THE RADICAL ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS OF CENTRAL ASIA

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Those Islamic political parties using relatively peaceful, non-violent, yet illegal methods to achieve their aims (unsanctioned protest rallies, illegal distribution of printed matter, etc.) are described as radical. Any student of Central Asian political developments should be able to distinguish between Islamic radicalism and Islamic extremism. The latter uses all means, including terrorism and subversion, to push ahead.[1]

The Ferghana Valley, a densely populated ethnic patchwork, is the center of Central Asian radical Islam. Due to scarce water supplies, appalling unemployment, and lack of information the local people are living on the brink of violent protest under religious slogans.[2]

An analysis of the available literature and media publications suggests that the radical organizations of the Central Asian Islamic movement greatly vary: since 1990 there have been two generations of radical Islamic organizations in the region.

[1] See: M. Khrustalev, "Diversionno-terroristicheskaia voina kak voenno-politicheskiy fenomen," *Mezhdunarodnye protsessy,* No. 2, May-August 2003, pp. 55-68.

[2] See: E.V. Abdullaev, L.F. Kolesnikov, "Islam i religiozniy faktor v sovremennom Uzbekistane," in: *Uzbekistan: obretenie novogo oblika,* in two volumes, Vol. 1, ed. by E.M. Kozhokin, RISI Publishers, Moscow, 1998, p. 252.

The First Generation

It came into being at the turn of the 1990s and can be best described as a group of Islamic parties and organizations which used peaceful means and methods to promote their program goals and avoided any opposition to the regional powers. The dialog between them and the state, however, which was becoming less and less effective, finally pushed them outside the sphere of law. They became illegal and, after being exposed to repressions, the radicals cut short the dialog and took to the road of uncompromising ideological confrontation.

Geographically, the first generation of the radical Islamic organizations can be described as "traditional" (limited to certain areas and never going beyond Central Asia).[3] As distinct from the "non-traditional" Islamic parties and movements acting in many countries across the world, the traditional parties never depart from their rather limited program goals, such as establishing the Caliphate in Central Asia and removing the ruling regimes.

The Islamic Revival Party (IRP), which dates back to the 1970s when it first appeared in the south of Central Asia, is one of the best examples of the above: the Caliphate and the triumph of Islamic values were its stated goals. The party lived on donations and commercial proceeds. After 1991, it acquired two republican branches—the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and the Islamic Party of Revival (IPR) of Uzbekistan. This generation also includes the Adolat and the Odamiylik va insonparvarlik movements, as well as the Tablikh, Adolat uiushmasi (Society of Justice), Islom Lashkorlari (Warriors of Islam), Tovba (Repentance), Nour (Light) in the south (Feghana Valley), Akylsunat Ual-Zhamagat, Daiva't

[3] See: R. Takeyh, N. Gvozdev, "Do Terrorist Networks Need a Home?" *The Washington Quarterly,* Summer 2002, p. 97.

Ul'-Ishrat in the north, and the radical Muslim communities, the Kokand Ir and Tarikhatshylar, in Kazakhstan.[4]

They have passed through several stages of their life cycle.

Emergence

Like many other nationalist Islamic movements of Central Asia, these groups appeared back in 1991as Muslim groups with no political aims. Adolat, for example, was set up with official permission as a group that patrolled the streets, detained violators of public law and order, and fought drugs and prostitution. The detained were displayed at the mosque for everybody to see and had to pay fines. The group investigated economic crimes, such as illegal export of commodities locally in short supply. The group, which had about 12,000 members in the Namangan Region alone, was not alien to robbery and plunder. The leaders cleared their activity with A. Gafurov, the kazi of the Muslims of the Ferghana Valley.

The quasi-party Odamiylik va insonparvarlik followed the same scenario. In 1991-1992, it operated in Kokand where, together with the authorities, it uprooted the protection racket on the local markets.

Stepping Up Activities as an Absolute Priority (1990-1991)

It was at that time that the majority of the local Islamic movements, having reached the peak of their activity and won popularity, began their systematic efforts to revive Islam in the region using legal methods. They planned to obtain high administrative posts and seats in the parliaments (at this stage the IRPT tried to raise a wave of spiritual revival, to achieve the political and economic independence of Tajikistan, and to awaken citizens politically and legally to the Islamic values). In 1991, it ran for parliament, together with Rastokhez and Lali Badokhshan, under the blanket name of the Union of Democratic Forces. They lost to the nomenklatura nominee Rakhmon Nabiev.

At this stage, the IRPT formulated its program aim as introducing fundamental Islamic values among the republic's Muslims; the party, as well as other groups (Adolat), based their cells on traditional religious and social structures (mosques, makhallia, family groups).

Confrontation (1992-1993)

In late 1991, the IRPT launched a series of anti-government rallies, hunger strikes, and even armed clashes. This forced the republic's leaders to outlaw it; as a result the majority of the national Islamic organizations went underground.

In the middle of 1991, the Adolat movement started losing its prestige among the common people, partly because its leaders were obviously abusing their powers. Not infrequently, its members (mainly socially deprived youths between 18 and 27 skilled in Oriental martial arts) lynched criminals, detained and beat the people they did not like, and sentenced them to fines, which they pocketed, and to forced labor in mosques.[5]

Adolat became radical to the extent that it was outlawed after the December 1991 40,000-strong protest rally. Presidential candidate Islam Karimov had to come and promise certain concessions. In 1992,

[4] See: S. Zhusupov, "Islam v Kazakhstane: proshloe, nastoiashchee i budushchee," *Islam na postsovetskom prostranstve: vzgliad iznutri,* Moscow, 2001, p. 121; E.S. Kuandykov, "Religiozniy ekstremizm—ugroza stabil'nosti strany," *Stabil'nost i bezopasnost Kazakhstana na styke vekov,* Astana, 2000, pp. 194-198.

[5] See: A. Bazarov, "Islamskiy fundamentalizm i obshchestvenno-politicheskaia stabil'nost v Uzbekistane," in: *Etnicheskie i regional'nye konflikty v Evrazii,* in three books, Book 1, *Tsentral'naia Azia i Kavkaz,* ed. by A. Malashenko, B. Coppieters, D. Trenin, Moscow, 1997, pp. 120-126.

under the pressure of official repressions, the movement had to fold up, yielding their niche to the armed Islamic organization Islom Lashkorlari (in the past, the radical branch of Adolat). It was a quasi-military structure headed by the emir and his deputy.

Opposition (1993-1996)

As a result of the 1992 parliamentary elections in Tajikistan, Davlat Usmon, one of the IRPT leaders, received the post of vice-premier in the coalition government. In the fall of 1992, a group of IRPT members formed a Garm Islamic Republic in Karategin. The IRPT was seeking political independence while pooling efforts with other political organizations (the Democratic Party was one of them). On 21 June, 1993, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan banned it. This made the IRPT the unquestioned leader of the United Tajik Opposition, yet many of its leaders had to leave the country after that (the majority went to Afghanistan and Iran).

In 1992, many of the Adolat activists had to flee to Afghanistan and Tajikistan to avoid persecution. They still remained members of radical or even extremist regional Islamic movements and acted on a different level. Some of them joined the ranks of the armed Tajik opposition.

The repressions either liquidated some of the parties and movements (Adolat uiushmasi, Odamiylik va insonparvarlik, Islom Lashkorlari, etc.) or forced them to cooperate with the powers-that-be (in 1999, the IRPT, which came up with a peaceful program, became a registered parliamentary party).

There is the opinion that the first generation was defeated because it relied on the traditional local structures (makhallia, etc.) rather than building up party networks.[6] To some extent, their failures can be explained by the fact that they relied on a non-formal system of acquiring new members (the formal procedure allows political structures to rigorously test the aspirants).

The Second Generation

Having learned from the mistakes of its predecessors, the second generation armed itself with absolutely new means and methods. Rather than using the traditional protest forms (rallies, leaflets, etc.), they confront the authorities with the means used in information wars: they place their stakes on disseminating their ideologies at the grass-root level. They are distributing illegal Islamic publications right and left and are actively working on the Internet.[7] They also try to recruit officials to their side.[8]

They are transnational organizations; as distinct from their predecessors, they belong to the class of "non-traditional" religious organizations formed according to the network principle. This makes it hard to control their activities. As repressions mounted, they adopted an even more formalized recruitment system, which makes it next to impossible to detain and interrogate them. The structures are built as cell (khal'ka) networks, each of them limited to 5 to 6 people to lessen the possibility of failure. New members are sought among young men with higher education, or among social outcasts. Each of the new members is invited to set up his own cell.[9] Contemporary communication means make it possible to spread far outside the region, to Europe and the Arab East. The latest information technologies have brought the struggle to the third countries beyond the confines of Central Asian law. Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (the Islamic Revival Party) can be described as one such structure.

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[6] See: A. Zelkina, "Islam and Security in the New States of Central Asia: How Genuine is the Islamic Threat?" *Religion, State and Society,* No. 3-4, September/December 1999.

[7] See: K. Mukhabbatov, "Religiozno-oppozitsionnye gruppy v Tajikistane," in: *Religiozniy ekstremizm v Tsentral'noy Azii,* Dushanbe, 2002.

[8] See: A. Nikolaev, "Khalifat podstupaet k rossiiskim granitsam," *Mirovaia energeticheskaia politika,* No. 9, November 2002, p. 30.

[9] See: AFP, 20 May, 2002.

Much has been written about it—there is no sense in going into details here. I want to point out, however, that the party came to Central Asia as soon as the Soviet Union fell apart. Its first cells appeared in Ferghana, Andijan and Tashkent in 1992-1994; later they came to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.[10] At first it used peaceful means to disseminate its ideology and avoided confrontation with the official structures. Its growing popularity, however, caused displeasure among the country's leaders, who drove the party underground. The amendments to its charter spoke of the need for strictest secrecy of its leaders, while dissemination of literature remained at the top of the list of priorities.

As distinct from the first-generation parties and movements with fairly simple programs (Adolat, for example, never looked beyond its immediate demands), the second generation chose the "multiple purpose" method (two or more strategic aims instead of one). The Hizb ut-Tahrir three-level program is one such example: formation of an Islamic party, integration into the world Islamic movement, and setting up the Caliphate.[11] Its leaders have described the Central Asian governments as non-Islamic and explained their non-Islamic governance as the reason for all the problems plaguing the local states.[12]

Even though the party was banned, it is skillfully exploiting the discrepancies between the laws of the Central Asian republics, inadequate cooperation among their law enforcement bodies, and the porous state borders to secretly roam in all states, mainly in the Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley.

In 1996-1998, two groups (Akromiylar and Hizb an-Nusra), which are inclined to more secrecy and radical measures, detached themselves from Hizb ut-Tahrir.[13] The party is not alien to the latest information technologies: its site [http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org] offers its program and describes its aims and tasks in eight languages, as well as lists of leaflets and books in circulation.

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The worldwide Islamic movement is busily adjusting to the current and far from simple domestic and foreign policy contexts (the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnia, etc.), which have already pushed its organizations, including those operating in Central Asia, to a qualitatively different level of political struggle.

Encouraged by the use of force elsewhere, the radical Islamic leaders in Central Asia are toying with the idea of moving toward even more radical methods of struggle. In October 2001, when the counter-terrorist operation in Afghanistan was launched, Hizb ut-Tahrir announced that it was readying itself for an armed struggle against the coalition.[14] We cannot exclude the possibility that, not content with bellicose statements, the party was involved in the March-April 2004 terrorist acts in Uzbekistan.[15] (There is preliminary information that its fighters helped organize the blasts.)

The above suggests that in the near future we can expect a third generation of the radical Islamic movements. While relying on the second generation's expertise, it will move to subversion and terror. This means that we should expect a convergence between the radical and extremist Islamic movements in Central Asia.

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[10] See: T. Razzakov, "Spetsifika poiavlenia terrorizma i ekstremizma v Kazakhstane (doklad)," *Tsentral'noaziatskiy zhurnal,* 18 June, 2002 [http://ctaj.eclat.kg/].

[11] See: D.V. Makarov, "Radikal'niy islamizm v kontekste vzaimodeystvia 'mestnogo' i 'inostrannogo' islama v Tsentral'noy Azii (na primere Ferganskoy doliny)," in: *Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskiy region i Tsentral'naia Azia: kontury bezopasnosti,* a textbook, ed. by A.D. Voskresenskiy and N.P. Maletin, MGIMO Press, Moscow, 2001, p. 325.

[12] See: IRP web-site [http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org].

[13] See: V. Khamisov, "O problemakh religioznogo ekstremizma v kyrgyzskoy chasti Ferganskoi doliny," in: *Problemy religioznogo ekstremizma v Tsentral'noy Azii,* Almaty, 2001.

[14] See: Iu.P. Laletin, "Situatsia v Afghanistane i ee vozdeystvie na iuzhniy flang SNG," *Iuzhniy flang SNG. Tsentral'naia Azia-Kaspy-Kavkaz: vozmozhnosti i vyzovy dlia Rossii,* Moscow, 2003, p. 260.

[15] See: V. Soule, "L'Ouzbekistan entre islamistes et dictature," *Liberation,* 31 mars 2004.