

## TERRORISM: A THREAT TO CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Today, terrorism has become a major problem for the entire world. Central Asian States are no exception. In these states, the important issues are separatism, Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and drugs. Because of these problems, the other external powers are affected: The author, thus, analyses the causes and the methods to check terrorism so that peace and stability can prevail in their states and by doing this they can play more assertive role in international politics.*

**Keywords:** *breeding ground, Islamic caliphate, law enforcement, border security, combating terrorism, CSTO, SCO, Committee for Religious Affairs, NGO.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Central Asia is a vast region, which includes Afghanistan, Mongolia, the northern regions of Iran, India and Pakistan, the western outreaches of China as well as part of the southern outskirts of Russia and five former Soviet republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the states of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan had to deal with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Today this terrorist group is seen as a threat to all countries of the Central Asia region. Its main goal was to achieve the separation of the Fergana valley from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and to form an independent Islamic state in its territory. The Fergana valley is a densely populated district and the unemployment rate is high. This makes it a perfect “breeding ground” for all sorts of radical organizations and the recruitment of new supporters. If the initial militants’ agenda involved just the establishment of an independent state in the Fergana valley, today they harbor an even more ambitious plan: they want it to become a part of the Islamic Caliphate, which is supposed to include the entire territory of the Middle East and the Caucasus.<sup>1</sup>

In August 2015 the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan integrated into ISIS. This organization has proved to be more and more assertive in the Central Asia. It is also constantly expanding its terrorist activities in other countries. In recent years, there has been quite upsurge in the activities of the agents of international terrorist organizations in the region. They recruit and train militants. There are militant bases in the territory of the country, where they indulge in various terrorist activities against neighboring states. People of Kyrgyzstan participated in the acts of terrorism in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The outlook for the future seems grim and the worst consequence of this situation for the countries of Central Asia could be that sooner or later militants will return to their home countries. Then, they could engage in terrorism activities at home.

The threat of terrorism in the post-Soviet republics of Central Asia further gain momentum of the popular support from the radical Islamic movements led by the local people. Generally, they are “brainwashed” through propaganda. Adverse living conditions, low wages and discontent with the government in their respective countries contribute to the recruiters’ success.

There are good reasons to believe that the West is much worried about the growing affinity between Russia and China and could produce tension in the Central Asia to underline the positions of the two countries and increase own influence in the region. Russia would be in grave danger if military conflict is sparked in the region. It would also engulf China, especially, if the Uighur separatists from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the people’s Republic of China (more than 15 million people live there, out of which 60% are of Turkic origin and practice Islam) would become active. The US and alliance members can produce such violent situation so that they can exert pressure on Russia and China.<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, Russian President pointed out in the General UN Assembly, that “the Islamic State did not come out of a clear blue sky: it was initially nurtured as an instrument against disfavored secular regimes.” The security related problems in the Central Asian are discussed below.

## **KAZAKHSTAN**

After independence, Kazakhstan could to solve many of the issues that could be the of excessive radicalization of public sentiments. Basically, the socio-economic transformations, consistent and tight controlled political liberalization, and public policies aimed at preserving the ethnic and religious tolerance showed the inner contradictions in Kazakh society. Thus, the possibility an area for the eruption all kinds of radical groups in the country were minimized.

In 1990s, the Kazakh government policy of counterterrorism focused more on neutralizing the social and political factors that could prevent the appearance of radical ideas. At the same time Kazakh being a conservative it terrorism was considered one of the most dangerous forms of crime. Over the years Kazakhs believed that

stability was important factor for integration of the country. The problem of terrorism in the early years of independence was more or less related with the fact that extremists from abroad could use the country's territory as a refuge or transit.

On 12 October, 2006 the Supreme Court approved a revised list of banned terrorist organizations. On this basis, the government banned the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizbut-Tahrir al-Islamic, Jammatt of Central Asia Mujahedins, Islamic party of Eastern Turkestan, Kurdistan Workers party, Boz Kurt, Lashkar-e-Toiba, Social Reforms Society (in Kuwait), Asbat an-Ansar (in Israel), Al-Qaeda, Taliban and the Muslim Brotherhood. Aum Shinrikyo and the East Turkestan liberation Organization were also included to the list of banned terrorist organizations on 17 November, 2006. Both organizations have members in Kazakhstan. The Government of Kazakhstan continued to express its willingness to increase counterterrorism cooperation with the United States, particularly in the areas of information sharing and law enforcement, as well as in the development of its ability to conduct special counterterrorism operations.<sup>3</sup>

The Government of Kazakhstan considers the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as a dangerous terrorist outfit and has often condemned the group publicly. The head of Kazakhstan's national Security Committee (KNB) made a statement in November, 2006 that about 300 Kazakhstani citizens are members of ISIL, and that law enforcement officials are working to identify these individuals.

**Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:** Kazakhstan has come out with comprehensive legal counterterrorism framework. It includes laws on countering extremism and terrorism. It is illegal for Kazakhstani citizens to fight an external wars. The Government of Kazakhstan passed amendments to its counterterrorism legislation in 2014, aiming to bring the country's laws in the line with the State Program on Combating Extremism and Terrorism 2013-2017.<sup>4</sup> Kazakhstan has rapidly increased its counterterrorism capability. The government officials actively pursue a program of training and professionalization that appear to enjoy political support at the highest levels. Security forces, including military and law enforcement are under security and undergoing a process of professionalization and reform with the motive discharging their duties more effectively.

#### **Countering the Financing of Terrorism:**

Kazakhstan belongs to the Eurasian Group on Combating Money laundering and Financing of Terrorism. It is Financial Action task Force-style regional body. In 2014, Kazakhstan made it clear that what constitutes terrorist financing in the Criminal Code to meet international standards. It was, then, recognized that any kind of transfer or exchange of funds, barter, or gift to a terrorist or terrorist group was criminal act under Kazakhstani law. Kazakhstan's unregulated financial sector is relatively small.

### **Regional and International Cooperation:**

Kazakhstan has participated in various counterterrorism forums for countering violent extremist activities within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Collective Security Treaty organization (CSTO) has established a joint task force for preventing the propagation of terrorist and extremist ideas via the internet.<sup>5</sup> In order to combat terrorism, Kazakhstan has pledged financial support to the Afghan National Security Forces (CANSF), including US \$2 million in 2014. Further, the government has also discuss the potential provision of other types of support to the ANSF. Kazakhstan is a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation but has a limited counterterrorism role.

### **Countering Radicalization to Violence and Violent Extremism:**

Kazakhstan's counterterrorism measures include prevention of radicalization and has made efforts to educate and provide necessary alternatives to youth through social programs and economic opportunities. But, it is found the results of these new programs are not clear. Kazakhstan's fight against terrorism is based on a multi-front strategy. For this diplomatic from foreign powers is necessary. Under, it modernized national defence force and the passage of extensive new legislation became important for implementation after proper study of the most effective laws dealing with the threat in other countries.

Kazakhstan's Minister of Culture and Sport was also suspicious of students studying abroad at religious schools. They were suspected of being indoctrinated in extremist ideology. Religious experts from the Committee for Religious Affairs was created to increase religious literacy and to counter radical ideas. Religious experts has created groups on social networks such as facebook and V Kontakte, where they post information and answer users' questions about religious extremism.

## **KYRGYZSTAN**

Terrorism in Kyrgyzstan has increased when the U.S. military forces attacked the terrorist outfit in overthrew the Taliban in 2001. The governments of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, then, provided airbases for counter-terrorism and propagate radical Islam. Since there were no reported terrorist attacks in Kyrgyzstan in 2014, security forces arrested several individuals suspected of affiliation with terrorist organizations and terrorist activities' abroad. At the same time, security forces was more aware of increased recruitment of citizens for terrorist acts in Syria. Kyrgyzstan regards the Islamic State (IS) group as a terrorist organization and has banned its activity in the republic.

In addition, there are organization such as Al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate, Jabhat Al-Nusram the ethnic Uzbek groups Katibat Imam Al-Bukhari an Jannat/Oshiklari which have been declared as terrorist groups. There are two such non-IS groups on the prosecutor's list – Tawhid/Waljihod and Katibat Imam Bukhari, comprising mainly

ethnic Uzbeks and Jabhat, Al-Nusra is a Russia-speaking faction that is led by an ethnic Uzbek. It is claimed that the majority of Kyrgyz nationals fighting in Syria are ethnic Uzbeks.

The government is more committed in containing terrorist attacks and getting the support of international organizations and foreign governments that could provide training and technical assistance. The country remained vulnerable to transnational threats, especially in the south where border issues with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and weak government capacity to control borders could facilitate the establishment of terrorist safe havens. The government was also concerned about the potential for an influx of terrorist elements from Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> The counterterrorism Centre in partnership with an international NGO has created community leadership groups in each region of Kyrgyzstan. There are led by local religious leaders trained in such methods to contain violent extremism and check potential fighters from traveling to Syria.

### **Legislation, Law Enforcement and Border Security:**

The main task of government is to combat terrorism. From time to time it has investigated and arrested several individuals based on their alleged connections to terrorist organizations, including those linked to Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Hizb-ut-Tahrir is regarded as terrorist organizations by the government in 2003.

There is a need enhance for political obtaining equipment. All law enforcement entities demonstrate a desire for cooperation with international organizations. Kyrgyzstan participated in the Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance program, and its security forces secured training assistance based on improving law enforcement capacity to secure the country's borders from terrorist, transit. The border guards and customs service are in hand and glove with the U.S. Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance (EXBS) office in combating terrorism. EXBS is funding construction of additional border towers. There seems to be much cooperation between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on working for regional security. The government does not maintain a terrorist screening watch list such as biographic or biometric screening capabilities at ports of entry. There is much need in improving internal information. It is information sharing with other countries happens rarely and usually only by request in the context of human trafficking or organized crime investigations quite amazing that Counterterrorist units are still largely untested in real-life situations.

### **Countering the Financing of Terrorism:**

Kyrgyzstan belongs to the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. Kyrgyzstan did not pursue any terrorist finance cases and did not identify or freeze any terrorist assets. Kyrgyzstan has made much progress in addressing the problems of the international community on money laundering and terrorist financing.

**Regional and International Cooperation :** In 2004, Kyrgyzstan got the support of the Commonwealth of Independent States Antiterrorism Centre, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization in countering terrorist

activities. In 2014, Kyrgyzstan cooperated with the OSCE and other international organizations to check violent extremism programs. The government launched a public awareness campaign in the Kyrgyz language press to discredit the efforts of ISIL recruiters.

## TAJIKISTAN

Terrorism in Tajikistan emerged mainly from the forces of political opposition who were against the comprehensive peace agreement that ended the civil war in 1997. President Emomali Rahmonov and UTO leader Said Abdullah Nuri signed the agreement on 27 June, 1997. They believe hostilities would come to stand still. But, this does not happened. An dissident islamist militants formed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1998 and with the support of Al-Qaeda vowed to unite Central as an Islamic state.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is a radical Islamist group formed in 1998.<sup>7</sup> Initially it bases were in Tajikistan and Taliban-controlled areas of northern Afghanistan. In 2015, Tajikistan addressed weaknesses of there system in its counterterrorism operation. To marginalize violent Islamist extremist groups in Tajik society were the main aim of the Tajik government's in countering terrorism. As a consequence, Tajikistan decided to increase military and law enforcement capability to hold tactical operations by laying emphasis on bilateral and multilateral assistance programs. The United States, Russia, and the EU provided funding for border security programs.

In Tajikistan's security environment it is good to see that about 300 Tajik citizens fought against government forces in Syria and Iraq, and of the threat they could pose when they return. The Tajik government found there was an increase in militancy numbers who was returned from foreign conflict zones in 2014. This reason was drawn down of international troops in Afghanistan and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant's success in attracting recruits from Tajikistan's Sughd and Khatlon regions, as well as among the migrant laborer population in Russia.

### **Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:**

The Tajik government prosecutes terrorists under the Laws in Combating Terrorism, Anti-Money Laundering, Currency Regulation, and Notary; and the Criminal Code of the Republic of Tajikistan. Resource constraints, corruption, lack of training for law enforcement and border security officials, and general capacity issues make it difficult for Tajik government's to check possible terrorists. Moreover Tajik law enforcement law enforcement bodies lacked sufficient interagency cooperation and information sharing capabilities.

Tajikistan had worked hard to improve its border security with bilateral and multilateral assistance. Though effectively policing the Tajikistan/Afghanistan border was quite a challenging task require. It has more resources and capabilities and these were not available to the Tajik government. Tajikistan also participated in the

Department of State's Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) program. Hence Tajik security forces got necessary training related to border security practice and counterterrorism investigations. Besides this, the Border Management Program in Central Asia and the UN Office in Drugs and Crime has help them to stabilize border infrastructure, promote inter-agency cooperation, provide direct training, and expand training capacity in Tajikistan.

### **Countering the Financing of Terrorism:**

Tajikistan is a member of the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG), a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body.<sup>8</sup> Tajik is an active member of the OSCE, Tajikistan has focussed on border security issues. The country is also a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). In August, Tajikistan participated with SCO partner nations in the Peace Mission 2014 counterterrorism – focussed military exercises held in China.

### **Countering Radicalization to Violence and Violent Extremism:**

To stern out violent extremism and radicalization in Tajikistan is the main goal of the Tajik government . The Tajik government has also worked hard to control radical messaging by selectively blocking social media sites, rather than issuing counter-narrative.

## **TURKMENISTAN**

Turkmenistan has maintained a policy of strict neutrality since 1990. Today, it is facing serious problems of terrorism as its military force has not been able to resist incursions by the Islamic State (IS), the Taliban or other militant forces emanating from Afghanistan and Unless something changes, it is entirely possible that the Islamic State will establish new beachheads in Central Asia. Recently, a small group of Taliban fighters attacked a Turkmenistani border post. Some of the Turkmen soldiers deserted with their weapons and others joined the Taliban forces. As a result, the Taliban group moved deeper into the country, taking prisoners and demanding tribute.<sup>9</sup>

Efforts are being made by the government to improve the capability of law enforcement agencies to combat terrorism, ensure border security, and detect terrorist financing. Turkmenistan has also cooperated with international institutions and has participated in trainings on preventing terrorist financing and strengthening border security. This resulted in positive response from the government as it did not reported any terrorist incidents, and authorities were asked to maintain close surveillance with the local people.

### **Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security:**

The country's legal system based on the 2003 counterterrorism law defines which crime are considered terrorist in nature. Turkmenistan has participated in training programs sponsored by the United States and

international organizations, including a program on border security organized by the OSCE, a program on strategic export control regimes organized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and U.S. government-provided training on combating transnational threats.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the State Border Service has further continued to operate frontier garrisons on Turkmenistan's borders with Iran and Afghanistan. The State Migration Service maintains a terrorist screening watchlist and possesses biometric screening capabilities at ports of entry. Overall political will amongst Turkmenistani people has helped to combat terrorism and ensure border security.

### **Countering the Financing of Terrorism:**

Turkmenistan is a member of the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing and Financing of Terrorism, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. From time to time government officials participate in OSCE trainings on anti-money laundering (AML) and thus checking helps the government in the financing of terrorism (CFT).

### **Regional and International Cooperation:**

Turkmenistan supports regional and international efforts to fight terrorism. Law enforcement officials participated in OSCE and UN Office of Drugs and Crime training on border security. Turkmenistan continued to participate in the Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Centre. Turkmenistan is not a member of CSTO.<sup>11</sup>

### **Countering Radicalization and Violence and Violent Extremism:**

Turkmenistan follows strict enforcement Law and this helps security agencies to have strict control over the population. The Turkmen government reportedly views conservative Islam with suspicion. Since the country's independence, mosque and Muslim clergy have been state-sponsored and financed by them. This level of government surveillance suggests that any violent extremist groups existing in Turkmenistan would be small, underground, and disparate. If there is a curtailment of basic freedom, growing economic inequality, an ideological gap among young people, and corruption the people could easily become victims of violent extremist ideologies.

## **UZBEKISTAN**

Uzbekistan is more prone to terrorist activities than in any other Central Asian state. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is a militant Islamist group formed in 1998 by ethnic Uzbeks from the Fergana Valley. The objective of IMU was to dethrone President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan, and to build an Islamic state under Sharia. However, in subsequent years, it got sufficient support from al-Qaeda and the Taliban.



In mid-2015 its leadership publicly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and announced that the IMU should be considered as part of ISIL.<sup>12</sup>

In 2014-15, the Government of Uzbekistan regarded counterterrorism as one of its top three security priorities within its borders. The other two were counter narcotics and countering extremism. There were no reported significant terrorist incidents on Uzbek soil in 2014. The government has attributed to its success by sincere making efforts to counter terrorism and extremism. The government has also expressed grave concern about the potential for a spillover effect of terrorism across Uzbekistan's land borders with Afghanistan and other Central Asian states, once U.S. withdraw its from troops Afghanistan. Uzbekistan's government felt that it can tighten grips on its border with Afghanistan but was not confident about its neighbours ability to do so. Hence, the country was more concerned with the infiltration of extremists through Uzbekistan's long borders with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

The government is also concerned about the recruitment of ethnic Uzbek fighters to fight in the Middle East and the threat of foreign terrorist fighters returning to their homodont. It seems also that there is collaboration between Central Asian extremists operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Hence, on October 31, the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers issued a public notice criticizing ISIL as un-Islamic and has urged citizens to resist its violent propaganda. Uzbekistan President Karimov has also criticized the functioning of ISIL.

#### **Countering and Financing of Terrorism:**

Uzbekistan belongs to the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism (EAG), a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)- style regional body. In August 2014 the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the Government of Uzbekistan's Prosecutor-General's Office signed a memorandum of understanding that establishes a legal foundation for training activities, joint counternarcotics and terrorist-related financial investigations, and for the exchange of intelligence.

#### **Regional and International Cooperation:**

Though the prime objective of the government is the bilateral dialogue and engagement in its security-related cooperation, it has sought assistance from several regional organizations that address terrorism, including the EAG and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In November, SCO member states agreed to exchange information on citizens who have participated in armed conflicts in the Middle East. The government is also in touch with the OSCE, the EU, and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on general security issues, including border control. In 2014, within the framework of an UNODC project which is funded by the Government of Norway, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan the government has opened joint liaison offices at two

Uzbekistani-Tajik border crossings to allow for direct communication between the law enforcement agencies involved in border control.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The first against terrorism is rather a difficult and challenging task. Concerted efforts by Central Asian countries are required. Moreover, regional and international political support cooperation and coordination are required. Since Central Asia's problem is not only related to separatism, religious fundamentalism and terrorism but more important the problem of smuggling of drugs remains and has engulfed the entire world. What is important is the efforts are being made to check terrorism and at the same time the Central Asian countries should move ahead and work unitedly for its struggle against terrorism and narco drug activities. If these are contained to a certain extent then strategic environment in Central Asia will be more peaceful. The nations will be more secured and can channelize their energies in another areas who can boast the status in international politics.

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