire some hope. However, we need to realize that many mistakes have been committed and therefore, I think, the political and extremist potential in the Fergana region has still not been exhausted."[27]

Babajanov's thoughtful analysis leads to several conclusions. First of all, the measures taken by the executive authorities enjoy popular support. Second, the bombings in Tashkent, the events in southern Kyrgyzstan in 1999-2000, and the armed clashes in the Surkhandarin oblast of Uzbekistan in the summer of 2000 demonstrate the necessity of developing policies that are responsive to both violence and the conditions that prompt violence. Finally, only such balanced policies will change the cruel reality of violence in Central Asia and the corresponding repressive thinking that brings about overreactions that are counterproductive.

In philosophical terms, it is essential to raise questions about how a genuinely free person is formed. One must recognize that most people have a need for a belief system that is relatively straightforward. Most

[27] B. Babajanov, "The Fergana Valley: The Source or the Victim of Islamic Fundamentalism?," *Central Asia and the Caucasus,* No.4 (5), 2002, p.131.

people operate more comfortably in an environment of consensus on basic notions of what is right and what is wrong. Such an environment enables people to enjoy a degree of freedom that was defined within the Soviet context. According to the philosopher A. A. Khamidov, it was not at all long ago that "the simple Soviet man" lived in a thoroughly comprehensible world. This gave him the certainty that the truth of the world had long existed in a ready and immutable form.[28] This was not the freedom of the Western world but it was a workable, secure alternative to that freedom. The violence of the post-Soviet era shattered that security. Many of the peoples of Central Asia have conveniently forgotten the Gulags that touched their lives. Memory is kind and all too few people remember the insecurities of the totalitarian state that once provided social services and full employment.

And finally, the suggestion the Russian journalist Arkadii Dubanov made at a conference in Alma-Ata in November 2000 on the events in Batkent requires careful consideration.[29] Partially agreeing with those who view armed terrorist attacks as a response to the actions of government officials, Dubanov emphasized the importance of dialogue in the context of the Batkent conflict.[30] "There is no need to conduct a dialogue with bandits, they need to be eliminated. But in order to be sure that they do not reappear, we need to take measures to forestall them. This can be done by means of dialogue."[31] Summing up his reflections, he observed that "dialogue is a constant process. It is by means of dialogue that we need to remove their target, if it is undesirable."[32]

Such suggestions are evidence of consistent support for nonviolent methods of settling conflicts. Yet, in the current environment, these suggestions are unlikely to be transformed into policy. In contemporary Central Asia, the acts of religious extremists, clothed in Islamic rhetoric, constitute an effort to destabilize the entire region and spark armed

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[28] A. Khmidov, Categories and Culture, Alma-ata, 1992. pp 200-201

[29] In August, 1999, a band of guerillas operating out of Tajikistan and led by an associate of Juma Namangani invaded Kyrgyzstan's Batkent district and took hostages.

[30] Is the Local Conflict Growing into a Regional War? Bishkek: Central Publishing House, 2001, p.25

[31] *ibid*

[32] *ibid*

conflicts. Critics argue that conducting a struggle with a radical Islamic movement that has both economic roots and military aid is difficult if not hopeless. They may well be proven correct in their negative assessments.

Among the ranks of analysts in Central Asia, these negative expectations were reinforced by the tragic events of September 11. The attacks on the United States brought into the public arena recognition of the fact that there were forces that openly expressed a desire to destroy the existing state system throughout the non-fundamentalist world. The radical Muslims, in effect, made common cause with secular officials whose repressive tendencies encouraged overreactions that merely fueled the fires of radical Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan and elsewhere in Central Asia. The radicals' success would result in a sharpening social and cultural divide and, eventually, in a catastrophic and destructive global clash.

Skeptics might observe that such a characterization is overly dramatic. Yet, the reality of regional developments over the past five years is that violence and strife are increasing. Moreover, well-known and established analysts such as Zbigniew Brzezinski have spoken of the dark future of Central Asia and the cruel wars likely to take place there if methods of conflict resolution and social advancement are not implemented.