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Contemporary Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia: Genesis and History of Development

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Abstract: The article studies the patterns of development of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia, its origins, history, and future. During the 20th century, Islam in Central Asia was mainly formed by internal regional factors intertwining with the local tradition and creating a distinct ethno-cultural identity. Perestroika largely contributed to the revival of political Islam, with a few parties and movements forming in the region. However, with time, local organizations promoting the agenda of radical Islam became marginalized and sidelined by the state. We propose to distinguish between organizations that are mainly focused on the Islamic revival in the region, purification, and non-violent politicization and those that have extra-regional ambitions, using the region as a recruitment base. Both types of foreign organizations are experiencing pressure from Central Asian governments, and Jihadists are also suffering from significant military defeats. We conclude that radical Islam may still have some traction in Central Asia because the region is experiencing a religious renaissance strengthened by socialization and enculturation.

Keywords: radicalism, Islamism, Salafism, development, history, Central Asia

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Introduction

The genesis of contemporary Islamic radicalism in Central Asia can be traced back to the end of the Soviet Union and to the disintegration of Marxist-Leninist ideology, one of the key metanarratives of the 20th century. The communist project, despite the enormous human, intellectual, and financial resources spent on the transformation and modernization of Central Asia, failed to fully secularize large segments of the population, which externally simulated allegiance to the dominant ideology, while internally adhering to Muslim values and a Muslim worldview to varying degrees.

Therefore, when the crisis of Marxism-Leninism began, and an ideological vacuum appeared in the societies of the socialist republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Islam immediately tried to fill it (Polakov 2014). This process was most obvious in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and parts of the Ferghana Valley in Kyrgyzstan. The revival of the Islamic value paradigm was generally perceived as a return to cultural and historical roots, but was not a homogeneous process. Rather, several trends emerged, principally traditional and radical Islam, distinguished mainly by their responses to the question of the "purity of Islam" and its relation to modernity, introduced by the Russian Empire and USSR.

Traditional, Central Asian or "steppe" Islam is understood as Islam of the Hanafi school (madhhab), in which Sufi beliefs, including about saints (wali) and the veneration of their burial places (mazars), hold a strong position. Traditional Islam was generally tolerant of modernity, demonstrating a willingness to coexist with it within the same secular space, while limiting the intrusion of its values into Islam, i.e. rejecting the modernization of Islam itself.

Radical Islam (other names include Salafism, Wahhabism, Islamic fundamentalism, Mujaddidiyya) is based on the principles of the Hanbali madhhab. It is based on a return to an ostensibly original, "pure" Islam, on a struggle against Sufism and innovations in Islam (Bid'ah), and on the complete rejection of the values of modernity (anti-modernism). Radicals seek to completely expel modernity and traditional Islam from the political, cultural, economic, and educational space, often by force. In this regard, three stages of radicalism's development can be distinguished:

Stage 1: Ideological. At this stage, radicalism operates by methods of Da'wah (propaganda), seeking to draw neophytes into its ranks by offering a return to pure Islam;

Stage 2: Political. At this stage, radicalism's followers are faced with the necessity of entering political competition in order to establish Islamic norms

within their society.

Stage 3: Military-Terroristic. When radicalism encounters opposition from the state and from supporters of secularism and traditional Islam, and it is unable to win the battle for the "hearts and minds" of believers, it begins to use armed and terroristic methods of struggle.

In Central Asia, radical Islam has a rather complex history, which can be divided into two periods: (1) From the revolution of 1917 to the early 2000s, when internal (endogenous) factors mainly influenced its development. (2) From the early 2000s to the present, when external (exogenous) factors began to significantly influence its development.

Internal factors of Islamic radicalism development in Central Asia (1980s-early 2000s)

Central Asia was one of the Soviet Union's key historically Muslim regions, and the authorities strictly supervised the dissemination of Islamic values in a society that officially followed a policy of state atheism. In 1943, in the midst of World War II, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan was established, headed by First Mufti Eshon Boboxon ibn Abdulmajidxon, and some elements of the Islamic education system were reestablished (the opening of the Miri Arab madrassah in Bukhara in 1946 and the Barak-Khan madrassah in 1956 (Babadjanov, Muminov and Olcott 2004), marking a departure from militant atheism, but the general policy of secularizing society based on scientific atheism continued throughout the following decades.

As British scholar of Central Asian Islam Shirin Akiner notes, "The result was that by the 1980s Islam had become something close to a marker of cultural and ethnic identity than an active spiritual commitment for most Central Asians. The chief manifestations of allegiance to the faith at this period were the celebration of religious ceremonies connected with rites of passage, such as (male) circumcision, marriage and burial. Also, there was widespread observance of folk traditions, such as pilgrimages to the graves of holy men and the performance of associated rituals to secure divine assistance and protection" (Akiner 2003). The British scholar characterizes such practices as "syncretic accretions" to the Muslim faith, which were nevertheless popularly perceived as consistent with the Muslim faith. The level of secularization of society and the weakening of the influence of Islamic doctrine reached such a level that "knowledge of Islamic doctrine, of prayers, and even of the basic Muslim profession of faith ('There is no God but God and Muhammed is His Prophet') was limited to a small number

of predominantly elderly individuals," Akiner points out (Akiner 2003).

A slightly different view is expressed by Katrin Pujol, Director of the French Institute for Central Asian Studies (IFEAC). She believes that, after Stalin officially recognized Islam in 1942, a new type of dual "Homo Islamo-Sovieticus" identity emerged in Central Asia. Instead of being 'national in form and socialist in content', the Central Asian republics became 'national-Islamic in content and 'Soviet only in form' (Poujol 2016). She subjects Islam's pre-Perestroika revival in Central Asia to the following periodization: a) The isolation of Central Asian Muslims from the outside world after the Russian Revolution of 1917; b) An end to isolation with the death of Stalin and the beginning of Khrushchev's rule; c) During the "Brezhnev stagnation," a modest return of Soviet Muslims to the global ummah, connected to the Soviet authorities' desire to instrumentalize Islam in foreign affairs; d) In the 1970s, the appearance of underground preachers and the first calls for the proclamation of an Islamic Republic of Tajikistan. In 1973, the first "Islamic Renaissance Party" was established in Kurgan-Tube, Tajikistan; e) End of the USSR's relative openness in 1979, after Soviet troops enter Afghanistan and the Islamic Revolution takes place in Iran (Poujol 2016).

Meanwhile, throughout Central Asia's time in the USSR, Islamic fundamentalist and radical ideas from outside penetrated into it. Connected to this were figures such as Shami-Damulla, Turk-Damulla, and Hasan-Hazrat Ponomarev al-Qiziljari, active in 1919-1937. Their worldview was distinguished by criticism of some local forms of Islam. In particular, they "rejected unconditional adherence to the provisions of the Hanafi madhhab (taqlid mutlaq) in the spirit of local traditions, proposing to follow only the Qur'an and hadith". They also rejected the local Sufi heritage and the worship of saints (Mukhametshin et al. 2013, 277-286).

This is unsurprising, given that Shami-Damulla and Turk-Damulla were emigrants from the Ottoman Empire, where Wahhabi ideas were gaining popularity in the early 20th century. According to some sources, Shami-Damulla was expelled from the Ottoman Empire for "Wahhabism" (Bustanov, Dorodnykh 2017). According to Kazakh researcher T. Abdullov, "as an adherent of the Shafi'i madhhab, his way of thinking was openly Salafi". He brought up in his hujra a large number of disciples who became a conduit of his purist ideas, including within the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia (SADUM). The most famous of his disciples was SADUM Mufti Ziyautdin Babakhanov (Abdullov 2020).

Also contributing to the criticism of local Central Asian Islam was the former Omsk imam Hasan Ponomarev, exiled to Tashkent in 1934 as a result of the trial of the "Rebel Group of Tatars". As researcher Pavel Shabley writes,

"While in Tashkent, Ponomarev tried to enter the circle of the local religious elite, which was favoured by the Soviet nomenklatura. He became a supporter of the influential religious figure Jamal-Khoja-Ishan and actively criticized Sufism and "folk" Islamic practices (worship of holy places, wedding rituals, etc.). In addition, Ponomarev taught Arabic to the future SADUM mufti Ziyaetdin Babakhanov (Shabley n.d.).

It is noteworthy that the fundamentalists, who criticized traditional Islam and Sufism, briefly allied themselves with the modernist Bolsheviks in Central Asia, who also were opposed to Sufi superstition. In particular, Bakhtiyer Babadjanov alleges the participation of Shami-Damullah and his disciples in the destruction of the famous "Sheikh Khavandi Takhur" mazar (Babadjanov, Muminov, Olcott 2004). Katrin Pujol finds the influence of Salafi discourse, in the 1970s and 1980s, in the official Tashkent-published journal "Muslims of the Soviet East", which periodically condemned pilgrimage to holy places as bid'ah (an innovation contrary to Islam). In her opinion, the political activity of Central Asian Muslims was also influenced by banned radio programs that restored their connection with the outside ummah (Poujol 2016). Radical ideas may have also been spread by foreign students who brought with them the writings of al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and A'la Maududi (Margulis and Demidenko 2019).

Two questions remain regarding the pervasion of radicalism. The first is the influence of the Hajj of 1953-1955, organized by the Soviet authorities, during which participants could have assimilated ideas characteristic of Middle Eastern Islam. The Hajj is known to have stimulated comparisons of Soviet Muslims' knowledge of the Koran, knowledge of Arabic, and observance of Islamic canons, with the state of those things in the Middle East and North Africa (Akhmadullin 2013). The second issue is the influence of South Asian Islamic thought on Central Asian Muslims. The figure of Muhammadjan Hindustani Rustamov (Hoji Domla), who had a significant influence on the Islamic renaissance in the Ferghana Valley and Tajikistan, invariably appears in related discussions. He was born in 1892 in Kokand (modern Uzbekistan) and studied for 8 years in either the "Osmania" madrasa in Ajmer (modern Pakistan) (Babadjanov, Muminov, Olcott 2004) or the Deobandi Hind madrasa (Salimpur 2013). One of the leaders of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, Khoji Akbar Turajonzoda, also noted that "Domulla Hindustani (Qori Mohammadjon Domullo) was a graduate of the world-famous Deoband University" (Knyazev 2002, 82). Bayram Balci of the Center for International Studies in Paris believes that although Muhammadjan Hindustani cannot be considered a representative of the Deoband school, he was nevertheless influenced by it (Balci 2015).

Among Central Asian Muslims, Hindustani is better known as a Hanafi

conservative who actively opposed the spread of Salafism in the region and the politicization of Islam (Abdullov 2020). Upon returning to his homeland, Hindustani was initially persecuted, but then in 1956, after rehabilitation, he was appointed imam of the Mawlana Charkhi mosque in Dushanbe (Babadjanov et al. 2004). He also became a teacher of Urdu and Hindi at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR in Dushanbe, while opening his own hujra, an illegal school that taught Islamic theology.

As Shirin Akiner notes, among Hindustani's many disciples were clerics of the official Muslim establishment. His disciples and followers also included such figures as Rahmatulla Qori Allama and Abduvali Qori Mirzoyev, who "began to call for an active struggle to cleanse society of its 'impurities' (including such heretical practices as pilgrimages to the tombs of holy men)". Hindustani and his followers took part in the dispute between radicals and conservatives in the 1970s, when local conservatives began using the term "Wahhabi" to refer to fundamentalists or "mujaddids" ("renewers"). This was then used by the Soviet press to hint at the existence of "a treasonous link to a foreign power (a link which was not proven and almost certainly did not exist at this period)" (Akiner 2003). Hence, Central Asia approached the collapse of the USSR with an environment favorable to Islamic fundamentalism and radicalism, which had been developing throughout the entire Soviet period. The short-term outburst of Islamic radicalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with its ideals of armed struggle for Sharia government, is less surprising in this context.

This upsurge did not attain a scale capable of completely transforming Central Asia, even in the deteriorated economic conditions, largely for three reasons. First, the new governments managed to both suppress the upsurge and promote their own ideologies, which included elements of secularism and traditional Islam. The exception was Tajikistan, which destabilized and descended into armed conflict in which Islamist radicals took part. Second, in the first years of independence, Central Asian societies were dominated by social groups oriented towards secular values and lifestyles, including large Russian-speaking populations. Third, local traditional Islam — with its ideas of tolerance, mystical love, and veneration of saints (wali) — was close to the overwhelming majority of Muslims in the region, and underwent a renaissance at this time.

Islamist radicalism in Central Asia, during Perestroika and the first post-Soviet decade, is linked primarily to local tradition, and only then to external sources. Nevertheless, those external currents began to penetrate the region after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Endogenous Roots of Radical Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia

Perestroika legalized support of political Islam. As Russian researcher Artem Andreev notes, the Soviet authorities "in the second half of the 1980s, as part of their 'freedom of conscience' policy, abandoned further attempts to counteract religious organizations." Moreover, at the local republican level, Islam's revival was reluctantly promoted through the return of mosques and madrassas to believers, under the control of SADUM and then without it. Andreev writes that the "all-powerful" authorities were incapable of controlling the numerous groups of believers, especially the "new wave" that professed political Islam, probably due to the impotence of Soviet propaganda, the lack of a "spiritual alternative", and support given to religious revival by the local nomenclatura (Andreev 2017).

Alexander Knyazev notes that "at the end of the 1980s, 17 mosques were officially registered in Tajikistan, while in 1991 there were already 130 cathedral mosques, 2,800 small mosques and prayer houses, and more than 150 Koranic schools. 120 Muslim communities were registered, with 50 of them calling themselves 'communities of pure Islam', and 95% of the new mosque ministers came from the unofficial clergy" (Knyazev 2002).

Consequently, Tajikistan experienced a sharp rise in the popularity of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), many of whose members came from underground Islamic circles, such as Khoja Kalandari Sadriddin's circle in Kurgan-Tube. The first meeting of the IRPT's five founders—Sadriddin, Sayid Abdulloh Nuri (the future leader of the united Tajik opposition during the civil war), Odinabeki Abdusalom, Nematullo Eshon, and Kori Mukhammadzhon Mukhiddin, who all considered themselves students of Hindustani—likely took place at Sadriddin's house in spring 1973.

It remains debated whether the IRPT's founders were Islamic fundamentalists. Sadriddin himself told Ozodi Radio that three questions were raised at the first meeting. First, what should be done to familiarize people with Islamic culture, because people have long been in disbelief. Second, how to fight against the heresies and superstitions which were seen as Islam. Third, how to break the silence of the Islamic scholars (ulama). But "we did not know that our work would take its toll" (Salimpur 2013).

Obviously, the second question aligns the founders with mujaddadiyya fundamentalists in opposition to traditional Central Asian Islam, a stance likely produced by the penetration of Middle Eastern political Islamists' works into the region. Tajik researcher M. Salimzoda, in his dissertation "From the History of the Emergence of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan", writes that

the works of Hassan al-Banna, Said and Muhammad Qutb, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani were disseminated in hujras and circles.

The penetration of political Islamism may have split the Tajik Islamic intelligentsia, including the followers of Hindustani, into two camps: the purist Mujaddadiyya supporters who united around Nuri in the IRPT, and the conservative-traditionalists (kadimgaroyon). Hindustani himself joined the conservatives and later denounced Nuri for having "clothed Islam in a political mantle" (Salimpur 2013). Tajik experts Saodat Olimova and Muzaffar Olimov also note that IRPT leader Nuri could be categorized as a Salafist, and that he "in the late Soviet years promoted the ideas of the ideologues of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, H. al-Banna and S. Qutb" (Olimova, Olimov 2001).

The American researcher Adeeb Khalid is of the opinion that the IRPT had local roots and was linked to the Mujaddadi fundamentalists. He writes that "the Tajik IRP, an alliance of unofficial reformist (mujaddid) mullahs of the countryside from the regions of Gharm and Hisor, quickly acquired a locally oriented program". He also emphasizes the difference between the Tajik Mujaddids of the IRPT and the Islamic parties of the Middle East with regard to the establishment of an Islamic state. "Its (IRPT's) leadership argued for the creation of an Islamic state in Tajikistan but acknowledged that this goal was a long-term one. After seven decades of Soviet rule, the main goal was to restore the basics of Islam to society and to begin the process of bringing Islamic knowledge and Islamic values back into public life," emphasizes Adeeb Khalid (Khalid 2010).

This position largely determined the Islamists' strategy in the Tajik Civil War, in which they "found themselves on the same side of the barricades as reformist nationalists and 'unorthodox' Ismailis". During the period of the Civil War and the presence of some United Tajik Opposition units in the northern regions of Afghanistan, the worldview of the IRPT leaders came under the influence of their Afghan counterparts. The Islamic Society of Afghanistan (Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan) (ISA) of Burhanuddin Rabbani, which aimed to build an Islamic state, became increasingly popular (Andreev 2017).

After the end of the civil war in 1997, the IRPT became part of Tajikistan's political system; however, it failed to transform itself into a pan-Tajik political force, dooming it to splits, marginalization, and political defeat by Emomali Rakhmon. In 2015, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan banned the IRPT and added it to the list of terrorist organizations. The ideas of the IRPT were alien to most Tajiks, as they adhered to a more familiar traditional Islam, and they were tired of the civil war.

The fate of the so-called Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which

also grew out of historically local radicalism, was short-lived, as the biographies of its two leaders, Tahir Yuldashev and Juma Namangani, demonstrate.

Russian researcher Mikhail Falkov notes that "in the late 80s and very early 90s, Tahir Yuldashev came under the strong influence of Umarkhon qori Namangani, then Kazim of the city of Namangan in the Fergana Valley". In turn, Namangani in 1989 became a disciple of Sheikh Abduvali qori Andijani, former imam of the "Masjid-i madrasa" mosque in Andijan, who, as M. Falkov points out, "played a huge role in the development of the fundamentalist movement in the 80s - early 90s in the entire Central Asian region" (Falkov 2000).

Bakhtiyar Babadjanov emphasizes the role of Andijani in the formation of the IMU and the worldviews of Yuldashev and Namangani. In particular, in Andijani's famous 1991 sermon "Ghuraba'" ("Outcasts"), he spoke out against so-called "secular" ("steppe") Islam, whose followers limit religion to its cultural and ritual heritage, "but do not accept calls for total control of the sharia in all spheres of life, especially in everyday life, legislation, and the political sphere". Andijani introduces the term "ghuraba'" to denote those rare Muslims who call for adherence to the injunctions of the Qur'an and Sunnah in all spheres of public life. They are a minority and are therefore "outcasts".

It was a speech in the purist tradition, as shown by the actions of those who took it as a guide. According to Babadjanov, Andijani's speech immediately became popular among some Muslims (especially his young followers) who felt the need to fight for a "pure Islam". The supporters of the movement began to call themselves "renewers" (mujaddidiylar), while other Muslims called them "wahhabis" (wohhobiylar). The "renewers" considered many of the rituals and customs of the local traditional Muslims to be impermissible innovations (bid'ah). The ensuing conflicts effectively constituted a religious schism.

According to Babadjanov, the "Ghuraba'" speech later turned into an ideological reference point for many radicalized Muslims, which "can be seen as a de facto recognition of Abduvali qori [Andijani]'s status as the spiritual father of such a radical organization as the IMU." "Despite its initial popularity, the 'ghuraba' ideology was doomed to become a minority ideology, which was one of the reasons for its subsequent radicalization" (Babadjanov 2010). This speech became one of the ideological foundations of the radicals' establishment, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, of Islom Adolati (Islamic Justice) and Islom Lashkarlari (Islamic Militia) in the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan. These organizations, created with the direct involvement of Tahir Yuldashev, sought to introduce elements of Sharia governance in Namangan, Uzbekistan's second most populous city. At the same time, another IMU leader, Juma Namangani, took part in the creation of the paramilitary group Tovba (Repentance), which

aimed to build an Islamic state in the Fergana Valley.

Islom Adolati first declared its political ambitions on December 19, 1991, when its members seized Namangan's khokimiyat (city hall) and, in a meeting with the republic's head Islam Karimov, demanded that Uzbekistan be declared an Islamic state. In 1996 they formed the IMU, with Yuldashev as its leader and Namangani at the head of its military wing. Notably, the IMU retained the ideological concept of "ghuraba", narrowed by Yuldashev to refer only to his group (Babadjanov 2010). However, Uzbek authorities were able to rapidly suppress the radicals in the Fergana Valley, forcing their leaders to flee the country for Tajikistan (where they took part in the civil war on the side of the UTO), then Afghanistan, and finally the western border regions of Pakistan (after the Taliban's defeat in 2001). The IMU's transition to terrorism was clearly demonstrated in the 1999 attacks on Kyrgyzstan (the Batken events) and the 2000 attacks on the Surhandaryo region of Uzbekistan.

After the liquidation of Namangani and Yuldashev, the IMU continued under new leaders Usman Adil and Usman Ghazi, swearing allegiance to ISIS-Khorasan in 2015, thereby foreclosing cooperation with the resurgent Taliban. The oldest Central Asian group with origins in local radical Islam, at present, has negligible influence.

However, although the defeat of the IRPT and the IMU showed the limits of locally-originated radical Islam, it did not mean the end of Islamist radicalism in Central Asia altogether. Since 1991, the region has gradually become host to various foreign groups and ideologues professing radical and terrorist ideas, which now play a decisive role in the promotion of purism. The millions of Central Asian migrants working in Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, South Korea, and other countries have also come under their scrutiny.

External Forces in the Development of Radical Islam in Central Asia

The foreign groups and movements that have been most active in promoting radicalism in Central Asia, since 1991, can be divided into two groups - those working to multiply their adherents in the region itself, and those that recruit Central Asians to leave (hijrat) and fight in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Hizb ut-Tahrir, Tabligh, and Salafiya

Hizb ut-Tahriri al-Islamiyya (HTI), Tablighi Jamaat (TD), and Salafiya represent the first category. Experts agree that HTI is the category's most powerful member. The HTI began its penetration into Central Asia in the mid-

1990s, declaring the goal of Sharia government and the caliphate's nonviolent restoration. The HTI considered the current governments of Muslim countries, including in Central Asia, to be un-Islamic, leading to the group's banning in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan for extremism and terrorism.

B.Babadjanov gives a periodization of HTI activity in Central Asia since the early 1990s. "In the very early 1990s, middle-class intellectuals inclined to religiosity prevailed among those recruited to the Hizb ut-Tahrir. This was a purposeful choice. Such people contributed to the expansion of the organization, because they could address the 'local audience' in a language they understood and could attract a large number of people to Hizb ut-Tahrir," he writes. Then, at the second stage (mid-1990s), "young people from all walks of life began to be involved in the cells of the same Hizb ut-Tahrir (Babadjanov 2013). HTI propaganda was popular with the youth, who faced poverty, a collapse of the education system, and economic crisis.

HTI's ideology is radical in that it recognizes only its own understanding of Islam. However, it lacks paradigmatic radicalism's purism and reliance upon theologians. As Adeeb Khalid notes, "For all HTI's talk of return and restoration, however, the group is a thoroughly modern phenomenon, both in the conception of its goals and its organization. If the IMU is at pains to cast itself as a religious movement (backing up its call to jihad with the authority of an "agreement by the major ulama"), the HTI casts itself proudly as "a political group and not a priestly one.""

Khalid underlines that "the HTI has little interest in theological debate, seeing Islam primarily as a political system. As the party's platform puts it, "Islam is [the party's] ideology." HTI's structure is inspired by that quintessentially modern form of organization, the revolutionary party. The party is ultimately a secret society organized in semi-independent cells of only five members each, which are supposed to elect national (or, in the party's vocabulary, "provincial") executive councils."

Regarding the concept of the caliphate as envisioned by the HTI, Adeeb Khalid writes that "the caliphate the HTI seeks to "restore" is a modern welfare state that has little connection to the caliphate as it existed in history. The organization couches its critique of the present world order in both anti-imperialist and Islamist terms. Tracing the HTI's lineage takes us back not to classical Islam but to the tradition of revolutionary politics of the modern world" (Khalid 2010, 225-227).

B. Babadjanov draws parallels between the HTI's program of gaining power and that of Vladimir Lenin. He writes: "The HTI's statements about "peaceful

methods" of political struggle are questionable, to put it mildly, if we recall the well-known episodes of their activities in Jordan, where in 1968, 1969 and 1971, under its leadership, failed military coups were organized; the attempt of a military putsch organized by the HTI in 1972 in Southern Iraq also failed. These attempts are not denied by prominent party members. As al-Nabhani and his followers once explained: "...if a society revolts against a regime, its removal, even by military force, is not an act of violence. It would be violence if one had to eliminate one's opponents in order to come to power". Such self-justifications, hidden under the modern rhetoric of "noble goals," very reminiscent of the early Bolshevik slogans of the party of V. Lenin, cannot conceal the HTI's ultimate goal - political violence, which is defined as the third stage of the party's struggle" (Babadjanov and Olcott 2004).

HTI's ideology inevitably radicalizes its followers. As B. Babadjanov notes, the first emissaries of the HTI to the region themselves stoked conflict and uncompromising (religious, political, and social) confrontation. "This is evidenced, for example, by their first leaflets that appeared in Uzbekistan. There is not even an attempt at tactful argumentation, or a clear explanation of why local Muslims and their theologians are declared "unwitting henchmen of the enemies of Islam"."

B. Babadjanov emphasizes that "the pursuit of insularity, claims to knowledge of the "Secret" and of the path to the "liberation of Islam" (or the "purification of Islam" or the "return to the true Islam")—such attitudes, of course, spiritually unite this and similar groups, but, at the same time, isolate them from other believers. On the other hand, it is precisely insularity and conflict with the community (society) that determines the inevitable path of all such religious-political parties and movements—the path to radicalization (under the pressure of circumstances) and even greater isolation" (Babadjanov and Olcott 2004).

HTI's ideology of "modern" Islamic radicalism, not based on authoritative theologians, has met sharp opposition from the "classical" radical groups and their leaders, such as the IMU and the IRPT, from the beginning of the HTI's penetration into Central Asia. The IMU's main criticism of the HTI's ideology was expressed in a 10 January 2006 video message by Tahir Yuldashev, in which he said that "the HTI is taking root where there are no authoritative and knowledgeable ulem, where Islamic enlightenment (daawat) is not firmly established," and accused the HTI of simplifying matters of faith for unenlightened segments of the population and of not conforming to the basic canons of Islam" (Mirsayitov 2006).

However, Kyrgyz researcher Iqboljon Mirsayitov argues that the IMU's criticism of the HTI was also motivated by the latter's emergence as an influential

force in Central Asia, while the IMU itself had no authority there (Mirsayitov 2006).

Relations between the HTI and the IRPT were also hostile. Hizb ut-Tahrir accused Abdulloh Nuri of having made a peace agreement with the Tajik government, which was unacceptable, as "Islam never reconciles with infidels". As a result, "the party became a plaything, acting only in the interests of the government" (International Crisis Group 2003, 36). The peace agreement was also criticized by many radicalized IRPT members who began to defect to the HTI (Margulis, Demidenko 2019).

Sayid Abdulloh Nuri, in turn, told Kabar News Agency in 2004 that "Hizb-ut-Tahrir, from the point of view of Shariah, has no right to act. When there is one Islamic system in one country, all Muslims must obey this system. For example, in Tajikistan there is an Islamic organization that has been operating for 31 years and has all the necessary structures. Every Islamic organization must have its governing body, and act on the basis of this religious direction (mazhab), to which all Muslims of the country adhere. Those who operate outside this system are considered rebels. No one and no group has the right to organize another religious organization or group contrary to this rule. You know that the HTI officials have announced that they have hundreds of thousands of followers. First of all, it is necessary to point out their mistakes to them, and if they do not pay attention, then it is necessary to prohibit their actions" (Nuri 2004).

At present, the exact number of HTI supporters in the region cannot be accurately counted. There were reports that, in 2006, HTI's supporters in the Jalalabad region of Kyrgyzstan alone reached 15,000 (Aalyev 2006).

Central Asian law enforcement is constantly detaining HTI propagandists and members, but the movement has not yet been eliminated. HTI recruiters are often located abroad and employ social networks and messengers. For instance, HTI supporters, detained by Uzbek law enforcement in July 2022, were being managed through a Telegram group by Kyrgyz-born Makhmudjon Kholdarov, acting under the pseudonym "Mahmud Abdulmumin" and currently hiding in Poland.

Additionally, the Taliban allowed HTI's members to hold meetings in Kabul and Kunduz, perplexing Afghanistan experts, as the Taliban had previously stated that they would not allow any party or group, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, to operate in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Taliban security forces have repeatedly detained HTI members in various parts of Afghanistan, and the Taliban do not share HTI's basic tenet of building a caliphate (Sadiq 2024).

The Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), founded in 1926 in India by Maulana Muhammad

Ilyas Kandhlawi in 1926, became active in Central Asia at almost the same time as the HTI, in the early 1990s. TJ positions itself as a "voluntary pacifist organization". TJ sees its mission as the return of apostate and nominal Muslims to Islam and correct Islamic practice. According to Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi's vision, jihad is a peaceful process, a call that should be a personal obligation of every believer. This duty is to carry out missionary activities (Balci 2015). A follower of the movement must perform a three-day daawat (the act of preaching) once a month, a 40-day daawat once a year, and a four-month daawat once in a lifetime (Rakhimov and Supotaeva 2023).

TJ is banned in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan as an extremist organization. Currently, its main field of activity is Kyrgyzstan. TJ initially focused on the north of Kyrgyzstan, which was considered less religious, but the organization's activity then spread throughout the country. "The Kyrgyz Republic has become one of the major centers of Tablighi Jamaat, where, in particular, religious literature is printed for distribution in other regions" (Rakhimov and Supotaeva 2023). TJ's supporters in Kyrgyzstan are estimated at 20-25,000 — perhaps up to 50,000 (Khlebnikov 2017) — mostly rural youth (Ia-centr.ru 2023). Back in 2009, the Kyrgyz Security Council recommended that the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan consider banning TD as a security threat. However, the movement remains active — according to a number of experts, because TD supporters hold leading positions in the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, and have infiltrated the elite more generally (Ia-centr.ru 2023; Khlebnikov 2017).

The third influential movement is **Salafiya**. This group, which adheres to the tenets of radical purist Islamism, has been spreading in Central Asia since the mid-1990s. It holds that Muslims need to return in their lifestyle and views to the early Muslim community, to the "righteous ancestors" (as-salaf as-salihun). Like all radical Islamist movements, they oppose traditional Islam and the division of the Muslim Ummah.

Meanwhile, there is no consensus among researchers as to whether Salafiya preaches only purist Islam, or also armed struggle. Mohammad Garabey, an expert on Islam at the University of Bonn, distinguishes three schools of thought within Salafism. The first is the Salafi fundamentalists, who preach "true" Islam while pursuing no political goals and rejecting violence. The second current is the political Salafis, who seek to establish a God-pleasing society within an Islamic state. The third current is the jihadist Salafis, who recognize the legitimacy of using violence to build a caliphate. Mohammad Garabey believes that the third current represents a clear minority within Salafism (Garabey and Jolkver 2014).

Salafiya is most active in Kazakhstan and among Central Asian labor

migrants. As of 2016, according to official data, there were 15,000 committed Salafi supporters in Kazakhstan (TengriNews 2016). The problem of Salafiya's spread has reached the political level, being discussed in Parliament in 2023. Religious radicalism, according to Majilis deputies, "is capable not only of splitting Kazakh society", but also of "erupting into open confrontation between citizens". Aq Zhol MP Kazybek Isa said at the time that "If we do not destroy the weed at the root, instead mowing only the top, it will continue to multiply. In 2009, the parliament amended the law on religion, but even then our authorities failed to introduce prohibitive norms. If these amendments had been adopted, there would not have been such tragedies that turned into bloody massacres like the events of January [2022]. And there would not have been negative religious movements, and with them the division of the nation". He recalled that in 2011, all state bodies, except the National Security Committee, supported the calls to fight radicals. In turn, MP Yermurat Bapi believes that the previous president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, used Wahhabism to retain power, and for that reason there was no active struggle against it. Speaking of the January 2022 unrest, Bapi and some other deputies mention Kairat Satybaldy, Nazarbayev's nephew, convicted in 2023, who was linked to the emergence of various radical groups (Khairgeldin 2023).

The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan also has a negative attitude towards Salafism. Its official website declares Salafism a threat to the unity of the Muslim Ummah, and describes the ideology's key features. Thus, Salafists call on Muslims to abandon all madhhabs and follow the way of the Companions, the Koran, and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Salafists equate Muslims who do not perform Friday namaz with kafirs, and recognize only their sheikhs, declaring all other scholars and followers misguided. It is also noted that key terrorist and extremist groups banned in Kazakhstan—such as ISIS, al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda, At-Takfir ul-Hijra, Lashkar-e Tayyiba, and the Caucasus Emirate—adhere to Salafism (Ongar 2023).

Salafiya also operates in Kyrgyzstan, arriving mainly via citizens who received religious education abroad. The State Committee for National Security (SCNS) and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan jointly requested citizens of the country to be "more vigilant and to develop their religious literacy by obtaining religious education from verified sources and prominent religious figures and scholars. They also stated that Salafis can be identified by their shouting and spreading their legs too wide during namaz, by their reciting "Allahu Akbar" and raising their hands only to their chest during Takbir, and by their making many unnecessary movements during prayer, contrary to the Hanafi mashab (Makanbai kyzy 2023).

Central Asians studying or working abroad are particularly vulnerable to Salafi propaganda. Uzbekistani and Tajikistani media periodically report on the detention of Salafis who were radicalized while in Russia, before themselves spreading radical ideas through social networks upon their return home.

Jihadist groups

The other category of foreign-origin movements and groups consists of those that seek to recruit Central Asians for departure (hijrat) to either fight in the Middle East and Afghanistan or to carry out terrorist acts elsewhere. This category includes ISIS, Katibat al-Imam Bukhari, Katibat al-Tawhid wal Jihad, and Jamaat Ansarullah.

All these groups emerged as a result of the invasion into Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) by the U.S. and its allies, and as a result of the Arab Spring (2010), which destabilized several countries, especially Syria, which since 2011 has become one of the key locations of jihadist forces. All espouse the ideas of radical Islam, as well as warfare and terrorism that they justify with narratives of restoring Islam's purity, reestablishing the caliphate, and conducting gazavat against the West, Israel, and secular regimes in the region. They thus represent radicalism in its third, military form.

This became especially evident after ISIS's declaration of a global caliphate in 2014. The organization's ideology does not fundamentally differ from other variants of radical Islamism, remaining in line with purist ideas. Russian researcher A. Sotnichenko describes it as "based on Salafi ideas about the moral decay of the Muslim world as a result of the incorporation of various innovations of pagan origin into Islam. The results of this decomposition are the degradation of the Muslim world, its political disorganization, enmity between Muslims, and the triumph of Western ideas, technology, and military force. ISIS offers to completely abandon the legislative and political innovations that have appeared in the world since the 7th century and to create a uniform Islamic world with identical religious and legal practices" (Sotnichenko 2015).

ISIS adheres to the principle of takfirism. If any Muslim refuses to recognize the authority of their caliph, he is given takfir, analogous to the Christian anathema. Unprecedentedly, ISIS also declared a caliphate not in the future, but in the present, with institutions and a territory that initially included parts of Syria and Iraq, with Raqqa as its capital. According to Sotnichenko, "After seizing territories in Syria and Iraq, ISIS established an administrative apparatus there, consisting of a religious council (up to 11 people), a military council (3 people) and a security and intelligence council (11 people). Al-

Baghdadi hands out orders to everyone with the help of provincial governors. When new territories are taken over, a local administration with a propaganda department and a field court is immediately organized. Once the territory is finally controlled, a religious police force is moved in to build an education system, provide humanitarian aid, and supply basic necessities. In an imitation of power, ISIS leaders pay salaries to employees and benefits to the unemployed, and collect taxes" (Sotnichenko 2015).

Almost immediately after its emergence, ISIS sought to expand, including into Afghanistan. This expansion was initially facilitated by the electrifying effect of the caliphate's declaration in the environment prone to radical preaching. In 2015, six Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan commanders swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and established an ISIS unit, Wilayat Khorasan, led by Hafiz Khan Saeed. Also in 2015, IMU leader Usman Ghazi swore allegiance to al-Baghdadi, giving ISIS a bridgehead into Afghanistan, mainly in the eastern Jalalabad province. At the peak of ISIS-Khorasan's power in 2016, when its militants in Afghanistan numbered 3-4,000 (Sharb 2018), their invasion of Central Asia was considered a possibility. However, this was prevented by resistance from both the Taliban and the Kabul government. ISIS thus shifted to recruiting Central Asians to travel to the Middle East.

It is difficult to estimate how much success ISIS propaganda and recruitment in Central Asia has had, and the opinions of experts, politicians, and intelligence agencies differ. Uran Botobekov, a specialist in Islam, on the basis of various sources, estimated that ISIS in 2016 included more than 500 fighters from Kyrgyzstan, about 400 from Kazakhstan, 360 from Turkmenistan, and 200 from Uzbekistan (Botobekov 2016). Another estimate counted 300 Kazakhstani citizens fighting in ISIS in 2014 (Smykov, Aigozhin, Turmaganbetov 2014).

ISIS's defeat in Syria and Iraq by government forces, militias, Kurdish groups, Russia, and the US-led coalition meant the loss of nearly all its territory, including key economic centers such as Raqqa and Mosul in 2017. The US killed al-Baghdadi in 2019, and intelligence services have intensified their work in preventing militants' movement. The end of the pseudo-caliphate meant a decline in ISIS's recruitment capacity in Central Asia and Afghanistan, although its supporters continue to spread propaganda.

Other groups, Katibat al-Imam al-Bukhari (KIB) and Katibat al-Tawhid wal Jihad (KTJ) (formerly Jannat Oshiklari), have in recent years actively recruited Central Asians to jihad in Syria. These terrorist groups are ideologically close to Jebhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's military wing in Syria, the core of that ideology being the willingness to wage armed struggle against anyone they considered enemies of Islam.

According to Rohan Gunaratna, a counterterrorism expert at West Point, the ideology of jihadism is traditionally associated with the works of two modern Sunni Islamic thinkers, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1702-1792) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). Wahhab claimed that Islam was corrupted about a generation after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and on this basis rejected the entire 1,000-year period of Islamic theology as un-Islamic. Qutb, after a trip to the United States, declared Western civilization the enemy of Islam. He also denounced the leaders of Muslim countries as "apostates" for not following the principles of Islam strictly enough. His doctrine is based on the idea of a "defensive jihad" with two components — the defense of Islam and its purification from all non-Islamic beliefs. His writings are believed to be the basis for al-Qaida and closely related groups who believe that the U.S. and Israel are the leaders of a global conspiracy against Islam and the Muslim nation (Gunaratna 2005).

KIB and KTJ are known for their predominantly Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Uighur fighters. KTJ's fighters number 500. The group began active propaganda and recruitment work in Central Asia, especially in Kyrgyzstan, back in 2014-2015, when 35 people left Osh province alone for Syria. The group also includes people from Batken and Jalalabad provinces, as well as people from Xinjiang in China (Mamytov 2016).

KIB's fighters in Syria also number up to 500. The organization has tried to expand into Afghanistan like ISIS. According to the UN, Qatibat al-Imam al-Bukhari leaders viewed Afghanistan as a new staging ground for attacks against neighboring Central Asian countries. Since 2016, KIB fighters have been redeployed from Syria to the north of Afghanistan (Faryab, Baghdis, and Jowzjan Provinces) with a view to setting up training camps for new recruits. KIB had an approximate strength of 80-100 fighters in Afghanistan, but there is no information available on the period since the Taliban's return to power. In September 2023, KIB's founder, Uzbek citizen Ulugbek Babamuratov, was killed in Syria (Kun.uz 2023).

KIB has also tried to establish a recruitment network in Russia, including among Central Asian migrant workers. In February 2023, the FSB smashed its cells in Moscow and Krasnoyarsk, in the process detaining four people who were recruiting and transporting fighters to Syria (Kommersant 2023). KIB also attempted to create a springboard for the spread of jihad in Kyrgyzstan, in 2013-2014, when Ilkhom Abdullaev arrived in the country to establish a cell in Osh comprised of radicalized athletes armed to carry out sabotage and terrorist acts. In February 2014, Kyrgyzstan's intelligence services crushed this group (Mamytov 2016).

Overall estimates vary regarding the number of Central Asians recruited to the Middle East. In 2016, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon estimated the number of Tajiks fighting in Syria at about 1,000, and Kazakhstan's security services estimated the number of Kazakhs fighting in the Middle East at 400 (Botobekov 2016). The BBC in 2019 estimated that more than 4,000 Central Asians had gone to fight in Syria, including 850 from Kyrgyzstan (Ryskulova 2019).

Viktor Mikhailov provides detailed information on the recruitment work of international terrorist organizations among Uzbek migrant workers: 27,000 Uzbek citizens were targeted for radicalization, of which slightly more than 2,000 were recruited by groups operating in Syria and Afghanistan, and about another 8,000 were ready for recruitment. However, ISIS's defeat, the effective work of law enforcement agencies, and the Covid-19 pandemic complicated the exit plans of those recruited. Mikhailov states that the migrants typically targeted are 19-30 years old, with various problems in their lives that make them psychologically vulnerable. 10% of recruits are potential killers, for whom the weapon in their hands is a way to personally satisfy their passions; 15% are religious fanatics who believe that armed jihad is the only way to fight the infidels; the rest have their own reasons, but their main desire (the recruiters assure them of this) is to help their Muslim brothers who are fighting for justice and the honor of all other Muslims. The Uzbek expert emphasizes that recruitment begins with the radicalization of the targets' worldview, mainly via the Internet, social networks, and messengers (Mikhailov 2022).

Separate from the above groups are the Afghanistan-based groups Jamaat Ansarullah (JA), founded in 2006 by Amriddin Tabarov, and Tehrike Taliban Tajikistan (TTT), founded in 2022 by Ansarullah commander Mahdi Arsalan. Both seek to build an Islamic state within Tajikistan. A number of experts believe that the TTT is a subdivision of JA. In any case, there is no doubt that both groups have been patronized by the Taliban since their inception, and JA fighters fought as part of the Taliban against NATO and the Afghan army. "Ansarullah played an important role in establishing Taliban rule in Afghan Badakhshan between 2021 and 2022." JA and TTT were estimated to have 300 and 200 fighters, respectively, in 2022 (Makhmudov et al. 2023).

In February 2024, a number of media outlets, citing the Swiss Institute for Global Affairs (SIGA), reported on Tajikistan's request to the Taliban for the extradition of JA members. However, the Taliban rejected the request, instead offering to mediate peace talks between the Tajik government and JA. JA's leadership initially put forward several conditions, such as declaring Tajikistan an Islamic state, the withdrawal of Russian soldiers from the country, the

release of all their imprisoned members, and the opening of madrassas (religious schools). Eventually, only one demand remained: the withdrawal of Russian troops, which Dushanbe rejected. Thus, the situation has reached a deadlock, and both JA and TTT continue to threaten Tajikistan from Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Islamic radicalism in Central Asia has evolved substantially in the last century. In the first stage, Islamic purism grew primarily from local soil, influenced somewhat by radical ideas from the Middle East and British India that penetrated during the Soviet era. This phase reached its peak around the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the IRPT and IMU emerged and achieved some political influence in the region. However, their defeat led to their displacement by radical Islamist groups originating from the Middle East and South Asia.

Initially, immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain, Central Asians were targeted by Hizb ut-Tahriri al-Islamiyya (HTI), Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), and Salafiya, which were then joined in the 2000s by outright militant jihadist groups—ISIS, Katibat al-Imam Bukhari, Katibat al-Tawhid wal Jihad, and Jamaat Ansarulloh—that emerged as a result of U.S. adventures in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

The defeat of radical Islamist force—especially ISIS—in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan has led to a partial decline in their ability to recruit in Central Asia. However, in general, radical preaching remains active on the Internet, social media, and messengers, raising the question of the Islamic radicalism's future development in Central Asia.

Most likely, the region will continue to fuel Islamist formations in the Middle East, as long as some of their enclaves remain, for example, in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, and the western regions of Pakistan. However, whether there will be a revival of local purism in a new form is still hard to say. Islam in Central Asia is clearly still undergoing a renaissance, as well as Arabization and Turkization, at least in dress code. This is unlikely to stop in the coming years, the consequence of which will be the expansion of the Islamic socio-cultural environment, which will reproduce itself through socialization and enculturation.

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Савремени исламски радикализам у Централној Азији: генеза и историјски развој

Сажетак: Овај чланак истражује обрасце развоја исламског радикализма у Централној Азији, његове изворе, историју и будућност. Током 20. века, ислам у Централној Азији био је пре свега формиран од стране унутрашњих регионалних фактора који су долазили у сусрет са локалним традицијама и тако стварали посебан етничко-културни идентитет. Перестројка је битно допринела обнови политичког ислама и то са стварање неколико партија и покрета у региону. Међутим, током времена су локалне организације које промовишу агенду радикалног ислама постале маргинализоване од стране државе. Ово није утицало на потпуни пораз идеја радикалног ислама у Централној Азији, јер су страни фактори постали посебно заинтересовани за овај регион након стварања независних муслиманских република након 1991. године. Ми предлажемо да треба направити разлику између страних организација које су пре свега фокусиране на исламску обнову у региону и ненасилну политизацију, од оних које имају регионалне амбиције и које користе религију за регрутну базу. Обе врсте организација су под притиском влада у региону, а џихадисти су такође под ударом битних војних пораза. Закључујемо да радикални ислам и даље постоји у Централној Азији зато што овај регион доживљава верску ренесансу која је појачана социјализацијом.
Кључне речи: радикализам, исламизам, салафизам, развој, историја, Централна Азија