RELIGION IN SOCIETY

CENTRAL ASIA: THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION AND THE THREAT OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

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Introduction

In Central Asia, religion is gradually coming to the fore in everyday life as a fairly integrated phenomenon with a wide range of functions: consolidation of ethnic self-awareness, shaping spiritual and moral culture together with the awareness of being part of a religious and the world community; fulfilling social functions through religious prescriptions; formulating the ideals of social justice, as well as man's duty to the state and the state's to man, etc.[1]

Some of the functions, however, are internally contradictory: consolidation of the religious community does not always bring society together. In other words, in some cases religion might exacerbate the relations between the state and the religious part of society.

Religious consolidation not infrequently revives old problems and breeds disagreements inside society; conscientious believers often make too rigid demands of the state (which turns them into the opposition), while any encroachments on the religious principle of fairness may stir up protest feelings.

In different countries, religious communities have different reasons for and ways of opposing the state; however, there is one common denominator: the gap between the religious interpretation of justice and the duties of the faith-

[1] See: R. Rakhimov, "Svoeobrazie islama v Tsentralnoy Azii," *Rossia i musulmansky mir* (INION, IV RAN), No. 1, 2011, pp. 97-114.

ful, on the one hand, and state expediency, on the other.

Not all religious communities disagree with the state: the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) insist on obedience to the authorities (since all authority is given by God, Allah). These religious teachings contain certain reservations which permit disobedience, and religious radicals never miss the chance to exploit them.

America, which tends to exploit religious radicalism to maintain instability in Central Asia, is another factor of the mounting religiously-motivated extremism and terrorism.

This is the context in which religions are functioning in Central Asia.[2]

[2] See: *Tsentralnaia Azia segodnia: vyzovy i ugrozy*, ed. by K.L. Syroezhkin, KISI, Almaty, 2011, pp. 130-156; D. Fayzullaev, "Radikalizatsia islama v postsovetskoy Tsentralnoy Azii," *Azia i Afrika segodnia*, No. 11, 2008, pp. 15-19; A.V. Mitrofanova, "Tsentralnaia Azia i radikalny islam," *Azia i Afrika segodnia*, No. 2, 2009, pp. 50-56; A. Nanaeva, "Islamskiy fundamentalism kak osnova razvitia politicheskogo islama v iuzhnom regione Tsentralnoy Azii," *Rossia i musulmansky mir*, No. 2, 2009, pp. 79-85; D. Chaudet, "Islamist Terrorism in Greater Central Asia: The 'Al-Qaedization' of Uzbek Jihadism," *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 35, IFRI. Russia/NIS Center, Paris, 2008, 29 pp.

Islam's Development Trends in the Region

There are several opinions in Central Asia about religion and its development.

It is believed that Islam is strengthening its position in many spheres of the public and personal life of the local population, the bulk of which regards itself as Muslim. Some five or six years ago this was a mere formality, while today, Muslims are demonstrating much greater interest in Islam and its meanings.

- One third of the total number of Muslims only pay lip service to their faith; this suggests answers to some of the questions. Why are the Salafis relatively successful in the region? The answer is obvious: the considerable interest in Islam breeds numerous questions, the answers to which are supplied by the Salafis rather than the official Muslim clergy. Muslims who pay lip service know next to nothing about the fundamentals of Islam, which makes them easy prey for extremists.[3] This explains why, despite the obvious absurdity of their arguments, extremists have no shortage of supporters in Central Asia.
- The second trend is closely associated with the first: the regional countries are Islamized, which has positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, Islam brings spiritual health to society and can positively affect local politics. However, the other side of the coin is that by insisting on strict obedience to the Shari'a, the Islamists overburden society, which can be treated as a negative aspect.
- The third trend, viz. the secular nature of all the local states, compensates for the region's growing Islamization. The diverse opinions about the future of Islam and its impact on the state system in different countries of the region can be put in a nutshell: the majority of the region's population prefers to live in secular states.

  Sociological polls drew an even clearer picture of what people want: from 55% of those who favor secular regimes in Kyrgyzstan (the lowest share: the local people are prepared to

[3] See also: E. Freedman, "Authoritarian Regimes, Muslims' Religious Rights in Central Asia and Lack of Foreign Press Coverage of Rights Violations," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 11, Issue 1, 2010; M.B. Olcott, "Velika li ugroza jihada v Tsentralnoy Azii," *Pro et contra*, No. 2, 2009, pp. 39-52.

accept Islam as a "bond" needed to keep the people together in a fairly shaky state) to 90% in Kazakhstan. The other states lie somewhere between the two extremes.

- The fourth trend is the diminishing of direct foreign influence on the nature of Islam in Central Asia. This has happened for several reasons:

  (1) the spiritual administrations of the Muslims of Central Asia (which are frequently and justly criticized) remain within the traditional Hanafi maddhab, which is the most loyal to the state and popular traditions;

  (2) the authorities in all the countries are working hard to prevent infiltration of extremism and its impact on the region's Islamic structures by tightening laws and cutting down on the number of those who study Islam abroad.[4]

Today, foreign influence on the nature of Islam professed in the region is much weaker than before; in the past it was considerable and is still bearing fruit: foreign missionaries planted the seeds of non-traditional versions of Islam in Central Asia.

The current landslide in the radicalization of Islam is explained by the following:

- Widespread poverty and property gaps;
- Inadequate efforts of the state in education, health protection, etc;
- The power struggle between clans and groups;
- Disdain for the basic democratic principles (human rights, rule of law, etc.);
- The people's inability to affect decision-making at the state level;
- Many years of foreign missionaries' successful efforts to spread radical Islam in the region;
- The external geopolitical impact, of which radical Islam is the main instrument.

The Republic of Kyrgyzstan

According to official sources, 80% of the country's total population belongs to the Muslim community, which includes about 20 ethnic groups: 60% are Kyrgyz; about 15% are Uzbeks; over 5% are Kazakhs, Tatars, Tajiks, Dungans, Uighurs, Turks, Bashkirs, Chechens, Darginians, etc. Nearly all of them are Sunnis (the Hanafi maddhab); no more than 1,000 belong to Shi'a Islam.

There are three Islamic universities, seven Islamic institutes, and 52 madrassahs in the republic; about three thousand imams serve in 2,050 mosques. The figures were supplied by Supreme Mufti of Kyrgyzstan Ch. azhy Zhalilov at a press conference on 19 April, 2011.

Over 1,700 mosques, nine Islamic higher educational establishments, 60 madrassahs, and about the same number of centers, public funds, and associations are officially registered with the State Commission for Religious Affairs.[5] About one thousand functioning mosques are not registered.

The number of religious facilities in the republic is on the rise; in 2010 alone, 100 new mosques were registered, many of them built on money supplied by Muslim countries.

[4] See: A.V. Shustov, "Transformatsia etnokonfessionalnoy struktury novykh nezavisimykh gosudarstv Tsentralnoy Azii (1990-e—pervoe desiatiletie 2000-kh gg.)", *Vostok-Oriens* (IV RAS), No. 5, 2011, pp. 98-115.

[5] See: K. Malikov, "Voprosy modernizatsii obrazovatelnykh uchrezhdeniy v Kirgizstane," *Rossia i musulmansky mir*, No. 1, 2010, pp. 103-109.

A public opinion poll about the people's attitude to the much more active propaganda of Islam produced the following figures: 76.6% are positive; 2.5% percent are negative; 8.6% are neutral; while 12.3% are undecided.

The republic's official Muslim community is headed by the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (DUMK); despite the fact that new heads were appointed in 2010, the structure is not very popular among the congregation. Two Sufi orders (Naqshbandia and Qadiriya) are more popular than the others.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is the largest religious minority; it counts all Russians and Russian-speakers as its followers (which means that religious affiliation is identified with ethnic). They comprise about 10% of the total number (5.2 million). There are 55 Orthodox parishes, one Orthodox convent, and four church schools; there are also two parishes of Old Believers and four Roman Catholic parishes.

There are about 280 Protestant communities in the republic (48 Baptist; 21 Lutheran; 49 Pentecostal; 35 Presbyterian; 45 communities of the Charismatic Church; 49 communities of Jehovah's Witnesses; and 30 communities of Seventh-Day Adventists).

The Church of Christ with about 14 thousand parishioners (35% of whom are ethnic Kyrgyz) is the largest of the Protestant communities.

There is a Jewish community in the republic; its synagogue is very active in the public and humanitarian sphere: it distributes food, teaches Jewish culture, etc.

The small Buddhist community uses one temple; there are 12 Bahai prayer houses.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic was enacted by a presidential decree on 12 January, 2009.

Parallel Islam is represented by non-traditional Wahhabi or Salafi jamaats (Hizb ut-Tahrir, Akhmadiya, Nurjiler, Suleymania, etc.).

Since 2005, the number of Muslims who prefer radical Islam has been steadily increasing; according to leading Kyrgyz experts, Salafis and Wahhabis are expanding the area of their activities. They pointed out that the Salafis presented no threat to the leading regimes; they do not claim political power, which means they could essentially be left in peace. However, there is one stumbling block: their teaching distorts the religious foundations of the Hanafi maddhab, the religion of the absolute majority of the region's Muslims. And this is absolutely true.

Radical Islamic trends have been readily embraced in Kyrgyzstan not only because of the poverty of the absolute majority and the weak state, but also because none of the Muslim leaders tried to oppose the radical trends.

In Kyrgyzstan, only 30 to 40% of the imams have special theological education; the clan system and corruption in the religious sphere cause social, economic, political, and spiritual frustration. In this context, the social aspects of radical proliferation are easily blended with Islamist ideology; radical protest generates Islamist feelings, and vice versa.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) stepped up its activities in light of the ethnic conflicts between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 2010. They plundered several Orthodox churches (an unprecedented event in the republic's history); the synagogue was bombed (no casualties according to the law enforcers).

Orthodox priest Father Dmitry said that "at the same time an Orthodox cemetery was desecrated in the north of Kirgizia; over 30 graves were destroyed." He also said that the republic had recently lived through a wave of plundering of Protestant prayer houses; in the last two months, 15 Protestant churches had suffered. "Everything happened according to the same pattern: a group of four or six armed Asians in masks burst into the churches; they attacked the guard, tied him up, and tortured him; some guards died. They stole everything of value, mainly money."

On 18 January, when speaking at a meeting of the Parliamentary Committee for Defense and Security, Minister of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic Z. Rysaliev said that there were 1,279 terrorists registered in the republic (86.1% of whom were born in the south); 1,192 of them support Hizb ut-Tahrir; 49 are Wahhabis; 36 are Akromists, and two are IMU members.

On the whole, between 1999 and 2010, the country lived through 1,059 acts of extremism; in 2010, there were 101 known instances, 64 of them led to criminal cases; 21 cases were sent to the State National Security Committee for further investigation. In 2010, law enforcers confiscated 12,179 extremist materials (including 3,151 leaflets; 126 magazines; 3,168 books; 7 brochures; 22 newspapers; and 67 videos).

Foreign special services are also aware of the activities of Islamist radicals in Kyrgyzstan. The Country Report on Terrorism 2008 of the U.S. Department of State based on secret service reports pointed out that between 2006 and 2008 the number of members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an "extremist political movement advocating the establishment of a borderless, theocratic Islamic state throughout the entire Muslim world" increased by 10 thousand (from 5 to 15 thousand). Its members congregate in the south among the compact communities of ethnic Uzbeks, however, as the report says, it is "reportedly achieving an increased following in the north as well. Kyrgyz officials reported growing support for and bolder public outreach by HT."

On 26 May, 2009, the Ministry of Interior of Kyrgyzstan refuted what the Department of State had written in its report relating to the number of members of Hizb ut-Tahrir operating in the republic.

Illegal activities with religious undertones have not subsided. On 1 August, 2011 an armed group suspected of contacts with the Union of Islamic Jihad, an international terrorist organization, was detained outside Bishkek. There were two law enforcers among its members, one of whom resisted arrest and was killed. Huge amounts of firearms were confiscated; seven members were arrested and taken to the State National Security Committee; the other law enforcer escaped and was put on the wanted list.

The government, the DUMK, and other official Islamic structures have been trying in vain to gain a grip on the developments. In November 2010, the DUMK adopted a fatwa on the preservation of interconfessional consent in coordination with the State Agency for Religious Affairs; at their joint meeting the two structures condemned those who looted churches and prayer houses during the 2010 conflict. Their spokesmen announced that "these were crimes pure and simple with no other undertones." The qadis of the regions and the imams of all the mosques were instructed to explain to the Muslims that religious intolerance could not be accepted.

Kyrgyz officials discussed a ban on education in religious establishments abroad. K. Uzakov, head of the republican State Committee, pointed out, "It would be expedient to ban religious education for our young men abroad since religious extremism threatens our state security;" to stress the point he referred to Tajikistan.

He deemed it necessary to point out that Wahhabism is the state religion in several Islamic countries and went on to say, "we do not know what sort of education our young men can receive there." He insisted that there are over 50 higher and secondary educational establishments and that those who teach there are "adequately educated."

Deputy Head of the Department of Internal Affairs of the Osh Region M. Nurdinov was of the same opinion: the imam killed during a special operation on 29 November, 2010, had studied abroad; "the other one, who dispatched young men to terrorist camps, allegedly for education purposes, studied abroad for about five years."

According to experts, Islamization in Kyrgyzstan is going on at a pace unmatched in the other Central Asian republics. About 50% of the republic's total population sided with the idea of an Islamic state.

The Republic of Tajikistan

According to expert assessments, 97% percent of the population (slightly over 7 million) are Muslims; according to the government, the share is 99%. Most of the Muslims belong to the Hanafi maddhab of Sunni Islam; a law of March 2009 made it the official religion. Minister of Culture M. Asrori explained that the new law was prompted by "religious radicalism, nihilism, and some other Islamic trends alien to our people spreading in our country." About 4% are Ismailites who live in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region and in several districts of the Hatlon Region and in Dushanbe.

There are 27 central mosques, 325 cathedral mosques, 3,334 juma mosques, and one Jamoatkhona (Ismaelian religious community) in the country. The cathedral mosques are free to elect their imams, publish periodicals, and run Islamic publishing houses (according to the data of the Department for Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Culture as of 1 August, 2010).

There is an Islamic university in Tajikistan and 19 registered madrassahs (figures for September 2010); religious education in private homes is banned; religious structures can set up their schools and grammar schools; in 2009, a new subject, Islamic Studies, was added to the secondary school curriculum (for the eighth to eleventh grades).

By 2010, the Department for Religious Affairs had registered 83 non-Islamic groups, the largest of them being Orthodox Christians (150 thousand). There are also Baptists, Roman Catholics, Seventh-Day Adventists, Lutherans, and Protestant Korean denominations.

In Dushanbe and other big cities, there are even some very small religious communities (Bahais, Zoroastrians, and Judaists).

Some religious communities are either banned or not registered; two local Christian groups—Haeti farovon and Jehovah's Witnesses—were banned in December 2008 and January 2009, respectively.

About 0.01% are atheists or do not belong to any confession.

The Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan founded in 1990 is the region's only religious party.

All religious associations have to obey the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations enacted in 2009.[6]

Terrorist acts with obvious religious roots are not infrequent in the republic, which suffers from an intricate intertwining of clan struggle, corruption, involvement of state structures in drug trafficking, and inability of the official Islamic leaders to keep religious activities within the law. This cannot help but increase the number of extremist and terrorist Islamist acts; here are several pertinent facts.[7]

The largest terrorist act of the last few years took place on 5 September, 2010 in the city of Khujand, in the republic's north. It killed two militiamen and left 30 wounded. The investigatory structures and Secretary of the republic's Security Council A. Azimov treated it as a terrorist act staged by IMU fighters. It should be said that the IMU is invariably accused of all terrorist acts in Tajikistan.

Islamists were accused of a bomb blast which took place in November 2007 on the grounds of Kohi Vahdad (the Palace of Unity) in which one person was killed. In June of the same year a bomb exploded on the grounds of the republic's Supreme Court.

Earlier, in 2006, the building of the Ministry of Emergency of Tajikistan was attacked three times. Some think that external forces were involved in the attacks carried out by suicide bombers.

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[6] See: A. Rakhnamo, "Transformatsia politicheskoy kultury 'politicheskogo islama' v Tadzhikistane," *Tadzhikistan i sovremenny mir* (TsSI, Dushanbe), No. 1, 2009, pp. 83-69.

[7] See: A. Nanaeva, "Islamskiy fundamentalism i politicheskiy islam v stranakh Tsentralnoy Asii (na primere Tadzhikistana i Uzbekistana)," *Rossia i musulmanskiy mir,* No. 1, 2009, pp. 84-93.

In the Rasht District (in the Pamir foothills), fighters of one of the local terrorist organizations attacked a column of 75 military dispatched to the so-called Rasht district group (180 km to the east of Dushanbe) to apprehend 23 dangerous criminals who had escaped from a temporary detention center of the State National Security Committee on 23 August, 2010. The column was ambushed and attacked with sub-machine gun, machine-gun, and grenade projector fire as it was pulling out of a gorge. According to the official figures, 24 people fell victim to the attack (independent media wrote about no fewer than 40 people were killed, 5 of them officers).

The law enforcers insisted that the attack was a terrorist act pure and simple and shifted the responsibility onto commander of the irreconcilable Tajik opposition A. Rakhimov (Mullo Abdullo) and his assistant A. Davlatov. The fugitive criminals (5 of them were Russians) planned to join Rakhimov's unit. Only seven of them have been caught so far.

The RF Embassy to Tajikistan explained that the fugitive Russians born in Daghestan had come to the republic allegedly to study Islam. They were all convicted to long terms in prison for their involvement in an attempted coup and unconstitutional activities.

According to the Defense Ministry of Tajikistan, today the unit of Mullo Abdullo (its numerical strength remains unknown) includes fighters from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Russia who can easily find their bearings in the mountains, are mobile and, most important, are supported by most of the locals living in the Pamir foothills. The ministry's statement, which called the group a "lawless international" said that they had hoisted the banner of the holy religion of Islam to turn the republic into the battleground of a fratricidal war.

According to official sources, 11 members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an extremist party, were arrested (two of them Uzbek nationals), brought to court, and sentenced to prison terms (from 3 to 20 years) for inciting national, racial, and religious enmity; propaganda of extremist activities, violent regime change and constitutional changes; organization of extremist groups; and involvement in political parties, public or religious alliances, or organizations which according to enforced court judgments should be liquidated or banned because of their extremist nature (typical wording of similar cases).

Late in March 2011, eleven members of Hizb ut-Tahrir (all of them Tajik citizens) were sentenced to 4 to 20 years in prison. According to the public prosecutor of the Sogd Region, in 2010 ninety criminal cases were instituted against 42 members of the same organization (banned in Tajikistan). In the first three months of 2011, twenty-nine members of the same organization were brought to court on criminal charges and three criminal cases were opened.

Hizb ut-Tahrir has been banned in Tajikistan since 2001; in 2008 it was listed as an extremist organization and its activists were prosecuted.

The state does a lot to oppose religiously motivated extremist and terrorist crimes. The Committee for Religious Affairs plans to reform the Council of the Ulemas in full conformity with the new law. On 10 September, 2010, after prayers in the central mosque of Tajikistan, Head of the Id al-Fitr Committee A. Kholikov announced that the Council of the Ulemas would acquire new heads and that this would be followed by measures designed to achieve fuller "freedom of conscience" and would prove "useful for the country's religious organizations."

Some think that the reforms of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Tajikistan will give the state more freedom to deal with mosques and the faithful. A little earlier, President Rakhmon separated the Committee for Religious Affairs from the Ministry of Culture; since then it has been involved in devising and implementing all sorts of limitations on the activities of religious organizations across the country.

The lower chamber of the parliament of Tajikistan approved amendments to the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (2009), according to which all those wishing to study

theology abroad should obtain official permission; they should receive corresponding documents from the Ministry of Education and the Committee for Religious Affairs.

The deputies said that the bulk of Tajik students prefer to be educated in Iran where Shi'a is the dominant trend, while the majority of Tajiks are Sunnis.

"The state will decide in which country citizens of Tajikistan will study and what type of education they will receive; this will help to avoid conflicts between clerics and in society as a whole," said member of the ruling People's Democratic Party (headed by the president) D. Davlatzoda. He pointed out that 1.5 thousand students were studying at the Islamic University in Dushanbe; that there are about six thousand official students at 19 madrassahs, one grammar school, and two mixed secular-religious schools.

Late in August 2010, President Rakhmon voiced his serious concern that those who studied abroad came back as "terrorists and extremists" and called on parents to bring their children home immediately. It should be said that today no more than 60 Tajiks are still learning religious subjects abroad; the others have returned.

Tajikistan tries to preserve the secular nature of the state; it bans headscarves at schools and other educational establishments. Recently the president criticized women who continue to wear Muslim headscarves.

Mosques were closed down (most of them in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region); imams were replaced (in 2010 about 20 imams of the largest mosques were removed); the list of banned organizations was extended and laws in the religion sphere tightened—this was expected to stabilize the religious situation. Today, the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan fears prohibition; to avoid this it concentrates on social and charity programs.

Some of the above measures are approved inside the country and abroad; other measures are resolutely condemned.

The United States, for example, became concerned with the "serious violations of religious freedom" in Tajikistan. According to ITAR-TASS, U.S. Ambassador Ian Kelly at OSCE made a statement, the text of which was published by the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe.

The American diplomat was quoted as saying: "The most severe abuses of religious freedom take place under authoritarian governments; those that seek to control all religious thought and expression as part of a more comprehensive determination to control all aspects of political and civic life. Some governments cite concerns about political security as a basis to repress peaceful religious practice. We see this today in the OSCE especially in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan."

This statement was suggested by the recent "draft law on the responsibilities of parents," which would prohibit anyone under the age of 18 from participating in religious communities (the ban extended to prohibiting children under 18 who did not attend religious schools from attending mosques).

The government keeps an eye on the Salafis, whose organization was banned in January 2009; by mid-2009, forty members were arrested.

The first Salafis appeared in Tajikistan back in 2005; today there are over 20 thousand of them. Senator A. Turajonzoda explained that they are mainly young men educated at the International King Faisal University in Islamabad and universities of Yemen and Saudi Arabia, where the position of the Salafis was especially strong.

Tajik students received financial assistance from all sorts of public organizations in Arab countries which paid for university courses, housing, and stipends. An analysis of their dangerous activities (in Tajikistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world), which not infrequently enjoy support from the West, suggests that these structures are backed by foreign special services.

The Republic of Uzbekistan

According to the official figures, about 93% of the republic's population are Muslims (the bulk of them are Sunnis of the Hanafi maddhab; 1% are Shi'a living in the Bukhara and Samarkand regions). As of 1 July, 2010, there were 2,226 registered religious organizations (they belonged to 16 confessions); 2,051 of them were Muslims (including mosques and educational and Islamic centers) and 175 Christians.[8] Several Shi'a denominations are active among the Muslim communities; there are 50 educational religious structures and an Islamic university.

Religious minorities are united into 52 communities of Protestants of Korean denominations; 37 ROC communities; 23 Baptist communities; 21 communities of Pentecostals (Full Gospel); ten communities of Seventh-Day Adventists; eight Judaic communities; five communities of Roman Catholics; six Bahai communities; two Lutheran communities; four New Apostles Creed communities; two communities of the Armenian Apostolic Church; one community of Jehovah's Witnesses; one community of the Society for Krishna Consciousness; one Buddhist community; one Christian Voice of the Lord Church; and one interconfessional Bible Society. The Tashkent Islamic University set up in 1999 on a presidential initiative (as a response to a series of terrorist acts in the republic's capital) and patronized by the Cabinet is a secular higher educational establishment where all sorts of subjects are taught with the help of latest secular methodologies.

Orthodox Christians comprise about 4%; their share is steadily shrinking due to the outflow of ethnic Russians and other Slavs.

Another 3% belong to small religious communities of Catholics, Christian Koreans, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-Day Adventists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Bahais, and Krishnaites, or they are atheists. There are about ten thousand Ashkenazi and Bukhara Jews, who mainly live in Tashkent, Bukhara and Samarkand.

In the early 1990s, anti-government Islamist movements took shape in Ferghana; they have been growing ever since.

It should be said that prior to the 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, there were about seven thousand religious communities in the republic, the larger part of them being Islamic. According to various sources, there was a large number of unregistered organizations (after registration their numbers shrank to 1,500). Leaders and members of unregistered religious organizations (especially those suspected of proselytism) were persecuted; surprise inspections and arrests were not infrequent; some members were brought to court on criminal charges.

The law bans religious attire in public places.

It is common knowledge that Uzbekistan acts harshly in the religious sphere; it was the first in the region to repress Islamist radicals; the number of people sent to prison for illegal activities in the religious sphere is the highest in the region. Its laws ban proselytism, uncontrolled import and dissemination of religious literature (censorship councils were set up), as well as private teaching of religious subjects, violations being treated as criminal offences.[9]

Here are several typical examples. In 2010, members of Nur, a Turkish Muslim organization, were sentenced to 6 to 12 years in prison (it is officially listed as an extremist organization; its membership is believed to be 141).

Hundreds of suspected religious extremists were arrested after three large-scale crimes which took place in the summer of 2009; many of them belonged to banned religious organizations but were not guilty of the crimes.

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[8] See: S. Agzamkhojaev, "Sovremennoe sostoyanie islamskogo obrazovania v Uzbekistane," *Rossia i musulmanskiy mir* (IMEMO/IV RAN), No. 1, 2010, pp. 124-133.

[9] See: B. Babadzhanov, "'Islamskoe dvizhenie Uzbekistana': juhad kak ideologia 'izgoev'," *Rossia i musulmanskiy mir*, No. 3, 2010, pp. 105-125.

The ban of or punishment for unregistered religious activities are the most typical human rights violations in Uzbekistan; Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as those who belong to other creeds, also suffer.

Uzbekistan is determined to keep religious organizations in check; it is hard to acquire official registration; the state keeps an eye on most of the Muslim communities; in the countryside mosques are closed or their official registration annulled.

A human rights activist who asked to remain anonymous due to his fear of being repressed by the state said, "The government does not want more mosques in the villages. It is not only hard to register an independent mosque in the countryside; those already registered are losing their registration."

All religious literature brought into the country is scrutinized, however since early 2011 the number of illegally imported books and other printed matter has been on the rise. The State Customs Committee reports that in the first few months of 2011 there were 66 attempts to smuggle 2,571 copies of religious works and 62 items of religious video and audio materials by various means of transportation and by post. Recently officials of customs checkpoints in Tashkent confiscated 547 copies of journals and leaflets published in South Korea and 120 copies printed in the U.K. and Germany.

Since the mid-1990s, Islamic radicals have been persecuted in great numbers; today, as many as several tens of thousands are behind bars; many of them have been sentenced to over 15 years and will remain in prison until the next amnesty.

The International Religious Freedom Report 2010 of the U.S. Department of State says that Uzbekistan is frequently listed together with other violators of freedom of conscience and that "on 16 January, 2009, U.S. Secretary of State redesignated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern."

The Republic of Turkmenistan

There are no official figures about the number of followers of different confessions in Turkmenistan; we all know, however, that Sunni Muslims are in the majority (they are ethnic Turkmens, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Baluchis). Shi'a Muslims (mostly ethnic Iranians, Azeris, and Kurds) live in small communities along the Iranian border and in the city of Turkmenbashi. Traditional rites (veneration of ancestors) figure prominently in the local version of Islam. The Council for Religious Affairs regulates relations between the state and confessions; according to its information, in 2010 there were 398 mosques in the republic.

The ROC runs 13 Russian Orthodox parishes (three of them in Ashghabad, the republic's capital) and a monastery, also in Ashghabad. In 2008, all the ROC parishes in Turkmenistan were transferred directly to the Moscow Patriarchate.

Small communities (Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaists, Shi'a Muslims, and several evangelical Christian groups, such as Baptists and Pentecostals) function without registration.

A small community of ethnic German Lutherans lives in the city of Sarakhs and its environs.

There are about 1,000 ethnic Poles who have already blended into the Russian community and consider themselves to be Orthodox Christians.

There is a Catholic community in Ashghabad which consists of citizens of Turkmenistan and foreigners; they use the chapel of the Papal Nuncio.

There are about 1,000 Jews in Turkmenistan who have neither rabbis nor synagogues.

Turkmenistan is practically free from Islamic radicals; there are essentially no cases of religiously motivated terror for two reasons: first, the spiritual traditions of the Turkmens, who at no time have

been devoted to fundamentalist Islamic trends; and, second, the state's strict control over the religious life of its citizens.

In 1994, a Gengesh (Council) for Religious Affairs under the president appeared, which is headed by a chairman and his deputies: mufti; deputy mufti, bishop of Turkmenistan (an Orthodox priest) and a state official. There are regional (velayat) councils for religious affairs at the local administrations headed by the chief imams of each of the regions.

The muftis and other clerics are paid by the state, a flagrant violation of Art 12 of the Constitution, which says "religious organizations are separate from the state." Turkmenistan prefers to ignore those who criticize this violation of its fundamental law.

The partial regime liberalization of 2008 did nothing to alleviate control over religious communities and over what is preached in the mosques and churches.

Very much as before, in 2008 the number of those wishing to perform hajj to Mecca was limited, under a decree issued by President Berdymukhammedov, to 188 (the number of seats in the Turkmen Airlines airplane chartered to take people to Saudi Arabia at the expense of the company).

Political scientists and other experts agree that as distinct from its neighbors Turkmenistan has avoided the danger of the influence of Wahhabi groups and their agents in its territory. This became possible thanks to strict control by the state and special services and because neither the Turkmen religious milieu nor the Turkmens' mentality is conducive to religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalist Islam stands little chance in this country. So far, practically all the emissaries that Hizb ut-Tahrir dispatched to Turkmenistan have failed; the local people remain indifferent to the ideas and the religious literature smuggled into the country.

No-one knows whether the local Muslims are profoundly religious: the huge mosques in Ashghabad remain half empty on Muslim holidays. Some observers think that the state's total control has taught people to pray at home.

The Country Report on Terrorism 2008 of the U.S. Department of State says that Turkmenistan was involved in international counterterrorist measures and that "clandestine passage was still possible due to long and porous borders that stretch across mountain and desert terrain, as well as the small size and uneven quality of Turkmenistan's border guard and customs services."

The report contains concise information about "September 2008 violence in the Khitrovka region of Ashghabad," which started for obscure reasons and lasted for a long time. This "forced the Government of Turkmenistan to reevaluate its counterterrorism program, training partners, and readiness."

The same report says, "Turkmenistan's law enforcement and security agencies exert stringent security control over all aspects of society, making it unlikely that Turkmenistan could easily be used as a terrorist safe haven."

The country has opted for a fairly original and efficient religious policy which keeps it safe from Islamic radicalism.

The Republic of Kazakhstan

The polyconfessional and polyethnic Republic of Kazakhstan has over 3,300 religious organizations which belong to over 40 confessions and denominations. The situation in this country proves that religion (traditional and non-traditional confessions and all sorts of religious associations) can have both a positive and negative effect on the social and political processes.[10]

[10] See: B.S. Zhusipov, "Religiozny ekstremizm kak ugroza bezopasnosti Kazakhstana," *Kazakhstan-Spektr* (KISI), No. 1, 2009, pp. 35-41; M. Asanbaev, L. Umirzakova, "New Forms of Religious Extremism in Kazakhstan: Destructive Sects

Religion is viewed as a positive factor; however more than a third of the population regards it as a negative phenomenon. It can be said that the people of Kazakhstan have not agreed on how to treat religion and its influence on social relations. Positive opinions, however, prevail.[11]

The South Kazakhstan Region is more religious than the rest of the country and stricter in following Islamic postulates.

It should be said that city dwellers are more negative about the role of religion in contemporary society.

The larger part of the republic's population prefers to commune with God directly; a third of the polled are undecided about whether religious services and rites are necessary; and there is no agreement on the role of the church/mosque and clerics.

Sociologists have pointed out, however, that Muslims are more positive about the role of religion than the followers of other confessions; they are more positive about the role of religious services/rites which open the road to God.

Kazakhs are more positive about the role of religion than Russians and other ethnic groups, who point to the negative sides of religion[12]; 75% of the people of Kazakhstan describe themselves as religious, while 15.5% do not regard themselves as believers.

The degree of religiosity differs from region to region; according to official polls, in the Atyrau region there are 3.3 times more religious people than in Almaty and Astana. Villagers are more devout than city dwellers: 11.6% of villagers perform namaz (7.4% in cities). The same goes for zakat and saum.

City dwellers, on the other hand, have more money to pay for hajj.

One out of ten people in Kazakhstan has problems associated in one way or another with his faith; the followers of other religions are more frequently exposed to problems than Muslims and Orthodox Christians.

There is a more or less widely shared opinion that radical religious groups and their activities can spoil relations among the followers of different religions. In the countryside, people believe that interconfessional relations are more or less stable, while in cities people are aware of negative factors.

Over half of Kazakhstan citizens (67.4%) pointed out that their faith has become stronger in the last three years, although only 3.6% of the total population is prepared to follow the Holy Scriptures and advice of priests when it comes to important decisions. This means that religiosity in Kazakhstan is skin deep.

According to sociological polls people in the South Kazakhstan and West Kazakhstan regions are more religious than people in other regions; recently people in Almaty have become more religious, while in the Karaganda Region one out of five has lost his faith.

Since August 2008, however, the people of Kazakhstan have been losing their previously positive opinion of religion. Today, many more people are convinced that religion manipulates public opinion and uses the faithful to pursue its own interests. This does nothing good for the nation's social cohesion.

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and Cults," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (55), 2009, pp. 42-48; A. Izbairov, S. Ayazbekov, "Osobennosti religioznoy situatsii v Kazakhstane: sushchestvuiushchie problemy," *Kazakhstan v globalnykh protsessakh* (IMEP, Almaty), No. 4, 2008, pp. 78-86.

[11] See: T. Kozyrev, "Novye tendentsii v razvitii etno-konfessionalnoy situatsii v Kazakhstane," *Analytic* (KISI), No. 5, 2009, pp. 87-90; K. Smagulov, "The Religious Situation Today in Kazakhstan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Volume 12, Issue 3, 2011, pp. 45-64.

[12] See: N. Krasnobaeva, "Religioznaia situatsia v Vostochno-Kazakhstansky oblasti," *Rossia i musulmanskiy mir*, No. 7, 2010, pp. 71-76; I. Tsepkova, "Mezhkonfessionalnye otnoshenia v Kazakstane," *Rossia i musulmanskiy* mir, No. 11, 2009, pp. 72-76.

In October 2011, the country acquired a new law on religion; amendments which had been postponed for over ten years were finally introduced under the pressure of Western human rights organizations, the ROC, public figures, and politicians; the Protestant churches were more critical than the others.

The new Law on Religious Activity and Religious Organizations replaced the old one On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations of 15 January, 1992; their titles suggest that the old one was designed to ensure religious freedom while the new law regulates the activities of religious organizations.

The new law outlined the responsibilities of the Agency for Religious Affairs of Kazakhstan, which is expected to study and analyze missionary activities and religious organizations, coordinate the activities of the local executive structures dealing with religious affairs, organize "religious study examination," check the lists of citizens who initiate religious groups, and coordinate the activities of foreign religious alliances in the republic and appointments of heads of religious organizations by religious centers outside Kazakhstan.

The government established control over foreign missionaries, but sacrificed the most odious regulation present in several drafts—quotas for missionary activities and their distribution by region. The new law established new rules of registration of missionaries and their re-registration and banned unregistered missionary activities.

Several public alliances (including Zheltoksan rukhy), some of them fairly obscure, objected to the law "which banned namaz."

Member of parliament and composer Bekbolat Tleukhan, who made himself a name by saying that celebrating 23 February (a holiday inherited from Soviet times and now called Defender of the Homeland Day.—*Ed.*) was an encroachment on Kazakhstan's independence, was one of the severest critics of the new law. He also insisted that films with erotic scenes should be banned and that their ads should be removed from the streets; he also wanted to remove the Darwin theory of the origin of the species from school curricula and change the designs on exercise books for schoolchildren.

The events of 2011 showed that religious extremism in Kazakhstan was a cause for concern. In April, law enforcers detained a group of four people who were close to radical groups. It is a well-known fact that people from Kazakhstan have been joining illegal terrorist groups in the Northern Caucasus.

A wave of terrorist acts swept the country. In May, 25-year-old suicide bomber R. Makatov, the only casualty of his amateurish act, blew himself up in the Department of the National Security Committee in Aktobe; it is believed that this was a test of the country's readiness to deal with terrorism.

Aktobe has earned a bad name as the city from which the people of Kazakhstan cross into the Russian Federation to join North Caucasian jihadists. Four of them were arrested in Makhachkala in the possession of a homemade bomb. In 2009, a group of six headed by A. Karimbaev (who later died in prison) was arrested in the Aktobe Region; they were accused of training for terrorist acts by firing pneumatic weapons in the steppes. On 20 April, 2011, S. Amanov, head of a clandestine network and one of the last Kazakhstani jihadists, was killed in Makhachkala.

A night blast at a temporary detention center of the National Security Committee was caused by the previous detention of about 20 people suspected of cooperating with the suicide bomber in Aktobe in May.

On 28 October, 2011, a previously unknown Islamist group which called itself Jund al-Caliphate (Soldiers of the Caliphate) threatened to use violence if the new law which banned namaz in state offices was not cancelled. This was their response to the ban on prayer rooms in state structures in the country with a predominantly Muslim population and annual repeat registration of foreign missionaries.

This was the first direct threat addressed to the authorities after the new law was adopted. On 31 October, Atyrau was shaken by two powerful explosions; five minutes later an unidentified suicide bomber blew himself up outside an apartment building; there were no other casualties because it all happened too early and because his bomb had no damage agents.

On 12 November in Taraz, a fighter known to the secret services as a jihadist robbed an arms shop, killed five law enforcers, used a grenade projector to fire at the building of the National Security Committee, and killed himself with a grenade. This stirred up a lot of panic in the city.

This is how religious extremism came to Kazakhstan.

Some political scientists think that if the people of Kazakhstan perceive "revenge-seeking" Islam as the norm, the social situation in the republic can be described as being akin to that in the Middle East, which is characterized by an ideological vacuum, unemployment, authorities which ignore the needs of the ordinary people, and replacement of state priorities with the material interests of the ruling elite.

The far from favorable social situation in the regions is a headache for law enforcers and antiterrorist structures; they rely on agents recruited from different groups of religious extremists.

The high corruption level in state structures makes efficient governance impossible; the ordinary people do not trust the authorities and do not respect them; well-informed officers of the special services and the police have even fewer reasons to trust the people at the top.

External forces are skillfully exploiting the instability belt in Central Asia and social inequality in Kazakhstan to sponsor religious emissaries sent to Kazakhstan from abroad.

There is another purely technical problem: the republic has no adequate network to train antiterrorist forces and experts in counter-partisan war.

Conclusion

The common features of the religious situation in the Central Asian countries are as follows:

- Sunni Islam (Hanafi maddhab) is the largest religion in all the countries; Orthodox Christianity (ROC of Moscow Patriarchate) comes second;
- Members of religious communities have become younger;
- City dwellers have become much more religious;
- Most religious organizations (particularly Islamic communities) have become more politically involved;
- Religious communities pay more attention to education;
- The number of new religious movements has increased ten- or even a hundred-fold;
- They receive money from abroad; their headquarters are found outside Central Asia;
- Political movements under Islamic slogans are mushrooming in the Central Asian countries (Turkmenistan being the only exception) and moving closer to other opposition forces;
- All countries have established control over religious organizations—strict in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan and more lax in Kyrgyzstan;
- All countries have repeatedly tightened their religious legislation;
- The situation with Islam is worsening in all the countries of the region;
- All Central Asian societies (with the exception of Turkmenistan) are becoming Islamized;

- Banned Islamist organizations operate in all the countries;
- None of the countries has a more or less clear idea about the extent of religious feelings of its population and the number of believers.

An analysis of the religious situation in Central Asia suggests that religiously motivated extremism and terrorism are on the rise.

So far, tighter legal anti-extremist and antiterrorist measures, as well as persecution and numerous court cases have not reduced the volume of extremist and terrorist activities, which means that what has been done is not enough.

Islam in Central Asia is developing political dimensions, which is the first step toward radicalization; the process must be stemmed: religion should save people's souls and not call on people to protest; it has the ability to transform negative sentiments into a creative force of personal and social development.[13]

The time has come to admit that religiously motivated extremism and terrorism are the two most dangerous threats to the region's stability.

The radical Islamist movements operating in the region are consistently improving the forms and methods of struggle; they are gradually becoming involved in drug trafficking, organized crime, and slave trade and luring young people into their orbit. This is the gravest threat of all. Islamist groups are now better organized and more mobile; they are mastering network operation principles. This means that the forms and methods of struggle against them should be adjusted to the new reality.

We cannot exclude the possibility that radical Islam has its supporters among the bureaucracy and business elite: this calls for close attention and investigation.

The acute social, political, economic, and religious problems in Central Asia encourage Islamic radicals; terrorism with religious hues is an outcrop of the region's systemic contradictions. It will develop into a real threat if several factors blend together and encourage terrorism, which means that the individual components of the terrorist structure must be destroyed to undermine terrorist capabilities.

It should be said that the local people have no trust in the official Islamic structures, while the informal Muslim structures are much more respected. Islamist movements cannot survive without wide-scale popular support.

There is a lot of dissatisfaction with the ruling regimes, which could create new protest forms (including radical Islamism). Nearly all the Central Asian regimes can be described as authoritarian; the ruling elites form closed groups; there are no instruments for putting pressure on the authorities; social programs remain on paper while social lifts are being cut back. Islamic radicals capitalize on the faults and shortcomings of the regimes and exploit them to promote the Shari'a as an ideal form of state governance.

In recent years, foreign missionaries have scored many points in planting the ideology of Islamism; today it can spread far and wide all by itself with the help of their pupils; there are crystallization centers of radical communities and terrorist groups.

So far, the Central Asian regimes use force, however it is fairly ineffective; positive forms of opposition to religiously motivated extremism and terrorism are needed; they have been used abroad and proven to be worth the trouble.

The region's law enforcers should always bear in mind that it is their fellow citizens who belong to Islamic radical movements: cruelty, as well as death, should be excluded. It is much wiser to try to

[13] See: Z.G. Zhalilov, "Netraditsionnye islamskie dvizhenia v Tsentralnoy Azii," *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 4, 2009, pp. 28-36.

return them to the legal field and reintegrate them into society. This calls for preventive methods in the form of discussions about religions and their practical contexts and active discussions of the most urgent problems of the region's states.

The above fully applies to the region's religious figures: the popularity of Muslim radicalism is largely explained by the impotence of the official Islamic leadership.

The official leaders of the region's umma avoid discussions with the radicals and daily sermons with clear and well-founded criticism of their ideas. While the imams are obviously unwilling to discuss the most outstanding social and economic problems, the Islamic radicals have the answers to all the questions, which attracts people to them. This means that the Central Asian spiritual leaders should take up the initiative from the radicals.

We should always bear in mind that many big geopolitical actors profit from Central Asia's instability; they know how to capitalize on the local protest potential and the ideas of Islamic radicalism brought to perfection outside the region: by combining the two factors they hope to stir up trouble and profit from it.

Despite the fact that extremists and terrorists are relatively strong when it comes to criticism, they have no positive program (the idea of the Caliphate, which looks fairly doubtful in the world today, cannot be described as such); this situation should be tapped to the full.

The time has come to address the political, social, and economic problems; while they remain pending, the radicals will continue to use them as trump cards.

The list of urgent problems is well known: corruption, social injustice, appalling unemployment among the youth, the absence of social lifts, undeveloped democratic institutions, etc. They must be resolved in order to begin fighting religious extremism and terrorism in earnest.