Growing Islamic Extremism in Central Asia and the Caucasus – Situation and Outlook

Dr. Anna Münster, Robert Bosch Visiting Fellow, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House.

Introduction

In 1904 Sir Halford Mackinder, one of the fathers of geopolitics, put forward a 'Heartland' theory. Referring to the land mass of Central Asia as the 'World Island' he suggested the theory that: 'Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island controls the world.'[1] Mackinder's theory was influential during the World Wars and the Cold War; it attracted further attention after the demise of the Soviet Union when a new political landscape emerged. The post-Soviet republics in the Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia as well as Russia's North Caucasus) and Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) became a place for a rivalry over influence and resources. Some suggest that 'The New Great Game' is unfolding in Central Asia, where some republics have considerable reserves of hydrocarbons to exploit (e.g. Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan), while others provide their territory for military bases (e.g. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).

The macroanalysis of the region, i.e. geopolitics and security, helps to understand the bigger picture and explain some dynamics in the region (e.g. the Russia/NATO scramble for military bases in Central Asia; Israeli military assistance to Azerbaijan or the US/EU reluctance to address the cases of human rights violations in Uzbekistan). There is also a meso-level analysis or inter-regional analysis, as some neighbouring countries are in tense relationships with one another, for instance the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia or ethnic tension and

[1] John Mackinder, 'The Geographical Pivot of History,' *Royal Geographic Society* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): 421-437 from which this 'Heartland' theory evolved, with a summary version evolving to be later quoted as above.

spillovers between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the major ones in 1990 and 2010. Each country is also unique and presents an individual case for a microanalysis, whether it is an aftermath of a civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s or a continued policy of repression in Uzbekistan.

The emergence and activism of politically motivated Islamic groups are often a reaction to the geopolitical reality in the region and a result of the transnational forces and dynamics. They are also a response to the historical circumstances and precedents, socioeconomic factors, and cultural and religious framework. It may be helpful, therefore, to approach Islamism in the Caucasus and Central Asia through these three-dimensional (macro, meso and micro) lenses on different levels – (1) history; (2) politics, security and socioeconomic factors; and (3) culture and religion. Furthermore, political Islam or Islamism, also in its extremist forms, is not only particularised by the context and its dynamics, it is often driven by an ideology and a certain interpretation of Islam.[2] It may require holistic and analytical approaches to understand the growth of Islamism (including the emergence of Islamic groups adhering to violent methods) and to shed some light on the mobilisation tactics of Islamist groups, their networks and discourses. Such an evaluation may also help to outline some prospects for the future of the region.

History

Understanding the past may help to understand some present-day tensions. The Caucasus region is incredibly diverse ethnically and it has a history of ethno-political and territorial conflicts. Its ancient small kingdoms of Armenia, Kolkhis and Iberia (Georgia), Albania and Shirvan (present day Azerbaijan) rose and fell, only to be overtaken by their greater neighbours – Persia, the Ottoman Empire and then Russia. The states of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The North Caucasus became a part of the Russian Empire as a result of the expansion wars, and it remains an integral part of Russia. Islam came to the region early on, and the oldest mosque in Russia is in the city of Derbent, Dagestan.[3] The republics of the North Caucasus, especially Chechnya, became known for insurgency and a striving for independence that swept through the region. The eastern

[2] According to Olivier Roy, Islamists perceive Islam '...not as a mere religion, but as a political ideology that should reshape all aspects of society (politics, law, economy, social justice, foreign policy, and so on).' Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004), 58.

[3] Robert Chenciner, *Daghestan: Tradition and Survival* (Richmond: Curzon, 1997), 144.

republics of the North Caucasus have a legacy of nationalistic strife; in contrast fighters in Chechnya and Dagestan re-enact the war in the name of Islam characteristic of the earlier Islamic resistance in the mid-nineteenth century. The most common reference is to '*ghazawat*' ('wars for the faith') headed by the Imam Shamil. These early resistance wars ultimately resulted in the establishment of an independent state in most of Dagestan and Chechnya in the 19th century.[4]

Central Asia has been a more cohesive region, though geography played an important role early on and divided the region along distinctive nomadic and sedentary fault lines. The fertile land and water have been contested commodities in the mostly semi-arid steppes of Central Asia. Kingdoms with centres in Merv, Khiva, Samarkand and Bukhara emerged essentially as oasis civilisations along the ancient Silk Road. They produced rich history and culture; they also had a sophisticated authoritarian structure and a conservative attitude to religious issues. In contrast, nomads in the north generated a culture that was more lax about religious observance.[5] They were also slow to accept Islam, which came to the region as early as the 7th-8th century through military and trade routes.[6] Further Islamisation and conversion took place under the Khan Öz Beg and his son Jani Beg in the 14th century; they conquered the vast territories and made Islam the religion of the Golden Horde.[7] The Golden Horde made inroads to the Caucasus and all the way to Eastern Europe, subjugating the local people and levying *jizya* or tax on the non-Muslim population there.

The region has been a battlefield among different empires and their legacy can still be traced to three formative influences: its Samanid (Persian) legacy, Timurian (Turkic)/Mongol legacy and more recent Russian/Soviet legacy. The nomadic and sedentary divide, as well as Persian/Turkic

[4] Uwe Halbach, '"Holy War" against Czarism: The Links between Sufism and Jihad in the Nineteenth-Century Anticolonial Resistance against Russia,' in *Muslim Communities Reemerge: Historical Perspectives in Nationality, Politics, and Opposition in the Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia*, ed. Gerhard Simon and Georg Brunner Kappeler, 251-276 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 263.

[5] Edward Allworth, 'The New Central Asians,' in *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance, A Historical Overview*, ed. Edward Allworth, 527-572 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 562.

[6] Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 73.

[7] Devin DeWeese, *Islamization and Native Religion in the Golden Horde Baba Tukles and Conversion to Islam in Historical and Epic Tradition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 95-96.

divide, has a lot to account for in terms of differences between the present-day states of Central Asia and geopolitical interests in the region. The countries themselves are a later invention of Stalin who artificially drew borders and created the lands or 'Stans' named after the ethnic group predominant in the region. A shared past but deepening regionalism and border disputes have produced contested historical accounts and become the source of potential conflicts. Olcott aptly describes it as 'a history which both binds and divides.'[8]

As in the Caucasus, the past has a bearing on conflicts and tensions in present-day Central Asia. A good example is an ethnically diverse and densely populated Fergana Valley (550 people per square kilometre[9]) shared between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Fergana Valley has historically been a conservative region; it also became a hotbed of the Basmachi (the 'bandits') rebellion against the Bolsheviks in 1918-1931.[10] The legacy of this conflict may be traced in a recent regional clash between Gharms and Kulabs in Tajikistan and Islamic activism in Uzbekistan.[11] Perhaps unsurprisingly the first Islamist groups of the 1980s-1990s also appeared in the Fergana Valley. Among them were Tauba (Repentance), Islam Lashkarly (Fighters of Islam), Adolat (Justice) and the Islamic Renaissance Party or IRP of Uzbekistan. The latter has merged with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) headed by Tahir Yuldeshev and Juma Namangani. IMU is acknowledged as one of the first extremist organisations in the region.[12] Activism of Hizb ut-Tahrir (or Khalifatchilar) and its splinter group Akromiya (Akromiylar) emerged also mostly in the Fergana valley and in Tashkent.[13]

---

[8] Martha Brill Olcott, 'Central Asia: Common Legacies and Conflicts,' in *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, ed. Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, 24-48 (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), 26.

[9] Yaacov R'oi, *Islam in the CIS: A Threat to Stability?* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001), 40.

[10] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 36-37.

[11] Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 46-49.

[12] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2002), 138-139. For a survey of Islamic/Islamist groups in Central Asia see Appendix: Local and transnational Islamic/Islamist organisations in Central Asia.

[13] Bakhtiyar Babadjanov and Muzaffar Kamilov, 'Muhammadjan Hindustani (1892-1989) and the Beginning of the "Great Schism" among the Muslims of Uzbekistan,' in *Islam in Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early*

Islam

Islam in the Caucasus and Central Asia is not monolithic, but it represents a wide spectrum. It is mostly Sunni except for Shiism – 'Twelvers' in Azerbaijan and 'Ismailis' (followers of Aga Khan) among the Pamir people of Tajikistan. Traditionally Sunni Muslims of Eurasia follow the Hanafi school, though the Shafi'i school became dominant in Dagestan.[14] There is also a plurality of expressions of Islam – from traditional, Sufi and folk Islam to reformist (Islamic beliefs and practices accommodated to those of the modern world) and normative Islam (based on the fundamentals of Islam). After the collapse of the Soviet Union some new local Islamic expressions developed under foreign influences (e.g. the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan/IRPT; the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan/IMU; the Islamic Jihad Union/IJU). Local chapters of Islamic transnational movements also sprang up in the region (e.g. Salafi, Hizb ut-Tahrir/HT; Muslim Brotherhood/MB; Fethulla Gülen Movement; Aga Khan Development Network/AKDN; and Tablighi Jamaat, among others). Islam has been historically spreading at various rates in the region. It came relatively early to Dagestan (7th-8th century) but late to Chechnya (around 18th century). Islam has a significant presence in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, but ironically it was Catherine the Great who facilitated the spread of Islam among Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads in the 18th century. Her cooperation with the local mullahs and missionary endeavours were pragmatically coupled with 'intensive economic and cultural colonization of the Kazakh Steppes.'[15]

In the past the Islamic centres of Central Asia played an important role in Islamic philosophy and science, with a legacy including such luminaries as al-Bukhari, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), al-Farabi, al-Birunu and al-Khwarzimi, among others.[16] The region had strong connections with the rest of

---

Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries), ed. Stéphane Dudoignon and Komatsu Hisao, 195-219 (London: Kegan Paul, 2001), 205.

[14] cf. Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[15] Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 58.

[16] Frederick Starr, 'Rediscovering Central Asia,' *The Wilson Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Summer, 2009): 33-43.

the Islamic world and Islamic centres in the Middle East and India[17]; however, these links were severed during the Soviet Union. Islam survived in the region despite the Soviet authorities' attempts to suppress religion, i.e. closing down the mosques, exiling or killing the clergy. The persecution eased with World War II when SADUM (The Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan) was created in 1943 to administer Islamic activity in the region.[18] It was actually a recreation of the Muftiat structure under the Russian Empire that Robert Crews suitably calls 'a Church for Islam'.[19] Official Islam had some strong influence on the urban setting, particularly Uzbekistan where Mir-i Arab Madrasa was opened in Bukhara and Imam al-Bukhari Islamic Institute in Tashkent.[20] Unofficial or 'parallel' Islam based on Sufi orders (e.g. Naqshabndi, Qadiri, Yasawiya) remained strong throughout the region as local *bibiotuns* (religious female instructors) provided rudimentary training in Islam[21] and some *hujras* ('underground schools') became the centres of unofficial Islamic education. In social and private settings Islam and its rituals (e.g. circumcision, fasting) played an important role; it remained an enduring part of the identity.

An early schism between the official Hanafi version of Islam and the more pristine version of Salafi Islam, labelled 'Wahhabism', emerged in the 1980s. The relationships between official Islam and this new trend of Islam were not that straightforward. For instance, there is some evidence that SADUM official clergy would secretly support emerging Islamist leaders to offset the influence of 'unofficial' traditional clergy.[22] SADUM also monitored the import of Islamic

[17] Muslim clergy from Central Asia went to study in Bombay, Delhi, and Lahore during the Russian Empire and even during the Soviet Union. Most religious literature was imported from South Asia. See Ehsan Ahrari, *Jihadi Groups, Nuclear Pakistan, and the New Great Game* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 14.

[18] Two directorates were also set up for the Caucasus region – the Spiritual Directorate for the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan and the Spiritual Directorate of Transcaucasia (Sunni-Shia).

[19] Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 31.

[20] Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 110.

[21] Bennigsen and Wimbush, op cit, 21-23.

[22] Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 52.

literature, among which were books by Abd al-Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb.[23] Furthermore, SADUM head clergy received education mostly in the Arab world where they encountered Muslim Brotherhood teaching.[24] There were also ongoing unofficial grassroots connections with the Muslim world as radio programmes were broadcast from Iran and a streak of illegally smuggled literature was coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. In the last twenty years some newly emerged Islamic groups with foreign connections (e.g. IMU, Salafi and Hizb ut-Tahrir) started pursuing their own goals, criticising local forms of Islam and competing for recruits who would follow their 'correct' interpretation of Islam.

As the pressure subsided (especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union), there was also a re-establishment of connections between the descendants of the Basmachi who fled to Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia and their kinsmen in Central Asia.[25] The war in Afghanistan in particular had its effect on the Muslims from Central Asia who faced fighting with their ethnic kin on the other side of the border; some defected and often ended up fighting along with their co-religionists against the Soviets. This relationship boosted an attraction to a Salafi interpretation of Islam, and provided a bridge for cooperation between some Islamic splinter groups in Afghanistan and in the newly emerged states of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (e.g. connections between Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of the Hizb-i Islami of Afghanistan and Shah Masud's Jamiat-e-Islami with the Islamic Renaissance Party or IRP in Tajikistan). In the words of Pinar Akcali: 'The idea of an Afghan jihad became part of the mass consciousness of the local people in Central Asia and greatly stimulated Islamic revival.'[26]

The situation in the Caucasus has been somewhat different. From the early nineties onwards Chechnya became a place of major confrontation between the Russian authorities and local Muslim fighters. It was also a clash between Chechnya's traditional Sufi Islam (e.g. Naqshabndi

[23] Babadjanov and Kamilov, op cit, 202.

[24] Olivier Roy, *The Foreign Policy of the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party* (New York: Council of Foreign Relations, 2000), 6.

[25] Naumkin, ibid, 38.

[26] Pinar Akcali, 'Islam as a "Common Bond" in Central Asia: Islamic Renaissance Party and the Afghan Mujahidin,' *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 2 (Florence/KY, Routledge, 1998): 277.

and Qadiri orders) and a new wave of Islam in the region – a Salafi-inspired and highly politicised Islam with transnational connections to Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan.[27] This hard-line Salafi Islam and a cult of martyrdom have become unifying and mobilising factors for the Chechen resistance movement. They also got some reinforcement from the former *mujahideen* in Afghanistan, including Ibn al-Khattab, a Saudi militant commander.[28] While the Russian military has been systematic in decimating the insurgency of its Islamist leaders (e.g. Dzhokhar Dudaev, Shamil Basayev), there seems no lack of new recruits as more young people 'go into the forest' or become drawn to what could have been just nationalist insurgency but instead turned into full-blown Islamic insurgency.[29]

The two sequential wars in Chechnya left the region in disarray. Yet it has become 'a Moscow success story' as the government instated a pro-Moscow Ramzan Kadyrov and poured millions of dollars into the reconstruction of the region.[30] Kadyrov and his supporters claim to have suppressed the insurgency, at times brutally, though the violence also spilled to the neighbouring republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria, and even to Moscow and mainland Russia (e.g. the bombings in the Moscow Metro in 2010 and the Domodedovo Airport in 2011). The self-proclaimed Caucasus Emirate, a Muslim entity headed by Dokka Umarov, unified the insurgents; it continues to spread its ideas via *kavkazcenter.com*, and to launch paramilitary operations and forge links with other Islamic organisations (e.g. al-Qaeda, IMU).[31] Gordon Hahn argues that the Islamic ideology and its stress on the global Muslim community plays an important role in the insurgency, its goals and strategy. He notes that:

---

[27] The various strands within Salafism are discussed at length in the edited volume Roel Meijer, ed. *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London : Hurst & Co., 2009). Three basic diversions can be described as 'apolitical, quietist currents' (Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his followers); 'political activist movements' and 'violent Jihadi networks' 8.

[28] Paul Murphy, *The Wolves of Islam: Russia and the Faces of Chechen Terror* (Dulles: Brassey's, 2004), 32-46.

[29] 'The North Caucasus: The Challenges of Integration (II), Islam, the Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency,' *Europe Report* no. 221 (Moscow/Istanbul/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 19 October 2012), 14.

[30] Tom Parfitt, 'The Islamic Republic of Chechnya,' *Foreign Policy*, 15 March 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/03/15/the_islamic_republic_of_chechnya?page=0,1 (accessed 15 November 2012).

[31] Robert Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad* (Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2010), 248.

> Pan-Islamism is the ideological foundation of the strategic choice taken to expand the jihad to the entire North Caucasus and beyond. Russia's Muslims, as part of the umma, should be united in a single Shariah-based caliphate and not be seduced and divided by the Western notion of national self-determination.[32]

Furthermore, the war in Chechnya has become a popular reference point of solidarity for Muslims around the world.

Politics, security and socioeconomic issues

One can deduce the significance of the Central Asian region from the revitalised notion of the 'Great Game', a geopolitical struggle between major (and not so major players) for resources and influence in Central Asia. China, Russia, the US and the EU have been the main stakeholders in the region; Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan, Japan and South Korea are also keen to explore the potential in the region. However, the 'New Great Game' does not look like a rerun of the previous 'match', as each Central Asian republic has become a player in its own right. Furthermore, the outside players do not necessarily compete for overall control, but pursue their own, often limited goals. The US is keen to secure military bases in the region (first in Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan and then in Manas, Kyrgyzstan), to provide routes for the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), and to facilitate the US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014.[33] Germany has a similar interest in Uzbekistan where it has an airbase in Termez, while Switzerland is more interested in deepening economic ties in the region (e.g. Switzerland's lobbying role in the IMF for 'Helvetistan'). Furthermore, the US encourages such projects as CASA-1000 (Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project) and the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline. Despite the security risks, particularly in the Afghanistan region, these projects seem to fit nicely the US's 'new Silk Road vision', i.e. Central Asia's reorientation to the south, away from Russia.[34]

[32] Gordon Hahn, *Russia's Islamic Threat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 80.

[33] Oksana Antonenko, 'The Central Asian States and Russia,' in *Adelphi Series* 51, no. 425-426 (2011), 199-218.

[34] Jim Nichol, 'Central Asia – Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests', *CRS Report for Congress* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2012), 57.

China seems to pursue mostly trade and energy investments, not establishing military bases or exercising its soft power, at least so far. It has successfully built a Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline and it has put forward plans for a Iran-China gas pipeline via Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. China also has stakes in the development of the Southern Yoloten-Osman gas field in Turkmenistan and the gas industry in Kazakhstan as well as transportation and development projects in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It invests in and promotes trade through establishing free economic zones and it is one of the main consumer goods importers in the region. Furthermore, in 1996 China established a security alliance, essentially an 'anti-NATO' alliance, originally called the Shanghai Five (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) with fighting terrorism as one of its major goals. Among other things the alliance reflects China's concern for stability in the Xinjiang province with its predominantly Muslim Uyghur population. After admitting new members in 2001 the alliance was renamed as the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation).

Russia has been another major player in the region, and it has been pursuing even more diverse goals. It seeks not only to have energy and trade deals, but also ways to exercise its military and geopolitical power (e.g. its military presence in Tajikistan and military base in Kyrgyzstan; the launch of another security and military alliance with the Central Asian republics – Collective Security Treaty Organisation/CSTO in 2002, with the addition of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force/ CRSF in 2009[35]). Russia also exerts its soft power through post-Soviet lingering connections (e.g. the continued use of the Russian language, often as a *lingua franca*).

The Caucasus region has similar geopolitical struggles with some surprising turns as in the case of oil-rich Azerbaijan. Squeezed between Iran in the south and Russia (Dagestan) in the north Azerbaijan remains staunchly secular. The government pursues pragmatic multipolar geopolitics and cracks down on the activism of radical Islamic groups as it did with the Iranian involvement

[35] Uzbekistan's quitting of the CSTO in June 2012 led to speculations that Uzbekistan may again lease its military base(s) to the US, and the US may leave its leftover military equipment to Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the creation of the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRSF) did not lead to its deployment during the violent clashes in Kyrgyzstan. It still remains a questionable entity unable to launch military intervention and assistance when it is really needed.

in Nardaran, Azerbaijan.[36] It is still agonised over the lost territories of Nagorno-Karabakh during the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict (1988-1994) and it is technically still at war with Armenia. The conflict has a bearing on the foreign policies of Azerbaijan. It has cooled relationships with Russia as well as Iran, however it has allowed Israel to use its airbase near the Iranian borders.[37] Azerbaijan also plays an important role in the Nabucco project, a European-bound gas pipeline from the Caspian Sea via Turkey that is meant to curb Europe's dependence on Russia's gas.

Most of these newly independent countries have pursued a multilateral approach to complex geopolitical dealings. They have been building alliances based on their legacy, i.e. such Russian initiatives as CSTO, or new realities – such as SCO spearheaded by China. They have also been pursuing their economic interests whether by becoming a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation/OIC (Kazakhstan) or the World Trade Organization/WTO (Kyrgyzstan and potentially Kazakhstan). On a meso-level, however, the relationships have been far from friendly, but instead rigged with tensions and rivalry. There were rows over water resources, particularly between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which harbours plans to build the Rogan Dam[38], and deadly ethnic clashes between Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations of Kyrgyzstan. The latter in particular spurred speculation about the potential recruitment pool for Islamists. Increasing numbers of young Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan became disenfranchised and frustrated as the recurring conflicts and growing death toll did not result in any tangible support from the Uzbek government next door.[39] However, there are also some serious security-related issues that have been bringing the countries together. Among them are people trafficking and drug trafficking, weapon proliferation, environmental issues, Afghanistan insurgency and terrorism. The

[36] Alexander Murinson, 'Iran Targets Azerbaijan', *BESA Center Perspectives Paper* no. 110 (Tel Aviv: BESA Center for Strategic Studies, 23 June, 2010), 3.

[37] Mark Perry, 'Israel's Secret Staging Ground,' *Foreign Policy*, 28 March 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/03/28/israel_s_secret_staging_ground (accessed 15 November 2012).

[38] 'Water wars in Central Asia: Dammed if they do', *The Economist*, 29 September 2012, http://www.economist.com/node/21563764 (accessed 15 November 2012).

[39] 'Kyrgyzstan: Widening Ethnic Divisions in the South,' *Asia Report* no. 222 (Bishkek/Brussels: International Crisis Group, March 2012), 13-14.

coordination has been weak though, and some believe that a lack of cooperation provides 'favourable ground for extremism to grow.'[40]

Finally, each country is unique and presents its own set of problems and challenges. Uzbekistan is the most populous country (almost 29 million people); it positions itself as a historic leader and a centre of the Central Asian civilisation. Kazakhstan is not only resource-rich but also business friendly; its economy continues to grow and it has a welcoming business and investment environment.[41] Turkmenistan with its autocratic if not dictatorial tendencies a neutral status in foreign policies, essentially minding its own business and not letting others interfere with theirs. Finally, both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have been plagued by political instability. Tajikistan suffered through the years of civil war in the early nineties, a slow economic growth and dependency on Russia. Kyrgyzstan has gone through two revolutionary overthrows, spreading the fear that similar 'colour' revolutions may cause a power change in other regions.

Discourse and tactics

Whether it is a US military base in Kyrgyzstan or Israeli military assistance to Azerbaijan, Islamists have skilfully used current geopolitical alliances and arrangements in their rhetoric against local government and the West. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, conflicts in Chechnya and Bosnia, have been often framed in solidarity terms for the Muslim audience. The war in Afghanistan and the upcoming troop withdrawal in particular has an immediate relevance to the region. Furthermore, Islamists have increasingly started presenting the war in Afghanistan as yet another failure of a non-Islamic state to conquer the land. Some of the Islamic organisations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have close connections with al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and even found refuge there, when the government in their own country launched a full-scale attack on them. The IMU has become known not only for its strong anti-Karimov rhetoric, but also military and paramilitary operations (e.g. attempts to assassinate Karimov in 1999; incursions into Kyrgyzstan and capturing Japanese geologists for ransom in

[40] V. Nagandra Rao, 'Religious Extremism in Central Asia: Towards a Conceptualisation,' in *Central Asia: Present Challenges and Future Prospects*, ed. V. Nagendra Rao and Mohammad Monir Alam, 99-133 (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2005), 124.

[41] In November 2012 Kazakhstan ranked 51st, ahead of Russia (67) and Kyrgyzstan (127) in the 20122013 Global Competitiveness Report (GCR) by the World Economic Forum (WEF). Kazakhstan also ranked 49th out of 185 countries in the 2013 Doing Business (DB) report.

1999; explosions in Tashkent in 2004[42]) as well as drugs and weapons smuggling. There are currently fears and speculations that the IMU may return from Afghanistan, and resume its operations in Central Asia with dramatic consequences.

Another common framing among Islamists is socioeconomic grievances, particularly corruption and abuse of power. Indeed, the corruption has become endemic as the local political elite has been prospering and amassing great wealth. For instance, in her investigative research Katherin Machalek outlines staggering cases of corruption at the highest level (i.e. family and close associates of the presidents) in Azerbaijan and the republics of Central Asia.[43] Meanwhile the rest of the population has been left impoverished, and in its struggle for survival often looks for employment elsewhere, e.g. in Russia (the remittances by those who left were especially high for poverty-stricken Tajikistan). Some of the Islamist movements, particularly Hizb ut-Tahrir and its splinter organisation Akromiya, are known not only for their anti-corruption rhetoric but also for their attempts to alleviate poverty through charity projects and establishing small businesses. Some believe that the massacre of Andijan in May 2005 was triggered by the imprisonment of twenty-three local Akromiya business people who were also known for helping the locals and providing jobs for them.

Islamists often refer to injustice, the lack of rule of law and gross human rights abuses. As Central Asian governments often do not tolerate and severely represses any political opposition, some Islamist groups are perceived as opposition simply because they have been highlighting discrimination and promise to bring order, justice and fairness to the region. Often the Islamists themselves were the ones who suffered brutality and torture in prisons; even those who never engaged in violent actions were incarcerated simply for possessing a Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflet. Cases of torture have been systematic and deeply disturbing, particularly in Uzbekistan.[44] Sadly, some Western governments have been closing their eyes to these and other human rights abuses;

---

[42] John Schoeberlein, 'Islam in the Ferghana Valley: Challenges for New States,' in *Islam in Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth to Late Twentieth Centuries)*, Dudoignon and Hisao, op cit, 328.

[43] Katherin Machalek, 'Corruptistan,' *Foreign Policy*, 4 September 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/04/corruptistan (accessed 15 November 2012).

[44] See the memoirs of a former British diplomat in Uzbekistan – Craig Murray, *Murder in Samarkand: A British Ambassador's Defiance of Tyranny* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2006).

they even 'whitewash' the image of the governments, essentially because of their own military and security interests in the region.[45] As David Lewis describes it in his research on Uzbekistan, '...the calculations of Uzbekistan's leaders that the US would overlook abuses in exchange for military cooperation proved to be correct.'[46] Meanwhile some states in the Caucasus and Central Asia have been suppressing not only Islamists but also civil society and pro-democracy movements. Some even pursue a so-called 'Caviar diplomacy', a deliberate attempt to bribe Western politicians and lobbies, and hush the cases of human rights violations.[47] Indeed, the extent of government control over life, including religious life and issues of consciousness, has been reminiscent of Soviet times, though the use of new technologies and events of the Arab Spring may present a stark warning to today's repressive governments.

Political and socioeconomic grievances abound in Central Asia and the Caucasus; yet the Islamists seem to pick and choose their message and how they frame it. They tend to focus on the immediate problems in the region such as poverty and corruption, repressive regimes and political alliances as well as geopolitical issues – the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and conflicts in the North Caucasus. They frame their message in such a way that it will resonate with a wider audience in order to attract more people and to mobilise them for action. However, they rarely appeal to problems related to drugs, people trafficking, weapon proliferation and security. Perhaps one explanation is that some Islamist groups (e.g. IMU and its splinter group – Islamic

[45] David Trilling, 'Propagandastan,' *Foreign Policy*, 22 November 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/21/propagandastan (accessed 15 November 2012).

[46] David Lewis, *The Temptations of Tyranny in Central Asia* (London: Hurst, 2008), 16. Relations between Germany and Uzbekistan have provoked similar concerns. See Christian Neef, 'Absolutism in Uzbekistan: Germany's Favorite Despot', *Spiegel*, 8 December 2006 http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/absolutism-in-uzbekistan-germany-s-favorite-despot-a-429712.html (accessed 15 November 2012). Furthermore, some transnational corporations have been implicated in 'whitewashing' and even promoting regimes, for instance Daimler-Chrysler, Nokia, Siemens and John Deere financed translations of *Ruhnama*, a propagandist book by Saparmurat Niyazov, the late dictator in Turkmenistan. See, Annasoltan, 'Adam Smith in Ashgabat, part 1: "Business is business and human rights are human rights,"' *New Eurasia* website, 10 May 2010, http://www.neweurasia.net/business-and-economics/adam-smith-in-ashgabat-part-1-%E2%80%9Cbusiness-is-business-and-human-rights-are-human-rights%E2%80%9D/ (accessed 15 November 2012).

[47] 'Caviar Diplomacy: How Azerbaijan Silenced the Council of Europe,' *ESI report* (Berlin: European Stability Initiative, 25 May 2012).

Jihad Union/IJU) have been implicated in illegal and criminal activity, as drug trafficking and extortion are often used to finance their activities.

Islamist activists not only provide diagnostic 'frames' (what is wrong?), e.g. Karimov's government in the IMU discourse; but also prognostic (what is the solution?), e.g. Caliphate in the Hizb ut-Tahrir discourse; and motivational (encouragement for action towards creating a certain society), e.g. establishing a new Islamic order whether through overthrowing a government or slow, incremental changes in society.[48] They may also frame their message as the disclosure of a grand conspiracy against the Muslim world and a promise to bring true Islamic order and justice. Ideology and a particular interpretation of Islam often serve as a main source of these interpretive and motivational frames. For instance, in his research on Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia, Emmanuel Karagiannis believes that it is the ideology of Hizb ut-Tahrir that may explain the organisation's growth in the region and its restraint from violence. He argues that, 'Participation in a banned group like Hizb ut-Tahrir apparently is motivated by deeply held religious beliefs and values, rather than plain self-interest based on a cost-benefit analysis. People join Hizb ut-Tahrir because they believe in its ideology.'[49]

Ideology may also explain the tactics that a particular Islamic group employs, whether they be violence, extortion and kidnapping as in the case of the IMU in Central Asia and Salafi Jihadist groups in the Caucasus; charitable projects run by Hizb ut-Tahrir, or educational projects by a Sufi movement of Fethullah Gülen (though essentially a pious Islamic group, the Gülen movement has been banned in Uzbekistan and Russia, and it is closely monitored in other countries). However, ideology and framing alone cannot explain why people decide to join an Islamist group. Quintan Wiktorowicz suggests that apart from ideology, personal predisposition is also important, along with the role of charismatic leaders, culturing (assimilation into Islamic

[48] The classification of frames is taken from David Snow and Robert Benford, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,' in *From Structure to Action: Social Movement Participation Across Cultures*, ed. Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1988), 197-217.

[49] Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2010), 96.

groups), and the commitment of members.[50] This personal aspect is best explored in the networks, another important dimension in recruitment and mobilisation.

Networks

One can argue that networks, the underlying grid of relationships and contacts, play a crucial role in a mobilisation for an Islamist group. As Vitaly Naumkin puts it, 'Local traditional networks – regional groups, extended families, clans, and so on – are exploited by both secular authorities in the government and radical Islamists, both of whom compete to dominate these networks.'[51] Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia is a good example of successful utilisation of family and friendship networks for recruitment, including connections developed during incarceration. Lewis observes that, 'Prison acted as a useful propagator of Islamist ideas, and had the added advantage of introducing Islamists to hardened criminals, thus providing potentially violent recruits to the cause.'[52] Family members, particularly wives and sisters of the imprisoned Hizb ut-Tahrir members, also form a supportive and propagating network of their own.

Hizb ut-Tahrir, IMU and other Islamist groups develop networks based on ideology and solidarity; they also gain financial connections and backing from the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere. For instance, IRP in Tajikistan looked for financial support through the Sunni networks of Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, the Muslim Brotherhood and the 'Saudi-sponsored networks'.[53] Saudi Arabia in particular has provided substantial financial support for reviving and promoting Islam by helping with the construction of mosques and *madrasas* (schools) in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Certain older links have been resurrected, as some ideological and financial support has come from the Uzbek diaspora in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan (i.e. Basmachi descendants and later immigrants).[54] The Islamic publishing business

[50] Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Lanham: Rowman, 2005), 85.

[51] Naumkin, op cit, 262.

[52] Lewis, op cit, 205.

[53] Roy, op cit, 14.

[54] Ramakant Dwivedi, 'Religious Extremism in Ferghana Valley,' *Strategic Analysis* 30, no. 2 (April-June 2006): 412-413.

in the region has also been getting foreign backing. For instance, a publishing house Santlada in Dagestan became notorious for its connections with Salafis in Saudi Arabia.[55]

Networks can be also traced at the level of leadership and ideologues, and reveal a story of spreading ideas in the region. A careful analysis of the growth of Salafism in Central Asia exposes an intricate net of connections between key individuals, their association and influence. Muhammadjan Hindustani (1982-1989) was a traditional cleric who played an important role in underground religious education in Uzbekistan. He adhered to the Hanafi school, promoted classical Islamic education, and vehemently opposed new ideas of 'purifying Islam', also among some of his followers.[56] One of his students, Hakim Qari from Marghilan, became known as 'the father of new-Wahhabism'. He broke away from Hindustani and established his own *hujra* or school in the Fergana Valley. Some of Hindustani's former students, notably Abdulvali and Rahmatulla, joined him; they also decided to go even further in their interpretation of Islam and critical re-evaluation of local Islamic practices. In the late 1970s Abdulvali and Rahmatulla were seeking to establish a movement that they called *Mujaddidiya* ('Renewal'). Their efforts to reform became labelled as 'Wahhabism', a blanket term that stuck with groups seeking to propagate a normative Islam.[57] Later Hakim Qari actually denounced Rahmatulla as a fundamentalist who calls for revival of the Islamic community and establishment of a new state, 'Musulmanabad'.[58]

In the 1980s Abdulvali and Rahmatulla became itinerant preachers, founded small underground religious schools of their own, and started secretly printing Islamic books. They were influenced by the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya, Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Sayyid Abu Al-Ala Mawdudi, key ideologists of normative Islam. They also spread their teaching and ideas, particularly in the

[55] Kaflan Khanbabaev, 'Islam and Islamic Radicalism in Dagestan,' *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Galina Yemelianova, 82-111 (London: Routledge, 2010), 95.

[56] Babadjanov and Kamilov, op cit, 205.

[57] Bakhtiar Babadzhanov, 'Islam in Uzbekistan: From the Struggle for "Religious Purity" to Political Activism,' in *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?*, ed. Boris Rumer, 299-332 (Armonk: Sharpe, 2002), 309-312.

[58] Abdujabar Abduvakhitov, 'Islamic revivalism in Uzbekistan,' in *Russia's Muslim Frontiers: New Directions in Cross-Cultural Analysis*, ed. Dale Eickelman, 79-97 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 82.

Fergana Valley, where Abdulvali headed a mosque in Andijan. [59] Abduvali became an inspiration for scores of young radicalised Muslims in Uzbekistan; he disappeared mysteriously in 1995, but his sermons still find their way through tapes and *YouTube* videos.[60] Some of their students also became known in their own right as they were establishing a network of mosques and *madrasas* in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Among Abdulvali's most prominent students were Juma Namangani and Tohir Yuldoshev, who would become leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Yuldashev established a particularly wide network of supporters, including al-Qaeda, Taliban and Islamist fighters in Chechnya (e.g. Ibn al-Khattab and Shamil Basaev).[61] As the IMU has been driven to Afghanistan, its pool of recruits and field of operation has become more international. From an Islamic group with local networks of ideologues and rank and file members IMU and its splinter group Islamic Jihad Union/IJU have been operating not only in Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also in Germany (e.g. the terrorist plot of the so-called 'Sauerland Cell' in 2007)[62] and some other European countries.

Prospects

Historical, geopolitical and socioeconomic forces may provide a partial explanation for the emergence and growth of Islamic insurgency in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Indeed, the advance of political Islam in the last quarter of the century in the region is often described as a response to local grievances, challenges and conflicts. While there is some direct relationship between militant Islamism and criminality (e.g. drug trafficking, hostage taking[63]), criminalising all forms of Islamism and pursuing repressive policies would be counterproductive. Tom Everett-Heath notes that:

---

[59] Martha Olcott, 'Islam and Fundamentalism in Independent Central Asia' in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i, 21-40 (Ilford: Frank Cass, 1995), 32.

[60] Martha Olcott, *In the Whirlwind of Jihad* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 12.

[61] Ahrari, op cit, 17.

[62] Steven Brooke, 'The Near and Far Enemy Debate,' in *Fault Lines in Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic and Ideological Fssures*, ed. Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman, 47-68 (New York: Routledge, 2011), 59. Despite the IMU presence in Europe (Germany, France and Netherlands) as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan, some analysts believe that after the death of Yoldashev in 2009the IMU influence has been waning. See Shakar Saadi, 'IMU, Losing Supporters, Talks Tough,' *Central Asia Online* website, 12 March 2012, http://centralasiaonline.com/en_GB/articles/caii/features/main/2012/03/12/feature-01 (accessed 15 November 2012).

[63] Naumkin, op cit, 262.

> 'The fear of Islamism, and the measures deployed to suppress it, may prove to be the very forces that bring it to life and accelerate its growth. Where there may not have been any meaningful political Islam, Karimov may be creating it.'[64]

In the case of Chechnya, it is not only suppression of militant Islam but also 'seizing what the enemy prizes most', i.e. attempting to make Chechnya more Islamic on its own terms. In the words of Schaefer,

> 'Kadyrov is fighting the Caucasus Emirate for the moral high ground. He is trying to show that the CE [the Caucasus Emirate] has no legitimacy for Chechens because if they continue to fight against the Islamic society that Kadyrov has put in place, they are essentially proving that all the emirate really wants is power for themselves.'[65]

One can only speculate about the outcome of this approach. Islamism and insurgency are also a part of the bigger picture, as Islamists in the Caucasus and Central Asia have transnational connections with other Islamic movements in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan, among others.

Chechnya in the Caucasus and the Fergana Valley in Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) tend to attract particular attention, as both regions are often branded as a hotbed of instability and insurgency. The question is often whether the insurgency will be contained or will have a spillover effect. While conflict in Chechnya affected Dagestan and other republics of the Northern Caucasus, opinions over the Fergana Valley are divided. Some optimistically suggest that though this region has witnessed the highest concentration of Islamic activism, it is unlikely to have a significant following elsewhere:

> The research revealed that the Islamic radicalization of the Ferghana valley had limited scope and was confined to a number of territorial enclaves (Namangan,

[64] Tom Everett-Heath, 'Instability and Identity in a Post-Soviet World: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan,' in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Heath, 81-204 (London: Routledge, 2003), 196.

[65] Schaefer, op cit, 259.

> Kokand, Margelan and Andijan). The main deterrent to the further proliferation of Islamism was the Soviet-era legacy of secularism, the resilience and conservatism of local societies, and the strong position of 'folk' Islam which opposed violence and promoted patience and tolerance, as well as a Muslim's non-involvement in politics.[66]

Others cautiously believe that Islamism is likely to grow in the region and harsh measures of the Uzbekistan government only drive radicals to other countries. Popularity of political Islam seems to rise as dire social and economic problems in the region persist and the state is inept at dealing with crises (e.g. the rise of IMU and Hizb ut-Tahrir popularity in the aftermath of ethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan in 2010). Among other factors is also the inadequacy of official Islam to compete with Islamists in education, *dawa* or missionary efforts to propagate ideology (also through the Internet and new technologies), and a flow of financial support.

The factors are multifaceted and complex, but even countries known for tolerance and stability are not exempt from Islamic militancy. For instance, in 2011 Kazakhstan experienced a series of terrorist attacks linked to home-grown Islamism (Jund al-Khilafah militant group). The situation in Central Asia remains insecure, and one can expect further destabilisation after the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan in 2014.[67] One particular concern has been about the IMU which may try to regain ground in Central Asia.

Indeed, political Islam continues to gain more adherents in the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, a more nuanced analysis suggests that though militant Salafi groups and IMU grab the headlines, they are less likely to produce sympathy in the wider community. The IMU has damaged its reputation by its violent methods, and it is Islamic groups with a muted agenda, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, that seem to gain more support in Central Asia. Hizb ut-Tahrir officially rejects violent methods, presents a strong message of justice and calls for the utopian idea of the

---

[66] Zumrat Salmorbekova and Galina Yemelianova, 'Islam and Islamism in the Ferghana Valley,' in *Radical Islam*,Yemelianova, , 240.

[67] Igor Rotar, 'Will the Fergana Valley Become a Hotbed of Destabilization in Central Asia?', *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no.180, *Jamestown Foundation* website, 3 October 2012, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39924 (accessed 15 November 2012). For some grim predictions see Ted Donnelly, 'Fergana as FATA? A Post-2014 Strategy for Central Asia', Master thesis, United States Army War College, 2012.

Caliphate. Such a message coupled with its charitable activity and creation of job opportunities finds an eager audience in the context of inequality, corruption and authoritarian rule. The success of this transnational Islamic group also lies in its ability to adapt to local needs and circumstances, as it is 'good at adjusting the party's [Hizb ut-Tahrir] priorities and tactics to local conditions.'[68] Despite severe repression, especially in Uzbekistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir continues to grow.

There are some important challenges for political Islam that one may consider in conclusion. First, the majority of the Central Asian population remains secular or prefers traditional Islam without political connotations. However, if an Islamic group is well-organised, well-connected and committed to its goals, it may exert a disproportionate influence in the region (e.g. mobilising its recruits among the strategic sectors of society or launching asymmetric warfare). Second, in places without viable political opposition, Islamists are treated as a de facto political opposition. Indeed, while Islamic groups may appear united on the question of their main agenda (e.g. the anti-Karimov discourse in Uzbekistan), there is also the potential for a growing rivalry and clashes between the Islamic factions themselves. Thirdly, one needs to factor in unexpected changes and political developments, especially in the current volatile political and economic climate. This may prove to be a threat or an opportunity for Islamists, as the changes may lead to more stringent security measures but also an ever more discontented population. So far crackdown on radical Islamic factions has proved to be ineffective or has turned out to be only a temporary solution, with a threat looming on the horizon (e.g. the potential return of IMU to Central Asia). One may even argue that repressive measures may have increased the potential for mobilisation among some impoverished and dissatisfied young people.

The withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan in 2014 means that the countries of Central Asia are bracing for a coming change. The situation in the region is also likely to be affected by the expected leadership change in Kazakhstan (Nursultan Nazarbayev, has ruled since 1991) and Uzbekistan (Islam Karimov, has ruled since 1989). The South Caucasus has also drawn the attention of the international community as the Karabakh conflict does not appear that 'frozen' any more. There is an escalation of tension on both sides, especially as Azerbaijan has been

[68] Salmorbekova and Yemelianova, op cit, 239.

getting some military assistance and training from Israel, thus also agitating its southern neighbour, Iran. There are also internal tensions: the government of Azerbaijan has been criticised for its harsh treatment of civil society in Baku and of political Islamist opposition in the south of the country. Whether it is Central Asia or the Caucasus region, the Islamist groups are viewed with a suspicion by governments even when Islamists may not have the necessary political clout and capabilities. The securitisation of Islam and a heavy-handed approach have helped to deal with Islamic insurgency in some regions (e.g. Chechnya), but they may have also aggravated the situation and only frustrated young people further, thus making them potential recruits for some radical factions.

Dr. Anna Münster, Robert Bosch Visiting Fellow, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House, London

Appendix

Local and transnational Islamic/Islamist organisations in Central Asia.

Name	Origin	Goals	Methods	Key figures	Networks	Current state
The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT)	USSR /Russia)/TJ; early 1990s; Said Abdullo Nuri	Originally in opposition to the govern-ment; lega-lised as a party in 1998	Peaceful political struggle; charity; the Internet (esp. social media)	Said Abdullo Nuri; Muhiddin Kabiri	United Tajik Opposition (during the Tajik Civil War in 1992-1997)	Turned into a mainstream Islamist political party in TJ (the only one registered in CA)
Salafi	Saudi Arabia; 18th century; Abdal-Wahhāb; Sunni Islam	'Back to the roots'; strict religious observance	Literalist interpretation of Islam: from education and mosque construction to military operations	Abdal-Wahhab	Al-Qaeda; 'Salafist jihadism'	Global reach
Islamic Movement of Uzbek-istan (IMU)	Namangan, Uzbekistan; 1992; Tahir Yuldashev (Salafi)	'The creation of an Islamic State. We declared a jihad in order to create a religious system and government.' (Yuldashev)	Military and criminal activity; drug trafficking; targeting military bases and embassies	Tahir Yuldashev; Juma Khodjiev Namangani	Al-Qaeda; Taliban; Islamic Movement of Central Asia (IMCA) – re-grouped unified multi-national IMU	Fled to Pakistan in 2001; recruitment in Europe; plans to re-enter CA
Islamic Jihad Movement (IJM)	Uzbekistan, 2004 (Salafi)	Toppling Karimov's government in UZ; establishing	Military operation; suicide bombings; attacking	Najmuddin Jalolov (bin Laden's senior aide; killed by a	IMU (a splinter group)	CA (Uzbekistan); Europe (Germany); Turkey;

		an Islamic state	military bases	drone in AF)		Afghanistan
Hizb ut-Tahrir	Jerusalem; Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani (1952-1953); Sunni Islam	Utopian; anti-democratic; establishing Caliphate	Networks and small groups; Internet; media; leaflets; conspiratorial; officially eschews violence	Abu Qatada; Omar Bakri Muhammad	Akromiya; Hizb un-Nusrat; Uzun Soqol (CA); al-Muhajirun (UK)	40 countries; HQ – London/ Jordan; in CA since 1990s; the strongest group numerically

Akromiya	Uzbekistan; 1996; Akram Yuldashev; Sunni Islam	Creating a state headed by a religious person; Shari'a law	Conspiratorial; small groups; transnational Islamic identity (unlike IMU)	Akram Yuldashev	Hizb ut-Tahrir	UZ/TJ/KG
Muslim Brotherhood	Egypt; 1928; Hasan al-Banna; Said Qutb; Sunni Islam	'Islam is the solution' – comprehensive, gradual; political Islam	Socio-political activism; education	Hasan al-Banna; Said Qutb; Yusuf al-Qaradawi; Tariq Ramadan	Muslim World League (MWL); World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)	Global reach
(Fethullah) Gülen Movement (FG)	Turkey; 1960s; Fethullah Gülen; Sufi Islam	Modernity and faithful observance of Islam; dialogue	Gülen-inspired schools; conferences; media; business; Internet	Fethullah Gülen (now in the US)	The Dialogue Society (London); *Zaman* newspaper; websites	Global reach
Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)	Aga Khan; 1970s; Shia Islam (Ismaili)	Bridging faith and society; providing aid; facilitating development	Socio-economic development; educational and cultural programmes	Prince Karim, Aga Khan IV	AK Foundation; The University of Central Asia (UCA)	More than 30 countries; Africa, Asia, Europe; CA - TJ (Pamir)
Tablighi Jamaat	India; 1926; Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi; Deobandi school of Sunni Islam	Reforming society; encouraging Muslims to become religiously observant	Itinerant teaching; small groups; apolitical and pacifist movement; Internet	Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi	A potential link to Taliban	Mostly among South Asians; CA – mostly Ferghana Valley