



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Programme Office in Nur-Sultan

NEW CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES
TO REGIONAL AND GLOBAL
SECURITY
IN CENTRAL ASIA

[INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS
(NUR-SULTAN, 26 OCTOBER 2018)]

OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan

**NEW CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES
TO REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY
IN CENTRAL ASIA**

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(Nur-Sultan, 26 October 2018)

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The edition will be of interest to political scientists, international relations experts, civil servants, scholars, educators, university-level students, and broad sections of the public interested in the contemporary development of the region.

The edition is published in Russian and English. The paper of Mr. Pal Dunay is written in the English language in the original, the rest of the reports are in Russian. All reports have been translated and edited with the support of the OSCE Program Office in Nur Sultan.

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**Welcoming speech by
György Szabó
Ambassador, Head of the OSCE Programme Office
in Nur-Sultan**

Your Excellences,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome such a respected audience and address the International Security Conference focused on “New Challenges and Approaches to Regional and Global Security in Central Asia”.

Above all, let me thank our partners – the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan’s Council on International Relations, the Institute of Diplomacy of the Academy of Public Administration under the President of Kazakhstan and the Research Institute “Public Opinion” for supporting the event and building such a strong co-operative platform.

Let me warmly welcome our experts, who have traveled great distances to share their vision on ways to address the challenges that we face together. I am pleased to note that just among the experts, we have 10 different countries represented here (nine OSCE participating States and one Partner for Co-operation (Afghanistan)).

I am also honored to welcome the distinguished group of government officials and representatives of civil society and diplomatic corps in Kazakhstan. You are a key component of this event. We encourage all of you to actively engage in discussions and provide your view and insights at today’s event and in the ensuing dialogue on these issues.

The OSCE has been active in promoting initiatives and creating platforms for many different forms of dialogue at various levels as a means of decreasing tensions, preventing conflict and promoting stability across the OSCE region.

The OSCE's commitment to establishing consensus-based agreements paved the way for a better understanding of what security means. Although it is not a collective security organization, the OSCE can build confidence in security co-operation, facilitate political will and leadership for collective actions and help resolve the collective action dilemma among states with different interests and agendas.

The role of international and regional organizations in countering the global threats, such as terrorism, organized crime, illegal trade and migration, prevention of youth radicalization, abuse of Internet for terrorist purposes and the integration of foreign terrorist fighters and their families into the social life will be topics for you to discuss today.

In the OSCE we recognize that these conditions include a wide range of political and socio-economic factors. Some of these factors are directly relevant: violations of human rights and the rule of law while fighting terrorism are directly correlated with the emergence and spread of extremist ideas. Other factors are more indirectly relevant but no less vital to address, such as lack of access to education, political alienation, and socio-economic marginalization.

Many of these issues were noted in the Berlin Declaration and Resolutions adopted by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the Twenty-Seventh Annual Session from 7–11 July 2018. This includes the idea that:

...a holistic and well-co-ordinated approach to Security Sector Governance and Reform is fundamental in dealing with today's security challenges, especially in the areas of police reform, border management and security, counter-terrorism, anti-corruption, and justice sector reform,

... the importance of Security Sector Governance and Reform efforts, including those designed to ensure the equal and effective participation of women at all levels of security management, provision and oversight, as playing an essential role in conflict prevention, early warning, crisis, and post-conflict rehabilitation.

Given this context, today's conference provides a valuable platform to better understand the opportunities for the wider use of both the potential and the rich experience in strengthening security through co-operation in the entire Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian space, especially in the Central Asia region, and ways to address old and emerging challenges and threats.

I wish us all a vibrant and, most importantly, a constructive and effective discussion with follow-up with our participants and amongst each other.

Thank you!

SESSION I
INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION: HOW TO ENHANCE
COOPERATION OF REGIONAL SECURITY
ORGANIZATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIAN AND OSCE?

Coordinating the Actions
of Regional Security Organizations in Central Asia.
Enhancing Co-operation and Efficiency

Muratbek Imanaliev

International organizations are a product of the second half of the 20th century. They represent the first collective and legitimate actor of international law and the global community, and although they are not the equivalent of governments, presidents and monarchs, they are designed in their likeness and, to a degree, are dependent on them. However, as far as providing peacekeeping, financial and other services integrated into international practice is concerned, international organizations represent an intermediary of unmatched ceremonial and other capacities.

Indeed, an international organization is a treaty mechanism for the joint activities of member nations, or sometimes – quite rarely, in fact – the independent activities of a government, but done in a specific framework of agreements, or within a group of member states that could take part of the organization's programme as the basis of joint activities, but only under the condition that such activities will not infringe upon the interests of the other members.

It is made apparent that any international organization thrives on procedures, norms, rules and coordinated stances.

Later, other players emerged on the international stage, such as non-governmental organizations, transnational corporations, and in the past few years – even international criminal syndicates, whose leaders unashamedly position themselves as legitimate thought leaders addressing the wants and needs of simple people. The global

community rejects the possibility of legitimizing the existence of such criminal groups, yet in its foreign policy, it is forced to acknowledge their positions.

The crisis of international organizations that followed the collapse of the USSR and a bipolar world was not something unexpected or sudden: there were expectations, and some countries were even seriously preparing for them. There were a number of people – futurists and various other political forecasters – who knew, for example, that the United Nations (UN) would have issues with transitioning from a bipolar system through a unipolar one and on to a multipolar system, but, as always, the problem consisted of determining the specific time lag. The matter proved impossible to resolve due to the fact that the leading five members of the Security Council refused to expand the Council and give the new permanent members veto power.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the unipolarity of world politics also reflected on the activities of international organizations – they now operate mainly in the wake of the only world pole that is currently available. Yet the world is changing: active decision-making on the global and regional levels and the development and implementation of geopolitical and geoeconomic projects now involve countries that only yesterday seemed to be on the geopolitical fringe, or, in the best-case scenario – global production sites and providers of cheap labour. Today, these same countries are providing robotics, spacecraft, powerful computers, cyber weapons and so forth; in other words, we are witnessing a civilizational and technological flattening of capacities.

The 1990s were a period of socio-economic, philosophical and worldview, religious, international and other crises encompassing practically all areas of activities of states and people, and became the period that gave rise to new Central Asian nations that came to be not through some desperate independence wars or lengthy political clashes, but as a result of the collapse of a nation – simply put, the former Soviet republics of Central Asia were left on their own. The political decay of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,

which had been brought about by the erosion of party development mechanisms, ideological intoxication of the public, and the command economy, was an objective process, whereas the dissolution of the USSR should be treated as a largely subjective occurrence.

A particularly challenging and seemingly insurmountable – and potentially conflictive – issue today is the inability of the Central Asian nations to establish and maintain adequate inter-governmental relations that are in line with the norms of international law and the customs of the international community. However, to be fair, multiple attempts have indeed been made, both independently and with the support of international organizations and individual nations.

One of the most glaring examples of this inability is the water relations between the countries in the region, or – more precisely – the lack thereof. The region is still unable to maintain even the most basic negotiation process, let alone create and use more complex mechanisms and evaluation vehicles in order to at least achieve positive intermediate results. Thus far, the process of engaging international organizations in this matter is being compounded by the aforementioned relations, and, often enough, the unwillingness of the countries to let international organizations get involved in the water matters. Still, efforts have not been entirely in vain – there has been some progress.

As a result of the above, the Central Asian nations are neither collectively nor individually capable of establishing a collective security system, although, in all fairness, there have been initiatives and projects on behalf of the Central Asia presidents regarding the Tajik Peace Accord and the Tashkent Agreement on Combating Terrorism and Other Kinds of Organized Crime of 20 April 2000.

Another extremely important issue that also directly affects the activities of think tanks and research institutions is the inability of the countries of Central Asia to jointly structure a hierarchy of threats and challenges, maintain functioning evaluation mechanisms, and develop methods for the elimination and mitigation of these threats. In this regard, the situation is very fragmented. National mechanisms

are in no better shape, and in some countries, the situation is outright disastrous.

As I see it, such systemic analysis and design functions could be assumed by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (SCO-RATS), in co-operation with other international organizations. It is readily apparent that a serious overhaul is needed in the activities of international organizations towards achieving security, forming new concepts for the provision of aid to the countries in the region, and implementing the necessary changes.

Central Asia's geopolitical value and importance, and, conversely – its vulnerability – stem from the fact that intracontinental vectors of interests from Russia, China and India, as well as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and a number of other nations, converge within this region. All of these countries are positioned along the perimeter of the Central Asian region. It is this fact that must have led Washington to designate Central Asia as the point of geopolitical convergence of Eurasia. And it is unlikely that this approach will change in the near future.

The positions of the aforementioned nations are evidently affecting the way international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) are developing their approaches to security arrangements and the creation of environments for economic and cultural/humanitarian co-operation. And this circumstance needs to be taken into account when examining potential partnerships between international organizations.

The Central Asian nations suddenly becoming independent and going from being fringe regions of a huge state, as Turkestan and Central Asian military commands, to regions on the geopolitical fringe of the global community, has had a number of consequences, some of which I will specify below.

Firstly, the need to build a national state with clear classic state institutions – preferably, democratic ones, of course – had crashed,

in a chaotic but, at the same time, timid contest with a rigidly delineated regime of personal power that was, indeed, more familiar and understandable to the managing elite that came to power. In this sense, even an “island of democracy” would not significantly differ from the blatant authoritarian regimes of Central Asia.

Secondly, in the majority of the Central Asian nations, the formation of foreign policy primitively devolved to balancing between the powers that be, instead of being based on national/ethnic values and implementing state diplomacy (and not the personal kind).

It is for this reason that participation of the region’s states in various international organizations was pre-determined primarily by the individual state’s position towards a certain country, or, to a lesser degree, some abstract ideas of globalization floating around the global community, or, to a greater degree, silent, feeble participation in forums and congresses instead of actively promoting own interests.

Perhaps this was also due to the fact that these nations had not yet assembled their set of national interests, and some of them at that point were still just forming their basic approaches to said interests. Yet, on the other hand, it is evident that fringe nations can have loyalty, obfuscated by neutrality, or open allegiance to a powerful actor – this is obvious and justified. Perhaps being “guided” is a blessing for the hinterlands.

Thirdly, the lack of political and economic discourse between the former Soviet republics (which, generally speaking, was not encouraged by the Kremlin during Soviet times) has led – due to the want of normal inter-governmental relations geared towards, if not unity, then at least the alignment of positions on the issues of security, global division of labour, and joint humanitarian projects – to the formation of divergent identities. However, this does not necessarily mean that the countries are incapable of achieving a semblance of integration.

The formation and reinforcement of geopolitical and geoeconomic mediation and integration systems, with integrated mechanisms

for security as well as socio-economic and cultural/humanitarian development, requires the creation of an environment for international co-operation by means of primary contributions from the region's nations themselves – something which, incidentally, has not been implemented to this day. It has become obvious that various international organizations must play an auxiliary role in this process as well.

However, it should also be acknowledged that as far as the efforts of international organizations are concerned – for instance, to maintain comprehensive security in Central Asia – there are more expectations than actual results.

Not to mention that international organizations, with very few exceptions, are created on the principle of “for” and “against”, and playing on this black and white chessboard was a challenge for the nations of Central Asia, especially in the 1990s. Countries would go wherever they were welcome – whether it was the OSCE, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the CSTO, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), or another organization – often without even understanding the purpose or programmes of the organizations they were joining. For instance, how justified is a Central Asian country's membership in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)? This realization came much later.

Scepticism towards the capacities of global and regional international organizations and structures regarding security in Central Asia remains very real to this day, and it is doubtful that we will see any shifts towards a more positive perception in the near future: the modest positive experience with co-operation between the Central Asian nations and international organizations was lost in the ocean of opinions that emerged in the 1990s regarding the “independence”, “impartiality” and “readiness to help young countries” of these organizations, especially in the areas that fall outside of ceremonial, formal relations. At first, the Central Asian population and politicians, being inexperienced and unfamiliar with international law and the intricacies of global relations, perceived international organizations as something independent and special,

without solid ties to founders' agreements signed by the founding nations – this was basically the biggest mistake made by the nations of the region. Granted, Central Asia is not unique in this regard – similar situations exist in other parts of the world as well.

Of course, a situation brought about by all of the participants – and one that is full of controversies and mistrust – must not be examined outside of the context of the changes that have been occurring in the system of international relations in today's global society, and certainly not outside of the context of the specific positions of international actors on key issues of global and regional policy, economics, and the various processes that occur in the global arena.

In this regard, increasingly coming to the fore is the idea that regional organizations only perform their functions and missions within the powers that are vested in them by their founding states and member states, and that one could not reasonably expect anything other than the powers delegated by said states. Furthermore, one would be wise to remain cognizant of the fact that the interests of specific countries often dictate the decision-making of international organizations.

There are several international organizations operating in Central Asia. First and foremost is the United Nations and its departments operating in the Central Asian region. It should be noted that despite the absence of the term “security” in the mandates of several UN offices in the region, their operations still, one way or another, concern matters of security, including economic, social and humanitarian problems, as well as more specific applications in the areas of healthcare, food security and so forth. In other words, the activities of the UN and its departments in the Central Asian nations cover a broad range of sectors, areas and issues, including those of security that can be critical to the nations of the region.

Of particular importance is the experience of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat. It would seem that this is, indeed, the first UN institution of its kind aimed at implementing early-warning measures to maintain security by engaging with

governmental and non-governmental entities to analyse the situation in various areas of life in the states and the region. Special interest and support should be given to the centre's efforts to form co-operation channels for the Central Asian countries with respect to water consumption. A number of other consultative, awareness-raising and project approaches – the significance of which has been acknowledged by the leaders and foreign affairs ministers of the Central Asian countries, provided that implementation is precise and unconditional – could prove quite resourceful both for individual countries and the region as a whole. However, due to the fact that the region has not yet become well-established as an environment for international co-operation, many common developmental issues still sow dissent and discord. The centre's activities have thus become formalized into a calendar of essentially protocol events, and as a result, the actual work has devolved into something of a series of “performance reports” neatly stacked and collecting dust in an archive somewhere.

As far as regional organizations are concerned, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the OSCE, the CSTO, and the SCO should be mentioned first and foremost.

Somewhat isolated from this company is NATO, since not a single Central Asian country is a member of this organization, and there are no bilateral partnership agreements conferring NATO a mandate to resolve the security issues of the Central Asian nations. Additionally, unlike in the case of the aforementioned international organizations, when we talk about NATO, we talk about the Central Asian region co-operating with NATO, not within NATO.

The fact that the Central Asian nations joined the OSCE is still a phenomenon that is poorly explained – it seems as if it was done on a whim, a “historical twist” at the most challenging and unstable stage of the dissolution of the bipolar system. It would appear that neither the nations of Central Asia, nor those of Europe – which, following the acknowledgement of certain implications of World War II, held the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in

Europe that was subsequently transformed into the OSCE – would be able to rationalize the sudden accession of what was formerly Soviet Central Asia to this European entity. The United States seems to have had a hand in the integration of the Central Asian nations into the OSCE, pursuing interests that fell outside of the competence and scope of this international organization.

Further co-operation later began to stumble over “third basket” issues.

Granted, the recent accession of Mongolia to the OSCE may bode well for the prospect of reconsidering the political and legal nature of the organization and expanding its geographical coverage. However, a more likely explanation for Mongolia’s accession could be some sort of a crisis slowly spreading through the organization – in fact, not just this organization, but its counterparts as well. And then came the Ukrainian conflict that gave the OSCE a jolt of energy.

The OSCE is fragmentarily integrated into the security system of the Central Asian region. One of the more prominent elements in the security concept of this international organization that has gained support within the Central Asian region is a position expressed in foreign ministers’ documents by which the security of the OSCE region is inexorably connected with the security of neighbouring regions. In light of the need to render aid to Afghanistan, this point is also set out in the Astana Declaration.

The (primarily auxiliary) measures for supporting Afghanistan developed and implemented by the OSCE are aimed, among other things, at controlling the borders between the Central Asian nations and Afghanistan, combating terrorism, illicit arms trafficking, drug trafficking and human trafficking, and assisting in economic and environmental programmes.

The main function of the Collective Security Treaty Organization is ensuring the safety of its member states and protection of their sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this regard, the CSTO is one of the most important international organizations dedicated to reinforcing military security in Central Asia.

It is evident that with the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan (or, perhaps, not), the deterioration of the situation in this country that practically all experts are expecting, and intensification of the activities of a number of transnational criminal groups – including, first and foremost, the Islamic State (IS) – which are currently based in Afghanistan but are slowly creeping north, closer to the borders of the CSTO member states, the Afghan issue is becoming more and more pressing and troubling, requiring an even higher concentration of preventive and preparatory measures from the organization.

The CSTO's efforts in the fight against illicit drugs are deserving of approval and support. It is important to note that a number of measures are still underway in co-operation with international security forces in Afghanistan.

At the same time, it is evident that the CSTO is in need of organizational and financial reinforcement, generalization of the legal framework for its activities, and a more prominent demonstration of its capacity to ensure the security of its member states.

The fact that various Eurasian nations have been initiating co-operation projects and programmes – especially the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and China's proposal to “jointly build the Silk Road Economic Belt” – could herald improvement in the quality of activities and enhance the capacities of some international organizations. This became even more evident after the leaders of Russia and China signed the Joint Statement of Co-operation in Aligning the Building of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Russian president Vladimir Putin proposed a rather ambitious version of project co-operation between three international organizations – the EAEU, the SCO and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – under the auspices of the formation of “Greater Eurasia”. Partnership in this case would appear more like a “docking” of spatial structures, if you will, as opposed to a functional dimension of co-operation. It is self-evident that both the SCO experts and scholars from other nations are attempting to bring security issues to focus, on top of the economic dimension.

Russian experts are also proposing that the SCO participates in the Eurasian designs according to the following format: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization would benefit from the coupling of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the EAEU in that it would produce an incentive for development on the basis of a critical platform for regional development and security. Following the accession of India and Pakistan and the expansion of co-operation with Iran, Mongolia, Afghanistan and potentially North Korea, the SCO could claim to be the most effective institution of international co-operation at the macro-regional (Eurasian) level. The core of this co-operation should be represented by Russia, as the strongest regional power, and China, as the economic leader, though without hegemony. In the future, the positive experience in co-operating and resolving the complex issues that have been accumulated by the SCO could very well form the foundation for the budding Greater Eurasia community.¹

In discussing restoration of the Silk Road, I would like to express my conviction that the Eurasian nations should embrace the strategic goal of establishing a fundamentally new historical process – a long-term process of joint development, which would prove to be all-inclusive in its positive content, dynamic in its project implementation, safe for states and individuals in protecting their needs and rights, profitable for all, and based on rules of co-operation that would be coordinated and adopted by all of the participants of this process and would become compulsory for every single one of them, without any exclusionary motives, reasons or factors.

In this context, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia is becoming more and more prominent. The dynamics and intensity of economic development in Asia, as well as initiation of the geoeconomic “engineering of Eurasia”, are bringing CICA to the forefront as the largest continental forum. However, the spectrum of development concepts emerging from

¹ «Сборник аналитических материалов международного дискуссионного клуба «Валдай», Проект «Большая Евразия», Часть 1, Москва, Октябрь 2016 г. [“Collection of Analytical Materials of the International Valdai Discussion Club”, The Greater Eurasia Project, Part 1, Moscow, October 2016].

Asian states, as well as their diversity in both format and content – eclipsing that of any other region of the world – make the challenges more complicated and difficult, and introduce certain apprehensions. Alignment of development concepts and international co-operation programmes appears to be constrained by various existing and – more importantly – anticipated problems, including those of a military-political nature.

The international organization that comes to mind as the one whose value has become relevant ever since the “engineering of Eurasia”, and which could be directly integrated into development of the Silk Road Economic Belt, promotion of the Eurasian Economic Union, and the coupling of both these processes, is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which considers fostering co-operation in the area of security – especially in combating international terrorism – to be one of its key goals.

It should be underlined that security co-operation must be ensured by observer nations and partner nations engaging in dialogue more actively. Against the backdrop of the Afghan issue, it is clearly of utmost importance to secure partnerships on these issues with observer nations and partner nations.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has recognized the SCO as the most important regional organization capable of making a significant contribution in the areas of security, socio-economic development, and the promotion of continental cultural/humanitarian projects. Of course, there have been high expectations for the capabilities that the SCO has attained in regard to the Afghan issue, due to the geographical, cultural and ethno-religious proximity, the economic affluence of certain SCO member states, and the determination conveyed through relevant declarations.

Afghanistan has observer status in the SCO, and is now actively involved in the activities conducted by the organization with respect to security building. Even though the operations of the contact group on Afghanistan have now resumed after a long break, I deem it advisable, in light of the increased relevance of the Afghan issue, to consider the possibility of creating a special committee within

the SCO for co-operation with Afghanistan that would include SCO member states, observers and dialogue partners, as well as, perhaps, countries that are invested in defusing the Afghan conflict. I also believe that the time has come when international organizations such as the SCO, the CSTO, the OSCE and CICA are capable of creating – perhaps even informally – a non-signatory alliance of international organizations that could jointly explore ways of resolving the Afghan issue. However, it is equally evident that the geopolitical and geoeconomic self-interest of certain nations is essentially stymieing any progress in any direction. However, there is still the opportunity to hold a conference of international organizations, inviting the nations that border Afghanistan to participate.

Today, the most critical value could be ascribed to the activities of international organizations against the backdrop of the increasing and expanding criminal activities of terrorists, drug dealers, arms traffickers and human smugglers. It is important to recognize the fact that international crime is becoming better organized, larger in scale, more financially backed, and so forth. As such, combating crime now requires a wider support base, solidarity, and the active involvement of both governments and the global community, which is something that has never been fully achieved.

The SCO is a unique regional organization, at least in terms of the diversity of civilization identity represented, including Chinese, Russian, Indian and – roughly speaking – Islamic. The likelihood of successful inter-civilizational dialogue within the SCO is reasonably high, especially with respect to the development and formation of new political, economic and humanitarian orders, and a vital feature of this process is constructive dialogue towards combating international organized crime, including religious extremism. The ancient and modern worldviews and the philosophical, ethical and other teachings endemic to the SCO countries are “geared” towards harmonic development and alignment of the interests of the individual, society and the state, rejection of unseemly acts (including crime), the fostering of respect, and approval of interpersonal relations, regardless of a person’s affiliation to any human community. One

could assume establishing inter-civilizational contacts between different international organizations is indeed possible.

One of the most impressive achievements of the SCO would probably be the creation of a conflict-free environment for the stable partnership and peaceful co-existence of the member states, which could be credited largely to the debatable, yet universally recognised dual leadership of Russia and China within the SCO. Prior to 2018, this leadership was considered to be the unique advantage of the Central Asian nations, which, in my view, should have been more active in utilizing this component to build their trade/economic, research/technological and military-political capacities. The leadership was initially formed out of a forced alliance between Moscow and Beijing, but the new trust between the two powers created through intensive, multifaceted co-operation, Washington's attempts to engineer the geopolitical isolation of Russia and China, and – rather importantly – the rapport between the leaders of the two nations, predetermined mitigation of the “constraint” factor and the transition to a qualitatively different partnership both within and outside of the SCO. Of course, some sort of partnership with other international organizations also falls within the SCO's strategy.

As expected, the most sophisticated ties have been formed with the UN. In 2011, the Secretary-General of the SCO and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon signed a memorandum of co-operation in New York, with one of the most important elements being reinforcement of the partnership and promotion of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. This was followed by a corresponding memorandum being signed with Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna Yury Fedotov on co-operation in combating the illicit production, traffic and distribution of drugs. Both documents formed the foundation for rather intensive co-operation between the UN and the SCO under the banner of combating cross-border crime.

Beyond that, the SCO has attempted to establish some semblance of formal relations with NATO, in order to publicly demonstrate to the SCO and NATO nations that co-operation between the two

global communities is indeed possible – and as the SCO understood, that the communities were equal in terms of basic parameters and characteristics. However, it was readily apparent that a significant shift towards intensive co-operation could not reasonably be expected due to the diametrically opposed security concepts that practically positioned them as potential adversaries.

The SCO – or more precisely, the SCO-RATS – was partially successful in its attempts to establish direct relations with counterpart units at the ASEAN and the CIS, but there has been no progress beyond the formal procedures.

The nature and contents of the meetings of representatives of the CSTO, the CIS, the EAEU and the SCO held annually in Moscow and Beijing under the auspices of one of the organizations could be considered rather unusual. Why? Simply because all of these organizations are made up of the same exact nations, with the exception of China, which is only a member of the SCO, and, to a certain degree, Uzbekistan, which withdrew from the CSTO and the EAEU, and has a dissenting opinion on a number of issues in the SCO regarding regional security. Nevertheless, it would seem reasonable to expect a partnership of sorts, especially between the CSTO and the SCO. In particular, I would like to note certain Afghan matters, such as the economic restoration of the country and the drug problem.

In my opinion, the various declarations adopted by the majority of international organizations, including the SCO, the CSTO and the OSCE, have one glaring flaw: these documents contain two extremely useful and valuable narratives: 1) what has happened in Afghanistan and what has come of a 40-year war with internal and external enemies; and 2) what kind of a country we would like Afghanistan to become. However, no one is discussing or proposing ways or options for reaching this goal, and no one is listing the prerequisites for this state – that is, with the exception of one condition: all of the belligerents in Afghanistan must start peace negotiations for the sake of peace and stability. Frankly, international organizations are virtually powerless, as the main actors have rather diverging views,

to put it mildly. As a result, the situation within the country only continues to deteriorate.

It is crystal clear that the Afghan crisis is extremely sensitive and acute, as it represents the most prominent focus of global tension, directly affecting the security interests of countries like China, India, Pakistan the Central Asian nations, and, to an extent, Russia. The centrepiece of this issue is the Taliban: what do non-Afghan actors (the US, Russia, China, India and others) see in this movement, and how do they understand the policy the Taliban pursues? There are evidently inconsistent interpretations and attempts to use it for the sake of self-interest. The Taliban's supremacy and the creation of the Islamic emirate of Afghanistan were something that many states consider unacceptable, for various reasons. Countries in Europe and America, as well as many Asian and African nations, deemed the Taliban's ways to be retrograde, intimidating, bellicose and on par with terrorism. Indeed, the Taliban's domestic actions have stirred fear and loathing among many external observers and laymen, and have aligned perfectly with the favourable conditions created by terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The SCO's call for direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban (the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Beijing on 24 April 2018) must be heard by both the Taliban and other participants in the peace process. It appears to be the optimal way to resolve the Afghan conflict and could, incidentally, proceed within the format of intra-Afghan negotiations, without mediators. At the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan on 27 March 2018, Uzbekistan president Shavkat Mirziyoyev reaffirmed the position of the Central Asian nations on this issue: "We must ensure that direct dialogue is commenced, without prerequisite terms, between the central government and the main forces of the armed opposition. Primarily with the Taliban movement."² It should be noted that this initiative was seconded by US Deputy Secretary of State John J. Sullivan.

² Выступление Президента Узбекистана Ш.М.Мирзиёева на международной конференции по Афганистану, 27.03.2018 [Speech by President of Uzbekistan S. M. Mirziyoyev at the International Conference on Afghanistan, 27 March 2018].

Today the situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating firstly due to the Islamic State units pouring into the country, and secondly due to the implementation of the terrorists' caliphate concept that spans a vast area between the Maghreb and South East Asia, as well as – importantly – the emergence of a large number of sympathizers, sleeper cells and other groups that could be called upon to act openly and discreetly to further terrorist goals in various countries around the world, both Islamic and not. The inclusion of Central Asia into the so-called Khorasan Province has aroused interest from the few IS apologists in the region, increasing the inflow of local fighters into Syria and Iraq and activating extremists and other opportunists. Central Asians weren't unfamiliar with the calls to create a caliphate, such as the slogans of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Yet in this regard, IS manifestos present a qualitatively new threat deepened by pseudo-governmental activities and, of course, mass and frontal acts of terrorism.

The threats posed by the Islamic State, as well as Hizb ut-Tahrir, consist primarily of attempts to encroach upon the constitutions of the Central Asian nations and the very constitutional regimes of these countries. The Islamic State shamelessly targets the political system and its individual pillars, such as secularism and gender equality. And, naturally, the Islamic State cannot accept the cultures of the people of Central Asia, whose contributions to theatre, cinema, art and literature have earned global admiration.

The Afghan issue, of course, requires a form of partnership, despite the diverging charter provisions, strategies and projects of international organizations. Above all, it would provide support for viable and promising initiatives, such as the Istanbul Process. Despite how toothless and impotent those initiatives may seem, they still prompt opposing forces to explore various forms of dialogue, negotiations and discussions, and to chip away at seemingly irreconcilable differences between certain groups, including governments.

The internal events that take place in Central Asian countries and the activities of various extremist groups in the region are an important issue. Of particular note are migration flows from all of the countries in the region to Russia, Turkey, the Arab nations, Kazakhstan and

elsewhere. Migration has a multitude of consequences, both positive (to a lesser degree) and negative (to a greater degree). One of the most severe and illegitimate is the recruitment of migrants into terrorist criminal organizations and their transfer to the deteriorating countries of the Maghreb/Afghan line of the Islamic world.

It would seem as if the migration aspect represents the most pressing task which could be undertaken jointly by international organizations, such as the SCO, the OSCE, the CSTO and other Eurasian structures. One might envision the creation of a single uniform monitoring platform which could be used to study and analyse the situation of migrating citizens of Central Asia and preventively alert the governments of these nations. Furthermore, awareness-raising activities of such a monitoring centre could go a long way. Naturally, this work needs to be done jointly with other organizations working in other countries.

In today's world of strategic uncertainty, we also go through the trials of "conflict-oriented impulses" forming as a result of the global crises that occur in every region and every country, in their local manifestations. It often feels as if the world is engulfed in a wave of marginalization, suspicion, arrogance and immorality.

Unfortunately, international relations, as one of the primary drivers and forms of life for people and states, are not outside the context of the aforementioned. Of particular concern is the fact that reassessment of the base elements of the existing system of international relations and modelling of the future structures of world order are again – as in previous stages of history – taking place through the lens of implied confrontation and "painting" adversaries and competitors in advance.

Nevertheless, it is reassuring that there are a number of positive ideas, trends and projects that could fuel the useful and necessary onset of the expected development. Central Asia is a region that is historically and geographically predisposed to inter- and intra-regional co-operation and mediation. In particular, the fact that the Central Asian countries are members of the SCO, the OSCE, the OIC, the CSTO and other Eurasian international organizations has

created a favourable environment for partnerships, at least in the dialogue format – somewhat from the inside, through the efforts of Central Asian countries, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina to initiate co-operation between the international organizations. This formula also has a lot to do with the development and functioning of Eurasian projects, including the Eurasian Economic Union, the Silk Way Economic Belt, the American New Silk Road initiative and European Union projects and programmes for Central Asia. However, the role of geopolitical and religious/cultural mediation and diplomacy requires, first and foremost, assessment of the capacity of the Central Asian countries – both collectively and separately – to perform such a challenging mission.

It should be acknowledged that to date, the capacities of the Central Asian states are limited; basically, they are only as broad as the extent to which these countries are able to operate independently, and to which their “elites” are able to understand the value of the region as a functioning international political environment – one that also contains a global dimension. To a large degree, it is precisely this factor that determines the design and implementation of political, economic and cultural/humanitarian “acts of influence” towards the outside world, with the subsequent formation and development of a positive image of Central Asia in the minds of leaders and people outside the region and potential and value as an international actor, as well as the implementation of practical measures to enhance multifaceted co-operation with other countries and international organizations, while also capitalizing on the growing capacities for internal improvements within the region.

The Central Asian countries, in turn, are subject to the influence of other countries – primarily the superpowers – as well as certain international organizations when it comes to the functioning and improvement of their political systems, socio-economic contents, social relations, foreign policy strategies and numerous other aspects. Yet it seems that the external influence on the institutional development of the region’s countries was and remains fragmentary.

The next question is how intensive and substantial the process of Islamization and re- Islamization is in Central Asian countries. Which local and foreign institutions and missions are involved in this process? Is this a return to roots, restoration, or something entirely new? Could we interpret this process as a multilateral consolidation of the Muslim community and the Central Asian countries and people, or is this a unilateral movement? What exactly do politicians, scholars and community leaders mean when they talk about the “(re-)Islamization” of the Central Asian region? It seems that serious research efforts in this area have only just been set in motion.

Finally, could the Central Asian nations utilize their rather weak but formal and legal “integration” into the activities of certain European institutions, such as the OSCE, their affiliation with the Islamic world, specifically the OIC, and their membership in the CSTO to, on the one hand, leverage their own growth and development as real actors in the modern international community, and, on the other hand, to establish dialogue between Europe, the former USSR and Islam? How contradictory or even outright antagonistic are the value compasses of the West, the CIS and the Islamic world, and how much of this stems from the influence and the domination of the egoistic interests of certain countries within the three communities that dictate the positions of their respective communities? Furthermore, I would like to note that the need to evaluate what has been said in this paragraph and the search for formulas of compatibility of “value capacities” also have an immediate impact on the internal political situation in the Central Asian nations. It would appear that Central Asia could utilize its unique international legitimacy to help align the three aforementioned international organizations, contributing to a better compatibility of strategies and charter provisions for co-operation.

Central Asia has always been a nexus of civilization, cultural flows and global religions, while also functioning as a channel for linking continents, albeit without major progress in the European sense, but with the integration impetus and extensive growth capacity. The latter also concerns the culture of nomadic mobility within the context of political, economic and other needs reflected in the worldview of Eurasian nomads, whose historic mission, in my eyes, consisted of moving “value capacities”, which are often

virtualized, from one cultural/civilizational environment to another, but without actively using them to their own ends.

Geopolitics – in this case, the use of geography as a political/spatial tool – also generally contributed to Central Asia becoming a “mediator” region. However, the contact between Russian and Chinese military organizational and socio-political spaces in the 21st century (specifically in Central Asia) which manifested itself in the demarcation of the Chinese–Russian border, led to the region losing its role as “geopolitical mediator”. What followed was the dismantling of the integration/mediation ideogeme that had always played a part in the formation of nomadic and settled nations and other societies in Eurasia.

In aspiring to build their own models of national statehood, the new states of Central Asia are concurrently attempting to restore and reconstruct the traditions of mediation and integration that existed in the past. Nevertheless, we must recognize the fact that only some phantom aspects of these traditions have been inherited – the very underlying notions have been lost.

Some interesting initiatives originating from Central Asia that, given, are only vaguely reminiscent of these traditions, are now being embraced by other nations. For instance, Kazakhstan’s CICA, Uzbekistan’s Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, Tajikistan’s Decade of Water, Kyrgyzstan’s Silk Road, and so forth. Even Turkmenistan’s “neutrality” could be viewed within specific historical and cultural traditions as a naturally recurring internal impulse to restore these political concepts. Recall, however, that discussions of neutrality had also taken place in other Central Asian countries at the dawn of their independence.

These initiatives have gained the support of numerous European and Muslim states, as well as international organizations. However, the development path that they need to follow is not one that focuses on organized trends and the fleeting improvement of a country’s image; rather, it involves the development of ideas that are perceived consistently and positively by other countries.

In particular, the creation of a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia could be utilized to reinforce the idea of non-proliferation and rejection of the military use of nuclear technologies. In this regard,

it would behove us to pursue a broader and more comprehensive use of Kazakhstan's decision to voluntarily give up its nuclear status. I believe that the coordinated and active efforts of the Central Asian countries, with the support of the UN and other global and regional organizations as well as individual countries such as Russia, China and the US, could be able to involve a wide variety of Islamic and European countries in this process, including even Iran under certain conditions. Why not consider the possibility of Afghanistan joining the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone?

In this regard, it would be extremely relevant and resourceful for the agenda of Central Asian (and not just Central Asian) co-operation to include the issue of non-proliferation in its more saturated, dynamic and constructive form, not limited to just the signing of a nuclear-weapons-free zone agreement – the region needs to draft a nuclear-weapons-free policy and a set of tools to implement it. I would only add that Central Asia, which is surrounded by nuclear superpowers as well as countries aspiring to be ones, should be more active in reinforcing and developing these ideas.

It is readily apparent that many international organizations could participate more actively in promoting the idea of a nuclear-free Central Asia. The SCO, the CSTO, CICA and, perhaps, the OSCE are fully able, within their charters, to integrate into the process of developing this idea.

The Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Agreement can be considered a precursor to creating favourable conditions for collective humanitarian security involving a number of international organizations such as the OSCE, the CSTO and the SCO.

In fostering a new culture of relations, Silk Road diplomacy objectively necessitates the development of dialogue on the possibility of aligning or joining the activities of all of the international organizations and projects, both economic and political, with a view of achieving all-inclusive security and the full development and welfare of the people living in the countries of Eurasia.

The Never-Ending Debate in European and Eurasian Security Architecture: Heading to the Next Round

Pál Dunay

Scholarly articles addressing Central Asia usually start with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of the five former Soviet republics. There is every reason to follow this example in order to lay the foundations for recent history and prospects for regional co-operation. The end of the Soviet Union meant the collapse of an amalgamated security community and the exit of a power from Central Asia that had determined its fate for more than a century (and in some parts, for much longer).³ It is possible to object to this on the basis that Central Asia could not have been part of an amalgamated security community, since both the Tsarist and the Communist regimes had been imposed upon the nations of the region. Such an assumption would sound convincing to a Western audience that is ready to accept a simplified approach. However, particularly in Central Asia, the situation was more complex. The Russian Empire appeared there as a power of transformation. Central Asia benefited economically and culturally from this involuntary integration into a larger entity.

However, the long-interrupted statehood followed by the amalgamation into an entity that made centralized decisions and deprived the local authorities of strategic decision-making had consequences for Central Asia. For example, in some matters, the authorities of the newly independent Central Asian states had no experience at all, or the limited experience they did have was associated with their Soviet past. They had a complete lack of experience in the democratic management of their countries and

³ In an amalgamated security community, states relinquish their sovereignty and merge into a larger sovereign entity. This is most often done by federal states, which give up a large portion of their political independence to overcome historical animosity that usually stems from the fact that one part of the entity subordinated the others to its will. It suffices to mention Germany, Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union as examples.

could only rely on their instincts. They also lacked experience in inter-state relations with sovereign entities. In sum, the experience that could have been put to use was not available. Under such conditions, it would have been surprising had Central Asia gone through successful and rapid transformation.

It also matters whether the newly independent states of Central Asia had a shared, not to mention common identity. Here, three questions emerge: 1) Were the Central Asian states interested in developing a shared identity upon gaining independence? 2) Were they considering options other than being “Central Asian”? 3) Did the external environment foster the integration of the Central Asian states or not?

The Central Asian states were not in the forefront of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Some of them did not even understand why this had to happen. In most cases, they had good reasons not only to not show interest in it, but also to actually show disdain. The former may have been related to the fact that modern statehood was brought to the region by Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. The disdain might have stemmed partly from their lack of experience in practicing sovereignty, and, perhaps even more, from the awareness of the economic weakness of their states, which were deeply integrated in the centralized Soviet economy. Even though the Communist leaders in Central Asia could not have had accurate knowledge of how much their republics benefited from the central distribution system, they had reason to assume that they would be worse off as independent states.

However, the fact that they were not interested in the dissolution process does not mean that they did not quickly accommodate to enjoy unconstrained sovereignty of one sort or another. Some established dictatorships, while others set up authoritarian regimes; Kyrgyzstan experimented with democracy, while Tajikistan rapidly sank into civil war. The search for identity also resulted in declaring what those nations were not. National identity based on ethnic identity led to exclusion. Building national identity is a historical task and can take generations to accomplish. Hence, less than thirty

years later, we could conclude that we are still in an early phase of the process. It was a consequence of this situation that the Central Asian states moved from their Soviet identity to a national identity that made them reluctant to be Central Asian. The perceived association with the Russian/Soviet experience was positive. That has given the states of Central Asia a distinctive Soviet legacy.

Central Asia is traditionally identified with five former republics of the Soviet Union: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. However, some experts have added Afghanistan to the region so that it would not fall between the Greater Middle East and South Asia. Understandably, this was done in order to associate Central Asia with a neighbour that was internationally better known than any of the five states mentioned above, and also to provide an understanding that the region is adjacent to a major source of insecurity.⁴ This could have helped with attracting attention and readiness to support and assist the five Central Asian states. There is also a “flight from Central Asia” while it sometimes is perceived as backward and underdeveloped. Dariga Nazarbayeva has put it clearly:

Geographically, Kazakhstan borders on Central Asia, but it is not a Central Asian country. Ours is a Eurasian state strongly influenced by [European] and Western values. Contrary to what certain politicians and journalists assert, we are not another *-stan*. Saudi Arabia is not our historical landmark: we look to Norway, South Korea, and Singapore.⁵

Kazakhstan, which is economically the most successful and functional of the countries, has also put forward the idea of “Kazakhstan and Central Asia” in order to differentiate itself from the countries to its south. President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov of Turkmenistan – the second richest Central Asian state (in terms

⁴ Starr, S. F. “A Partnership for Central Asia”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 84, No 4, July/August 2005, pp 164-178.

⁵ Назарбаева, Д. «Специфика и перспективы политического развития Казахстана», 2003.12.03 [Nazarbayeva, D. “The Specifics and Prospects of Kazakhstan’s Political Development”, 3 December 2003], <http://www.imp.kz/Lists/articles/DispForm.aspx?ID=766>.

of per capita GDP) – has presented his country as having a dual Caspian and Central Asian identity.⁶

In spite of those two factors, the identity of the Central Asian states is historically well established and identical to that of the five former Soviet republics. However, with the Soviet Union gone for more than a quarter of a century, it is clear that the states of Central Asia have decided on their own directions. Centripetal tendencies have prevailed in the past 25 years, or have at least attracted more attention than the factors that continued to hold the countries of the region together. It remains one of the most intriguing questions of the region whether conclusions for the future can be drawn from its recent past.

Internationally, Central Asia has a dual identity: as a region of five former Soviet republics which are all participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), they have some alleged European identity, while geographically, they are east of the Urals and belong to the Asia-Pacific Group in the United Nations. The world tends to forget about the region due to the fact that the two main reasons why Central Asia mattered after the dissolution of the Soviet Union have largely lost their importance. These two reasons were: 1) the abundance of natural resources and energy; and 2) since 2001, the close vicinity to Afghanistan. Neither one nor the other garners much attention any longer. Both in terms of sources and transit routes, natural resources and energy have largely been sold, and although there are some efforts to change the direction of trade, those rearrangements will only address “left-overs”. Having Afghanistan in the neighbourhood continues to be regarded a factor that influences international attention to Central Asia. However, this attention has definitely declined over the years, compared to the first decade that followed 9/11. The fact that the instability in Afghanistan has not spread across international borders

⁶ Speech by President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov at the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (New York, 23 September 2009), www.turkmenistan.ru/en/node/8396.

and Western bases in Central Asia have been closed has contributed to this.

The external environment of Central Asia has fostered integration in various institutions. Two – the United Nations (UN) and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) – have one thing in common: inclusiveness. Both organizations (as the CSCE *de facto* had transformed into an organization by the time the Central Asian states joined in 1992) are inclusive – one on the universal scale, and the other in the broad meaning of the Euro-Atlantic area. They have demonstrated this by absorbing new members without consideration to the standards they could meet. Both organizations quickly accepted the five Central Asian states as members, despite the reservations and doubts that existed. Russia's leading OSCE expert, Andrei Zagorski, then argued against "quick admission of the new republics without first insisting on traditional CSCE criteria."⁷ He was first and foremost referring to the Central Asian states, implying that they should first develop domestically, solving the challenges stemming from their newly acquired statehood, inexperience with sovereignty, modernization and democratic transformation. In retrospect, Zagorski could have raised similar doubts with respect to nearly all of the 12 successor states of the Soviet Union. It was clear: those two organizations gave priority to inclusion over setting standards. With this, they positioned themselves as institutions that gave preference to socialization over conditionality. In light of more than quarter of a century of experience and the record of the Central Asian countries in realizing the values that the OSCE professes, there could be pro and con arguments for the early granting of participating State status to the five Central Asian states. However, had the CSCE participating States decided against it, it would have been alien to the immanent logic of an inclusive organization.

Understandably, the Central Asian countries started their journey as independent states without a network of international institutions.

⁷ Zagorski, A. "The CSCE and the New Euro-Asian Challenge", *The CSCE in the 1990s: Constructing European Security and Cooperation*, Michael R. Lucas (ed.), Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 1993, p. 282.

On the first day of independence, their membership was confined to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that had just been established less than a month before. A brief past, and hence – an uncertain future. Now, all of the Central Asian nations are members of the OSCE, the UN (and some of its specialized agencies) and the CIS. Therefore, the region has remained quite limited in terms of multilateral engagement. However, some institutions have emerged that did not exist when the Central Asian states gained their sovereignty. Although neither the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), nor the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), nor the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), nor the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) counts every Central Asian state among its members, their existence is something that Central Asia and the other organizations active there have to adjust to.

However, this situation is not unfamiliar to the OSCE. Most of its participating States belong to one international organization or another with fewer members than the OSCE. In most cases, these organizations have better internal cohesion than the OSCE, where, regrettably, cohesion has been fluctuating and is often just declaratory. Due to their historical development and organic evolution, these organizations potentially present more of a challenge, as well as an opportunity – primarily because they can rally the support and resources of their members. This is evident in the massive support and assistance that the European Union has given to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. However, it makes a significant difference that every EU member state is an OSCE participating State that represents some – but not all – of the organizations that the Central Asian states participate in. This specifically applies to the CSTO and the EAEU, but not to the SCO and CICA. It would be difficult to associate the OSCE with organizations that have members which are not OSCE participating States. Hence, their contribution will remain largely non-existent, even though in some cases, there is an apparent overlap in their agendas, such as with CICA and OSCE confidence- and security-building measures.

The OSCE is at the soft end of the spectrum of organizations without recourse to exclude states from membership. This is the case in spite of the CSCE suspension of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s in response to the war of aggression fought by Belgrade.⁸ The CSCE/OSCE has thus had to choose a difficult path to aid development in Central Asia. Through persuasion and socialization, it has been trying to influence the Central Asian countries to uphold the shared values, principles and norms that the individual participating States committed to upon joining the organization in the post-Cold War era. However, not all states are equally affected by this socialization.

Central Asia has been a “difficult customer” for the OSCE, in part due to the objective factors mentioned above, and in part due to subjective ones that could be attributed to the leaders of the still relatively new states. Problems with liberal norm violations have stemmed not only from the growing reluctance of Central Asian leaders to uphold them, but also from weak state capacity. It is for this reason that Martha Brill Olcott concluded that Central Asia has missed its second chance as well.⁹ In order to help adhere to the values, standards and norms inspired by the Helsinki Final Act, the OSCE has attempted to foster the development and potential transformation of the participating States in need of support in fulfilling the requirements enshrined in the OSCE Acquis.

In turn, the Central Asian states have often paid lip service to their OSCE commitments, providing a formal demonstration of having lived up to them on the one hand, while trying their best to retain as much autonomy as possible on the other. This is nothing new. As Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye concluded in their seminal book in the 1970s: the problem facing individual governments is how to benefit from international exchange while maintaining as much autonomy as possible... how to generate and maintain a mutually beneficial pattern of co-operation in the face of competing efforts

⁸ Schlager, E. B. “An Introduction on Helsinki-II”, *The Challenges of Change: The Helsinki Summit of the CSCE and Its Aftermath*, Arie Bloed (ed.), Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1994, pp. 5-6.

⁹ Olcott, M. B. *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005.

by governments ... to manipulate the system for their own benefit.¹⁰ This is particularly relevant to our topic, as participation in various international institutions increases room for manoeuvring.

It remains debatable, however, whether the different objectives of the OSCE are reconcilable, and whether they can eventually be harmonized and how. The underlying noble goal is clear: providing “comprehensive security” within the community of participating States. This is served by different means, ranging from guaranteeing international security, including sovereignty, among the participating States; contributing to their prosperity and a liveable human environment; and ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. As the CSCE/OSCE developed at various junctures and then confirmed its agreements and collective commitments, it would be difficult to deny its existence and post-Cold War relevance. Today, the participating States of the OSCE seemed to agree – at least formally – on the relevance of the organization their heads of state or government declared at the 2010 Astana Summit that: “We reaffirm our full adherence ... to all OSCE norms, principles and commitments ...”.¹¹

Depending on their socio-economic conditions, history and traditions, the various states display different levels of achievement in terms of implementing OSCE requirements. However, it is the stated objective of the OSCE to secure adherence to its norms among all participating States, regardless of existing predicaments. If each and every one of its participating States demonstrated good governance and steady prosperity domestically, and was peaceful and co-operative internationally, the organization would lose its purpose. Viewed dynamically, it is doubtful that the OSCE participating States will be collectively heading in that direction any time soon. There are two reasons for this situation: lack of capacity and lack of will.

¹⁰ Keohane R. & Nye, J. *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*, Boston, Little Brown, 1977, p. 46.

¹¹ Astana Commemorative Declaration Towards a Security Community, SUM.DOC/1/10/ Corr.1, point 2. <https://www.osce.org/mc/74985?download=true>.

It is also apparent that the OSCE should respond differently to the participating States based on their progress, or lack thereof, vis-à-vis compliance with the Helsinki Principles. If a participating State is unable to meet the requirements, it should be helped. However, if a participating State is reluctant to meet the requirements, diplomatic support should be complemented by formulating the expectations clearly and exerting some pressure on the participating State. In practice, however, it is unlikely that any participating State would clearly renounce its reluctance to live up to the OSCE requirements. And, indeed, this is something that countries do not do. Rather, they qualify their position, referring to principles and norms that provide reasons to retreat from other norms and principles. It is sufficient to mention the ultimate reference to (unrestrained) “state sovereignty” and “non-intervention in the domestic affairs of States” whenever certain participating States are challenged and criticized for violating human rights or not taking steps to improve the quality of governance (e.g. reducing corruption).

These principles of sovereignty and non-intervention have been invoked frequently by Central Asian leaders. As Nargis Kassenova insightfully notes, the activities of the OSCE were “rightly considered as interference into ... internal affairs...”¹² The reasons vary, and include both weak state capacity and the reluctance of rulers to carry out reforms that would endanger their power base and/or deprive individual leaders and their cronies of various benefits. As long as the OSCE played a classical diplomatic role by merely expressing criticism, the situation was easy to manage. Moreover, the organization was busy with other matters (first and foremost, with the war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s), and the Central Asian countries were new states that deserved some patience in terms of their development, so there was a fairly tolerant attitude toward the region. The CSCE delegations from the Central Asian states that were gradually established reported their concerns in

¹² Kassenova, N. “Kazakhstan – Mastering the Art of Selective Engagement”, *Perceptions of the OSCE in Europe and the USA*, Alexandra Dienes and Reinhard Krumm (eds.), Vienna, Friedrich Ebert Foundation Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe, 2018, p. 64.

Vienna through diplomatic channels, but the organization did not address their regimes too intrusively.

The CSCE eventually extended its presence to the region by way of field missions. It established a field presence in Tajikistan as early as 1994 due to the civil war that was taking place. This was followed by the OSCE Liaison Office in Uzbekistan being opened in October 1995 with responsibility for the rest of Central Asia. The process was completed by 1999, when the OSCE finally had local presence in every Central Asian state. Its reports on Central Asia were not reassuring. With variation, the absence of free and fair elections, the systematic violation of human rights, endemic corruption, and cronyism were on the list of grievances reconfirmed by OSCE technocrats. And the benefits of opening field missions in the region have not always been clear. According to Karolina Kluczevska, the presence of an OSCE field mission in Tajikistan has created a complex “system of mutual accommodations” between the organization and the government.¹³ While Tajikistan has been socialized by the OSCE to at least nominally uptake the organization’s values in a greater “neoliberal world order,” the OSCE, in turn, has also been socialized and is perceived by Tajikistan’s government, civil society and population “simultaneously [as] an enemy, a benefactor, and an industry [as a dispenser of foreign aid]”.¹⁴

Although academic circles that monitor the activities of the OSCE are of the view that many of them are multi-dimensional, it is clear that the most common problems over the past two decades have concentrated on the human aspect (i.e. human rights) as opposed to the politico-military and economic and environmental aspects that together form the OSCE’s “three dimensions of security”. This has been so for three reasons, as detailed below.

Firstly, the human dimension is an area of emphasis among a large group of democracies that represent the vast majority of participating States. It has to be understood that the enlarged West will not give up

¹³ Kluczevska, K. “Benefactor, Industry, or Intruder? Perceptions of International Organizations in Central Asia – the Case of the OSCE in Tajikistan”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 36, issue 3, 2017, p. 363.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 357.

on this priority, as its domestic political system (very often rooted in centuries of history) is based upon it. It would clearly be impossible to imagine a hypocritical approach where the systemic domestic foundation is not represented internationally in such a community. It is also important to emphasize that the unchallenged leader of the free world – the United States – has a democratic history (albeit, with long years involving decimation of a vast part of the native population and the practice of slavery and racial discrimination). The Western agenda is therefore reflected in the heavy emphasis, even if at times nominally due to *realpolitik*, on the human dimension. Still, as Alessandra Russo and Andrea Gawrich remind us, “OSCE’s Cold War focus on the human dimension has been heavily diluted with hard security”,¹⁵ while Karolina Kluczevska notes that “[i]n the post-9/11 era, regardless of any neoliberal rhetoric, the *de facto* emphasis of influential Western powers have been on stability rather than democratization”.¹⁶ In light of the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), as well as the partial involvement of Central Asia both as a source of fighters and as a destination of ISIS returnees, the importance attributed to Central Asian stability has temporarily returned following the drawdown of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the ongoing war in Afghanistan. Still, the nearly complete disbandment of the ISAF in the sense of controlling territory has meant reduced attention to Central Asia among the vast majority of OSCE participating States.

The second reason behind the problematic nature of the human dimension, and hence, the OSCE’s declining emphasis on it in Central Asia, is that security issues concerning the politico-military dimension have been less dominant in Central Asia than, for example, in the Caucasus, or earlier in the Western Balkans. Since the civil war in Tajikistan ended in 1997, classic inter-state conflicts that could have

¹⁵ Russo A. & Gawrich, A. “Overlap with Contestation? Comparing Norms and Policies of Regional Organizations in the Post-Soviet Space”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 36, Issue 3, 2017, p. 338.

¹⁶ Kluczevska, K. “Benefactor, Industry, or Intruder? Perceptions of International Organizations in Central Asia – the Case of the OSCE in Tajikistan”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 36, Issue 3, 2017, p. 368.

been addressed by the means available in that dimension did not have to be applied. Low-intensity conflicts have been present in the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, but when they intensify, the OSCE has either been too slow in reacting to the rapidly evolving events (the First Kyrgyz Revolution and the Andijan unrest in Uzbekistan in 2005, as well as the violent inter-ethnic-induced mass movement of people in June 2010), or the conflicts have occurred despite the OSCE's intention of constructive engagement (the 2011 Zhanaozen massacre in Kazakhstan, the events in Khorog, Tajikistan in 2012, and the 2016 demonstrations in Kazakhstan). In this context, it is notable that Kazakhstan had difficulties intervening in the conflict between its two southern neighbours while holding the OSCE chairmanship in 2010.

Thirdly, the economic and ecological dimensions are often the default focus in Central Asia, since these create the least problems with the region's mostly authoritarian regimes. This is despite the fact that matters of prosperity and well-being are not on the OSCE's agenda, at least as far as values and principles. This is partly because the set of principles dates back to the 1975 Helsinki Decalogue, in which economic issues, per se, were not on the agenda as principles. Issues like the right to a clean environment as a "third-generation" human right did emerge later on, but were not on the Helsinki agenda, either. In addition, as compared to many other inter-governmental entities (such as the myriad UN agencies), the OSCE is a relatively "poor organization" with a comparatively small budget. So although the Central Asian states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) still view the OSCE as a donor and a source of funds and material goods, many have limited expectations as to what kind of resources it can provide access to.

Nonetheless, the OSCE has managed to increase gradually its focus on the human dimension after the end of the Cold War. However, the organization's original focus was not on Central Asia, so the five former Soviet republics have been able to get away with a shaky record from the get-go. The region's overall record on human rights has been poor, despite considerable regional variation. While Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have been widely regarded as dictatorial, Kazakhstan

has introduced a more differentiated authoritarian rule. Kyrgyzstan, which is generally regarded as the most democratic state in the region, has oscillated with its democratic record, while Tajikistan has been backtracking for some time now. Of course, the change of guard in Tashkent led to high hopes for moving Uzbekistan away from its dictatorial past. Just two years after the change, these hopes have been fulfilled beyond expectation. However, the question remains as to whether the OSCE played a role in this, or if it happened due to Uzbekistan's internal dynamics.

Due to both geography and *realpolitik*, Central Asia has been far less interesting to most OSCE participating States than either the former Yugoslavia or the other post-Soviet states. Among the former Soviet republics, Belarus mattered, as did Ukraine from time to time. Moldova and the states of the South Caucasus also mattered due to the protracted conflicts in their territories that often resulted in internally displaced persons and violation of the rights of ethnic minorities. One may conclude that these conflicts mattered more as they were closer to Western Europe and the community of western democracies. However, a different reading may also offer some explanation: that such conflicts matter more to the West because the Russian Federation is party to them, and the West is in fact engaging in geopolitical rivalry with Russia through this protracted conflict. Last, but not least, as long as the "Russia-first" policy of the Clinton administration prevailed, the entire human dimension mattered less than was subsequently the case. Today, it seems as though the human dimension is once again less prominent than it was over the past decade due to the US-led War on Terror and the importance attributed to stability over democratic transformation.

Nevertheless, when the OSCE has addressed the human dimension and democracy in Central Asia, the assessment has been worrisome. For instance, there has not been a single election in this region that was assessed as "free and fair". The reports from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on Central Asian elections demonstrate a differentiation between various diplomatic formulations, ranging from an assessment of "neither free, nor fair" to "technical shortcomings". The OSCE has refused

to send a monitoring presence to nearly any of the elections in Turkmenistan. The “blockading” of elections in Turkmenistan until 2013 gave way to an Election Assessment Mission being deployed to observe the parliamentary elections in December of that same year. This solution was to the satisfaction of the Turkmen leadership as well. Both parties could claim something: the OSCE could claim that it had assessed the elections in Turkmenistan, while the Turkmen authorities could claim that they had held a monitored election. However, it was easier to understand the refusal to send election observers than the offer of a “half-way solution”. If and when the OSCE, which has established itself as a standard-setting organization in election monitoring, refuses to observe elections in a participating State, it deprives those elections of international legitimacy. It is a matter of debate whether depriving elections of their legitimacy is a stronger incentive than monitoring, and thus marginally influencing it and collecting information about where the country stands on its democratic record. Even though non-transparent states would not perceive the reluctance of the ODIHR to monitor their elections to be a major loss, it is a bit more difficult to understand than the low level presence in some other cases.

That said, some argue that the OSCE also needs to reassess its own activities to ensure that its election monitoring and presence are not doing more harm than good. Nearly all of the Central Asian elections (with the exception of post-2010 Kyrgyzstan) have resulted in the OSCE/ODIHR reporting on the lack of a genuinely pluralistic choice for voters and ... -that most previous ODIHR recommendations remain unaddressed [by the state]... Some observers, including Payam Foroughi and Uguloy Mukhtorova, contend that “the OSCE/ODIHR’s election observations in the Central Asian states not only fail to contribute to the flourishing of democracy and political pluralism, but ... unintentionally [aid] the consolidation of virtual democracy, instead.” Foroughi and Mukhtorova call this phenomenon the “counterintuitive Helsinki effect” and maintain that the ODIHR knowingly participates in this process of observing foregone fraudulent elections to provide itself a

“*raison d’être* as a post-Cold War institution.”¹⁷ With due respect to this view, one may consider a somewhat more conciliatory reading: that the OSCE and its participating States are simply of the view that active engagement carries the promise of more influence than introducing conditionality and denying election monitoring.

Elections and election monitoring have gained more importance with the Russian Federation increasingly joining other (regular) violators over the last decade. The OSCE has come to view the violation of election norms as a spreading malaise. Under Russian initiative and leadership, a coalition was formed in the mid-2000s by many post-Soviet states, which collectively contested the more active involvement of international actors – first and foremost, the OSCE – in their elections. This coalition, which included the states of Central Asia, argued that there was a fundamental bias in the organization’s approach towards monitoring. It asserted that the OSCE/ODIHR’s focus had primarily been on the organization’s eastern regions; that reporting by observers was conducted without the possibility of appeal for the host country; and that election monitoring could be used to undermine stability. The Russian-led group of states was increasingly concerned about the possibility of “colour revolutions” in response to alleged undemocratic elections.

In terms of human rights and their violation, which is another key element of the human dimension, the picture is complex and requires nuanced assessment. Western human rights advocacy groups (including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House) regularly assess the situation and present a bleak overall picture. And there appear few reasons to be optimistic – at least in the short- to medium-term.

However, to qualify the human rights picture, several factors should be taken into account. First, since the end of the East-West conflict and the inception of sovereign statehood in Central Asia,

¹⁷ Foroughi, P. & Mukhtorova, U. “Helsinki’s Counterintuitive Effect? OSCE/ODIHR’s Election Observation Missions And Solidification Of Virtual Democracy In Post-Communist Central Asia: The Case Of Tajikistan, 2000-2013”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 36, Issue 3, 2017, p. 377.

the focus of human rights has been on political rights and individual freedoms – areas where authoritarian regimes perform poorly.

Second, assessment of the human rights records of the different Central Asian states is hindered by the fact that the region is not a priority for the West. When the same Western countries are looking for strategic partners in the region – whether it be with regards to the ongoing Global War on Terrorism or to trade and economics – they are usually very careful, if not outright mute, on human rights matters that would otherwise be discussed. This presents a challenge, with human rights NGOs continuing to speak up, and state institutions left to manage the pressure. In some cases, the consideration results in a delicate choice between values and norms on the one hand, and concerns for stability on the other. In a region that is of no particular global strategic importance in the positive sense, but which can create problems if it is reluctant to co-operate, priority leans toward stability and a “consolidated” relationship. A case in point here is Uzbekistan – despite its disappointing human rights record, this country was an important partner of the United States in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) when armaments and equipment were being removed from Afghanistan after the ISAF completed its mission.

Third, the OSCE’s assessment of the region is often compromised by lack of knowledge. Assessment of the region is often anecdotal, drawing heavily on a cursory review of the local media and accounts of other international organizations, rather than its own on-the-ground research and field work. This is evidenced by the comments and presentations made by delegation heads at the OSCE Permanent Council (PC) at the organization’s headquarters in Vienna, even as some delegations pick out and promote certain violations and individual cases (arrested journalists, mistreatment of opposition politicians, and biased media). It is also important to emphasize that regardless of normative declarations made by the OSCE’s 57 participating States, in reality there is no consensus as to what constitutes violations of rights. The normative divergence between various participating States either never disappeared with the end of the Cold War, or returned

soon thereafter. Views about individual freedom are also divergent. Furthermore, following several waves of democratic transformation between the 1960s and the 1990s, including two in Europe, the advancement of democracy has been halted. We may also say that there has been a return to authoritarian rule.¹⁸

Whether substantially or nominally, OSCE activities address the values, norms and principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. However, since the early 1990s, a key feature of the OSCE is that it has been physically present, in the form of permanent field missions and offices, in participating States that have had difficulty in living up to the requirements of the Helsinki Accords. This is generally regarded to be a major difference compared to other organizations, even though both the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE) have significant field presence. It makes a big difference, however, that the OSCE can address the Central Asian countries as participating States, unlike the field presences of the EU and the CoE, which cannot. The field presence in the OSCE participating States is concentrated in the Western Balkans and the post-Soviet space, with no permanent missions in the Western countries, even though some of them are also having problems with their OSCE commitments in one or more of the three dimensions.

The total OSCE Unified Budget (UB) for 2017 was just under EUR 139 million; 55 percent of the UB was spent on OSCE field operations, with less than half (EUR 20 million) allocated to 13 presences in the post-Soviet area. The two largest budgets were in Tajikistan (EUR 7.55 million) and Kyrgyzstan (EUR 6.8 million).¹⁹ The field missions, while overlapping in their activities in different participating States, nonetheless claim to carry out projects tailored to the specific needs of the host country. Originally, OSCE presence was conceived as having autonomy as far as the projects to be realized. However, funding from the Unified Budget also presented some constraints, since it was subject to a consensus

¹⁸ Cooley, A. "Countering Democratic Norms" *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 26, No 3, 2015, pp. 49-63.

¹⁹ Annual Report 2017, Vienna, OSCE, 2018, p. 98.

of the participating States. However, Extra-Budgetary (ExB; does not require PC approval) funding complemented the strictly limited UB resources. Certain Western states (chiefly the US and the EU countries) and some of the organization's more affluent members have stood out as the primary ExB donors. Understandably, their political preferences were reflected in the funding stream, upsetting the states that were the prime recipients of the resources, as well as their mentor in the post-Soviet space, the Russian Federation.

The situation got particularly aggravated between 2003 and 2005, when one colour revolution followed another. With or without evidence, some post-Soviet states were under the impression that the resources channelled through the OSCE contributed to the funding of political transformation. Many states with varying degrees of authoritarianism wanted to prevent a snowball effect closer to home. As noted above, a group of post-Soviet states, under the guidance of Russia, developed a set of grievances that ranged from ExB financing for certain political purposes and the under-representation of their citizens in leading OSCE positions, to the over-emphasis of monitoring elections in countries "east of Vienna", i.e. the former Communist Bloc. Russia correctly contends that ExB funding has led to the autonomy of some OSCE institutions (chiefly the ODIHR). It also accuses the West – primarily the United States – of "privatizing" the OSCE, an organization that used to reach all of its decisions through consensus.²⁰ However, this conclusion was drawn on the basis of the change of political influence rather than formal revision of OSCE decision-making. These accusations influenced the changes that have taken place within the organization in the past decade. Among other things, two post-Soviet states have held the OSCE chairmanship (Kazakhstan in 2010, Ukraine in 2013), citizens of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine have headed OSCE field missions in different states (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) at different times, and ExB funding has more frequently been used for purposes amenable to the host state.

²⁰ "Should Russia Leave the OSCE?", *Russia in Global Affairs*, No 3, 9 August 2008, eng. globalaffairs.ru/number/n_11274.

If field presence is essential for the OSCE, the states that host the field offices also have considerable bargaining power. There is a noteworthy trend here: participating States tend to dislike OSCE presence on their territory. Three distinct tendencies can be singled out. First, some participating States have made efforts to convince others to abolish OSCE field presence by consensus. Estonia and Latvia had their field offices closed in 2001, arguing that they were approaching EU membership. Croatia first had its OSCE presence reduced in 2007, before it was abolished in 2011 on similar grounds. Second, some states have initiated the termination of presence without the consent of other participating States, or have vetoed presence in another participating State. This was the case in Belarus (twice), Azerbaijan and, most recently, Armenia. Third, several participating States have significantly reduced the status and reach of the OSCE presence from “centres” or “missions” to “programme coordinators” or “programme offices”. This has been done by both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan first closed the Almaty office, and reduced the presence in Astana into a programme office in 2015. Then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Erlan Idrissov even said that this was not the last step. OSCE missions categorized as “project coordination” and “programme” offices can only carry out projects that have been approved by the foreign ministries of the host state. This reduces the freedom of action of the OSCE presence to a minimum and puts it at the mercy of the host state. This tendency has been on the rise despite the fact that OSCE missions have acted more and more carefully not to upset the authorities of the host states. The OSCE’s reporting activities also increasingly reflect a careful diplomatic approach, since the host state also receives the reports.

It is notable that those participating States that benefit from trade in natural resources, whether it be their own (Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan) or those of another state (Belarus), have clearly felt more empowered to challenge OSCE presence on their territory. By contrast, poorer and weaker states (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) have not gone so far as to openly challenge OSCE presence, and have all hosted

large OSCE missions. Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan both eventually followed the examples of other states and initiated negotiations in 2016 to change the full-fledged OSCE centres into programme offices. The talks ended in 2017 both with Bishkek and Dushanbe, demonstrating that their relationship with the OSCE at best can be described as interdependent.²¹ In both capitals the full-fledged OSCE missions have become programme offices, with reduced autonomy vis-a-vis the host state. To both compare and contrast overlapping inter-governmental organizations, like the EU and NATO, with Russian-centric regional organizations – notably the CIS, the SCO, the CSTO and the EAEU – which seek to reduce Western geostrategic influence in Eurasia. Organizational rivalry can be used to serve a variety of objectives, including forum shopping, strategic inconsistency and strategic ambiguity.²² Empirical research on the example of Kazakhstan has demonstrated that the OSCE has been seen in this light. Namely, the OSCE was used to: 1) keep Kazakhstan linked to the European security system; 2) contribute to the country's claim to have a partially European identity; and 3) help broaden its concept of security in the first years after independence.²³ Western hesitation, as was visible in the case of Georgia, has also contributed to this, as has Russia's rapid rise in the first 15 years of this century.

What risks does the situation present, and what should the OSCE do? Indeed, there is a risk that the post-Soviet states where the OSCE continues to maintain a presence will coordinate their stance to “break the back” of the organization. Thus far, the organization has relied on skilful diplomacy. Field staff strive to work in co-operation with the host state authorities, keeping a low profile and avoiding major collisions. The OSCE presence can only decide in light of accurate

²¹ Armenia was the second OSCE participating State where OSCE presence was terminated at the will of another participating State, and not the state proper. In 2008, this happened to Georgia due to Russia's decision, and in 2017 it happened to Armenia due to Azerbaijan's decision.

²² Russo A. & Gawrich, A. “Overlap with Contestation? Comparing Norms and Policies of Regional Organizations in the Post-Soviet Space”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 36, Issue 3, 2017, p. 336.

²³ Kassenova, N. “Kazakhstan – Mastering the Art of Selective Engagement”, *Perceptions of the OSCE in Europe and the USA*, Alexandra Dienes and Rainhard Krumm (eds.), Vienna, Friedrich Ebert Foundation Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe, 2018, p. 63.

knowledge of the environment how to find the right mix of resolve and flexibility. The latter may well produce the impression that its very presence represents an attempt to placate the authorities. It is clear that some might find this opportunistic, sacrificing the values, principles and norms that the OSCE should foster. Others are equally worried that a straightforward, occasionally tough stance might compromise co-operation and endanger the relationship for the future.

Is there any chance of overcoming this volatile situation and arriving at a positive sum game? Not in the near future. The deepening division that has emerged over the past 25 years among the OSCE participating States and their allies is likely to entail a certain amount of erosion in terms of OSCE presence in the post-Soviet space. Some of the states that still host OSCE field missions may – as we have seen already with Russia, Belarus and Azerbaijan – reach the conclusion that “the deal is not right” and that the costs of OSCE field presence outweigh the benefits. This would particularly be the case if Russia were to encourage the termination of OSCE presence.

The activities of the OSCE field missions vary by country. Although field activities are always first and foremost concerned with the development of state capacity, there are significant differences in emphasis and the allocation of resources, including military reform and co-operation (Kazakhstan), elections (Kyrgyzstan), and support for the media (Uzbekistan). It is also evident that when the OSCE has doubts about its influence in a participating State, it focuses on matters that cannot easily be opposed by the host state – projects that are non-controversial and are oriented towards a view to the future (education, student/young scholar exchanges) or the quick expenditure of funds to benefit the state and its bureaucrats. In the most difficult cases, the organization has avoided reaching out to activist NGOs and individuals in order to keep them out of trouble. In some of the less democratic states, a large portion of the civil society sector has indeed been dominated and controlled by the government. Government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGOs) have at times dominated the field and left no room for others. Foreign support and financing has often made NGOs suspect and subject to

state interference. This has happened through mechanisms similar to those established in the Russian Federation through the 2012 Foreign Agents Law, which a number of other states have sought to emulate.

Conclusions

It is questionable what the OSCE could do differently to achieve more in its relations with the Central Asian states. There is no easy answer to this question, as it partly depends upon the developments of the respective state and geostrategic issues of importance to influential countries, such as the ongoing Global War on Terrorism and the situations in Afghanistan and Ukraine. It is clear that the OSCE has a better chance of retaining its influence in those states that are not openly rejecting democracy and hence maintain a mixed anocratic façade (such as Kazakhstan) and/or in those that are more dependent upon aid (such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). However, there is reason to differentiate between the latter two as well. The former is a democracy that declares – and many observers concur – that it is the most democratic in the region. The latter intends to cash in on its strategic proximity to Afghanistan, while living up less and less to the values and norms of the OSCE.

Twenty years of OSCE presence with full-fledged missions in Central Asia witnessed the establishment of complex relationships with host states. On the one hand, this presence made it possible for the OSCE to more closely monitor developments in the countries, while on the other, the history of OSCE field presence in Central Asia has demonstrated mutual socialization. While most Central Asian states have only nominally accepted the organization's values and greater “neoliberal world order”, the OSCE has also been socialized and is perceived by most governments, (rudimentary) civil society and the population simultaneously as an adversary, a benefactor, and an industry (as a small but not insignificant dispenser of foreign aid). The OSCE has recognized its limits and has often given the impression that it is more engaged in the process of its actions than in the outcome. Despite the ambivalent relationship

between the OSCE and its Central Asian participating States, and despite the challenges the organization has faced in dealing with both high and low intensity conflicts in the region, there are some **key characteristics** that are common across the States:

1. *The states want to stay in the OSCE and accept OSCE principles.* None of the states have broken ties with the OSCE; rather – they have all retained some level of co-operation with it.²⁴ This demonstrates that the Central Asian countries appreciate the importance of the organization and the legitimacy it provides. The five countries have not comprehensively and openly contested the principles and values of the organization. This would have been contrary to the basic rules of diplomacy. Furthermore, they have been conscious of the fact that some principles can be used to their own benefit. Specifically, the principles of sovereign equality and the inviolability of frontiers enshrined in the Helsinki Decalogue are certainly to the advantage of the Central Asian states. They tend to act to protect their own systems and do not want to exchange views with their neighbours concerning state borders. Those borders were demarcated according to the principle of *uti possidetis juris* after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is correct to conclude that reference to the right to self-determination and human rights would not be to the advantage of most of the Central Asian states. Hence, the regular reference to the Helsinki Final Act, if applied with reference to each and every principle of the Helsinki Decalogue, is inconclusive. The states that arbitrarily create a hierarchy among the 10 principles are attempting to square the circle. However, they have already been paying a price for this, since some countries have taken notice and have reacted by referring to the right to self-determination in order to legitimize their actions.

2. *The OSCE's role is being reduced.* Beyond values and principles, it is a reflection of the carefully measured reservations of the Central Asian states with respect to the OSCE that none of them have fully terminated the OSCE presence in their territory. Instead, they have

²⁴ Unlike Estonia, Latvia, Croatia, Belarus and Azerbaijan, which terminated OSCE presence within their respective territories in that sequence.

reduced the full-fledged missions to OSCE programme coordinator offices. The crucial difference between the two is that programme coordinators can only carry out projects that have been approved by the authorities of the host country. Hence, it partially reinstates sovereignty while retaining field presence on its territory. This process has been completed in each and every Central Asian state. However, the different sizes of the programme offices indicate that the OSCE participating States see different prospects in different countries.

3. *The OSCE needs the Central Asian states.* Bearing in mind the problems the Central Asian states have been facing and the OSCE's constant preoccupation with these countries, it is not only the OSCE that is providing some limited legitimacy to the regimes that rule Central Asia – the latter are providing legitimacy to the organization as well. It is for that reason that there is a balance between the positions of the parties. The OSCE does not want to lose Central Asia, as it is an area where it can demonstrate some of the important activities it carries out and also where it does not face any major European/Euro-Atlantic rival for influence, unlike in the Eastern Partnership countries.

4. *There is a need for a participatory approach.* Through election monitoring, supporting independent media, and promoting respect for human rights, the OSCE can offer a rich variety of conflict prevention and management tools, ranging from diplomacy in the field to fostering democratization. However, the position of former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Erlan Idrissov gave ample demonstration of the dissatisfaction in his country, similar to that in the other Central Asian states: “the Organization should work *with* the governments of the participating States, not *on* them.”²⁵

5. *The OSCE spreads itself too thin.* The activities of the OSCE, beyond certain commonalities stemming from the shared values, principles and general activities of the organization, are tailored to

²⁵ Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan H. E. Erlan A. Idrissov at the plenary session of the OSCE Council of Foreign Ministers, 9 December 2016, www.mfa.kz/index.php/en/minister-s-blog/17-minister-s-blog/7917-statement-by-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-h-e-erlan-a-idrissov-at-the-plenary-session-of-the-osce-council-of-foreign-ministers.

meet the needs of the individual participating States. This has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, this optimally results in addressing the primary needs of each participating State. On the other hand, however, it means that the activities of the OSCE are scattered, which contributes to a lack of focus and low visibility.

6. *The states would like the OSCE to have a non-political role.* The Central Asian states are ready to retain the OSCE on their territory as long as it acts more like an aid organization than a living reminder of the commitments the states of the region undertook upon joining the organization. This view was reconfirmed at the OSCE Summit in Astana in December 2010. The Central Asian participating States, to varying extents, are trying to divert the attention of the organization away from matters such as human rights, which would put them in a bad light. This results in a certain “aversion” in Central Asia to the OSCE addressing human rights. This is partly due to the approach the OSCE often takes with a focus on individual cases, casuistically and often with less differentiation than necessary, be it the arrest of journalists, brutality against human rights activists, or abuse of state authority to remove opposition personalities from the political scene.²⁶

7. *National vs transboundary focus.* The fact that the field presence of the OSCE addresses the issues of every participating State on a national level, even though many problems are transboundary or regional, poses a challenge. Some missions have noticed this and have tried to cross borders on issues like water management, rectification of national boundaries, and border disputes. However, their role remains limited due to their mandate and national sensitivities. Thus, the missions are left with feeding information into the OSCE system (participating States and institutions) and hoping that the right processes will be established on a different level.

²⁶ It suffices to mention the case of Toronto University PhD student Alexander Sodiqov, who was accused of spying and charged with high treason in 2014 in his native Tajikistan. The matter was raised a few times by various OSCE delegations, with the lead taken by the United States. Following 36 days of arrest, Mr Sodiqov was released, but not allowed to leave his country. Another 50 days later, due to unceasing international pressure and the absurdity of the charges against him, Mr Sodiqov was finally permitted to return to Canada to continue his studies. See: Case of Alexander Sodiqov as delivered by US Ambassador Daniel B. Baer to the Permanent Council, Vienna, 24 July 2014, <https://osce.usmission.gov/case-of-alexander-sodiqov/>.

There are two consequences that follow from these observations. First, the OSCE should find an adequate balance between projects that the host state wants and those that matter for the democratic majority of the participating States. Second, the respective Central Asian participating States should understand that the OSCE presence is backed by the community of that majority, and that their reluctance to co-operate may lead to reduced co-operation within a broader circle of states and institutions that stretches outside of the OSCE as well. With this, the stakes would be increased so as to understand that the consequence of reduced co-operation (non-cooperation) will be reciprocated.

The OSCE is in a situation where there is no “one size fits all” solution to ensure respect for its values, principles and norms. Hence, ambiguity and a case-by-case assessment of issues will continue to characterize the work of the organization. It is essential that the organization continue to find those niches that guarantee its complementary influence to European and Eurasian security. This requires finding a balance between supporting the interests of the individual 57 participating States, including those of Central Asia, while also addressing the interests and benefit of the entire OSCE community so as to promote the core values and norms enshrined and formally agreed upon in the Helsinki Final Act more than 40 years ago.

Regional Security Risks in the Context of Geopolitical Competition

Sultan Akimbekov

At the moment, the situation in Central Asia is becoming increasingly less certain; this, of course, is not surprising, given the overall global instability, which is largely associated with a marked increase in competition in international relations. This is not limited to traditional competition, such as between Russia and the West, which became noticeably aggravated after the 2014.

Today, difficulties are noted even within previously stable alliances, such as NATO, where conflicts have recently intensified, particularly in relations with Turkey, due to, among other things, its contact with Russia in the military-technical sector. There are also difficulties regarding financing from different countries within the organization itself. In relation to this, four US senators introduced a bill on 25 July 2018 “to prevent President Trump from withdrawing the United States from NATO without the prior approval of the Senate.”²⁷ It is also important to note the growing conflicts within the EU as a result of the migration crisis, as well as within the United States as a result of the Trump presidency. Significant changes are also occurring in the global economy, where – considering the development of trade wars, especially between the US and China – it is likely that we will be seeing increased protectionism and the problems in trade relations that brings.

In general, all of these processes increase the level of instability in the system of international relations, and inevitably affect the development of the situation in the Central Asian region. Since the collapse of the USSR, there has been active rivalry between various external forces; with the growing tension in international relations,

²⁷ Demirjian, K. “Bipartisan Bill Would Prevent Trump From Exiting NATO Without Senate Consent”, *The Washington Post*, 26 July 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/powerpost/bipartisan-bill-would-prevent-trump-from-exiting-nato-without-senate-consent/2018/07/26/4ca1b206-9106-11e8-bcd5-9d911c784c38_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.967eb4ff63f4.

the competition has intensified and is now directly affecting the state of affairs in Central Asia.

Although Central Asia is a peripheral territory for the main rival powers – China, Russia and the United States – it is still of great importance to them. Of course, interaction between these powers usually occurs at the global level. For example, the United States and Russia have an entire range of pressing issues: anti-Russian sanctions, the Ukrainian issue, the situation in Syria, and many more. For China and the United States, there is the issue of North Korea, the trade imbalance, the situation in the South China Sea, and so on.

Yet for small countries, any major aggravation of relations between the great powers at the global level is dangerous and includes all possible critical areas. In this sense, Central Asia is one of the most important areas of application of efforts by all competing great powers, without any doubt.

The processes that are occurring in our region today are therefore closely connected to the global conflicts between the great powers. And this, without doubt, is related to security issues. Central Asia borders dangerous parts of the planet with a high level of conflict, specifically – Afghanistan and the Middle East. In this sensitive region, the conflict of interests between the United States and Israel on the one hand, and Iran and the Shiites of Syria, Iraq and Lebanon on the other, has already reached a level where the threat of armed conflict is quite likely.

This probability undoubtedly increases the risks to the Central Asian security system. That region is too close. And the fact that the US is actively involved in the development of events around Iran, and that Russia is actively involved in the Middle East – to a large extent, as Iran's ally – is not good news for Central Asia.

The position of the great powers in Central Asia is relatively unstable. This is because the situation in this region may vary depending on changes in market conditions, which can depend on both external and internal circumstances.

The situation in Uzbekistan, which was one of the original post-Soviet countries that formed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) but later withdrew, is indicative. In the early 2000s, Tashkent maintained close relations with Washington, resulting in an American military base being opened in Khanabad. However, relations soured after the 2005 Andijan unrest and the base was closed.

Kyrgyzstan has also been in a very difficult position for some time, balancing between the interests of Russia and the United States. The external manifestation of Russian-American conflict in Kyrgyzstan was the existence of an American military base in Manas. The base was eventually closed, after years of pressure from Moscow.

Incidentally, rumours about plans to open American military bases in Kazakhstan's Caspian ports of Aktau and Kuryk served as the basis for an information campaign conducted by Russia against Kazakhstan in the spring of 2018. Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was subsequently forced to make a statement denying this information.²⁸ It is clear that for Russia, American military presence in Central Asia is a very sensitive issue, regardless of whether it is real or fake. It is the principle that is important.

However, US military bases, which are often the subject of heated debate, are only an external part of the knot of conflicts that has existed in the Central Asian region since the collapse of the USSR in 1991. General issues are deeper and more diverse. Yet the alignment of forces in the region between the great powers can still vary depending on the circumstances, as has happened repeatedly with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. And this causes the great powers obvious concern about the possible actions of their opponents.

The Central Asian countries have a certain degree of independence that also influences the concerns of the great powers. The countries mainly follow a multi-vector policy, although in the cases mentioned

²⁸ «МИД РК: Ни о каких военных базах США на Каспии речь не идёт», *informBURO*, 9 июля 2018 [“MFA of the RK: US Military Bases at the Caspian is Out of the Question”, *informBURO*, 9 July 2018], <https://informburo.kz/novosti/mid-ni-o-kakih-voennyh-bazah-ssha-na-kaspii-rech-ne-idyot.html>.

above with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the 1990s and 2000s, foreign policy took a 180-degree turn.

At different times, Tajikistan has actively steered its way between external forces – Russia, Iran and China, and then later the United States when it appeared in neighbouring Afghanistan in 2001, opening up new room for Dushanbe to manoeuvre. Turkmenistan was also looking for new options for exporting gas, which impacted the direction of its foreign policy. Ashgabat was interested in finding sales channels for its gas, and therefore supported projects that could provide access to new markets. In this regard, one of the most promising markets was the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline project, which at different times was supported by the United States and Pakistan.

Unlike its Central Asian neighbours, Kazakhstan had a more effective multi-vector policy without abrupt manoeuvres, and it was much less dependent on external players. Astana was able to pursue an independent policy, act in its own interests, and maintain relations with all forces external to the region. This was due to economic opportunities and the quality of the country's foreign policy.

However, the incident in the spring of 2018 with the information campaign claiming that there were plans to open US military bases in the Caspian Sea was a colourful demonstration that Astana's opportunities for foreign policy manoeuvring are gradually diminishing.²⁹ This incident also demonstrates the importance of the alignment of forces in Central Asia to the great powers (in this case – Russia) resulting from their growing confrontation at the global level. And this is actually the reason for the diminishing space that the states of Central Asia have for manoeuvring, even as they continue to pursue a multi-vector policy.

That is, it is precisely the multi-vector policy that the Central Asian countries are pursuing that may cause concern among the great powers in certain cases. This is because it means that they

²⁹ «Акимбеков, С. Информационная атака на Казахстан. Новая реальность?», *info.kz*, 03 мая 2018 [Akimbekov, S. "Information Attack on Kazakhstan. The New Reality?", *info.kz*, 3 May 2018], <https://365info.kz/2018/05/informatsionnaya-ataka-na-kazahstan-novaya-realnost/>.

could potentially lose their positions in a strategically important region if one of their opponents makes an unexpected move. For example, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan changed the direction of their policy towards Afghanistan in 1998, putting Russia and Iran in a difficult position.³⁰ Against the background of current global tensions, anxiety is only growing.

Hence, Russia is perhaps being over-sensitive about the hypothetical possibility of an American military presence in the Caspian Sea, and reacted with unease to Kazakhstan's decision to allow the transit of American non-military goods to Afghanistan. It is significant that in 2018, very indicative assessments of the situation began to appear. In particular, Russian author Gennady Chufrin wrote that: While recognizing the right of its partners to pursue a sovereign foreign policy, Moscow, at the same time, cannot ignore the fact that the implementation by them of a policy based on "multi-vector" principles in practice not only does not consider the national interests of the Russian Federation, but also directly contradicts them.³¹

Undoubtedly, Russia's concern over the multi-vector policy of the post-Soviet countries got worse after the 2014 Crimea events. Up until then, Moscow may have been, on the whole, satisfied with the established balance of interests with various external forces, including in the region of Central Asia, but the situation changed after 2014. As a result, Russia is now pursuing a more active policy, part of which is to exert pressure on those states whose actions, from the point of view of Moscow, can affect its interests.

Thus, the 2014 conflict in Crimea became the main reason for the change in the geopolitical situation in Central Asia. Russia is becoming more active, and is no longer satisfied with the balance of

³⁰ Акимбеков С.М. *История Афганистана*, Астана-Алматы, 2015, с. 586-588 [Akimbekov S.M. *The History of Afghanistan*, Astana-Almaty, 2015, pp. 586-588].

³¹ Чуфрин Г. «Внешиполитическая стратегия постсоветских стран: теоретические аспекты», *Россия и новые государства Евразии*, № 1, ИМЭМО, 2018, с. 22 [Chufrin G. "The Foreign Policy Strategy of the Post-Soviet Countries: Theoretical Aspects", *Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, No 1, ИМЭМО RAS. М., 2018, p. 22].

interests, primarily with the United States, to a certain extent with China, and, in part, with the countries of Central Asia.

Searching for a Balance

Actually, the current trends in the development of the situation around Central Asia directly depend not only on the actions of the countries competing in the region, but also on their relationship to the balance of interests between them. In turn, this balance is a consequence of the partial compromise between the great powers that was reached after US operations began in Afghanistan in 2001 and lasted until the 2014 Crimean crisis.

There is no doubt that during this period, many events occurred that were connected to the continued competition for influence in the region and its immediate vicinity. One example was the struggle between Russia and the United States over the US military base in Kyrgyzstan. Another notable event was the strengthening of Chinese presence in Central Asia. China began intensifying its policy in the fall of 2013, when paramount leader Xi Jinping unveiled the One Belt One Road initiative and Beijing began to play a more prominent role in the geopolitics of the region.

However, there was, in general, a balance of interests. At least in and around Central Asia, the methods and techniques of confrontation that we observed in the 1990s – especially in the second half – were not applied.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the essence of the main conflicts around Central Asia. Obviously, this region is strategically important for Russian interests. On the one hand, it is portrayed as a kind of “soft underbelly” for Russia. Such a characterization implies the vulnerability of this area and the need to protect its interests. On the other hand, Central Asia acts as a corridor for Russia to South Asia. Preserving Moscow’s influence in Central Asia allows Russia to remain an important player in the Asian direction.

Accordingly, Moscow has been critical of the increasing influence of third countries in this region, at least since the mid-1990s. First of

all, this relates to the United States, which, after a brief respite in the early 1990s, is once again perceived as Russia's main geopolitical opponent. In turn, US strategic goals are associated with a desire to reduce Russia's influence in the newly independent countries of Central Asia. The true independence of the post-Soviet states makes it theoretically impossible to restore Russia to its former scale.

In this sense, the term "*cordon sanitaire*" was often used in the 2000s in reference to a number of countries, on the analogy with the group of Eastern European countries. In the 1920s, Poland and Czechoslovakia were supported by France and England in order to prevent the restoration of the former power of simultaneously the German and Russian empires. To a certain extent, Ukraine, Georgia can be attributed to such a "*cordon sanitaire*"; in some periods of their history, they took a tough stance towards Russia.

While Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova were located between Russia and the European Union and could count on the support of the latter, the countries of Central Asia could not afford to harbour anti-Russian sentiments. Their geographical location left them with no other option but to try to balance between China, Russia and the United States.

At the same time, from a tactical point of view, the main tasks of the United States in Central Asia were associated with the opening of transport corridors – ensuring that the region was not isolated from world markets and providing an alternative to the routes going through Russia, Iran and China that the Central Asian countries were dependent on. Therefore, the United States concentrated on opening transport corridors from Central Asia in two strategic directions: one through the Caucasus, and the other through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. The development of the latter direction was reflected in the New Silk Road initiative announced by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

As part of a tactical struggle against American policy in Central Asia, Russia opposed any projects that the US proposed. And Russia was right to assume that the United States was ultimately looking to weaken Moscow's influence in Central Asia. In fact, the Americans

were not even hiding it. This led to Moscow being very suspicious of any actions undertaken by the US in the region.

For example, the assessment of the situation given by Dmitriy Popov in his book published by the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies in 2016 is very indicative: The question arises: what goals does the doctrine of the New Silk Road pursue, and why is it adopted as a baseline for the US foreign policy department? The first thing that can pragmatically proceed from in Washington is the need to ensure a long-term presence in Afghanistan. Stimulating the Afghan economy by expanding its ties with the neighbouring countries of Central and South Asia will increase the resilience of the secular government in Kabul, and hence the prospects for preserving the Western contingents here.³² It is clear that this assessment was built on the high level of negative expectations that this author had for American policy in general. Although in this case, it would be more logical to assume that “stimulating the Afghan economy” would reduce the need for financing state structures on behalf of the international community, where the United States plays the main role. This should increase the resilience of the state in Afghanistan. In addition, development of the economy, and interregional trade in particular, increases interest among different groups within Afghanistan in the overall stability of the situation. They may well be the beneficiaries of this process.

However, it is obvious that there are serious concerns in Russia about the Americans strengthening their presence in Afghanistan with the prospect of entering Central Asia. Moscow cannot help but feel concerned about the implementation of US plans to promote its influence in this strategically important region.

This was the reason for the actions Russia has taken around the region. Since Moscow was against an increased American presence, it opposed all of the projects that could theoretically reduce the extent of its influence in Central Asia and create opportunities for the United States to expand its influence. This includes the projects for

³² Попов Д.С. *Центральная Азия во внешней политике США 1991-2016 гг.* РИСИ, 2016, с. 153-154 [Popov D.S. *Central Asia in US Foreign Policy 1991-2016*, RISS, 2016, pp. 153-154].

the opening of new transport corridors. Hence, the critical attitude towards the New Silk Road initiative put forward by the US.

Since all of the projects for opening new transport corridors to Central Asia through the Caucasus and Afghanistan were very complicated in their implementation, this issue was not of utmost urgency for Russia in the 2000s and mid-2010s. The situation in Afghanistan was still unstable, hindering implementation of the main transport project in this country – construction of the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and further to India. In addition, the route through the Caucasus faced a large number of obstacles, the most significant of which was the legal status of the Caspian Sea. In particular, this prevented the construction of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through the Caucasus to Europe.

Of importance here was that the countries of Central Asia pursued a very cautious policy, even though the US presence in Afghanistan created new opportunities for some of them. For example, Uzbekistan acquired a channel for supplying electricity, and a railway was built to Mazar-i-Sharif. Similarly, Tajikistan has been actively involved in economic relations with the northern provinces of Afghanistan.

In general, though, the balance between Russia and the United States has been maintained since 2001, despite some excesses and mutual suspicions. We can mention the situation in Kyrgyzstan, where the discussion was not only about the base in Manas, but it also was connected to two local revolutions that took place in 2005 and 2010. In any case, this did not at all resemble relations between the United States, Russia, a group of regional powers – Iran, Pakistan, and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, which unfolded mainly around Central Asia in early 1990s.

It should be noted that a certain stability has formed in terms of regional associations. For Russia, the most important organization is the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The reason was not only that it was made up exclusively of post-Soviet states, where Russia traditionally played first fiddle. The reason was also that the main focus of the CSTO was security problems, and first and foremost, security from external threats. For example, the CSTO's

institutions did not get involved in the 2010 ethnic clashes in the Kyrgyz city of Osh, even though this occurred within its territory.

Another example is a potential conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia (the latter is CSTO member) will not be seen by CSTO members as a case to intervene. It concerns mainly the Central Asian states, for whom the main function of CSTO is to protect the region from south.

However, this is fine with Russia. Firstly, because the existence of a threat from the south is the most powerful factor in making Russia attractive to the Central Asian countries. Secondly, because it legitimizes Russia's military presence in the region, particularly in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Thirdly, because it allows Russia to focus on security issues, which makes it possible to steer away from discussions about Russia's economic participation in the region. The latter circumstance is important due to the limited possibilities Moscow has to implement economic projects and provide economic support to the states of the region.

Regional security issues are an important basis for the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and its most significant unit – the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS). The RATS is based in Tashkent, so like the CSTO, it is mainly focused on threats from the south, which the SCO considers to be the most significant.

It is worth noting here that since its establishment, the SCO has been, to a certain extent, an additional element of regional security design in Central Asia for Russia. Moscow certainly felt that Russia is the basis of this structure, while China, with which Russia shares an interest concerning American presence in the region, could only play a supporting role.

China's presence was indeed very formal. This also concerned the structures of the SCO. If security was the main priority, then Russia, which had military bases in the region and also had close ties with the region's political elite, had an undoubted advantage over China. Until 2013, the SCO provided Chinese presence, but it was mostly symbolic. "The SCO is neither a formal alliance nor

a security organization, but rather a discussion and training forum, focusing primarily on counter-terrorism, counternarcotic, and cyber issues.” The situation changed after Xi Jinping’s famous speech in Astana announcing the One Belt One Road initiative.

When China unveiled this project in 2013, it was actually rather unexpected for Russia. On the one hand, Beijing was offering the Central Asian countries financial support for the implementation of various projects, mainly in the field of transport infrastructure. Moscow clearly did not have such opportunities. On the other hand, this financial support, which was arranged on a bilateral basis, inevitably should have increased China’s influence in the countries of the region.

And although the creation of transport corridors through China did not contradict the general idea of countering the influence of third countries (mainly the United States) in Central Asia and related projects, these corridors should have led somewhere. That is, theoretically, they could, at certain points, run into American projects, in particular, southward towards Afghanistan and Pakistan and westward across the Caspian Sea to the Caucasus.

And this is where difficult questions came up. All parties were interested in whether Beijing would be limited to economic cooperation, or if it would claim political influence as well, which automatically implies its strengthening in regional geopolitics. And any strengthening would only be possible by reducing Russia’s role. Naturally, this concerned Moscow, despite its being on generally equal standing with Beijing.

Nevertheless, China itself actively denied having any political or geopolitical plans, focusing on economic issues. This in turn contributed to the emergence of the popular idea that a certain distribution of responsibility between China and Russia will arise in the Central Asian region, where the Russian side will concentrate on security issues and the Chinese side will concentrate on economic issues. A similar idea has even emerged in American think tanks. According to Paul Stronski, China “is careful to be deferential to Moscow, refraining from projecting its own military power

in the [Central Asian] region and leaving most security issues to Moscow.”³³

This distribution of functions, when one country finances projects and the other is only responsible for security, did not seem completely illogical at first, especially since China’s goal of developing new western transport corridors obviously went beyond the framework of purely economic tasks. They also went beyond the borders of Central Asia, which, in fact, concerned Russia. In particular, China maintains close relations in South Asia with Pakistan, which is a major recipient of Chinese investment under the One Belt One Road initiative. However, Pakistan is also a serious player in Afghanistan, which is the focus of the CSTO and the SCO (and especially its Tashkent-based RATS) in their fight against terrorism.

Over time, China began to intensify its participation in anti-terrorist exercises, including in Central Asia, with some of them taking place without Russia’s involvement. For example, on 26 April 2018, Senior Colonel Wu Qing, spokesman for the Ministry of National Defence of the People’s Republic of China, proclaimed that they “will organize several joint exercises and training focusing on real combat experiences and co-operation within multilateral framework such as China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan co-operation”.³⁴ Of note is the inclusion of Tajikistan, which is a member of the CSTO. In theory, it is this organization that should act as the main security officer, at least in Central Asia. Involving Dushanbe in these exercises, under the auspices of Beijing, automatically decreases the value not of the CSTO itself, but of Russia. For this country, the CSTO is an important instrument of influence in the region and a way to maintain its presence there.

³³ Stronski P., Ng, N. “Cooperation and Competition: Russia and China in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 28 February 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/02/28/cooperation-and-competition-russia-and-china-in-central-asia-russian-far-east-and-arctic-pub-75673>.

³⁴ “China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan to Conduct Joint Counter-Terrorism Exercise: Chinese Defence Ministry”, *Associated Press of Pakistan*, 26 April 2018, <http://www.app.com.pk/china-pakistan-afghanistan-tajikistan-conduct-joint-counter-terrorism-exercise-chinese-defence-ministry/>.

China is indeed becoming more active in the affairs of the region, including in the field of security. It is indicative that the list of participants in the aforementioned exercises includes Afghanistan itself, as well as its southern and northern neighbours of Pakistan and Tajikistan.

There is an application for modelling the situation in which the coordinated efforts of these countries with Chinese support will become a key element not only in preventing the penetration of conditional terrorists, but also in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. It is no secret that internal political confrontation in Afghanistan often relies on external support. In particular, support for the Taliban was provided in the 1990s by way of people, weapons and resources from the territory of Pakistan, while the Northern Alliance was supported in the same way from the territory of Tajikistan. If China can ensure the coordination of efforts of these countries, it would greatly reduce the chances of the situation of the 1990s being repeated. This actually changes the balance of powers in the region.

It is also worth noting the expansion of the SCO that occurred in 2018 when Pakistan and India joined the organization. Of course, the conflicts between these countries will not be ending any time soon, but with the inclusion of Pakistan, the SCO countries surround Afghanistan from all directions, except for Iran.

At the same time, China has levers of influence in Pakistan and Tajikistan, including through numerous infrastructure projects. In this case, economic issues are the obvious route to the geopolitical level.

Russia clearly has no special ways to influence China's policy. Paul Stronski and Nicole Ng write that "Beijing has been effective at managing Russia's concerns about its place in Central Asia in part because there is little Russia can do about China's influence in the region."³⁵ The key thing here is that Moscow is not in a position

³⁵ Stronski P., Ng, N. "Cooperation and Competition: Russia and China in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 28 February 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/02/28/cooperation-and-competition-russia-and-china-in-central-asia-russian-far-east-and-arctic-pub-75673>.

to offer the Central Asian countries the economic opportunities that Beijing can offer. Accordingly, Russia is unable to compete with China economically, which limits its ability to influence even Tajikistan, where it has a military base.

In addition to the economic circumstances, China's ability to influence Pakistan is also of importance to Tajikistan. Dushanbe must understand that if Beijing is able to influence Islamabad, this markedly reduces the risk of increased tension in Afghanistan and, in turn, the security threat from the south. Thus, China is taking on even greater significance for the interests of Tajikistan, despite its close relations with Russia.

In Dushanbe, China is probably viewed as a supplement to Russia in areas where its capabilities are limited. The Tajik leadership is not trying to counter China with Russia and vice versa. However, this means that China is already pressing Russia on the subject of regional security, which it considers its priority. Moreover, this is already being done beyond the limits that were indicated earlier, i.e. outside the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

For Russia, the SCO was still a compromise, and a compromise on its behalf. Moscow considered the SCO to be an additional element to the security system of Central Asia. Russia and China also had common interests, taking into consideration the growing American presence. But in the end, it turned out that the SCO was meant to be a Trojan horse for growing Chinese influence, and not only in Central Asia. In the foreign policy of modern China, Central Asia and Russia occupy an important place, but they are still only part of the overall picture.

This is where it becomes difficult for Russia. China plays at the global level, where it interacts with various players, including the United States. In light of this, it may well build foreign policy combinations – for example, with Washington – where Central Asia or Afghanistan and Pakistan will be part of a general agreement.

It is significant that back in 2012, before Paramount Leader Xi Jinping announced the One Belt One Road initiative, French researchers Marlene Laruel and Sebastian Peyruz indicated that:

For Russia, the organization [SCO] obliged China to play the card of multilateralism and allow Moscow to curb Beijing ambitions without directly confronting its growing influence in Central Asia region. For China, the SCO has made it possible to institutionalize its legitimacy in the region. With this done, it can set about playing on the conflicts between member states and lobby groups without risk of being accused of expansionism. For the Central Asians? The organization serves as a buffer – it can mediate disagreements peacefully [and] channel competition between the two dominant powers for more advantage solution.³⁶

Despite India and Pakistan joining the SCO in 2018, the organization itself has not become more significant or influential. In fact, one could objectively say that it is becoming weaker. The compromise between Russia and China, which was agreed on when the SCO was formed, was used to include two historically hostile countries. Not to mention the difficult relationship between China and India. As a result, the SCO is increasingly becoming a dialogue platform.

It can be assumed that this is a more convenient format for China, as it allows it to escape the rigid linkage to Central Asian affairs and the need to coordinate regional security issues with Russia. Beijing prefers bilateral partnership, and if partnership is multilateral, as in the case of the aforementioned exercises with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, then its defining role is clearly visible.

In Russia, the new situation is not only disappointing, but also raising concern about China's position. The opinion of Russian analyst Irina Kuklina expressed in 2018 is very indicative: In modern conditions, when the whole world, in the words of A. Toffler, is infected with the "disease of change", one cannot count on the fact that Russia's current relations with China will remain inviolable. We cannot close our eyes to the stagnation of Russia's internal development, the stagnation of Russian-Indian co-operation, or the signs of increasing asymmetry in Chinese-Russian relations. Russia

³⁶ Laruelle M. & Peyrouse S. *The Chinese Question in Central Asia. Domestic Order, Social Change and the Chinese Factor*, Columbia University Press, NY, 2012, p. 33.

should continue to search for ways to create a solid security system for the SCO, without affecting the consensus statutory norm and not showing excessive ambitions in determining its place in the world of the 21st century. Using membership in the SCO in the interests of development, while avoiding the violation of its own interests and combustion of the old (and new) hotbeds of instability, is not an easy task which Russian diplomacy faces.³⁷

There is no doubt that Russia has limited opportunities to respond to the changing geopolitical situation in the region. It cannot influence some processes – in particular, China’s policy of building bilateral relations, including with the countries of Central Asia. Russia is also unable to compete with China in providing investments for large infrastructure projects. And as noted above, these projects enhance transport connectivity in the Central Asian region, which creates new grounds for it to pursue a multi-vector policy.

Nevertheless, in the current complex geopolitical situation, which for Russia is largely associated with the ongoing conflict with the West, China is of great importance – if not as an entirely strategic ally, then as an important partner which shares common interests with Moscow. Yet it is important to keep in mind that these interests may change depending on the conjuncture, as is currently the case with China.

However, the Central Asian region remains strategically important for Russia, and Moscow should make efforts to maintain its position within it. In this context, security issues are its undoubted priority, as seen in 2018, when Russian representatives at different levels focused on threats to the Central Asian region.

The Security Factor in Regional Geopolitics

There is no doubt that the indicative threats to the security of the Central Asian region are connected to the development of the situation in Afghanistan, which is the sole source of external threats.

³⁷ Куклина И.Н. «ШОС и застарелые конфликты в регионе», *Запад-Восток-Россия 2017*, ИМЭМО РАН, 2018, с. 42 [Kuklina I. N. “SCO and Chronic Conflicts in the Region”, *West-East-Russia 2017*, IMEMO RAS, 2018, p. 42].

The absence of an effective central authority in Afghanistan with a large number of independent armed groups creates a theoretical possibility that Central Asia may have security problems in the future.

Moreover, some of these groups are loyal to the Afghan state, while others oppose it. This situation contributes to the appearance of free space inside Afghanistan where different organizations can be based, including ones that pose a threat to Central Asia. In addition, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) gained prominence in the Middle East in 2014, and has been joined by quite a few people from the post-Soviet space, including the countries of Central Asia.

In this situation, the question of the fate of Afghanistan has acquired particular relevance. In fact, there was a question of whether the Afghan state would be able to hold out if the Western coalition stopped supporting its government. Will withdrawal of the US military presence, and – more importantly – reduced funding for the government, army and loyal militias lead to the fall of the central state in Afghanistan? Since 2017, when Donald Trump became president of the United States, he has repeatedly implied that the US would be pulling out of Afghanistan. But in the end, the United States and its allies confirmed their commitments to Afghanistan. In particular, it was decided at the November 2017 Meetings of NATO Ministers of Defence in Brussels to continue financial sustainment of the Afghan security forces until 2020, thus maintaining the status quo in the Afghan situation.

It is significant that on 25 December 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin noted that “indeed, it [the situation with the terrorist threat in Afghanistan] has worsened, it’s true, and it continues to grow worse. But if the United States were not there, it would probably be even worse.”³⁸ However, on 8 February 2018, Deputy Secretary General of the CSTO Valery Semerikov stated: After the successful completion of the operation in Syria by Russian

³⁸ «Путин: ситуация в Афганистане была бы хуже, если бы там не было войск США», ТАСС, 25 ДЕК 2017 [“Putin: The situation in Afghanistan would be worse if there were no US troops”, TASS, 25 December 2017], <http://tass.ru/politika/4842634>.

Aerospace Forces (VKS), they (ISIL/IF fighters) are beginning to return to their countries of origin. Most of them are concentrated within the territory of Afghanistan. ... Today, the average figure is about 7,000 people. This is quite a large number, which cannot but cause concern.³⁹ On 4 April 2018, Minister of Defence the Russian Federation Sergey Shoygu emphasized that “Afghanistan may become a refuge not only for ISIL fighters, but for other terrorist organizations as well, from which they will move across the entire Eurasian continent.”⁴⁰

During the 11 June 2018 meeting of the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers, a concern was expressed about ISIL fighters penetrating into Afghanistan and establishing bridgeheads in the north. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov responded by saying: We see how the NATO mission does not always act transparently. There have been several instances when provincial governors have made statements about certain unidentified helicopters heading to the area where terrorists were stationed. And given that the NATO operation and the United States control the entire airspace over Afghanistan, they, at the least, could not have been unaware of this. Therefore, the CSTO member countries will continue to coordinate their actions.⁴¹

Actually, one of the main issues touched upon in the speeches of Russian officials in 2018 was the growing security threat coming out of Afghanistan. Moreover, emphasis was placed on the fact that the West cannot control the situation in Afghanistan, where, consequently, the number of fighters from radical organizations is growing. Of particular prominence among these fighters are immigrants from

³⁹ «В ОДКБ сообщили о перемещении семи тысяч боевиков из Сирии в Афганистан», *INTERFAX.RU*, 8 февраля 2018 [“The movement of seven thousand militants from Syria to Afghanistan reported in the CSTO”, *INTERFAX.RU*, 8 February 2018], <http://www.interfax.ru/world/599045>.

⁴⁰ «Сергей Шойгу: Афганистан может превратиться в прибежище террористических организаций в регионе», *Afghanistan.ru*, 04.04.2018 [Sergey Shoygu: Afghanistan May Become a Refuge for Terrorist Organizations in the Region”, *Afghanistan.ru*, 4 April 2018], <http://afghanistan.ru/doc/119783.html>.

⁴¹ Францев, Р. «В Алма-Ате главы МИД ОДКБ обсудили Афганистан, Сирию и Корею», *Вести.Ру*, 11 июня 2018 [Frantsev, R. “Heads of the CSTO MFAs Discuss Afghanistan, Syria and Korea in Almaty”, *Vesti.ru*, 11 June 2018], <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=3027132>.

Central Asia who previously fought in Iraq and Syria for ISIL, thus linking the events in the Middle East and Afghanistan.

In this case, the focus is obviously on the role of the CSTO, as the main organization for the defence of Central Asia against threats from the south. The point is that the terrorist threat from Afghanistan, which is something of a projection of similar threats from the Middle East, is such a serious challenge that it requires complete concentration on security issues. Consequently, economic development to the south, including new transport corridors, fades into insignificance.

However, such position is not only against the US and its projects that implied the creation of a corridor through Afghanistan to Central Asia. Nowadays it also affects the interests of China. Given that China has already significantly invested in Central Asia, Pakistan, and provided that India and Pakistan have just been accepted into the SCO, China is not interested in definition of Afghanistan as a kind of new Middle East, threatening the stability of all its many projects and investments.

In terms of Central Asia itself, Uzbekistan has recently demonstrated a desire for modernization and economic development. Uzbekistan is not a member of the CSTO, but it is a member of the SCO, and the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure is headquartered in Tashkent. Also of importance is that Uzbekistan has a strong army and special services, has the highest population in Central Asia, and is the most obvious direction of activity for Islamic radicals, many of whom come from this country. Furthermore, there is a large Uzbek community living in northern Afghanistan, whose leader, former Vice President of Afghanistan Abdul Rashid Dostum, returned from expatriation in the summer of 2018 to participate in political life.

Obviously, Uzbekistan is *de facto* a key element in the entire security system along the Afghan border. Therefore, its position regarding any actions taken by influential third countries – China, Russia or the United States – is of fundamental importance. In her 2018 article on the foreign policy of Uzbekistan, Russian researcher Dina Malysheva made an interesting point: Under the

new leadership of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan has been declared a resource for new opportunities, despite the fact that the Islamist threat has not disappeared anywhere and, on the contrary, has acquired new outlines, now being “enriched” with the ideology and practice based in the northern regions of Afghanistan, “the Khorasan Emirate”, which is nothing short of a branch of the Islamic State restricted in the Russian Federation. But conjuncture considerations apparently gained the upper hand in Uzbekistan. In addition, the authorities of the republic, are acting, in fact, in the framework of the arrangements envisaged in various American strategies (“Greater Central Asia”, “New Silk Road”, etc.), which precisely pose post-Soviet Central Asia to deepen economic and political co-operation with Afghanistan instead of partnership with Russia and its integration projects (EAEU).⁴² This assessment clearly reflects some disappointment in Moscow regarding the priorities of Tashkent’s policy. However, the statements from Russia about the threat to Central Asia from Afghanistan do not make much sense if they are not concerned about this threat in the border countries of the region itself. Another opinion from Russia is also significant in this respect: It is not difficult to penetrate from Afghanistan across its northern border due to its large expanse and the difficult terrain it passes through. With all due respect to the border guards of the Central Asian countries, they are not capable of properly securing the border with Afghanistan. This should be said honestly and frankly. The situation in the Central Asian strategic direction and the security interests of Russia do not invite particular political correctness.⁴³

The main message here is not that without Russia, it is impossible to secure the border and ensure the security of the countries of the region. The basic idea is to warn the countries of Central Asia that in

⁴² Малышева Д.Б. «Обновление внешней политики Узбекистана», *Запад-Восток-Россия 2017*, ИМЭМО РАН, 2018, с. 95 [Malysheva D. B. “Updating the Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan”, *West-East-Russia 2017*, ИМЭМО RAS, 2018, p. 95.

⁴³ Плотников Н.Д. «Талибы мешают вторжению ИГ в Россию. Как обстановка в Афганистане влияет на безопасность южных рубежей СНГ» [Plotnikov, N. D. “The Taliban is Interfering with the IS Invasion of Russia. How the Situation in Afghanistan affects the Security of the Southern Borders of the CIS”] http://www.ng.ru/kartblansh/2018-07-23/3_7272_kartblansh.html.

this case, it is all about the interests of Russia. On 6–10 August 2018, a delegation from the Afghan Taliban visited Tashkent: Muhammad Sohail Shaheen, spokesman for the Taliban’s political office, said ... Taliban representatives met Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdul Aziz Kamilov and Special Representative for Afghanistan Ismatulla Irgashev during the Aug. 6-10 visit. He said they “discussed current and future national projects such as security for railroad and power lines.” ... A senior Taliban official said the movement had established a political office in the Uzbek capital Tashkent aimed at developing better ties and showing that they did not intend to support local insurgent groups.⁴⁴

Although the Uzbek authorities denied Reuters’s report that they were going to open a Taliban office in Tashkent,⁴⁵ the very fact that they had met with the Taliban and discussed the security of Uzbek projects in Afghanistan (the Hairaton-Mazar-i-Sharif railway and power lines to Kabul) is significant. In addition, the Taliban official’s remark that they are not going to support “local insurgent groups” directly concerns immigrants from Central Asia – mainly from Uzbekistan – regardless of whether they are affiliated with ISIL, the former Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, or “the Khorasan Emirate” mentioned by Malysheva.

Significantly, on 3 August 2018, just a few days before the Taliban delegation visited Uzbekistan, the Taliban’s office announced the defeat of ISIL in northern Afghanistan.⁴⁶ On 6 August, the Taliban announced a new operation to oust ISIL from the eastern provinces.⁴⁷ On the one

⁴⁴ “Afghan Taliban delegation visits Uzbekistan to talk security, power lines”, *Reuters*, 12 August 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban/afghan-taliban-delegation-visits-uzbekistan-to-talk-security-power-lines-idUSKBN1KX056>.

⁴⁵ «МИД: в Ташкенте не намерены открывать офис движения “Талибан”», *Sputnik*, 13.08.2018 [“MFA: No Intention of Opening an Office of the Taliban Movement in Tashkent”, *Sputnik*, 13 August 2018] <https://ru.sputniknews-uz.com/politics/20180813/9101511/MID-v-Tashkente-ne-namereny-otkryvat-ofis-dvizheniya-Taliban.html>.

⁴⁶ «Талибан объявил о разгроме ИГИЛ на севере Афганистана», *Ислам Сегодня*, 03 августа 2018 [“Taliban Announces the Defeat of ISIL in Northern Afghanistan”, *Islam Today*, 03 August 2018], <https://islam-today.ru/novosti/2018/08/03/taliban-obavil-o-razgrome-igil-na-severe-afganistana/>.

⁴⁷ “Taliban prepare ‘decisive’ anti-ISIL operation in eastern Afghanistan”, *The National*, 6 August 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/taliban-prepare-decisive-anti-isis-operation-in-eastern-afghanistan-1.757218>.

hand, the elimination of ISIL in Afghanistan clearly elevates the status of the Taliban in any negotiations on its participation in a political settlement. On the other hand, if there is no ISIL in Afghanistan, or if ISIL becomes insignificant, then it will be difficult to assert that there is a real threat to the Central Asian region.

Thus, the current situation around Central Asia remains rather complicated. It is still determined by the geopolitical confrontation of external forces that have an interest in the region. First of all, this concerns the great powers of China, Russia and the United States. At the same time, their interrelations in this region are projections of the processes that are developing at the global level. These include Russian-American conflicts, US policy in the Middle East (which is in vicinity of Central Asia), is expressed in its conflicts with Iran), and China's desire to reach a new level of geopolitical influence.

It is important to note that geopolitical conflicts are developing at a different level than in the 1990s, and the geoeconomic situation has noticeably changed. Once a peripheral region on the outskirts of an empire, Central Asia is now becoming a transit centre. And although improving the region's transport connectivity was once only supported by the United States, it is now part of China's policy as well. This circumstance makes it difficult for Russia to pursue its policy, which is mainly focused on addressing security issues in the region. This policy perceives the south not as a promising transport corridor, but as a territory with heightened security threats that might require/request defence efforts, and thus, better kept in isolation.

In any case, the solution to both the security problems of the Central Asian countries and their economic development is still largely dependent on geopolitics and the competition between the great powers. At the same time, it is this competition that creates conditions for the continuation of manoeuvring between the interests of the great powers, which is the basis of the multi-vector policy that the countries of the region are *de facto* pursuing.

Comparative Analysis of the Goals and Opportunities of Regional Security Organizations and the Probability of their Co-operation in Countering Afghan Threats

Alexander Knyazev

For each state or a group of states, the area of security, which *a priori* involves the military-political and general military interests of every participating actor, is inherently sensitive to the current state of affairs in international relations. As such, in *realpolitik* terms, we must conclude that in security co-operation schemes, the interests of the various actors do not always correspond and can even clash, resulting in disputes and eliminating the possibility of trust or fruitful co-operation.

During the 1990s, the general idea of threats of Afghan origin⁴⁸ consisted of three aspects. The first was the production and distribution of drugs. The second was the illegal or poorly controlled migration of Afghan refugees. And, finally, the third aspect was the interaction between radical religious groups opposing the governments of the Central Asian countries, including illegal paramilitary factions with various degrees of military-political presence in Afghanistan.⁴⁹

We can now point out two out of three most relevant components: it continues to be the production and distribution and the processes associated with the activities of extremist and terrorist groups that use Afghanistan for their own purposes, due to the Afghan government's inability to assume full control of its own territory.

⁴⁸ For purposes of this article, "Afghan origin" means the use of the territory of Afghanistan as a staging area for security threats. The article also does not concern security issues in the broad sense of the term: the article's scope has been narrowed to examine security issues in the more conventional sense, in the military and adjacent fields, including, above all else, issues related to cross-border spread of terrorism.

⁴⁹ Князев, А.А. *Афганский кризис и безопасность Центральной Азии (XIX — начало XXI в.)*, Душанбе: Дониш, 2004, с. 6, 236, 250 [Knyazev, A. A. *The Afghan Crisis and the Security of Central Asia (20th – early 21st c.)*, Dushanbe: Donish, 2004, pp. 6, 236, 250]; See also: Князев, А. *Афганский конфликт и радикальный ислам в Центральной Азии. Сборник документов и материалов*, Бишкек: Илим, 2001, с. 4 [Knyazev, A. *The Afghan Conflict and Radical Islam in Central Asia. Collection of Documents and Materials*, Bishkek: Ilim, 2001, p. 4.].

Another individual factor that was and continues to be potentially destabilizing and conducive to increasing the security threat is the fact that Afghanistan harbours ethnic communities and diasporas that are kin to the state-forming ethnicities of the Central Asian nations. Authors often refer to this factor, but its consideration in the context of historic development has not yet been tackled by the scientific community.⁵⁰ Since the Taliban's rise to power in 1996, the main discourse regarding the security situation has been focused on the phenomenon of terrorism that accompanies religious radicalism. Another undoubtedly significant factor aggravating the military-political situation in Afghanistan is the presence of external influences – especially the US/NATO military presence – as well as operations of intelligence services from many other countries in Afghanistan.⁵¹

The unprecedented growth of drug production in Afghanistan provoked by the actions of the United States Central Intelligence Agency in the early 1980s was one of the major factors impacting the Afghan war at the time, while also being its direct consequence. In the 1990s, the world faced a definitive trend where the regions involved in the illegal production and transit of drugs were the same regions with active low- and medium-intensity combat zones. Naturally, illegal drug manufacturers become directly invested in

⁵⁰ Басов, В.В. *Национальное и племенное в Афганистане. К пониманию невоенных истоков афганского кризиса*, М.: Научно-исследовательский центр ФСКН РФ, 2011 [Basov, V. V. *National and Tribal Identity in Afghanistan. Understanding the Non-Military Origins of the Afghan Crisis*, Moscow, Research Centre of FDSC RF, Russia, 2011]; Босин, Ю.В. *Этнический фактор во внутриафганском конфликте (исторический анализ*, Восток, М., 1999, №5, с. 65–75 [Bosin, Yu. V. *The Ethnic Factor in the Intra-Afghan Conflict (Historic Analysis)*, Vostok, Moscow, 1999, No 5, pp. 65–75]; Босин, Ю.В. «Роль религиозно-этнического фактора во внутриафганском конфликте», *Афганистан: проблемы войны и мира*, М.: ИИИиБВ, ИВ РАН, 2000, с. 159–161 [Bosin, Yu. V. "The Role of Religious and Ethnic Factor in the Intra-Afghan Conflict", *Afghanistan: Issues of War and Peace*, Moscow, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2000, pp. 159–161]; Князев, А. «Этнический фактор в военно-политической ситуации в Афганистане и проблемы безопасности Центральной Азии», *Этнические процессы и современность*, Бишкек: Изд-во КРСУ, 2003, с. 25–39 [Knyazev, A. "The Ethnic Factor in the Military-Political Situation in Afghanistan and Security Issues of Central Asia", *Ethnic processes and Modernity*, Bishkek, KRSU, 2003, pp. 25–39.

⁵¹ Князев, А.А. «Влияние афганского кризиса на безопасность Центральной Азии (1990-е — начало 2000 гг.)», Диссертация докт. истор. Наук, Душанбе, 2004, с. 263–276 [Knyazev, A. A. *Impact of the Afghan Crisis on the Security Situation in Central Asia (1990s – early 2000s)*], doctorate dissertation, Dushanbe 2004, pp. 263–276.

maintaining and prolonging political instability in these regions. The illegal distribution of drugs, along with arms trafficking and international corruption, has been the defining factor of the criminalization of international relations, while the permanent crisis situation in Afghanistan is perhaps the most stark example of this trend.⁵² These patterns are currently persistent, particularly for the Central Asian nations, showing no signs of de-escalation and largely contributing to the deterioration of the effectiveness of all of the domestic, regional and global organizations involved in Afghan and Central Asian security issues.

The global organizations that are involved, one way or another, in Central Asian security include two that are traditionally classified as “military blocs”, i.e. alliances with the military capacity to directly counteract military and terrorist threats: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

NATO, of course, is the larger of the two and the most in line with the definition of a military bloc; however, its activities in the Central Asian region could be described as “permanently ambiguous”. NATO’s involvement in the region’s affairs is consistent and systemic, but thus far, the organization’s work has not reached a critical level of significance where its impact could be considered irreversible. NATO has never viewed the Central Asian nations as direct partners, and its operations in the region were designed using network principles and involved the creation of conditions for NATO forces to be present, should the need arise. The ineffectiveness of NATO’s direct military intervention in Afghanistan – including supervision of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2003–2014 as well as the current Resolute Support Mission (RSM) – is readily demonstrated by the rise in terrorist activity in Afghanistan and the decreasing level of control the Kabul government has within its country. NATO’s presence in Afghanistan was not an obstacle to

⁵² Князев, А.А. *К истории и современному состоянию производства наркотиков в Афганистане и их распространения в Центральной Азии*, Бишкек: Илим, 2003, с. 92–93 [Knyazev, A. A. *On the Background of the Modern State of Drug Production in Afghanistan and Their Distribution in Central Asia*, Bishkek, Ilim, 2003, pp. 92–93].

the formation of terrorist units within the country, including the self-proclaimed “Islamic State”.

Once NATO took the lead of the ISAF, the military and political situations began to deteriorate rapidly, as did the situation with drug production and trafficking. The different nations involved in the NATO mission adhere to their own individual strategic and tactical approaches, and often do not even share intelligence. Individual NATO units in Afghanistan even went so far as to begin establishing separate contacts with local warlords to gain their loyalty, supplying them with food and even weapons in the process. All these schemes were one way or another linked with drug trafficking – either through payment, or through share partnership and the use of the ISAF’s transport capacities.⁵³

A situation analysis during the post-Taliban period leads us to the conclusion that the conflict in Afghanistan cannot be solved by military means. American and NATO military presence in Afghanistan is, in and of itself, a destabilizing factor. There is a well-formulated position that any attempts in Afghanistan to forcibly plant the seed of a Western-style democratic model of society, or the insistence on “exporting democracy”, would in many cases have a reverse effect.⁵⁴ Afghan society is largely unresponsive to the innovations being introduced, and the overarching negative reaction to the “democratic transformations” adds to the generally low popularity of the government and its foreign allies. Ending foreign military presence in Afghanistan has ultimately been the most important – and sometimes the only – condition previously articulated by the Taliban in negotiation initiatives over the years. To the Taliban, the very notion of officially supporting any foreign military presence is direct evidence of the illegitimacy of any political regime in the country. From the persistent demands for the

⁵³ Author’s interviews with representatives of Afghan security services in April 2002, August 2003 and August 2005, as well as with Taliban representatives (“Shura Quetta”) in Peshavar in September 2007 and November 2014.

⁵⁴ Белокреницкий, В.Я., Сикоев, Р.Р. *Движение «Талибан» и перспективы Афганистана и Пакистана*, Москва, Институт востоковедения Российской академии наук, 2014, с. 186-205 [Belokrenitskiy, V. Ya. & Sikoyev, R. R. *The Taliban and the Prospects of Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Moscow, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2014, pp. 186–205].

withdrawal of US troops and allied NATO forces, it can be inferred that the very presence of these forces is not negotiable – in fact, it makes negotiations outright pointless.

NATO's lack of progress in its counter-terrorist operations is easily explained by the hypothesis that counter-terrorist activities were never the real (and not just formal) mission of NATO. A more plausible goal would be the long-lasting systemic efforts initiated after the collapse of the USSR to build influence in the region by implementing a number of partnership programmes. The permanent presence of NATO specialists at military facilities in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and, to a lesser extent, Turkmenistan facilitates efforts to monitor the military status of these countries. The formation of a monitoring network is also done by establishing international legal framework enabling NATO to use the military facilities of NATO programme participants – for instance, communication nodes, air fields, training centres and national border control systems.

Similar systemic efforts are being made to establish sustainable relations between military entities in NATO and the Central Asian countries. It would seem that first and foremost, it is the “human resources” work that deserves recognition: over time, the training of officers at various training centres in NATO countries fosters a gradual transition towards the Western ideology of military and security personnel in Central Asia. This is not the only line of work – the Central Asian nations are also being involved in various NATO co-operation programmes contributing to the development of various levels and contexts of relations. The most prominent of these programmes is the Partnership for Peace (PfP), which all five of the region's post-Soviet states participate in. All five are also members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), and Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAPs) are in implementation in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In addition, Kazakhstan has been participating in the Planning and Review Process (PARP) since 2002. The PARP is designed to create a base platform for evaluating and determining the composition of assets that could be provided

for drills, exercises and operations at an international level in co-operation with NATO forces, including peacekeeping operations. The Partnership Goals package incorporates the issues of defence planning and transformation of the Kazakhstani Armed Forces, as well as training and equipping peacekeeping contingents according to NATO standards, and providing training for officers, border security management, and emergency response management. Kazakhstan is also part of the Operational Capability Concept (OCC) programme. The OCC is a mechanism for evaluating the degree readiness among the peacekeeping units of partner nations to interact with the armed forces of NATO member states. The Kazakh Partnership for Peace Training Centre (KAZCENT) provides a venue for training with the participation of military personnel from Kazakhstan and NATO member and partner countries. This training has included seminars on the legal aspects of peacekeeping operations and the operation planning process, and courses on topics such as English military terminology in multi-national operations and NATO staff procedures.⁵⁵

Within this context, also worth noting is the still isolated (for now) introduction of many NATO standards into the material support of armed forces and other security entities in Central Asia, as well as various regular joint exercises.

Activities directly related to NATO – primarily, American – military presence in Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries involve two aspects. The first is using the countries of the region for practical co-operation. The most prominent examples of this are the NATO (or NATO member state) military bases in the Central Asian countries within the framework of Operation Enduring Freedom, such as the Karshi-Khanabad Air Base and the Termez Air Base in Uzbekistan, and the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan – although now defunct, these bases serve as precedents for NATO military presence in the region. The second aspect involves efforts to engage the region

⁵⁵ Details on the Kazakhstan Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: <http://www.mfa.kz/ru/brussels/content-view/kazakhstan-nato>.

in NATO operations in Afghanistan. The most recent example of this is the work to recreate the renewed Northern Distribution Network.

Formally speaking, the CSTO fits the definition of a military bloc. The organization originated with the signing of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) in 1992, and, like Russian President Vladimir Putin once said about the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), was basically a means of “civilized divorce” for the military entities of the former Soviet republics.⁵⁶ However, the CIS CST reflected the gravity of the situation at that time. The euphoria following the collapse of the USSR turned the leaders of the new countries off to any attempts to preserve aspects of their former unity, and in most of the capital cities, pursuing initiatives to do so was perceived as an aspiration to preserve the “imperial” influence (primarily that of Russia). That said, when they began their state building, the former Soviet republics did not have the capacity to immediately tend to their internal security arrangements, and many of the new countries viewed Russia as a guarantor of their security. The CIS CST was a form of arranging this. Generally speaking, even at that time it was possible to predict a situation where former Soviet republics would create a new military bloc, in a more narrow, but also more actionable format. Interestingly, the CST was proposed by Uzbek President Islam Karimov, but in 1999, Uzbekistan became the first country to exit this treaty. The CIS CST ended up being of little interest, and did not prove to be an organization capable of arranging peacekeeping operations, implementing preventive policy, and defusing conflicts. The only example of the CIS CST being used as a peacekeeping mechanism was when CIS Collective Peacekeeping Forces were deployed in Tajikistan.⁵⁷

In 2002, a decision was made to transform the CIS CST into a full-fledged international organization – the CSTO. Its membership

⁵⁶ In 2005, Putin said: “Whereas in Europe, the EU member states worked together for unification, the CIS was formed as a civilized divorce.” http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/russian/russia/newsid_4382000/4382389.stm.

⁵⁷ Князев, А. «ДКБ — это форма цивилизованного развода СНГ в военной области», *Центразия*, 11.02.2008 [Knyazev, A. “The CST is a Form of Civilized Divorce for the CIS in the Military Field”, *Centraziya*, 11 February 2008], <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1202715300>.

at the time consisted of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Armenia. The Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF) was created in 2009, though Uzbekistan and Belarus refused to join the agreement. In June 2010, in response to the Kyrgyz-Uzbek inter-ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan, the Committee of Secretaries of the Security Council was urgently convened to discuss the issue of deploying CRRF units in Kyrgyzstan. The majority of CSTO members did not support intervention, and the organization's refusal to assist in resolving a conflict in a CSTO member state exposed an absence of mechanisms, and, therefore, the ineffectiveness of the organization in such situations. On 12 December 2012, Uzbekistan withdrew from the CSTO. The CSTO was ineffective in resolving conflicts in its area of responsibility (border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan), and the diverging interests of its member states and the corresponding deficiencies of the legal framework prevented the CRRF from being of any real use. As such, the CSTO does not have a unifying political component, even in its own environment.

The CSTO's issue with unity is even more problematic when viewed from the larger international perspective. Not a single CSTO nation has supported Russia in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 (including recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia) or in the Russian military intervention in Ukraine that began in February 2014 (including the status of Crimea and the situation in Donbass). Political support of Russian actions in Syria is given exclusively as part of counter-terrorism rhetoric, categorically excluding any larger issues of the Syrian war related to the political struggle between Russia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Iran on one side, and the US (and the West as a whole), Israel and the Arab monarchies on the other. The only successful case of mutual support of initiatives and/or actions in the area of foreign policy among the CSTO member states was, perhaps, the Syrian peace talks hosted by Kazakhstan in Astana, with backing from Russia, Iran and Turkey.

This stance of the CSTO member states does not reflect their status as military-political allies of Russia, and, by proxy, the

CSTO's positioning as a military bloc. The most glaring doctrinal shortcoming of the CSTO as a military bloc is the absence of a coordinated foreign policy, with aligned aims and objectives in the interests of all of the member states.

The CSTO could be regarded as a collection of bilateral relations: between Russia, on one side, and each member state individually – on the other. As part of the CSTO, each member state receives various forms of military and technical aid, assistance in military personnel training, and, in a number of areas, direct assistance in the form of security, which varies depending on the state. No overarching security interest has been formulated. In the medium-term, this form of relations can be mutually beneficial. For instance, it can be beneficial to Russia by enabling it to preserve its influence in the military and in the area of co-operation with intelligence and law enforcement agencies in each country. For Russia's partners, the CSTO membership allows them to garner guaranteed preferential treatment from Russia. In the geopolitical context, a nation's membership in the CSTO is seen by the Kremlin as a criterion of loyalty, yet it is absolutely inconceivable to talk about any sort of inherent expectation of an alliance (even though that is something that members of a military bloc would reasonably expect).

In the military sphere, CSTO activities are primarily of a preventive nature, with the organization acting as a deterrent (specifically in Tajikistan). It should be noted that unlike NATO, the CSTO does not have any direct or institutionalized channels of influence on the security situation of Afghanistan itself.

Besides proper military organizations, Central Asia has a considerable number of international organizations that, to a lesser or greater degree, are committed to multilateral security efforts (or declare to be). For example, the CIS has its Anti-Terrorism Centre (ATC), with a regional office in Bishkek. The ATC is designed to coordinate the efforts of competence authorities in CIS member states in combating international terrorism and other manifestations of extremism. Its activities are mainly focused on awareness-raising, but there have been counter-terrorism military exercises for

general staff and tactic-operational exercises among member states as well. The ATC is also involved in preparing model legislative acts, regulatory documents and international treaties for combating international terrorism and other manifestations of extremism.

The primary Russian integration project in the region – the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) – does not involve a military component, and for Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it does not even contain a political component. However, economic integration does involve a customs (and therefore, border-control) component. Within the EAEU, matters of illegal migration are addressed on a bilateral basis, which includes elements that are related to security.

The possibility of transforming into a sub-regional political organization in the area of security was once entertained by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Within the SCO, there have never been talks of becoming a military alliance, but the organization can nevertheless boast of several cases where it successfully resolved security issues – for example, in border and territorial disputes between the members of the Shanghai Five (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). In light of this potential, the SCO had every chance to become an OSCE counterpart (the best aspects of the organization) for the Eurasian space.⁵⁸

However, if the SCO's evolution is any indicator, the organization remains a political alliance that for years has been unable to make up its mind regarding its mission and mandate. Since 2009–2010, the SCO's multi-functionality has been growing, spreading thin its plans and intentions that are effectively declared in the information space, but rarely implemented in reality. This multi-functionality is threatening the most important feature of the SCO that sets it apart from other international organizations, but an even more egregious

⁵⁸ Князев, А.А. «Новая мировая реальность и ШОС как геополитический и геоэкономический феномен: проблемы, функциональность и исторический шанс», *ШОС как фактор интеграции Центральной Евразии: потенциал стран-наблюдателей и стран-соседей*, Бишкек, 2009, с. 16-38. [Knyazev, A. A. "New World Reality and SCO as a Geopolitical and Geoeconomic phenomenon: Issues, Functionality and Historic Chance", *SCO as Integration Factor for Central Asia: Potential of Observer Nations and Neighbouring States*, Bishkek, 2009, pp. 16–38].

problem lies in the ambiguous understanding of priorities in the two major areas of the organization's activities: security and economic co-operation. This ambiguity is further intensified by the expansion of the SCO to include states with interests that are poles apart. The SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is even less effective than the aforementioned CIS ATC.

In summary it appears that the SCO currently has no prospects of becoming a military bloc or an entity that could be responsible for the security of its member states. Furthermore, the accession of India and Pakistan to the SCO will continue to exacerbate the overall political dysfunction of the organization, while also pushing other Central Asian countries farther behind in the agenda.

Nevertheless, the need for at least partial/local security arrangements, including the security of its cross-border projects, is forcing China to engage in initiatives beyond the SCO and bilateral relations. It is customary to assume that China's top priority in Central Asia is the expansion of its economic influence, which mainly rules out any partnerships in the military. Until recent years, these relations have been limited to isolated episodes of China providing military/technical assistance to the countries of the region, but now we are observing both an increase in such assistance (supplying Chinese air defence systems to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), and the first signs of bloc-like activity. This was in the form of a quadripartite security treaty (the so-called "Urumqi Treaty Organization") entered into by China, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan in 2016. The organization's goal is to form a quadrilateral co-ordination and co-operation mechanism as part of the effort to combat terrorism and extremism, as primary regional threats.⁵⁹ Within this alliance, which is still just a tentative outline, the four member states have varied military, economic and political capacities, as well as serious divergences of interests, resulting in frequent tensions, primarily

⁵⁹ «Организация Урумчийского договора: Китай становится лидером нового регионального военного альянса», *China-INC.ru*, 02.09.2016 ["Urumqi Treaty Organization: China Becomes the Leader of a New Regional Military Alliance", *China-INC.ru*, 2 September 2016], http://china-inc.ru/news/organizacija_urumchijskogo_dogovora_kitaj_stanovitsja_liderom_novogo_regionalnogo_voenного_aljansa/2016-09-02-792.

between Pakistan and Afghanistan. A major beneficiary of the new coalition is China, which, above all else, is looking to ensure the security of its economic projects (with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor as a top priority) and counter India’s growing influence in Afghanistan. Indirectly, China is also looking to secure its investments in Tajikistan by way of influencing national security agencies there. In their public rhetoric, representatives of all four member states insist that this regional counter-terrorism “quartet” is not designed to oppose any country or international organization. A weakness of this proto-bloc lies in the position of Afghanistan, especially following the launch of Trump’s plan for Afghanistan, which involves, among other things, increased Indian influence to counterbalance Chinese activity. It is still too early to speak about the feasibility and competence of this organization, since its actual activities are limited to a handful of episodes on a local scale: the short-term patrolling of Chinese troops in the Wakhan District of Afghanistan’s Badakhshan Province, and a project to fund a military base for Afghan national security forces in Badakhshan Province. At any rate, Beijing is quite irritated by the fact that the events in Afghanistan are precluding the implementation of large-scale Chinese cross-border projects for the economic development of Asia. It is essential for China that the situation in Afghanistan is stable, so Beijing is forced to look for mechanisms to influence security there.

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) is a dialogue platform based on the recognition that there is a direct link between peace, security and stability in Asia and worldwide. Like any other dialogue platform without institutions of practical implementation, CICA by definition cannot act as an effective mechanism for the practical safeguarding of peace, security and stability, even in one particular country. Pressing security agenda issues in Central Asia are currently focused on the need for concrete mechanisms to counter terrorism, radicalization, religious extremism and other cross-border destructive phenomena. CICA’s activities – as positive and noble as they may sound – could

be classified as a manifestation of a sort of a political idealism that is unable to function as a factor to negate the violent methods used in modern international relations.

In terms of security, the OSCE cannot be considered an international organization of critical importance to Central Asia, for a number of reasons. OSCE projects are usually long-term, but the Central Asian countries require immediate assistance in this sphere. At present, there is also a need to intensify efforts to reduce the propensity for conflicts, develop measures to increase trust, and join efforts in the area of regional security, which is currently a fragmented chaotic mess. Against this backdrop, all of the Central Asian countries, without exception, reject the OSCE's increased focus on the so-called "third basket", which is viewed as meddling in internal affairs and an infringement of sovereignty.

A number of objective and subjective factors lie behind the current inadequacy of practically all military (or paramilitary) projects in Central Asia. Within the context of the transformation of the global system of international relations, the Central Asian foreign policy doctrines (that is, actually implemented doctrines, not just declarations) remain either less than fully established and prone to fluctuations (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan), or dependent on short- and medium-term factors (Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan), with the strategic dimension left unformulated. The foreign policy doctrines of all of the region's nations are based on the absolute elevation of the "multi-vector" concept. It is precisely this concept that gives rise to the CSTO's vulnerability, and the inability of other external centres of power or actual superpowers to form the core of military-political integration in the form of a union, alliance or treaty. In many cases, this concept proves to be effective for the region's countries in isolated episodes. However, "states with transitional institutions, with an unstable development vector, represent an inexhaustible source of geopolitical designing."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Князев, А. «Балканизация» на Кавказе и Востоке — или возвращение империи», *ИА Регнум*, 9 ноября 2009 [Knyazev, A. "The 'Balcanization' in the Caucasus and the East — or the Return of the Empire", *IA Regnum*, 9 November 2009], <https://regnum.ru/news/1223235.html>.

Generally speaking, all of the Central Asian nations can be classified as such. It is for this reason that they can be situationally exploited in the policies of external nations. This status has little to do with the national interests of any given nation of the region, and largely stems from the misalignment of national interests among the local political elite that set short-term goals and are unable to build development programmes on a strategic scale.

The aggravation of the disputes between the US and Russia and the US and China leaves little hope that Russia and China could establish a fruitful dialogue with the US and NATO regarding the Afghan issue. Returning to the issue of NATO's military presence in Afghanistan, it needs to be recognized as an indisputable fact that the current real government power only exists thanks to the US and NATO military contingents in Kabul and other provinces where these forces play a significant role in stabilization. However, this role is purely tactical.

For over two hundred years, Afghanistan has been continuously reproducing its conflict-generating capacity, which has also been fuelled externally through well-established channels. This capacity is inexorably projected across the entire sub-region of the Middle East and Central Asia, which is why it still influences any regional projects. The conduct of external actors suggests that there is practically no party that is truly interested in reaching a peaceful settlement for Afghanistan. Furthermore, most external actors possess various mechanisms for influencing events in Afghanistan which can also be used to adjust the intensity of the conflict. Contradicting one another, these actions tend to increase the intensity of the conflict, not reduce it.

For the US and its allies, maintaining the conflict level in Afghanistan in the medium-range (with the ability to reduce or increase the conflict intensity) serves as the rationale behind their military presence as well as the expansion of their military and political influence over the bordering nations. This represents some very important elements of the overall US geopolitical strategy, which is not tied to any given administration – the intensity and

forms of implementation may change, but the concept itself remains fundamental for US foreign policy.

For China, the stabilization of Afghanistan is generally beneficial in terms of the security of the existing China–Pakistan Economic Corridor and the implementation of Chinese economic projects (including ones related to transport and communications). However, the implementation of competing projects (such as the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline) and the US and NATO military presence in Afghanistan can act as incentive for China to preserve the instability (at least in certain regions of Afghanistan).

A peaceful resolution in Afghanistan would be in Russia’s best interests, but only if it is accompanied by the full withdrawal of US and NATO forces with the involvement of Russia, Russian influence in all co-operation projects between Afghanistan and post-Soviet Central Asia, and the safeguarding of Russia’s interests in the region. Since that this scenario is purely theoretical at this juncture, Russia’s interests (in a peaceful resolution) are not relevant.

For Pakistan, one of the primary and increasingly pressing concerns in the Afghan situation is preventing India from increasing its influence in Afghanistan. As Indian activity endorsed by the US, Saudi Arabia and Israel continues to grow, Pakistan will remain interested in preserving the conflict situation, especially since, compared to any other actor, Pakistan has the best leverage and control over the Taliban and other terrorist groups and movements. It is a given that any efforts by Pakistan to counteract Indian activity will be supported by China as well. The interests of the other major foreign actors – namely, the Arab monarchies, Turkey and some European nations – are also highly conducive to conflict. In a number of cases, there is a divergence of interests concerning Afghanistan not between individual countries, but between various business groups in a certain country, or between transnational corporations.

In the context of this dynamically developing global competition and the evident crisis in the entire architecture of international relations, co-operation in Afghanistan and in the field of security

between the US and Russia or the US and China seems unrealistic. The current positions of the key foreign actors are directly projected upon international structures such as NATO, the CSTO and, to some degree, the SCO. Moreover, both the crisis in Afghanistan and regional security in general have become both an arena and a toolkit for this competition. Other international organizations (such as the OSCE, CICA and the CIS) and regional multilateral alliances (such as the Urumqi Treaty Organization) that find themselves embroiled in the competitive confrontation of higher-level actors simply end up unable to tackle anything other than isolated, low-scale security issues.

This situation has induced and will continue to induce increased risk and threat levels for both each individual country and the region in general, and, with the growing trend of disputes and conflict generation, will remain a factor inhibiting development. This, in turn, further highlights the need for the creation of effective institutions of regional security that meet the requirements of positive development.

SESSION II

RADICALIZATION OF YOUTH AND WAYS TO STOP IT HERE AND NOW

Radicalization of Youth: Reasons for It and Ways to Fight It

Moheb Rahman Spinghar

The radicalization of youth is currently one of the most dangerous problems of modern society. The situation is especially acute in Islamic countries struggling with military and political instability, where there is a wide range of unresolved social, cultural, psychological and moral issues.

The problem of youth radicalization is particularly dire in Afghanistan. A bloody war has been taking place in the country for the past thirty years. The main participants in this fierce warfare are very young people, and not just native Afghans, but also “imports” (mainly migrants from the Central Asian countries) whom the Afghanistan leadership has repeatedly referred to.

Islamic extremism, as it is known, is manifested on several levels:⁶¹

- Ideology: a commitment to the radical application of *takfiri*, a concept in orthodox Islamic discourse which serves to accuse certain groups or individuals of breaking from Islam and being non-believers;
- Family and household: excessive claims, nagging and harshness, forcing family members and loved ones to strictly adhere to the optional guidelines of Islam, and restricting the freedom and opportunities for self-realization of females, oftentimes leading to family violence;
- Public: intolerance towards dissidents, liberal-minded Muslims and adherents of different faiths, and breaking off relations with and boycotting certain social groups;

⁶¹ روزنامه اطلاعات روز، ۲۶ سنبله، ۱۳۹۶. عوامل افراط گرایی و راهکارهای مبارزه با آن، (Причины экстремизма и механизмы борьбы, Информационная газета «Этлаат», 2017 г.)

- Politics: non-recognition of the legitimacy of governments, parties, movements and organizations that are liberal-minded, moderate or Western-oriented, or which do not observe harsh and extreme interpretations of Islam;
- Military: organizing armed groups which are not controlled by any other than their own emirs, and conducting armed acts of intimidation, sabotage and terrorism against the enemy (the interpretation of which can be quite ambiguous – from the Western coalition to people from Israel, the West, and even Muslim states supporting the government).

Each of these levels requires elaboration in order to ascertain the true causes, trends and scenarios for further development of the situations, to assess the real and plausible threats to public and state security, and to develop individual programmes and countering strategies.

Who is behind the radical and extremist movements? What are their intentions? How can they be stopped?

For the most part, radical movements are formed by religious youth who are strongly influenced by extremist preaching and ideology – they want to overthrow existing governments in the Muslim world and, in turn, restore their world order and caliphate. These extremist movements fight against the dictatorial and despotic regimes of their countries, as well as poverty, injustice and the conflict between tradition and modernity, while the geopolitical games at the level of the Greater Middle East turn them into well-organized and formidable sects throughout the Islamic lands.

It should be noted that Afghanistan is also part of this region and has been under the pressure of fundamentalism and terrorism for decades.

The extremist and terrorist movements in our region do not have any epistemological differences from other large-scale fundamental radical movements around the world. According to official data, there are currently more than 20 terrorist groups from around the world operating in Afghanistan. These groups are exploiting the unstable situation related to the high unemployment rate and poverty

in the country, and are attempting to use the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as a base to promote destabilization in other Asian countries.⁶²

Radically-minded youth includes extremists in Indonesia and the Philippines as well as radical youth in China, Chechnya and Central Asian republics. These young people oppose all existing regimes in the Islamic world and want to revive the caliphate and declare a global jihad against the so-called “Daral Alkufra” (all non-Muslims). The existing extremist movements oppose political, civil and religious freedom. They are against education, employment, trade and the participation of women in public life. Guided by the orthodox concept of the past centuries, they are willing to impose a system of ancient views on modern society.

The extremists in Afghanistan and elsewhere oppose the domination of civilized order in the world and demand that all modern forces be rolled back to establish theological supremacy on the basis of Islamic law (Sharia). One of the most popular reasons for the radicalization of Afghan youth is the presence of foreign armed forces in Afghanistan. Since the majority of young people have not yet formed a complete picture of the world, they naturally tend to listen to the opinion of the mullahs (muftis) and the former mujahedeen, who have experience fighting foreign forces and turned fundamentalists. In addition, there are tens of thousands of religious schools (madrasas) in one of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan which specialize in suicide attacks and other extremist elements. The lack of concrete and tangible measures to eradicate or liquidate them gives a formal reason for the youth of our country not to trust the coalition in Afghanistan, and to co-operate with its opponents.

These deadly movements primarily consist of young people who are attracted to them for the following reasons:

1. The extreme significance of historical memory for Muslims, in particular, events associated with the crusades, the Western

⁶² Quarterly Journal, Strategic Study, Center for Strategic Studies (CSS), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, winter 2018, Issues No. 38.

colonization of Islamic countries, and the liberation jihad of Muslims, which has been prolific in generating heroes, *shahids* and martyrs for their faith for many centuries. Their way of life, acts of faith, patterns of behaviour, military-political tactics and strategies are perceived by the current generation of Muslims as an example to follow;

2. The identity crisis of Muslim youth in the Islamic countries, which manifests itself in the form of resistance against what is perceived to be interference and pressure from the Western countries;

3. Socio-economic reasons: poverty, misery, insecurity and unemployment among young people, as well as a lack of prospects for the younger generation;

4. The inability or unwillingness of world powers to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has acquired a new explosive character since the US Embassy opened in Jerusalem;

5. The US, in its unilateral support of Israel and refusal to recognize the widespread violations of the human rights of the Palestinians;

6. The open operation of extremist and fundamentalist centres and schools (madrasas) in some countries;

7. The lack of consensus between world powers in relation to terrorism and terrorist groups, and attempts to divide terrorists into “moderate” and “radical”, that is, good and bad;

8. Double standards in understanding democracy and human rights;

9. Discrimination in the distribution of jobs among native citizens and migrants from the East in some Western European countries;

10. The spiritual impoverishment of the world (“lack of humanity”) and the overwhelming influence of material values on the entire spectrum of human life, i.e. the transformation of modern man into a “robot-like” creature;

11. The arrogant and contemptuous attitude of some superpowers towards the traditions and culture of underdeveloped countries;

12. Despotism, oppression and corruption among some rulers in the Muslim world, as well as the monopolistic and corrupt systems in place in their countries;

13. The absence of balance in international relations and the world order, as well as attempts by superpowers to usurp global resources, especially those of the Islamic countries;

14. Moral and psychological reasons: since the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, Russian forces from Chechnya, and US forces from Somalia – as well as the inability of the Western alliance to win in Iraq and Afghanistan – are regarded by Muslims as a sign of Western weakness and their inability to defeat Mujahedeen. Thus, radical ideas and positions as well as leaders with big military and political ambitions are becoming increasingly popular among Muslim youth;

15. The emergence of the Internet as an uncontrollable information space where radicals and jihadists have launched vigorous and successful campaigns to promote their convictions and recruit new supporters;

16. Demographic reasons, stemming from the high birth and population growth rates in Islamic countries, which are superimposed on the low economic growth rates arising, in part, from an inability to efficiently absorb excess labour;

17. The ideological conflicts in the Islamic world between fundamentalists, Salafis, Wahhabis and jihadists on the one hand, and moderates, traditional Muslims, Sufis, Madhalits and other pro-state communities on the other;

18. The stagnation of Islamic religious and legal thought and its inconsistency with the scale and diversity of contemporary civilizational challenges to Islam. This means that modern Islamic thought cannot provide the younger generation with acceptable, reasonable answers to the problems, threats and challenges emerging. Consequently, young Muslims are left to look for these answers on their own. However, their lack of education, enlightenment, competence, experience and breadth of horizons results in them developing an enthusiasm for radical ideas;

19. The aforementioned stagnation of the Muslim education system and its discrepancy with the spirit of the time means that it is unable to provide people with an adequate level of understanding of the world in a new and globalized environment, and leaves them without adequate socialization and subsequent integration into a changing society. The system also fails to impart them with any skills or guidance so that they can engage in constructive and creative activity, which, most importantly, will allow them to preserve their Islamic identity and self-esteem;

20. The rapid revival of Islam and socio-political Islamic activism around the world, which feels constraint within present borders previously defined by Western colonial rule and subsequent secular national and authoritarian regimes of the countries of the Islamic East;

21. The anti-Muslim, Islamophobic, and sometimes overtly provocative policies of some media outlets, as well as aggressive propaganda and distortion of the image of Islam, depicting it as a backward and dark religion, and Muslims and their leaders – as barbarians and savages.⁶³

Though long and detailed, this list does not include all of the reasons behind today's radicalization of youth. Each of the reasons given describes only a narrow part of the problem, providing a simplified, one-sided picture without reflecting the depth and breadth of the issue. Even if we combined all of the above reasons to form a more or less comprehensive vision of the situation with the radicalization of Muslims, we would still feel that the question of why it is happening is unanswered.

Why does one problem, such as insecurity or poverty, make some people grab a weapon, while others work hard and achieve success for their own benefit and that of the Islamic community?

Why does resentment towards the current situation of the Islamic *ummah* drive some people to learn, acquire knowledge and improve

⁶³ Курбанов Р.В. (кандидат политических наук, научный сотрудник RAND Corporation, Вашингтон) Ислам и радикализм. «Узловая» причина радикализации мусульман в современном мире, 07.06.2007.

their social status so that they can help their fellow citizens, while others are driven to the Afghan ravines and the forests of Ichkheria?

What is the reason for the growing number of radicals and terrorists among affluent and successful Muslims? In fact, the Gallup World Poll shows that in Islamic countries such as Iraq, Libya and Algeria, radicals are, on average, not poorer than their moderate compatriots; they are more likely to have comprehensive or higher education, and to expect their lives to improve in the next five years.⁶⁴

Why do wealthy and poor Muslims alike dream of dying for the sake of Islam more than they want to live and develop? Actually, radicals also want to live, have families and raise children. Yet for some reason, they feel that life is a shameful option that is worse than martyrdom and death. They simply do not see how they can live this life while maintaining respect for themselves, as Muslims; they do not believe that they can achieve what they want to or that they can change the situation while thriving.

The radicalization of youth carries another root, nodal moment in this process, which, like through a lens, collects bundles of various causes and, after their focus and refraction, gives rise to radicalization. One key point which determines whether a particular Muslim is prone to radical ideas and scenarios under the burden of problems and challenges is his or her ability to see other ways acceptable to a Muslim to strengthen and develop the religion without weapons.

With this powerful internal energy of resurgent Islam, striking the consciousness of a Muslim believer, demanding that he do everything he can to protect and promote the interests of Islam regardless of any challenges or life circumstances he might have, we are able to understand how hopeless this person feels when he is unable to fulfil his mission by ways which are acceptable to him and compatible with his beliefs.

And, most likely, these two factors are the immense burden of the above problems and challenges of the individual, family, nation of

⁶⁴ Война ценностей. Природа исламского экстремизма остается для Запада загадкой // Коммерсантъ, 21.12.2006

the believer and the entire Islamic community, which he assumes as the “governor of Allah on earth,” as well as an incredibly powerful energy impact on a believer’s awareness of the scale of his mission in this world – lead him to the threshold line, to the nodal reason indicated above.

Being in the back of the pack, if this believer is able to see any alternative options to realize his mission and defend his honour, dignity, convictions, religion and lifestyle, then – albeit with difficulty and at the cost of making painful revisions to some of his convictions and breaking the usual standards of behaviour – he will adapt to the rules of the game in the rapidly changing world. He will do everything in his power to get on board of modern civilization and gain access to its resources and capabilities, and then, become a successful entrepreneur, scientist, politician or public figure, he will utilize the newly obtained resources for the benefit of his family, nation and religion.

However, if this believer is not able to see any other way of fulfilling his mission and protecting his dignity, religious beliefs and lifestyle, he will resort to animosity and blaming non-Muslims and enemies of Islam for his misfortunes, and eventually fall into the abyss of radicalism and extremism. At this point, he is just one step away from grabbing a weapon. Moreover, a Muslim sees the legality of such a move in the verses of the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad; examples of selfless and heroic jihad can be seen in the life and death of the first Muslims, and the heroes of the liberation jihad are described in the history of Islam. Furthermore, sabotage war skills are easily found on the Internet and on television, and the reward and the Sabbath will be given by Allah.

It is obvious why the younger generation finds it difficult to independently handle and overcome all of these obstacles and difficulties, and to turn away from the “wrong” path taken by the various radical movements before it is too late.

It is Afghanistan that plays an extremely important role in the geopolitics of many countries of the world. The country is the “heart” of Central Asia, and its location makes it much easier to control and

influence the policies of the surrounding countries. It also acts as a link in land trade relations. Afghanistan has a relatively large area that is approximately the size of France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark combined, and has reserves of natural gas, oil, precious metals and gold, but despite this, it is one of the most economically backward and politically unstable countries in the world. Clearly, any radical movement requires financial resources to maintain and spread its activities. In Afghanistan, the treasury of extremist groups is being replenished, in particular, through the sale of drugs, with the main dealers coming from the CIS countries.

In light of the worsening relations between the US and Russia on the Syrian issue, Central Asia is steadily becoming a platform for transferring confrontation, where the interests of Russia, China, Turkey, India and a number of other countries are also present. The division of regional and global forces into opposing coalitions on the Syrian conflict is affecting Central Asian security. Furthermore, some experts from the Central Asian countries and Russia fear that the deterioration of US-Russia relations to the cold war level on the issues of Syria and Ukraine may result in the activation of various separatist and terrorist groups from Central Asia and the North Caucasus, and the further creation of a broad terrorist underground aimed at the Central Asian countries, China and Russia.

The events in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and the connection of the terrorist underground in these countries with Central Asia create conditions for the US to intensify the fight against terrorism, taking into account the interests of Russia and China in the Central Asian region. In light of this, ensuring a sustainable security system for the Central Asian region is highly dependent on Afghanistan and, accordingly, the level of co-operation on terrorism and drug trafficking between the US-led NATO countries and the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) countries.

Given the various goals of the terrorist organizations operating in Afghanistan, the term “immediate threat” can be interpreted in different ways. Even in the unlikely case that a pro-Taliban government comes to power in Afghanistan, the Taliban can hardly

be expected to attack the territory of the neighbouring Central Asian states. The Taliban movement is focused on internal Afghan issues, controlling and retaining power, and expanding their area of influence throughout the territory.

Nevertheless, the Taliban movement was at one time supported by jihadist groups targeting the Central Asian countries, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU; a group created by jihadists from Uzbekistan who settled in Pakistan and Afghanistan) and Jamaat Ansarullah (JA; an extremist group banned in Tajikistan). In addition, the majority of jihadists took the oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014.

In other words, the base of terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan is made up of militants from the above-mentioned groups – citizens of the Central Asian states who left the Fergana Valley earlier and are ready to return with guns in their hands. In this regard, the Fergana Valley, where Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan meet, remains a more vulnerable point within the Central Asia region. Ever since Soviet times, the Fergana Valley has been plagued with complicated problems concerning issues such as boundary delimitation, access to irrigation and drinking water, drug trafficking from Afghanistan, overpopulation, social issues, youth unemployment, radicalization and ethnic conflicts.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are all predominantly Muslim countries with their borders meeting in the Fergana Valley. Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also have borders with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Kazakhstan is also predominantly Muslim, and has borders with Russia (with access to the North Caucasus), the PRC, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Yet the fact of the matter is that in all these countries, as in many post-Soviet countries, Islam is represented more in terms of identity and traditions than of religious practices. According to opinion polls, only 10 percent of Muslims in these countries regularly perform *salah*. According to “The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society”, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, two percent of Muslims in Kazakhstan say that violence against civilians

in defence of Islam is often/sometimes justified; in Kyrgyzstan, this number is 10 percent, and in Afghanistan – 39 percent. The survey also found that only 10 percent of Muslims in Kazakhstan favour enshrining sharia as official law, as opposed to 35 percent in Kyrgyzstan and 99 percent in Afghanistan.⁶⁵

One might say that radicalization in these Central Asian countries gained momentum in the following stages:

- Migration of the Russian-speaking population from the area. The Russian-speaking population outflow that began around 1989 with the collapse of the USSR and intensified as a result of the Tajikistani Civil War (1992–1997) and the two revolutions in Kyrgyzstan (in 2005 and 2010) left these countries with populations that were more than 85 percent Muslim. After they gained independence, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also saw significant internal migration from rural areas to cities due to unemployment and poverty. This has led to urban culture morphing into a more rural one in some areas.

- Revival of national identity and culture and a return to religious values after 70 years of atheism. Upon gaining independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries had to re-establish their national identity. This was accompanied by a parallel process of re-Islamization that took place outside of state regulation and control.

- Influx of Islamic missionaries from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan and Kuwait into Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and – to a lesser extent – Tajikistan. With the fall of the Soviet Union and the democratization and freedom of religion that followed, various religious centres, mosques and madrasas were opened in the region, filling the ideological vacuum with religion. This process of importing religious beliefs into the Central Asian countries is still in progress.

⁶⁵ "The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society", *Pew Research Center*, 30 April 2013, <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/>.

- Outflux of youth to study in Muslim countries. These young people often return home with non-traditional ideas of Islam. As a result, the Sunni Islam communities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are now represented by a variety of religious ideological movements – *jamaats* (groups) opposing or competing with each other that have external control centres, mostly overseas.⁶⁶

- The Muslim communities are now struggling not only with generational conflict, but also with growing religious intolerance and radicalization, in relation both to other religious groups and to government policy and secular institutions of power. This is manifested in part at the interpersonal level with labelling and stereotyping. The rapid spread of takfiri and jihadist ideologies among young people has produced the most devastating consequences:

- Two wars in Chechnya (Russia) in 1994–2000. These have resulted in the expansion of the terrorist underground in the North Caucasus (Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia) and the dissemination of takfiri/jihadist ideas of Salafism in western Kazakhstan from the North Caucasus of the Russian Federation.

- Activity in the Fergana Valley. Activation and raids of the terrorist movement of the IMU from the territory of Afghanistan in 1998 and 2000 in the territory of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the Andijan events of 2005 with the Akromiya movement participated.

- Increased labour migration from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to Russia since 2000. The formation of large diasporas of Central Asian citizens professing Islam is affecting security and internal socio-cultural issues in Russian cities. Labour migration from Central Asia is becoming a crucial factor for Russian society. Living outside of their culture and struggling with language barriers and the complexities of adaptation, Central Asian migrant workers often see Islam as the only way to preserve their identity. Consequently, mosques have become the main venue for Central

⁶⁶ Др. Кадыр Маликов, Директор аналитического центра «Религия, право и политика», «Безопасность ЦА: современная динамика радикализация среди молодежи в Казахстане, Кыргызстане, Таджикистане», 2018 г

Asian migrants to meet and socialize in Russia, and the process of Islamization is gaining momentum.

The Syrian Civil War (2011–present) and the emergence of ISIL in 2014. This has become the basis for propaganda among the jihad and young Central Asians leaving for Syria. Under these circumstances, Islam represented by traditional imams is experiencing a shortage of professional personnel and thus far is unable to counter the current trends of radicalization.

From 2011 to the end of 2016, a marked change towards radicalization and Islamization in all aspects of society could be seen in the Central Asian countries. Despite all of the controls in place to monitor the religious sphere in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the ideological and cultural mosaic of society is becoming predominantly Muslim, especially among young people. And with the rapid and often spontaneous growth in religiosity among the population and the emergence of new challenges and threats of global terrorism, governments feel compelled to control the processes in the religious sphere. However, they must first define the boundaries and the role of religion in society and the state, determine the desired trajectory of the radicalization process, and establish methods for controlling it, with consideration to the new challenges in the spiritual and moral sphere and attracting religious resources to counter the ideas of terrorism.

The conceptual issue lies in the national constitutions of the Central Asian countries, which do not establish the model of secularism, church-state relations or the “rules of the game”. All of the constitutions are unitary, secular, democratic, legal, social, etc. Like in most countries of the former Soviet Union, the French model, which provides for total separation of church and state, is taken as the basis for secularism. However, the process of Islamization is becoming more and more pronounced and is essentially irreversible.

Considering that the vast majority of the populations of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are Muslims, the states are pursuing a policy that supports traditional Islam

(Sunni, Hanafi school of jurisprudence, Maturidi creed) as opposed to “imported” religious movements.

Several factors point to the strengthening of Islamization in the Central Asian region over the past decade and increased radicalization among young people:

- The increased number of religious sites (mosques, religious centres) and various Islamic *jamaats* (groups). The dynamics of growing religiosity, taking into account the low level of education, rising unemployment and social problems, are closely linked to the dynamics of radicalization due to the wide recruitment network among protesting youth.

- The number of young people from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan going to combat zones in Syria and Afghanistan. By the end of 2016, the number of militants from the Central Asia region had reached somewhere from 3,000 to 4,500.⁶⁷

- The coalescence of criminal and terrorist groups observed in the Central Asian countries. Meanwhile, the number of people convicted for extremism and terrorism is constantly growing in these countries, resulting in radicalization being spread among prisoners and prisons becoming a hotbed of radical ideas.

- Significant progress in identifying underground cells of terrorist groups and preventing terrorist attacks in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia from 2014 to 2016. For the past few years, the CSTO has been building up its forces and strengthening its military and technical potential in countering possible terrorist threats both from Afghanistan and within the Central Asian CSTO member countries. In addition, Europe and the United States have been increasing financial assistance to the countries in this region to combat extremism.

The external factors affecting the radicalization dynamics in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are becoming more complex every year. The processes in Central Asia are associated with the external ideological influences of combat zones in the Middle East

⁶⁷ Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017.

and should be viewed through the prism of the Syrian opposition with the United States, the EU and Russia, as well as the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar and their influence on various groups in Syria, including those aimed at Central Asia, Russia and the PRC.

External factors are having a destructive impact on the region. As a result, terrorist activity and militarization are increasing, and the political trust and economic interaction between the countries are decreasing. The Arab Spring essentially provoked chaos with this type of external intervention and affected the regional security system. Now that ISIL (the Islamic state) has emerged in the territories of Iraq and Syria, it represents a threat to both the countries in the region and the entire global community as it spreads dangerous takfiri terrorist ideology on the basis of jihad. This is giving rise to the transformation of local jihadist groups, essentially bringing them to the transnational level through inclusion into a global network of terrorism.

The rapid radicalization of Muslim youth is an urgent problem affecting all of the countries of Central Asia and the CIS, as well as Afghanistan.

Young (age 18–30) citizens of the CIS countries primarily go to join ISIL in Syria and Afghanistan for ideological reasons. Analysts and experts were previously of the opinion that young people mainly leave their homelands in order to earn money from the war. It was assumed that they come from dysfunctional families or are driven to conflict zones by social problems, poverty and other factors. However, recent studies have shown a different picture. Almost all of the people who have gone to Syria and Afghanistan were from medium-sized families or business environments, with some even selling their businesses, houses or cars and taking the money to Syria to help them buy weapons for the needs of radical groups.

The analysis, which was based on numerous interviews with detained militants, shows that the main cause of radicalization is a deep crisis in conscience among certain “risk groups” of young people. Young people are most concerned with the lack of social

justice, social elevators, prospects for self-realization and job opportunities, and this is what is leading them to rebel against the entire system.

The liberal and democratic reforms in Central Asia are also in a state of crisis, with people broadly disappointed with the outcome. Western liberal values are losing their importance. The ideological vacuum is being filled with religious values, some of which are imported (via the Internet, extremist literature, underground training, contacts) and radical in nature. Meanwhile, young people are looking for spiritual and ideological guidance, searching for answers to questions about international politics in the political Islam. And this is where value orientations are becoming crucial.

People are pouring in from around the world to fight for ISIL. Some analysts, such as Akram Andeshmand, Vahid Muzhda and others, estimate that while ISIL might have had as many as 12,000 foreigners in their ranks in 2014, it now has somewhere between 27,000 and 31,000 people from 86 different countries. The number of Russian and Central Asian citizens engaged in warfare has tripled. According to official sources, there were 2,400 Russians, 500 Uzbeks, 500 Kyrgyz, 400 Kazakhs, 386 Tajiks and 360 Turkmen fighting for ISIL by the beginning of 2016.⁶⁸

However, no one knows the actual figures, and the official numbers are likely understated. People have left their countries with their families and children. This migration peaked in the beginning of 2016 and is now declining in connection with the actions of the Russian Federation in Syria – Central Asian law enforcement agencies are currently seeing a decrease in the number of citizens leaving for Syria. However, this does not mean a decrease in radicalization – most likely, the returning fighters, the sleeper cells in Central Asia, and the organizations that sympathize with ISIL or al-Qaeda will now become particularly dangerous. Thus, some field commanders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihad Union deployed in Afghanistan, as well as part of Hizb

⁶⁸ Byman, Daniel L.: What happens when ISIS goes underground? Brookings, January 18, 2018

ut-Tahrir in Central Asia, have already declared their readiness for joint actions with ISIL.

Another key factor that influences radicalization is the low level of education and awareness of Islam and its various movements. Of note is the low level of religious education among religious youth. According to one study conducted with detained militants, none of the militants had studied in a madrasa (religious school). Furthermore, they all lacked basic knowledge about Islam, since they had mainly been taught from online sources (YouTube, Facebook, Odnoklassniki and WhatsApp), and were fed radical information aimed at introducing the jihad and declaring a secular state to be a hostile one. In other words, modern technology has made it possible for international terrorist groups (ISIL, al-Qaeda) to recruit young people through social media. In light of this, ISIL has created a special media department (Al-Furqan) which –to the envy of al-Qaeda and the al-Nusra Front – effectively utilizes all available online tools.

In May 2014, Al-Furqan published “The Clanging of the Swords”, a documentary that CNN deemed to be comparable to Hollywood in terms of camerawork, production techniques and viewer impact. Available online, this film and its successor, “The Flame of War”, scored a record number of views. The video, which shows the execution of an entire group of Syrian Air Force officers, was labelled as “extremist propaganda” and removed almost immediately around the world.

With ISIL’s huge losses in Syria and Iraq, the physical presence of this group in the real world has decreased, and the importance of a virtual presence on the Internet, social media and various instant messaging services has increased. This is the digital underground where the unravelling Islamic State is going even deeper. Just like various caliphate groups once fought over Iraqi and Syrian cities and territories, now they are vying for the right to control cyberspace.

Thus, the information and propaganda sphere is now becoming the main form of existence and positioning of the Islamic State. Today, the ISIL media block is being transformed into another

special service of the caliphate. Amniat, which is the ISIL special service, is doing everything in its power to increase its popularity among extremists and radical elements in our region. In particular, this is the Russian-speaking segment of the jihadist discourse, which is aimed at young Muslims in Russia, Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states. It is quite possible that Amniat's operatives are not only counting on controlling the mechanisms of "soft recruitment", but are also looking to lay down a new agent and sabotage network within the former USSR.

One might say that the modern ideology of extremist groups is reaching a new level, using modern technology and propaganda methods aimed at the entire global community to create terror, i.e. to cause fear.⁶⁹

At the same time, the Afghan government and the Central Asian states are relying on traditional clergy to prevent the ideas of extremism from spreading. However, in some countries of our region, the clergy cannot counteract the propaganda of terrorist groups now that modern technology has made it possible for terrorist organizations to recruit young people online. This means that terrorist propaganda and recruitment is taking place outside of the control of the mosque. Furthermore, the traditional clergy are not competent to address politics and the jihad, so their role is strictly ceremonial.

Cause analysis of radicalization among young people in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan shows a number of internal and external factors for radicalization. However, the radicalization dynamics within the countries are determined primarily by internal factors such as social and economic stability, education, youth involvement in society, and timely government policies in countering and preventing extremism. Therefore, the coming years will see discussions on the politicization of believers, "Salafization" and the threats of Takfirism, state control of religious organizations, the understanding and interpretation of a secular state,

⁶⁹ Независимая (газета), Интернет-версия, 28.05.2018.

the boundaries between the rights of believers and non-believers, the role of religion, customs and traditions, and the spiritual foundations of national ideology.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, there are dangerous internal conditions for recruitment in our region, with the prospect of constant replenishment of new recruits among young people.

According to analysts, the strength of the regime and that of the repressive apparatus can guarantee stability within a state for a certain period. In this case, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, as well as – to a lesser extent – Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, are demonstrating the strength of their political regimes, with the “power vertical” and a relatively powerful apparatus, and weak or non-existent political opposition. However, destabilization in any one of these countries for political, social, economic, ethnic or religious reasons could lead to the infiltration of various extremist groups or the activation of sleeper cells.

Central Asia is faced with the threat of terrorist attacks or destabilization carried out by citizens returning from conflict zones or radical individuals or small terrorist groups penetrating any one of the countries. Meanwhile, security in the region will continue to be influenced by the situations in Syria and Afghanistan as well as the soundness of US-Russia relations in the fight against extremism and terrorism.⁷¹

To solve the problem of youth radicalization, an integrated and comprehensive approach is required. We feel that the solutions and methods of dealing with radical and extremist groups in our region are as follows:

- Providing real, substantial economic support to vulnerable underdeveloped countries, including the creation of jobs;
- Uniting globally to combat terrorism in a real, extensive and unambiguous manner, without labelling terrorists as “good” and “bad” / “ours” and “not ours”;

⁷⁰ Никитин, Тимур: О радикализации ислама в Казахстане, 15.07.2016.

⁷¹ محقق، نسب علی: عوامل افراطگرایی دینی و شیوه های مقابله با آن، پاریس، ۸ مارس سال ۲۰۱۵ میلادی (Насаб Али: «Причины религиозного экстремизма и методы борьбы с ним», 08.03.2015)

- Supporting moderate religious intellectuals and promoting a moderate interpretation of religious understanding, based on peaceful coexistence, peace and good;
- Resolving the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
- Developing methods and ways to comprehensively and extensively pressure organizations, forces and countries that support and sponsor extremism and terrorism;
- Supporting a democratization process in closed countries and providing conditions for expressing feelings and explaining beliefs and political activities within the law, so that the young people in these countries do not feel compelled to form or join underground organizations;
- Reviving moderate Islam and supporting Sufi philosophy to enhance religious understanding and increase tolerance and interdependence in Muslim countries;
- Expanding universal mechanisms to prevent violence and excessive interference of certain world powers in the affairs of other countries, as this is one of the main factors contributing to young people joining extremist groups;
- Building more schools, universities and cultural centres in countries that have a sensitive and volatile environment, as well as developing cultural tourism between countries that have been able to survive terrorism;
- Developing the exchange of capital, goods and services, moving the competition paradigm from negative to positive, and nurturing co-operation between the countries of Central and South Asia and Afghanistan.

After the devastating events in the 1990s – especially the grim experience with Taliban rule – it was expected that extremism and radicalism would never be able to set the stage for expansion in Afghanistan. However, the countless mistakes made by Western partners coupled with rampant corruption have put the Afghan population (including, above all else, the majority of youth) in a paradoxical situation where they are forced to seek support from the very groups that had curtailed their civil and political rights not so

long ago. In the opinion of the radical clergy, discrimination in the form of employment opportunities only being provided to graduates of religious and civilian universities also plays a role in young people joining the ranks of extremist movements.

The danger of radicalization and extremism lies in its taking the form of religious practice in many countries of the region. Many young people truly believe in the truthfulness of this way of thinking and preach it as true faith. Politicizing religion and using religious interpretations as a tool in regional competition between certain Muslim countries turns the Middle East, and probably Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries as well, into a lever of potential conflict. These countries should therefore consolidate their efforts and look for common mechanisms to prevent the expansion of terrorism and extremism. The main reason for the high potential of youth radicalism is that young people are energetic, but often lack a place in life, career prospects or a way out, and this combination can spark irreconcilable hatred toward society. In everyday life, youth radicalization exists primarily on an emotional level, manifested in a system of attitudes and moods of an extremist nature. Dissatisfaction with life is morphed into right-wing radicalism and hostility towards immigrants or people of other ethnicities. One of the key features of youth radicalization is a distorted concept of Islam, with many of the young people involved being grossly uninformed. After all, if a Muslim knows that Islam is a religion of moderation and justice that teaches us to be merciful and bring good to people, this will undoubtedly keep him from engaging in any manifestations of extremism. Ignorance is the root of all evil. Islam discourages scriptural literalism (which is characteristic of the Kharijites), but encourages understanding the sacred texts as they were understood by the generally accepted imams and Muslims scholars. Ignorance leads to uneducated Muslims making ungrounded judgments and religious rulings. Ignorance leads to uneducated Muslims learning about religion from people who are not competent to teach. Ignorance leads to uneducated Muslims blindly accepting the views that suit them, and blindly putting them into practice. These uneducated

Muslims represent a danger not only to society as a whole, but also to other Muslims, since they distort the true image of a Muslim with their fanaticism, leaving non-Muslims with an inaccurate understanding of Islam⁷².

Youth is a mirror that reflects the social reality of the society. Unfortunately, in today's Afghanistan, that reality leaves much to be desired. And even more unfortunately, it does not appear that young people will be taking a turn for the better in the foreseeable future. Afghanistan has an acute shortage of specialized Muslim institutions of higher education where qualified personnel provide quality training, leaving most people to interpret the sacred teachings in their own way. In addition, the trend of youth radicalization is not losing momentum. European countries are deporting more and more young people, and economies are struggling; these factors will inevitably lead to a rise in the number of young people joining extremist groups, where they are promised a "paradise" and given shelter and assistance in self-realization. That is, until they are no longer of use to the particular group, at which point they will physically be disposed of.

This is the situation we have today, and if no urgent measures are taken – particularly in the realm of youth employment – the process of youth radicalization will no doubt continue to intensify, and innocent people will continue to lose their lives.

اندیشمند، محمد اکرام: نویسنده و پژوهشگر: ریشه های افزایش افراط گرایی در افغانستان، دی ۲۸، ۱۳۹۴ 72
(Андешманд М.А.: «Источники увеличения экстремизма в Афганистане», 2015 г.)

Information Literacy and New Media Culture as Early Warning of Youth Radicalization

Inga Sikorskaia

Introduction

In this day and age, information and the quality of it have a significant impact on people and their actions. The rapid development of the Internet, telecommunications and mobile technologies has ushered in a new era of public relations and a new media environment, tearing down established borders and rules. Now, more than ever, people can speak their minds and be heard, in keeping with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”⁷³ However, these innovations have also been widely used by extremists and terrorist groups banned in Central Asia, which have created websites, social media platforms and instant messaging services for spreading propaganda, implementing media campaigns, organizing communities of followers, and recruiting young people. The majority of banned groups have their own websites and social media profiles. For instance, the Islamic State (ISIS) – a terrorist organization that is banned in Kyrgyzstan⁷⁴ – created a global media network managed by its own special media department in 2014–2015, at the peak of its operations; this, in turn, created six media units specializing in various areas (video, text,

⁷³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by Resolution 217 A (III) of the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948, UN Website, http://www.un.org/en/documents/decl_conv/declarations/declhr.shtml.

⁷⁴ The Islamic State (IS, ISIS, ISIL) was declared a terrorist and extremist organization and its operation in Kyrgyzstan was banned by the 13 February 2015 decision of the Oktyabrsky District Court in Bishkek. http://religion.gov.kg/KY/religioznost_rastet.html.

photo, audio, infographics and translation) that collect information from 38 “media offices” around the globe.⁷⁵



Figure 1. Youth level of confidence in radical narratives received

In 2016, terrorist and extremist groups expanded their media strategies to include multi-lingual content for distribution in Central Asia, Russia and the Caucasus. The Internet’s penetration level and accessibility due to practically full mobile network coverage in Central Asia have created favourable conditions for terrorist groups to implement their media strategies. The most vulnerable targets of this information are young people, who have trouble navigating the huge information flow, recognizing extremist propaganda and hate speech, and distinguishing truth from lies. This is exacerbated by a shortage of knowledge and information literacy in society, as well as a lack of critical thinking and the skills necessary to search for, understand and verify information.

The data presented in Figure 1 is from a field study entitled “Messages, images and media channels promoting youth radicalization in Kyrgyzstan,” and demonstrates that over 60 percent of the young people surveyed in regions susceptible to recruitment trust the information available in the media. This degree of trust

⁷⁵ “Jihad Against Journalists”, *Reporter Without Borders*, 2015, <https://rsf.org/en/news/one-year-charlie-rsf-publishes-jihad-against-journalists>.

correlates with the established view that conventional and social media outlets can only depict reality and truth.⁷⁶

Hence, the methods for youth deradicalization must include education and awareness-raising, development of information literacy and critical thinking skills, and the formation of a new media culture where young people can independently examine the veracity of extremist views and their narratives, and become resistant to propaganda. The important role of education in deradicalization and the prevention of violent extremism has also been recognized by the UN Security Council in the form of special resolutions and plans^{77, 78}.

The Primary Elements of New Media Culture and Information Literacy, Their Interaction and Influence on Deradicalization

Media culture is a special type of culture intrinsic to the information society that supplies it with socially pertinent information accumulated through various media channels.⁷⁹ Media culture incorporates a culture of information sharing and a culture of information consumption; it can serve as a system for the levels of development of a person capable of perceiving, analysing and evaluating media texts, engaging in media creativity, and absorbing

⁷⁶ Analytical report, "Messages, images and media channels promoting youth radicalization in Kyrgyzstan", SFCG, author and mail researcher: I. Sikorskaia, 2017, <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Kyrgyzstan-radicalization-social-media-report-ENG.pdf> https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Action-Research_Outcomes_FINAL_RUS.pdf, pp. 22–23, figures 9–10.

⁷⁷ План действий по предотвращению насильственного экстремизма. Доклад Генерального секретаря (A / 70/674) http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2015/SCR%202178_2014_EN.pdf

⁷⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014), http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2178%20%282014%29; UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015), [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250\(2015\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2250(2015)); UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism A/70/674 (2015), https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674.

⁷⁹ Лизунова, И.В., «Медиакультура как диалог культур современного общества», *Библиосфера*. 2017, № 4, с. 30-34 [Lizunova, I. V. "Media Culture as a Dialogue of the Cultures of Modern Society", *Bibliosfera*, 2017, No 4, pp. 30–34].

new knowledge in the media sphere.⁸⁰ Global academic discourse on the media's role in deradicalization is mainly focused on discussing how conventional media outlets, as a result of their obsession with making headlines, are willing to broadcast radical narratives and violent extremist ideologies, recounting the details of terrorist acts and spotlighting terrorist groups and their followers. Consequently, terrorist groups use conventional media as an information dissemination tool, with the media acting as the unwilling promoters of banned organizations.⁸¹ Researchers focus on analysing the media strategies of terrorist groups and the methods they employ to influence the public.

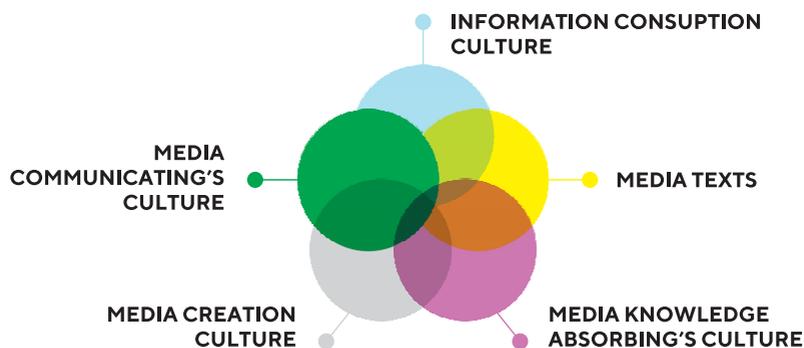


Figure 2. Elements of new media culture

In the “Jihad Against Journalists” report,⁸² the authors examine the role the media play in the operations of the ISIS, which elected to keep reporters hostage in order to use their professional involvement to interact with global mass media outlets, develop new strategies, and release propaganda media products. Akil N. Avan, Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin, the authors of another study,

⁸⁰ Кириллова, Н. Б. «Медиакультура: от модерна к постмодерну», 2е изд.; перераб. и доп. — М., Академический Проект, 2006, с. 448, [Kirillova, N. B. “Media Culture: From Modern to Post-Modern”, 2nd edition, Moscow, 2006, p. 448].

⁸¹ Perešin, A. (M.S., assistant professor, Centre for Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb) “Mass Media and Terrorism”, UDK: 316.77:323.28, 2007.

⁸² “Jihad Against Journalists”, *Reporter Without Borders*, 2015, <https://rsf.org/en/news/one-year-charlie-rsf-publishes-jihad-against-journalists>.

“Radicalization and Media”,⁸³ bring up the issue of communication between the media and terrorists within the new media ecology. The authors use this term to describe the rapidly changing information carriers through which locations, events and personalities – as well as their actions and inactions – seem all the more interconnected. In her overview, Suzanne Waldman points out that there is an understanding of the role of social media in the radicalization process, but also notes that the lack of detailed and contextualized understanding of the processes used in radicalization, as well as the lack of methods for actually countering radicalization in the media environment, make it harder for governments to assess the effectiveness of deradicalization policies.⁸⁴ Existing researches of traditional and social media in the radicalization’s context have highlighted new media tools and different types of communication. This phenomenon is the new media culture. For the first time in Central Asia, this new concept began to be used by School of Peacemaking and media Technology for their research.⁸⁵

New media culture is a special kind of culture emerging in the digital age of disintermediation⁸⁶ and the “blurring” of lines between receiving and transferring information, which has given rise to a new kind of thinking characterized by possession of the information and skills needed to create and disseminate information. New media culture is distinguished by an intensity of audio-visual content streams via television, cinema, the Internet and computer graphics – the channels that most people can no longer live without. On the

⁸³ Avan, A. N., Hoskins A. & O’Loughlin, B. “Radicalisation and Media”, Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library, ISBN13: 978-0-415-55035-2 (hbk) ISBN13: 978-0-203-82967-7 (ebk), 2011.

⁸⁴ Waldman, S. “Countering Violent Extremism on Social Media”, DRDC – Centre for Security Science, Defence Research and Development Canada Scientific Report DRDC-RDDC-2016-R229, 2016.

⁸⁵ Новая медиакультура и компетенции в публичном пространстве, Школа миротворчества и медиатехнологий в ЦА, 2018 года [“New Media Culture and Competences in Public Space”, School of Peace and Media Technologies in School of Peacemaking and Media Technology in Central AsiaCentral Asia, 2018], <http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/vebinary/5239-novaya-mediakultura-i-kompetencii-v-publichnom-prostranstve.html>.

⁸⁶ Disintermediation is the “elimination of the middle man”, providing information directly on social and other media so that end consumers do not have to wait for it to be delivered through conventional media.

one hand, these channels allow people to explore their environment and its social, moral, intellectual and psychological aspects; they also enable dialogue through the global communications network. On the other hand, the intensity of the information stream does not give the audience enough time to navigate it and verify the accuracy of the information received. This particularly applies to young people who are avid Internet users. Today we are not only *information consumers* – we are also *content creators and distributors*, and this makes us treat media culture in a new way, including as a deradicalization tool.

Figure 2 shows the five main elements of new media culture: information consumption culture, media communicating's culture, media tests, and media absorbing culture. Mastering the culture of information consumption plays a major role in how individuals perceive the information that is disseminated (including radical narratives), what their level of critical perception is, and the degree to which they trust the information they receive; it also affects their ability to verify the accuracy of the information and decide on its subsequent use. Information consumption culture enables streamlined development of the skills needed for media creation and easy navigation of an environment oversaturated with information. In other words, when young users possess the aforementioned skills, then, upon receiving information containing extremist propaganda, they can independently deconstruct radical narratives and help their peers do the same.

An important tier within new media culture consists of *cultural literacy*, which represents a knowledge and understanding of how a country's traditions, religions, ethnic and social groups, beliefs, symbols and existing means of communication influence the creation, dissemination and consumption of information through modern technologies. In this regard, one should also note some aspects of *religious literacy* that a young information user should possess. This is because the modern media sphere is replete with banned material where parallels are drawn between Islam and terrorism through visual

imagery and audio content (such as the use of *nasheeds*⁸⁷), twisting ayat and hadith of the Quran to suit the narratives of extremist propaganda and attempts of banned extremist and terrorist groups to legitimize their activities, and presenting alternative interpretations of certain concepts, such as jihad, caliphate and takfir.⁸⁸

The dissemination and consumption of information within the modern media sphere require young people to possess a critical understanding of the media that they use.

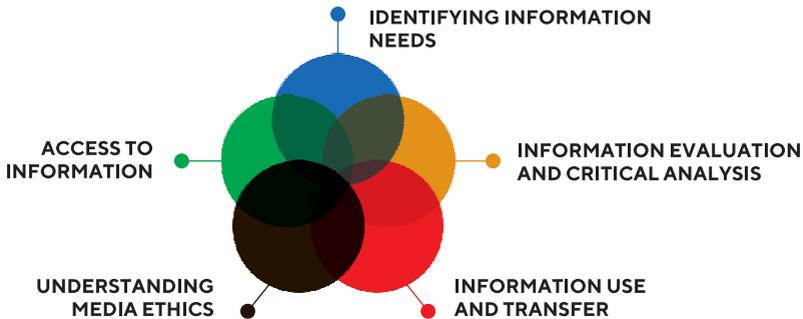


Figure 3. Elements of information literacy

Information literacy represents an awareness of the positive and negative way cultural factors affect the public through the impactful use of modern communication technologies.

Today, much is being said about *media literacy*, which does resemble information literacy in terms of its origin. However, media literacy is more about understanding the target audience and how

⁸⁷ A *nasheed* is a type of Muslim religious chant popular throughout the Islamic world. *Nasheeds* are performed either solo or by a group of men. The lyrics are about serving God as well as the life of the Prophet Mohammed, in accordance with the traditions of Sharia law. <https://islam-today.ru/obsestvo/kultura/nasidy-mozno-ili-nelza/>.

⁸⁸ Аналитический отчет «Смыслы, образы и медиаканалы, способствующие радикализации молодежи Кыргызстана», SFCG, автор и главный исследователь И.Сикорская, 2017 год [Analytical report, "Meanings, Images and Media Channels Promoting Youth Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan", SFCG, author and lead researcher: I. Sikorskaia, 2017], <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Kyrgyzstan-radicalization-social-media-report-ENG.pdf> <http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/295-smyslyobrazy-i-mediakanalny-sposobstvuyuschie-radikalizacii-molodezhi-kyrgyzstana.html>, https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Action-Research_Outcomes_FINAL_RUS.pdf, раздел «Основная тематика, месседжи и запоминающиеся образы», с. 19 настоящего исследования. [section "Main topics, messages and memorable imagery", p. 19].

the media operate from the standpoint of marketing and message exchange.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, information literacy is a means of clear and objective thinking, understanding the representativeness of the media and the capacity of young individuals to identify their information needs and to access information and evaluate, critically analyse, use and transfer it, while taking ethical norms into account.

Figure 3 presents the five main elements of information literacy within the context of combating the radicalization of youth. These five elements were formed based on findings and observations during seminars with young people who had been subjected to recruitment attempts, as well as during interviews with members of this target group regarding their access to information, selection of information channels, perception and evaluation of the content consumed, understanding of the ethics of the Internet, and subsequent use of media content. These five elements complement each other and clearly could not exist independently. For example, the evaluation and critical analysis of information would not be possible if access to information was limited. Similarly, the use and transfer of information is dependent on the identification of information needs and the understanding of media ethics.

In the war against radicalization, young people must be armed with the skills necessary to adequately perceive conflict-sensitive content and know the rules for reacting to such content. Within the information consumed, they must be able to identify hate speech that is treated as negative content but is not illegal, as well as extremist propaganda and media xenophobia that could lead to violence.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Lee, A. Y. L. & So, C. Y. K. "Media literacy and Information Literacy: Similarities and Differences", 2014, http://mediataitokoulu.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=272:media-literacy-and-information-literacy-similarities-and-differences&catid=12:medialiteracy&Itemid=405&lang=fi.

⁹⁰ Учебное пособие «Как избежать пропаганды экстремизма в медиа», Школа миротворчества и медиатехнологий в ЦА, 2018 год, под редакцией И.Сикорской [Training guide "How to Avoid Extremism Propaganda in Media", School of Peacekeeping and Media Technologies in Central Asia, 2018, edited by I. Sikorskaya] <http://ca-mediators.net/ru/novye-instrumenty/3448-prezentaciya-uchebnyh-posobiy-kak-izbezhhat-propagandy-ekstremizma-v-media.html>; and учебный модуль «Противодействие пропаганде экстремизма и нетерпимости», Школа миротворчества и медиатехнологий в ЦА, 2018 года, [Training module "Countering Extremism and Intolerance Propaganda", School of Peacemaking and Media technology in Central Asia, 2018] <http://ca-mediators.net/press-relizy/3441-zhurnalisty-obuchilis-protivodeystviyu-propagande-ekstremizma-i-neterpimosti.html>.

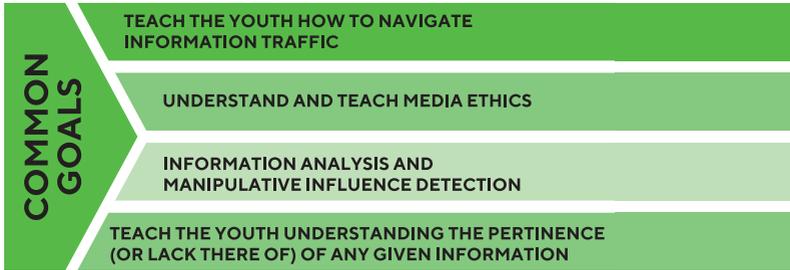


Figure 4. Common goals of media culture and information literacy within the context of the deradicalization of youth

The common goals of information literacy and new media culture naturally complement one another. They aim to convey to young people the importance of information and to teach them how to identify manipulative influences and navigate the information flow. However, this requires the development of special personality traits that enable young individuals to delve into the media space in a streamlined manner, using their own competencies.

Information and cultural literacy skills play a major role in the deradicalization of youth. Quality education and strong competencies are the basis for creating an environment that deters violent extremist ideology and efforts to spread it, and bolsters young people's resistance to radical narratives. This can be achieved by introducing methods and tools to the education system that help students develop an intellectual barrier against violent extremism and reinforce their commitment to non-violence and peace. Education must also cultivate human rights and diversity, foster critical thinking, promote media and digital literacy, and develop behavioural and social-emotional skills that are conducive to peaceful co-existence and tolerance.

Factors Contributing to Radicalization in Media Communications

According to a study conducted in Kyrgyzstan, social media is the leading communication channel for exposing young people to

information containing extremist propaganda.⁹¹ This study was the first of its kind, and later served as an action plan for the “Social Media for Deradicalization in Kyrgyzstan: A Model for Central Asia” initiative. The study pin-pointed the role of social media in distributing and consuming radical ideologies and narratives in the Kyrgyz Republic. The term “social media” in this study refers not only to the Internet, but also to mobile applications (such as instant messaging services) used to share content and information.

The study used a qualitative approach and the following methods:

a) analysis of the most popular social media channels among local youth and the types of information received and transferred through them;

b) examination of the type and language of communications within a select youth environment;

c) identification of popular messages disseminated through these channels and planted in the minds of the youth, leading to radicalization;

d) 108 structured interviews with active social media users and information consumers in the eight regions of Kyrgyzstan most susceptible to violent extremism. These regions were identified as such in light of the fact that according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, they had supplied over 500 fighters to combat zones at the time the study was conducted.⁹² *Some regions of southern Kyrgyzstan became more susceptible to youth radicalization following the ethnic violence that erupted between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in June 2010. In 2014–2015, the Jeti-Ögüz Raion (district)*

⁹¹ Аналитический отчет «Смыслы, образы и медиаканалы, способствующие радикализации молодежи Кыргызстана», SFCG, автор и главный исследователь И.Сикорская, 2017 год [Analytical report, “Meanings, Images and Media Channels Promoting Youth Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan”, SFCG, author and lead researcher: I. Sikorskaya, 2017], <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Kyrgyzstan-radicalization-social-media-report-ENG.pdf> <http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/295-smyslyobrazy-i-mediakanaly-sposobstvuyuschie-radikalizacii-molodezhi-kyrgyzstana.html>; https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Action-Research_Outcomes_FINAL_RUS.pdf.

⁹² Кожекова, А. «Голос Америки»: Число радикально настроенных женщин в Кыргызстане может быть гораздо больше, *24.kg*, 01 марта 2016 [Kozhekov, A. “Voice of America: The number of radical women in Kyrgyzstan may be much larger”, *24.kg*, 1 March 2016], http://24.kg/obschestvo/28522_golos_ameriki_chislo_radikalno_nastroennyih_jenschin_v_kyrgyzstane_mojet_byit_gorazdo_bolshe/.

*in the northern part of the Issyk-Kul Oblast (region) struggled with various degrees of civil unrest in response to the activities of the Kumtor gold mine, and young people were the main force behind the unrest. According to law enforcement authorities, there are a number of cases where people from this district later went to Syria to engage in combat.*⁹³

Respondents were selected in target regions by sampling based on the 16–32 age group and recommendations from members of the working group, which consisted of key partners, including representatives of government authorities, local and religious communities, NGOs and the media. These people were the main guides in determining the target group, because, thanks to their sources, they knew the young individuals very well. Some of the individuals selected were classified as “sitting on the fence”, i.e. they consumed radical narratives and were pondering their future, debating whether they should stay in Kyrgyzstan or leave to engage in violent jihad.

These groups were interviewed by six specially trained local field researchers who managed to gain the trust of the respondents. An informal method was used, and the findings were evaluated according to 15 indicators.⁹⁴ These interviews formed the basis for analysis of the content and formats of information consumed, as well as the degree of trust and subsequent channels of communication. Afterwards, experts examined all of the content, comparing radical narratives and their degree of influence, penetration and impact on the target audience. The data produced from the interviews helped extract clear descriptions of meanings, messages and imagery that were attractive to youth and could contribute to radicalization.

⁹³ «Семья из Иссык-Куля, выехавшая в Сирию в составе 25 человек», *Turmush*, 2016 [“25-person family from Issyk-Kul left for Syria”, *Turmush*, 2016], http://isfanat.turmush.kg/ru/news:1341213/?from=ru_turmush&place=newstoplast

⁹⁴ Аналитический отчет «Смыслы, образы и медиаканалы, способствующие радикализации молодежи Кыргызстана», SFCG, автор и главный исследователь И.Сикорская, 2017 год [Analytical report, “Meanings, Images and Media Channels Promoting Youth Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan”, SFCG, author and lead researcher: I. Sikorskaya, 2017], <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Kyrgyzstan-radicalization-social-media-report-ENG.pdf> <http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/295-smyslyobrazy-i-mediakanaly-sposobstvuyushchie-radikalizacii-molodezhi-kyrgyzstana.html>.

The term “radicalization” in this study denotes ideological and behavioural tendencies that are characterized by a shift to intolerance for the current way of life and state structure, as well as by various levels of proclivity for violence, through means of communications and joining extremist and terrorist groups.

From the acquired information and its analysis as well as the target audience’s attitude towards it, one could conclude that a multi-channel approach is widely employed – one of the most common models of communication in the digital age. This is demonstrated by the ability to select channels for optimal online influence, namely: social media, video-sharing platforms and thematic platforms. These means of sharing information were named by all the respondents in Kyrgyzstan during the analysis of meanings, images and media channels contributing to the radicalization of Kyrgyzstan’s youth.

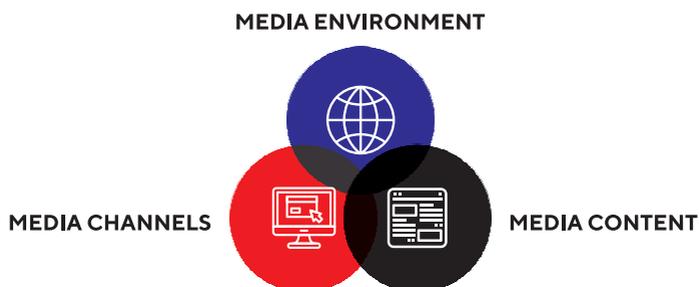


Figure 5. Factors contributing to the dissemination and consumption of extremist propaganda

We can currently distinguish three primary factors influencing the way young people distribute and consume messages containing violent extremist propaganda:

1. The media environment where radical narratives are propagated. The media environment consists of the conditions in which media culture exists; where it informs and connects an individual with the outside world through mass media outlets, and impacts an individual’s behaviour, opinion and evaluation ideologically, economically or otherwise.

2. The media channels for the dissemination of information - are means of distributing content of the same type in terms of the method of transmitting information, which are similar in the same type of perception by consumers. Studies show that the most popular online platform in Kyrgyzstan is the **YouTube**⁹⁵ video-sharing website, which provides youth with information as well as radical content.⁹⁶ Video content distribution analysis demonstrates the diversity of methods used by media units such as Al-Furqan (an ISIS producing centre banned in Kyrgyzstan). During the survey, most respondents listed videos posted on YouTube by the common name of *Tavhid va Jihad Katibasi* (Arabic for “Oneness of God and holy war”) and published mainly in the Uzbek language. This material is published by **tavhidvajahod.com**, a domain which is currently unavailable even through a VPN (virtual private network) connection. Some respondents said that they find these videos by entering keywords in the search bar, while others view them when friends repost them on social media. One young man from Nookat, a district centre in southern Kyrgyzstan, had recently returned home from labour migration and said that one particular YouTube video had stuck with him: “it called for opposing infidels and hypocrites everywhere, even in our homeland. They also quoted ayat stating that a hypocrite must bear the punishment of death.”⁹⁷ This platform is also the preferred channel of information distribution for other terrorist and extremist groups.

The second most popular media channel is **Facebook**, which is used for a variety of propaganda. Extremist groups use Facebook

⁹⁵ Аналитический отчет «Смыслы, образы и медиаканалы, способствующие радикализации молодежи Кыргызстана», SFCG, автор и главный исследователь И.Сикорская, стр. 25, 2017 год [Analytical report, “Meanings, Images and Media Channels Promoting Youth Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan, SFCG, author and lead researcher: I. Sikorskaya, p. 25, 2017], <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Kyrgyzstan-radicalization-social-media-report-ENG.pdf><http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/295-smyslyobrazy-i-mediakanaly-sposobstvuyuschie-radikalizacii-molodezhi-kyrgyzstana.html>; Школа миротворчества и медиатехнологий, Исламофобия и пропаганда в онлайн медиа и соцсетях Кыргызстана, 2018 год [School of peacemaking and media technology. Islamophobia and propaganda on the Internet of Kyrgyzstan, 2018], <http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/3453-islamofobiya-i-propaganda-v-onlayn-media-i-socsetyah-kyrgyzstana.html>.

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.17

both to share operation and tactical information, and as a gateway for their sites, by connecting Facebook groups with the “relevant” pages and forums. According to official Facebook statistics, the median age for users is 30 years. Facebook currently has over 650,000 users from Kyrgyzstan, half of whom visit daily.⁹⁸ Since this media platform is used to disseminate information in various languages to various population groups, practically every young person is a member of a community on Facebook. Surveys have shown that information containing extremist propaganda is displayed in their news feed, on their walls, or in reposts from their friends. Respondents did not name any groups that they could have joined, or claimed that they “didn’t remember” if they were members of any groups or communities.

Further down the list, but still very popular, are the Russian social media networks **Odnoklassniki** and **Vkontakte (VK)**. The respondents expressed an attraction to the image of Chechen mujahedeen who have long been “successfully fighting” the Russian regime and are currently engaged in active combat in Syria. Information is shared both openly among the members of the network at large, and in closed groups such as “Warriors of Allah” and “Shaheeds”. Over 80 percent of the survey participants confirmed that they had accounts on these sites.⁹⁹ Furthermore, many reported that they had viewed videos in Russian calling to participate in jihad.

Closing the list of platforms popular among young consumers of extremist propaganda were **Instagram** and **Twitter**, which were mentioned by a small number of respondents who mainly used those platforms to view photos and slideshows from war zones in Syria involving citizens of Kyrgyzstan or other Central Asian countries.

⁹⁸ Internet World Stats, <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>.

⁹⁹ Аналитический отчет «Смыслы, образы и медиаканалы, способствующие радикализации молодежи Кыргызстана», SFCG, автор и главный исследователь И.Сикорская, стр. 25, 2017 год [Analytical report, “Meanings, Images and Media Channels Promoting Youth Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan”, SFCG, author and lead researcher: I. Sikorskaya, p. 25, 2017], <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Kyrgyzstan-radicalization-social-media-report-ENG.pdf>; <http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/295-smyslyobrazy-i-mediakanaly-sposobstvuyuschie-radikalizacii-molodezhi-kyrgyzstana.html>.

The captions under these photos made an impression on the respondents: “Olokh zhangchilari” (Uzbek for “warriors of Allah”), “shahids”, “jihad”. Some mentioned the “*Tavhid va Jihod Katibasi*” page where they could get the latest information on people who had joined the jihad.

The last group of media channels is made up of three instant messaging platforms – **WhatsApp**, **Telegram** and **Imo** – which are used for sharing unlimited amounts of content. All respondents listed these applications as information providers. The choice of a media channel largely depends on the sender of the message and their authority or influence on consumers of information. Analysis reveals that young people tend to use the media channel where messages are sent by their friend, relative or member of an online group/community of information recipients. However, their lack of testing, verification and analysis skills often result in these young people being caught in a web of online recruiters.

3. Media content (media text, audio-visual content, infographics, etc.) with violent extremist propaganda. Media content can be a message, post, article, news story, photo, video, infographics or meme – any piece of information conveyed in any way through specific technologies. Examination of the media channels, meanings and imagery that made up the radical narratives consumed by youth subjected to recruitment in Kyrgyzstan has shown that young people tend to remember the “protagonists” – a certain image conveying information to the consumer through speech, photos and videos. Memorable images that made an impression on the respondents include young fighters in camouflage uniforms speaking their native language on an infantry fighting vehicle, on the battlefield, or holding a machine gun, as well as men calling for violent jihad, often surrounded by faces that were familiar to the respondents, which dispelled any doubts and made them wonder: “Maybe there really is a jihad going on over there?” Other respondents said that they were deeply moved by media content involving suicide bombers who, in their view, “perform a heroic act in the name of Allah”, as well as

religious activists “speaking on behalf of Allah”, quoting (on- or off-screen) hadith and ayat of the Quran with references to jihad.

Upon analysing the aforementioned factors contributing to radicalization, we must note that as we enter a new era of public relations that are mainly established in a digital environment, we must introduce and construct new formats in the education, training and professional development of teachers, journalists, public relations specialists, internet activists and legal experts.

The strong influence of social media has led to disintermediation¹⁰⁰. This phenomenon grants the user direct access to information that would have previously required a bridge in the form of mass media outlets or other sources.¹⁰¹ Today, a single Facebook or Twitter post can establish a public agenda for the moment or a week down the road. Social media is creating stories and mass media and journalists are using them.

In this situation, many young Internet users are finding themselves exposed to the threat of online radicalization. When summarizing multiple studies¹⁰², including ones conducted in Kyrgyzstan, we can see that a quarter of users are or were virtual targets of intolerance, or embroiled in the anti-Islamic rhetoric that has been rampant for the past three years.¹⁰³ Paradoxically, media strategists for banned extremist and terrorist groups have begun using already existing Islamophobia (hate speech, derogatory clichés and stereotypes towards Muslims) in the media to convince young people of the need to fight

¹⁰⁰ Disintermediation (англ.) - освобождение от посредников.

¹⁰¹ «Как не кормить троллей и избежать уголовного дела за высказывание в Интернете», интервью И.Сикорской, директора программ Школы миротворчества и медиатехнологий в ЦА, 2017, [“How to Stop Feeding Trolls and Avoid Criminal Prosecution for Things Said on the Internet” Interview with I. Sikorskaya, programme director at the School of Peacemaking and Media Technology in CA, 2017], [http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru_news/292-vyskazyvaniya-v-internete-kak-ne-kormit-trolley-i-izbezhat-ugolovnogo-dela.html](http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/news/292-vyskazyvaniya-v-internete-kak-ne-kormit-trolley-i-izbezhat-ugolovnogo-dela.html).

¹⁰² Исследования и медиамониторинги СМИ, Интернета и публичного дискурса Школы миротворчества и медиатехнологий в ЦА [“Research and Media Monitoring of Mass Media, Internet and Public Discourse”, School of Peacemaking and Media Technology in Central Asia], <http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/media-monitoring/>.

¹⁰³ Исламофобия и пропаганда в онлайн медиа и социальных сетях Кыргызстана, результаты тестового исследования, 2018 год, Школа миротворчества и медиатехнологий в ЦА [“Islamophobia and Propaganda in Online Media and Social Networks in Kyrgyzstan, Results of a Test Survey”, 2018, School of Peacemaking and Media Technology in Central Asia], <http://ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/3453-islamofobiya-i-propaganda-v-onlayn-media-i-socsetyah-kyrgyzstana.html>.

Islamophobia in the name of the faith.¹⁰⁴ During the field study, young respondents named a number of messages that are most likely to spark discussions in their communities and influence their actions.¹⁰⁵ When answering questions regarding their preferred media channels and radical content consumed, almost two-thirds of the respondents who could be classified as “young people subjected to radicalization”¹⁰⁶ demonstrated a low level of media culture and information literacy, an inability to recognize extremist propaganda and hate speech that could contribute to said propaganda, obliviousness of the need to verify information using various sources, and trouble rationalizing their attitude towards media content.

Deradicalization Through Training in a New Format

The success of the youth deradicalization process is largely contingent on promotion of the ideas of pluralism and diversity, empowering young people to grow freely and realize their ideas. Typically, young people in Central Asia who succumb to violent extremism do not have faith that a “bright future” is achievable in their home country, so they turn to extremist ideologies. One method to counter this would be to involve young people who are susceptible to recruitment in the deradicalization

¹⁰⁴ «Исламофобия является мостиком к религиозной пропаганде и дальнейшему рекрутированию», видеоинтервью И.Сикорской, 2017 [“Islamophobia is a Foothold for Religious Propaganda and Subsequent Recruitment”, video interview with I. Sikorskaya], <https://cabar.asia/ru/inga-sikorskaya-islamofobiya-yavlyaetsya-mostikom-k-religioznoj-propagande-i-dalnejshemu-rekrutirovaniyu/>.

¹⁰⁵ Аналитический отчет «Смыслы, образы и медиаканалы, способствующие радикализации молодежи Кыргызстана», SFCG, автор и главный исследователь И.Сикорская, 2017 год [Analytical report, “Meanings, Images and Media Channels Promoting Youth Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan”, SFCG, author and lead researcher: I. Sikorskaya, 2017], <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Kyrgyzstan-radicalization-social-media-report-ENG.pdf> <http://www.ca-mediators.net/ru/issledovaniya/295-smyslyobrazy-i-mediakanaly-sposobstvuyuschie-radikalizacii-molodezhi-kyrgyzstana.html>; https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Action-Research_Outcomes_FINAL_RUS.pdf.

¹⁰⁶ «Радикализирующаяся» молодежь – прослойка молодых людей, не обладающая критическим мышлением, подверженная влиянию, но еще не являющаяся частью групп, продвигающих идеи насильственного экстремизма, Социальные медиа для дерадикализации: практическое руководство, автор И.Сикорская, Ш. Бактыгулов, под общей редакцией И.Сикорской [Youth “subjected to radicalization” is a sub-group of young people who lack critical thinking, are susceptible to influence, but not yet part of groups promoting violent extremist ideas. *Social Media for Deradicalization: Practical Guidebook*, I. Sikorskaya and Sh. Baktygulov, edited by I. Sikorskaya], https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/KGZ-TOOLKIT_Final.pdf.

process. A social media project in Kyrgyzstan which involved youth in this way produced good results.¹⁰⁷

Without a doubt, deradicalization efforts require large-scale approaches in all social spheres, as well as investments into innovative methods and media education in a new format.

These strategies must involve the following actions:

- improvement of the education system, by restructuring teaching practices and teacher training to focus on the inclusion of skills related to information literacy and the new media culture;

- integration of the five main elements of information literacy and five main elements of new media culture into new training modules for teachers and students alike;

- creation of programmes for training secondary school teachers to identify factors contributing to youth radicalization through media communications;

- provision of access to media education for groups that are susceptible to recruitment, through flexible modules geared towards motivating and involving young people in projects aimed at self-fulfilment through active participation within their communities;

- establishment of separate subjects and elective courses on critical and analytical thinking that would serve as protective barriers against violent extremist ideologies;

- expansion of access to media education through summer schools and training seminars for parents, local activists and religious leaders.

In light of the fact that recruiters are currently focusing entirely on ideology and are using new media and the Internet as their preferred vehicle of recruitment, an understanding of the creation, reception, dissemination, critical analysis and verification of information and messages in the digital environment has become crucial. At the same time, the online environment should also serve as a tool for empowering young people and increasing their involvement as active citizens who are able to address the problem of radicalization using their own competencies.

¹⁰⁷ Социальные медиа для дерадикализации: практическое руководство, автор И.Сикорская, Ш. Бактыгулов, под общей редакцией И.Сикорской [Social Media for Deradicalization: Practical Guidebook . I. Sikorskaya, Sh. Baktygulov, edited by I. Sikorskaya] https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/KGZ-TOOLKIT_Final.pdf.

SESSION III

COUNTERING USE OF INTERNET FOR TERRORIST PURPOSES

Cybersecurity Threats: Challenges and Countermeasures

Shavkat Sabirov

Abstract:

This article deals with cyber threats in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the causes and background of the terrorist threat, European matters, the activities of the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as Kazakhstan's role. By 2018, terrorism and religious extremism had already been felt on all seven continents, while the forms and methods of terrorist attacks have become widely unpredictable, causing damage that is hard to evaluate. This has significantly changed the overall situation around conventional cyber threats such as crime, fraud or trolling. The new communication environment has enabled terrorists to maintain an influx of new fighters. In this article, the author provides a short analysis of the efforts being made by international organizations to combat terrorism and extremism, an evaluation of the threats that the nations of Central Asia – and the Republic of Kazakhstan in particular – currently face, and a list of the factors that are contributing to the negative development of the situation in Kazakhstan.

As one of the region's leaders in information society development Kazakhstan also faces a terrorist threat in the field of high technology.

Keywords: cyberspace, cybersecurity, terrorism and extremism threats, informatization, information security, information and communication technologies, Central Asia, Republic of Kazakhstan,

Kazakhstan, e-government, combating illegal content, internet, internet users, hotline for combating illegal content.

Cybersecurity Threats: Challenges and Countermeasures

The global information society stepped into the year 2018 developed and updated. Its level of development is measured by international progress in the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and digital technologies, while the extent to which it is updated depends on the actual situation in the world. The global state of affairs can undergo radical changes in a matter of months or even days, sometimes due to a single tweet. The world has become digital and mobile, and all users have become both the sources and consumers of information.

Information has an unlimited capacity for influence, both positive and negative. Content creators stand alongside the “forward forces” capable of affecting the minds and hearts of millions of people. Information on the Internet is a key strategic resource for any nation, and is actively used in the political processes of many countries alongside conventional resources. The world of new communications has not only introduced instant messaging and new foreign words, but also the “dark side” of the virtual world – threats originating in cyberspace.

Cyber threats are likened to that of nuclear weapons or weapons of mass destruction. Just a few years back, cyber threats were quantified as financial losses, or economic and non-economic damages; today, they are capable of disrupting the critical infrastructure of an entire city. Moreover, cyber capabilities are so vast that they could be used to organize protests involving tens of thousands of people and create a real threat to the very existence of a state system. The challenges affect the political structure of nations, economic transformation, influence of the information environment on the society and economies.

The global community has become concerned with the problem of organized crime and preventing the further development of threats

originating in cyberspace. However, past alliances and agreements between nations were primarily of an investigatory nature and did not include any joint efforts beyond bloc affiliations. As a result, the Council of Europe adopted the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime in 2001 – this was the first international treaty to offer definitions and classifications of crimes committed in cyberspace, to propose international co-operation mechanisms and procedures for co-operation between law enforcement agencies, and to specify the terms for the recording of information by internet service providers.¹⁰⁸ Naturally, this immediately drew backlash from a number of human rights organizations, as storing and transferring personal data violates users' rights, restricts their freedoms and gives the state excessive powers. The Convention entered into force on 1 July 2004, and by 2005 it had been signed and ratified by 30 countries, including the European nations, the United States, Canada, Japan and South Africa. Other 17 countries had signed the Convention but not ratified it. Kazakhstan has not signed the Convention and does not consider itself to be a member.

The primary precursors to this Convention were cyber threats that existed in the late 1990s. The Convention was based on voluntary principles of information sharing and providing technical access to signatory states. It should be noted that all of the countries that signed the Convention have close economic ties, and the majority of them are NATO members. Meanwhile, countries without military-political affiliations declined to sign the Convention for fear of interference in internal affairs or threats to their sovereignty and national security. This was the reason that the Russian Federation refused to sign the Convention in March 2008.¹⁰⁹

The Convention touches upon various areas of international law and provides for the establishment of joint legal and criminal evaluation of cybercrime and joint efforts in criminal investigations. The authors of the Convention attempted to provide a detail description

¹⁰⁸ Convention on Cybercrime, Treaty No 185, Budapest, 23 November 2001, www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/185.

¹⁰⁹ A decree of the President of the Russian Federation dd. 22.03.2008 r. № 144-rp www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/27059.

of the various areas of international co-operation, including different means of storing information, co-operation between law enforcement agencies, and mutual assistance arrangements.

However, by the mid-2000s, the world had split into two camps in terms of approaches for tackling cyber threats. One group, represented by the United States and Europe, insisted on adopting joint measures to counter cyber threats on the basis of voluntary access to the technological capabilities of the countries. The other group, which included Russia and China, among others, insisted on introducing coordinated countermeasures that did not involve granting voluntary access to information systems. Following a series of political confrontations at the UN and the OSCE, these two groups began developing countermeasures independently. One camp acted within the framework of a military-political alliance, while the other acted under bilateral relations and the SCO. Co-operation between the two camps in combating cybercrime was paralyzed. The process of promoting universal co-operation at the UN came to a standstill, and any attempts resulted in the blocking of decisions at the level of the UN Security Council and the General Assembly. Only in 2008 did the UN General Assembly adopt – without voting (by consensus) – a resolution on “Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security”.¹¹⁰ The resolution was designed to enable a study to be conducted in the field of cyber threats with the help of governmental experts appointed “on the basis of equitable geographical distribution”, but nothing has been implemented thus far.

The year 2010 saw a slight improvement in US-Russia relations, which sparked hope that a common solution would be found in the field of cybersecurity in order to ease political tensions. This required measures of trust between the countries, so that both would have a platform for joint efforts to maintain security in cyberspace. To this end, the OSCE participating States adopted the “Initial

¹¹⁰ Resolution A/RES/58/32/, “Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security”, UN General Assembly, session 58, 8 December 2003, http://www.un.org/ru/ga/first/58/first_res.shtml

set of OSCE confidence-building measures to reduce the risks of conflict stemming from the use of information and communication technologies” in December 2013.

The OSCE set of confidence-building measures (CBMs) provides for data sharing, co-operation, consultations and the coordination of efforts of the participating States in the field of cyber/ICT security. The basis of these measures is voluntary information sharing, the degree of which is left to the discretion of the signatory states.

The document stipulates that participating States will hold “consultations in order to reduce the risks of misperception, and of possible emergence of political or military tension or conflict that may stem from the use of ICTs”.¹¹¹ The participating States are also expected to voluntarily share information on measures taken to ensure the interoperability, security and reliability of the Internet. Furthermore, participating States are encouraged to introduce appropriate changes to their legal framework in order to harmonize legislation and avoid redundancies in the existing information sharing channels. Yet another important clause concerns the commitment of the participating States to “voluntarily share information on their national organization; strategies; policies and programmes – including on co-operation between the public and the private sector, relevant to the security of and in the use of ICTs”.

The OSCE Secretariat’s Conflict Prevention Centre was designated as a dialogue platform for the participating States. Such unprecedented transparency in the sharing of information was bound to impact whether Russia and the Asian countries would choose to sign the decision. After all, 2013 was already brimming with disputes and conflicts around the globe, and some of the provisions of the document drew negative reactions from certain nations. Furthermore, there were no guarantees that the information sharing would be truly transparent; in fact, it was highly likely that some countries would end up taking a less transparent path.

¹¹¹ Decision №1202, PC.DEC/1202, “OSCE Confidence – Building Measures to reduce the risks of conflict stemming from the use of information and communication technologies”, 1092nd Plenary Meeting, 10 March 2016

Nevertheless, in March 2016, the OSCE added more CBMs to the existing document, including the expansion of inter-governmental sharing in various formats, at the regional and/or sub-regional levels. The additional CBMs were meant to “step up individual and collective efforts to address security of and in the use of information and communication technologies in a comprehensive and cross-dimensional manner in accordance with OSCE commitments”.¹¹² The updated document includes a special provision encouraging participating States “to invite and engage representatives of the private sector, academia, centres of excellence and civil society in such activities”, as well as a clause which obligates participating States to “conduct activities for officials and experts to support the facilitation of authorized and protected communication channels”. It concludes with a description of the procedure for meetings and activities held jointly with groups of UN national experts. It should be noted that these additional measures were put in place after the conflict in Ukraine and the ensuing sanctions against Russia and escalation of global tensions.

Terrorism and religious extremism has significantly changed the overall situation around conventional cyber threats such as crime, fraud or trolling. The new communication environment has enabled terrorists to maintain an influx of new fighters. Threats that were once distant, incomprehensible or virtual have become real. Since the early 2000s, terrorism has transformed considerably. Terrorist groups claim to be states and unite tens of thousands of qualified armed fighters under their flags. Not only has terrorist ideology changed – their basic approaches to the recruitment of fighters has as well. In his UN Security Council report, UN Secretary General António Guterres said that “ISIL may look for a rapprochement with Al-Qaida’s affiliates in the region.”¹¹³ Thus a kind of “reintegration”

¹¹² Initial set of OSCE confidence-building measures to reduce the risks of conflict stemming from the use of information and communication technologies, OSCE, 975th Plenary Meeting, Decision No 1106, 3 December 2013.

¹¹³ UN Security Council, Report number: S/2017/97, “Fourth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat”, 2 February 2017.

of terrorist groups is taking place, as well as a radical change in the recruitment strategy.

The rapid and significant expansion of new social media and Internet technologies has changed the information environment for terrorism and extremism. Recruitment efforts have become focused on the information space, with “expedition terrorism” numbers dwindling, and “grass-roots terrorism” growing in size. The Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan has identified several main trends in the evolution of terrorist threats.¹¹⁴

Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) develop their policies, goals and roles based on different understandings of the image of the enemy. For example, al-Qaeda traditionally formulates its mission as the protection of Muslims and positions itself as an international terrorist organization. ISIL, on the other hand, names the protection of Islam across the globe as its mission.

These organizations employ different methods and means of exploiting the information environment. Where al-Qaeda uses a strategy that primarily consists of “increasing the number of hard-to-predict terrorist acts aiming to force governments to impose tighter restrictions, thereby compromising declared democratic liberties and discrediting themselves in the eyes of the public”¹¹⁵, ISIL’s main focus is engaging foreign terrorist fighters, which it does by aggressively recruiting through websites, forums and a wide social media network.

Information policy is constantly evolving and constitutes a flexible system of dynamically changing objectives. ISIL’s defeat in Syria made the policy pivot back to the policy of engaging fighters in “terrorist acts at place of residence, which would be equated to

¹¹⁴ Karatayeva, L. R. “Terrorism and Domestic Policy Processes in Afghanistan. The Transition from War to Political Decisions Within the Context of Regional Activity”, report, Moscow, 11-04-2018.

¹¹⁵ Karatayeva, L. R. “Terrorism and Domestic Policy Processes in Afghanistan. The Transition from War to Political Decisions Within the Context of Regional Activity”, report, Moscow, 11-04-2018.

‘jihad’ in Syria”¹¹⁶. A new initiative was launched as early as 2016 which promulgates “lone wolf” tactics and forming a new paradigm of terrorist activity – one that does not involve special skills, large funding or complicated equipment.

Terrorist groups undoubtedly have a special interest in the Central Asian countries. In an analytical report entitled “The Threat of Religious Extremism in the Post-Soviet Space”, Moscow’s Centre for Integration Research claimed that the highest level of threat is concentrated in this region as a result of the population being exposed to extensive Islamic radicalization. According to the authors, Uzbekistan is a centre for powerful and aggressive groups, while Kyrgyzstan is strongly influenced by religious and political tendencies and the merging of extremist and criminal circles. Despite the lack of official statistics from Turkmenistan, experts estimate a very large proportion of jihadists in the country.¹¹⁷

Over its 25 years of independence, the Republic of Kazakhstan has far surpassed the other countries of the region in terms of economic development. Socio-economic motives for terrorist recruitment play a smaller role in Kazakhstan than in the other Central Asian countries. Instead, recruiters exploit Kazakhstan’s information environment, working with their target audiences via social media and various new means of communication.

The origins of security challenges and threats as well as the effective model for countering terrorist and violent extremist propaganda are determined by a number of significant factors that set Kazakhstan apart from the other Central Asian countries.

The Informatization of Kazakhstan and the Information Society

Kazakhstan began making active efforts to develop a system of e-governance in the early 2000s. In 2008, one stage in the

¹¹⁶ Karatayeva, L. R. “Terrorism and Domestic Policy Processes in Afghanistan. The Transition from War to Political Decisions Within the Context of Regional Activity”, report, Moscow, 11-04-2018.

¹¹⁷ Kazantsev, A. A. & Gusev L. Yu. “The Threat of Religious Extremism in the Post-Soviet Space”, Integration Research Centre, Moscow, 2017.

development of the information system was completed and public services began to be provided on a broad scale. The number of personal and corporate accounts at second-tier banks has been steadily increasing, and electronic payment cards are now the main method of payment among the country's residents. In 2011, a law was adopted on electronic money transactions.

Kazakhstan has made considerable progress in developing an information society and e-government, with digital public services now available. Public databases have been put into operation, and the e-government gateway has become a functional interface between state authorities. Further efforts are being made to create a gateway for law enforcement agencies. Kazakhstan's state structure is becoming increasingly digitalized, and the public has been learning how to utilize the amenities of an information-based society. Consequently, Kazakhstan is no longer able to remain isolated from the events taking place in the virtual world.

At the 2011 Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev said:

The time has come to introduce new concepts into international law: *e-frontiers* and *e-sovereignty*. We could also consider the possibility of creating a special body under the SCO that would perform the functions of Cyberpol. Separatism, terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking utilize the Internet as a means of infiltrating our countries and expanding across the globe. This network-based destructive force is another – fifth – general threat. The SCO member states must therefore urgently erect a strong bulwark against this threat. The United States has already demonstrated the use of such defensive measures in the form of the cybersecurity doctrine – a set of measures to counter cyber threats and cyberterrorism.¹¹⁸

President Nazarbayev's proposal to create a special body under the SCO was relevant and timely, as the cyberspace situation had changed again, and the leading global powers were introducing

¹¹⁸ Speech of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev at the 10th SCO Summit in Astana, 15 June 2011, www.akorda.kz/ru/events/segodnya-v-astane-glava-gosudarstva-nursultan-nazarbaev-prinyal-uchastie-v-yubileinom-sammite-shanhaiskoi-organizacii-sotrudnichestva.

special programmes and measures both to protect their own countries and to provide active countermeasures against the spread of terrorism and extremism. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization launched this initiative through joint efforts to combat the threats of terrorism and extremism in the field of information security. In 2007, a group of experts from the SCO member states began drafting the Agreement on Co-Operation in the Field of Information Security; this agreement was signed by the member states on 16 June 2009.¹¹⁹

Kazakhstan ratified the Agreement on Co-Operation in the Field of Information Security on 6 May 2010 during a plenary meeting of the Senate of Kazakhstan. The agreement provides for co-operation and joint efforts within the information space, structured in such a manner that:

these activities contribute to social and economic development and are compatible with objectives of maintaining international security and stability, consistent with universally recognized principles and regulations of international law, including the principles of peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts, non-use of force, non-interference in domestic affairs, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principle of regional co-operation and non-interference.

The document clearly delineates areas of co-operation in combating terrorism, extremism and crime. The agreement was ultimately ratified by Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and entered into force on 2 June 2011.

In order to reduce the level of information inequality within the population, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan issued a resolution on 13 October 2006, approving a programme to:

— create favourable conditions for the effective use of the Internet in the everyday lives of at least 20 percent of the population of Kazakhstan;

¹¹⁹ Agreement of the SCO Member States on Co-Operation in the Field of Information Security, 2009], <http://rus.sectsc.org/documents/>

— increase the social and economic significance of information resources in the life of the population of Kazakhstan.¹²⁰

The programme covered areas such as the creation of a regulatory legal environment, development of a computer literacy training system for the public, a reduction of Internet prices, the universal provision of affordable computer equipment, training for IT specialists, and fostering public interest in improving computer skills. The programme was effective – according to the Statistics Committee under the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the number of Internet users grew from 4 percent in 2005 to 31.6 percent in 2010, and in 2011, taking mobile Internet users into account, it reached 55.8 percent.¹²¹

Public support measures in the area of fostering an information society and the active development of e-government enabled the nation to transition into a “digital mode” of functioning and become information-based as early as 2011. Young adults (aged 15–25) were the driving factor for Internet usage growth.

As far as the spread of terrorism and radical extremism was concerned, the Republic of Kazakhstan was practically unscathed during that period. This was a product of the stable economic growth, the robust development of information technologies, and the multi-ethnic structure of the country.

By 2011, Kazakhstan had become a level-two information society boasting functioning public information systems and the provision of online services. More than half of the population was using the Internet, actively enjoying its benefits and taking more interest in new media and social networks.

¹²⁰ “On Approval of the 2007–2009 Programme for Reducing Information Inequality in the Republic of Kazakhstan”, Resolution No 995 of 13 October 2006 of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, zakon.uchet.kz/rus/docs/P060000995.

¹²¹ Statistics Committee under the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official statistics by sector, http://stat.gov.kz/faces/wcnav_externalId/homeNumbersInformationSociety?_afzLoop=1956611104720539#%40%3F_afzLoop%3D1956611104720539%26_adf.ctrl-state%3D18o4wms9rt_34.

Economic Policy and Social Development

Since gaining its independence, the Republic of Kazakhstan has always set itself apart from the bordering Central Asian nations in terms of economic and social development. The fact that Kazakhstan promotes the growth of the middle class, the development of small and medium businesses, effective crime prevention, and straightforward tax legislation has resulted in practically all businesses – with only minor exceptions – operating legally and paying taxes. The country’s population began using bank accounts and credit cards early on. Now people are using the Internet to buy goods and services, pay for utilities, participate in promotions, and lead active “online lives”. Kazakhstan have long stood out from their neighbours as being law-abiding and financially capable citizens.

Prior to 2011, terrorism and extremism in Kazakhstan were marginal in scope, and were quickly curbed by law enforcement agencies. In October 2006, a number of organizations were declared to be terrorist factions by the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan (following a petition from the Prosecutor General), and their activities within the country were prohibited by law. However, the number of individuals convicted for terrorism has been growing every year, and terrorists have begun recruiting Kazakh nationals through the Internet.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is attractive to terrorist organizations, but not in terms of the socio-economic situation. According to a report entitled “Terrorism in Kazakhstan: 2011–2012”, Kazakhstan finds itself in a unique situation where all of the acts of terrorist in the country have so far been committed in a confrontation between the state and the terrorist underground. Essentially, terrorist acts have never targeted civilians.¹²²

¹²² Shibutov, M. & Abramov, V. “Terrorism in Kazakhstan: 2011–2012” 27 November 2012, report based on materials from the “Security 2013: Trends, Risks, Scenarios” roundtable, <http://counter-terror.kz/ru/article/view?id=118>.

Kazakhstan's Hotline for Combating Illegal Content

In 2011, the Internet Association of Kazakhstan created a publicly available virtual receptionist website – a hotline of sorts – designed as a countermeasure against illegal content promoting extremism, terrorism, drug addiction, pornography or the cult of violence within Kazakhstani Internet jurisdiction. Users can go to the safekaznet.kz website to report illegal content; they are asked to provide a URL for the content being reported, as well as their name and e-mail address so that they can be notified about the status of the report. The user's IP address and identity are not relevant – only the illegal content being reported is of concern. The status as a non-profit organization does not impose any restrictions or liability on users. After receiving a report, an analyst examines and checks the data, and then either uses mediation mechanisms to resolve the issue, or forwards the report to law enforcement agencies if the content is potentially of a criminal nature. Access to illegal content can only be restricted by an authorized state body or by law enforcement agencies as part of investigative operations.

The hotline has become a catalyst for active co-operation with state authorities in combating illegal content. Countermeasures against cybercrime must be a joint effort between state authorities and non-governmental organizations. As part of the implementation of the Safe Internet project, collaborative arrangements have been made with organizations around the world, such as the INHOPE global network of hotlines, the Internet Watch Foundation in the United Kingdom, and the ROCIT Internet Technology Centre. Cyberspace is not limited to the physical boundaries of a given country, so keeping it secure requires the coordinated efforts of various countries and organizations. The Kazakhstani hotline became a member of the INHOPE Foundation and has been part of the global network of hotlines since 2013. As of June 2018, the INHOPE Foundation had 45 members from 40 countries.

INHOPE Foundation membership requires an official agreement with national law enforcement agencies, so in February

2014, a memorandum of co-operation was signed by the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Internet Association of Kazakhstan, along with a co-operation protocol governing the operational arrangements of the hotline in combatting illegal content on the Internet. Corresponding memorandums and agreements were signed with counterpart hotlines in the EAEU countries. The hotline is funded by the non-governmental organization, as well as by sponsorships and donations from the Internet community.

The hotline receives reports from both inside and outside Kazakhstan. In 2017, a total of 3,250 reports were submitted (Figure 1), which is a significant increase from the 258 reports in 2011. Of note is that during its first year of operation, the hotline only received reports regarding child pornography, but over the course of the next two years, users started reporting cyber fraud, terrorist and extremist propaganda, cult of violence, trolling and verbal abuse as well. As a result, the original name – Hotline for Combating Child Pornography – was replaced by the current name.

The significant spike in reports that occurred in late 2014 was due to the hotline becoming a member of the INHOPE Foundation, as well as a large-scale advertising campaign targeted at Kazakhstani Internet users. During these years, state authorities provided considerable assistance to the hotline. For instance, the staff was increased to six people, with two analysts examining and processing incoming reports. According to the protocol for co-operation signed with the General Prosecutor's Office, content that includes child pornography or illegal activities must be handed over to law enforcement authorities. Other reports can be processed in-office, involving the organization's management if there is a need for a mediator.

The increase in the number of reports in 2017 to 3,250 was a result of the 2016 terrorist attacks in Aktobe and Almaty, after which users became more active in reporting suspicious links and information.

Total number of reports, 2011-2017

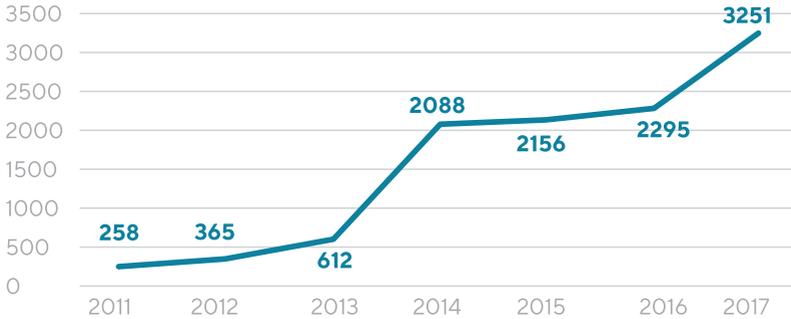


Figure 1. Total number of reports received by the hotline in 2011-2017

The hotline receives the following categories of reports from users:

- Online abuse and bullying;
- Internet fraud;
- Racism, ethnic chauvinism, xenophobia;
- Child abuse (child sex abuse materials – CSAM);
- Terrorist and extremist propaganda;
- Copyright infringement;
- Defamation, intrusion of privacy;
- Suicide.

Additional report categories are created as needed, and a category does not have to be specified when submitting a report. The experience of international counterparts demonstrates that report categories are created as certain reports emerge and increase in number. If no category is applicable, then isolated reports are classified as “Other”.

The reports received by the hotline show that the online situation has changed radically over the past five years. Internet users have begun to notice content that could be considered illegal. Prior to 2014, the reports of extremist and terrorist propaganda received by the hotline were so few in number that they were placed in one category: “Racism, ethnic chauvinism, xenophobia”. However, a

new category (“Terrorist and extremist propaganda”) was created in 2014 which accounted for 17.9 percent of all reports received in the first year alone, and 24.6 percent in 2017. This reflects the increase in terrorist-related content online.

Table 1 presents a breakdown of reports by category. The “Copyright infringement” and “Suicide” categories were added in 2014 and 2015, respectively. Reports in the “Suicide” category showed a sharp surge due to the “Blue Whale Challenge” situation.

Table 1. Reports by category, 2011–2017

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1 Online abuse and bullying	32,56 %	42,47 %	51,63 %	42,19 %	40,07 %	30,41 %	27,93 %
2 Internet fraud	21,71 %	13,97 %	24,35 %	4,41 %	5,84 %	6,84 %	7,47 %
3 Racism, ethnic chauvinism, xenophobia	16,28 %	29,32 %	15,03 %	32,18 %	29,27 %	28,935	26,55 %
4 CSAM	22,87 %	6,30 %	6,05 %	0,48 %	0,28 %	0,35 %	0,25 %
5 Terrorist and extremist propaganda	0,00	0,00	0,00	17,91 %	21,34 %	23,01 %	24,64 %
6 Defamation, intrusion of privacy	6,59 %	7,95 %	2,94 %	2,16 %	1,72 %	8,10 %	12,09 %
7 Copyright infringement	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,67 %	0,56 %	1,13 %	0,95 %
8 Suicide	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,93 %	1,22 %	0,12 %
	258	365	612	2088	2156	2295	3251

Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of the body of reports by category, showing yearly changes in structure, including a very distinct spike in the “Terrorist and extremist propaganda” category in 2017 to 24.64 percent. Meanwhile, the number of reports in the CSAM category has decreased to just a handful every year. It should be noted that CSAM reports come from INHOPE, proving once again that Kazakhstani Internet users and the population at large are incapable of producing and distributing content featuring child sexual abuse – all child pornography reports concern cases where it is downloaded from abroad, intended for foreign users.

Overall statistics on user reports are available on the INHOPE website (www.inhope.org) and published by national organizations as needed.

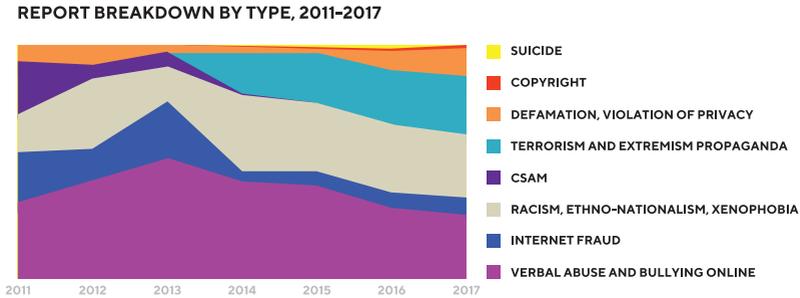


Figure 2. Structure of hotline reports by category, 2011–2017

The hotline’s activities demonstrate the importance and relevance of the role played by this organization in providing timely support and raising awareness of the challenges and threats originating on the Internet. Non-profit methods of raising public awareness, providing consultation to Internet users and participating in public events demonstrate the effectiveness of the hotline. The website enables Internet users to report illegal activity online, and is the only non-governmental hotline of its type that promptly responds to user reports.

The nature of the reports reflects the current situation and makes it possible to forecast new developments in the Kazakhstani information space. Analysis of the reports indicates that terrorist organization recruiters have become more active on social media. They primarily use Russian networks to connect with both individual members and active recruiters.

Major contributing factors in terrorist recruitment are Islamization in the country, the socio-economic situation, and the opportunity to exert moral influence on the target audience. The current situation in the Kazakhstani information space is such that the primary target audience for terrorist organizations is “ripe” for propaganda influences, for the reasons listed below.

A significant number of Internet users only know one language – Kazakh. Active promotion of the Kazakh language on the Internet over the past 6–7 years has contributed to the fact that today there are over 2.5 million people who do not know any other language.

Millions of affluent young Internet users are Muslim, making it much easier for terrorist recruiters to manipulate them. As mentioned earlier, financial motives are less prominent in Kazakhstan than in the other republics of the region.

The unfilled void in the Kazakhstani information space is facilitating terrorist efforts. For instance, the fact that show business on the Internet is popular among young Kazakhs is not an indicator of actual demand, but only of the absence of other types of content. Young people need a sufficient amount of diverse content in order to occupy their minds and fill their time. The lack of Internet content offered in the state language (Kazakh) is readily apparent and essentially leaves the Kazakh-speaking audience to its own devices against the challenges of our age.

In recent years, the birth rate in Kazakhstan has been increasing rapidly, without any additional incentive on the part of the state. The country is already facing shortages of secondary school places. According to the Statistics Committee, the country had over 80,000 university graduates in 2017. The economic situation in Kazakhstan is such that the number of jobs is decreasing at an alarming rate, and no incentives are being implemented for small and medium businesses to create more jobs for current and future graduates of higher education institutions.

The aforementioned factors – large audience, religion, lack of content and jobs – are the drivers of terrorist activity. As a country that is keeping pace with the digital world, Kazakhstan should prioritize the challenges of the new era. In recent years, Kazakhstani state authorities have significantly enhanced the legislative framework to counter terrorist threats. New definitions and criminal liabilities have been introduced, security has been improved in public places, anti-propaganda strategies have been put in place at correctional facilities, the tactics and structure of counter-terrorism activities

have changed and become more flexible – the list of changes in the Kazakhstani information space goes on.

Unfortunately, the reality is such that the bloc affiliations (NATO, the SCO, the CSTO, etc.) that countries belong to pre-determine their security models, usually only taking into account the military-political interest of the blocs. Co-operation in counter-terrorism and counter-extremism continues in parallel, and without any coordinated efforts. Further development and joint efforts are required under collective confidence-building measures among nations to build a common counter-terrorism framework based on the global platforms of the UN and the OSCE. The cross-border nature of cybercrimes related to terrorism and extremism poses not only a national threat, but also a global one. Prompt and effective countermeasures are only possible through international co-operation. There is no other way.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is now facing new challenges of domestic origin. Besides the obvious terrorist threats, internal domestic threats have emerged, primed to synergize with the external ones. We should make immediate efforts to reformat our approach to Internet users and focus on working with the young people who only speak Kazakh. Efforts should also be made to develop the work in a systemic fashion, concurrently covering all population groups and the state.

Introduce special state support measures for non-profit organizations directly involved in developing countermeasures against terrorist propaganda aimed at youth.

Implement an entire array of organized practical measures, including youth training (seminars, conferences, training, etc.) and establishing centres engaged in supporting small and medium businesses and promoting the creation of new jobs.

Establish a national programme supporting the efforts of non-profit organizations directly engaged in combating terrorism-related threats.

Information Terrorism Strategies: Challenges for Counter-Terrorism Actions

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The development of the Internet and expansion of its social base have allowed terrorists to fully use the asymmetric capabilities of information weapons in order to level the power and resource asymmetries characteristic of real space. Thus, the positive results of fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq and Syria did not lead to the complete destruction of the structure, and ISIL has now been continued in the form of Caliphate 2.0. Resurrecting al-Qaeda using the capabilities of communication protected by end-to-end encryption technology applies the franchise format and gradually activates its cells in a number of regions. Information technologies make it possible to solve the problem of financing terrorist organizations, almost without going beyond the limits of legally permissible mechanisms. The Internet has become the main incubator of terrorism. In addition, military and civilian infrastructure are increasingly dependent on information technology, so the risk of terrorists using cyber weapons is also growing.

Overview of Expert Opinions

The September 11 attacks evoked a desire to put an end to terrorism by physically destroying terrorist groups. At the same time, the increased terrorist presence in the information space necessitated a search for mechanisms to counter information. As Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter noted in “The Strategy of Terrorism”, the perception of the process of countering terrorism only in the context of understanding it as a “war on terrorism” is not correct.¹²³ They point out that terrorists are too weak to directly influence governments and force them to make policy changes, so

¹²³ Kydd, A. H. & Walter, B. F. “The Strategies of Terrorism”, *Quarterly Journal: International Security*, Vol 31, No 1, Summer 2006, pp. 49-80.

they try to achieve their goals by changing the perception of the target audience. According to the authors, the main focus in the process of countering terrorism should not be on the “war on terrorism”, but on collecting and analysing information about the conditions and environments of terrorist activity.

A similar approach based on the perception of terrorism through the prism of “asymmetric war” is put forth by Bruce Hoffman: ... terrorism’s success is best measured not by the accepted metrics of conventional warfare – number of enemy killed in battle, amount of military assets destroyed, or geographical territory seized – but rather by its ability to attract attention to the terrorists and their cause and by the psychological impact and deleterious effects that terrorists hope to exert over their target audience(s).¹²⁴

Gabriel Weimann, professor of communications at the University of Haifa, has suggested evaluating the behaviour of terrorists in the information space in the context of theatre drama.¹²⁵

With people increasingly using the Internet in their everyday lives, assessing the behaviour of terrorists in cyberspace has become more pertinent. Jarret Brachman has written about the strategic importance of new technologies for promoting the ideology of terrorism. In “High-Tech Terror: Al-Qaeda’s Use of New Technology”, Brachman notes that “by leveraging new information and communication technologies, al-Qaeda has transformed itself into an organic social movement, making its virulent ideology accessible to anyone with a computer.”¹²⁶

In “Cyberspace as a New Arena for Terroristic Propaganda: An Updated Examination”, Elizabeth Minei and Jonathan Matusitz analyse the role of propaganda use in cyberterrorism, concluding

¹²⁴ Hoffman, B. “A Form of Psychological Warfare”, *Countering the Terrorist Mentality*, eJournal USA, Vol 12, No 5, 2008, p. 8.

¹²⁵ Вайманн, Г. «Теракт как «театральная постановка» на сцене СМИ». *Террористическая ментальность. Контрмеры*. eJournal USA. Т.12, №5, 2008, с. 30 [Weimann, G. “Mass-Media Theater”, *Countering the Terrorist Mentality*, eJournal USA, Vol 12, No 5, 2008, p. 30].

¹²⁶ Brachman, J. “High-Tech Terror: Al-Qaeda’s Use of New Technology”, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol 30:2, Summer 2006, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a458499.pdf>.

that the widespread use of semiotic gestures (such as images and video content) has become a characteristic feature of modern terrorist propaganda. The authors add that “in many cases, this form of propaganda is the primary means of communication for various cyberterrorist groups to convey their intents.”¹²⁷

Henfried Münkler has reasoned that the desire among terrorists to use the information space as much as possible in order to level the power asymmetry that has been present in real space for a long time can be explained by the fact that terrorists do not have a “political body”.¹²⁸ This lack of a “political body” means that terrorists do not have a territory with a physical infrastructure, an immobile (for the most part) population, and other objects that could be given a symmetrical strike. This lack of a “political body” also diminishes the capability of terrorist organizations to conduct full-scale military operations against government forces. The situation changed in the summer of 2014, when ISIL fighters announced the establishment of their “Caliphate”,¹²⁹ and required a change of view on the nature of the information policies of terrorist organizations.

We are currently seeing a wide range of studies devoted to the transformation of international terrorism at the present stage, the behaviour patterns of global terrorist groups in specific regions, and the methods of propaganda and engagement that they use. Most of the studies focus on the information behaviour of two terrorist organizations: Al-Qaeda and ISIL. After the defeat of ISIL in Syria and the “return” of al-Qaeda, the number of studies featuring comparative analyses of the strategies of these organizations has increased. Of note is “Al Qaeda v ISIS: Ideology & Strategy”, where Cameron Glenn provides a comparative analysis of the views that al-Qaeda and ISIL have towards the West, religious minorities,

¹²⁷ Minei, E. & Matusitz, J. “Cyberspace as a new arena for terroristic propaganda: an updated examination”, *US National Library of Medicine*, 9 August 2012, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3510409/>.

¹²⁸ Мюнклер, Х. «Терроризм как стратегия коммуникации». *Internationale Politik* (Berlin, русская версия). № 12, 2001, с. 19-30 [Münkler, H. “Terrorism as a Communication Strategy”, *Internationale Politik* (Berlin, Russian version), No 12, 2001, pp. 19-30].

¹²⁹ “ISIS Declares Establishment of ‘Caliphate’, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the Leader of World’s Muslims”, *India TV*, 29 June 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV1dC8fq6Sc>.

violence, and the use of media.¹³⁰ The work presented below is an attempt to systematize the approaches that al-Qaeda and ISIL have taken to promote their ideology in the post-2011 era.

Modern Trends in International Terrorism: Key Factors and Scenarios

In 2017–2018, the landscape of terrorist activity in the world was reformatted. The qualitative and quantitative composition of terrorist organizations and their geographical location changed, and their methods of terrorist activity were transformed.

Al-Qaeda regained its status as the leader of the international terrorist movement, and this became a significant factor affecting global security. Al-Qaeda used the Arab Spring and the demise of ISIL (since death of Osama bin Laden in 2011) to facilitate its own recovery. As Bruce Hoffman explained in his expert brief “Al-Qaeda’s Resurrection”, the organization’s success was the result of three strategic moves.¹³¹

The first strategic move “was to strengthen the decentralized franchise approach that has facilitated the movement’s survival.”¹³² The leaders and representatives of al-Qaeda franchises were gradually integrated into the movement’s consultative and decision-making processes. The ability to use end-to-end encryption technology ensures unhindered and secure communications. And the ability to use the specific interests of geographically diverse franchises in its global strategy has produced significant results for al-Qaeda, with territorial cells much more interested in getting involved in the general movement.

The second strategic move was Ayman al-Zawahiri’s 2013 order prohibiting terrorist attacks on foreign soil (in Western countries) which might result in the death of peaceful Muslims. The exceptions

¹³⁰ Glenn, C. “Al Qaeda v ISIS: Ideology & Strategy”, Wilson Center, 28 September 2015, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/al-qaeda-v-isis-ideology-strategy>.

¹³¹ Hoffman, B. “Al-Qaeda’s Resurrection”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/al-qaedas-resurrection>.

¹³² *Ibid.*

to this were the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris (2015) and the Saint Petersburg Metro bombing (2017). Since the death of innocent Muslims had always been one of the foundations of counter-terrorist tactics aimed against the movement, this new prohibition decreased the effectiveness of counter-terrorist efforts and also allowed al-Qaeda “to present itself through social media, paradoxically, as ‘moderate extremists,’ ostensibly more palatable than ISIS.”¹³³

The third strategic move was a result of the second – the prohibition of terrorist attacks brought al-Qaeda into the “grey zone” and redirected counter-terrorist efforts to ISIL; this, in turn, gave al-Qaeda the room to recover.

According to Bruce Hoffman, al-Qaeda currently has a network of more than two dozen franchises, with an estimated 10,000–20,000 fighters in Syria, 4,000 in Yemen, 7,000–9,000 in Somalia, 5,000 in Libya, 4,000 in the other countries in the Maghreb and Sahel, 1,000 in Egypt, 800 in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, 300 in Bangladesh and Myanmar, and 100 in Russia.¹³⁴ In a 2017 interview, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation Nikolai Patrushev said: The terrorist ringleaders, realizing that they are in danger of being destructed in the zones where they previously dominated, have begun to change their tactics. Emphasis is being placed on the creation of autonomous undercover terrorist cells in various countries around the world and the wide dissemination of radical ideology. Only al-Qaeda, according to various estimates, has them in more than 80 countries around the world, including the United States and Canada.¹³⁵

Today, al-Qaeda is inferior to ISIL in two aspects. The first is the ability to carry out impressive terrorist attacks in Western countries (although the attacks in Paris and Saint Petersburg may suggest otherwise). The second is the strength of the brand, since al-Qaeda’s

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ «Николай Патрушев: склонность России к агрессии — это опасный миф», Еженедельник Аргументы и Факты, № 52 27/12/2017 [“Nikolai Patrushev: Russia’s Propensity for Aggression is a Dangerous Myth”, *Argumenty i Fauty* No 52, 27 December 2017], http://www.aif.ru/politics/russia/nikolay_patrushev_sklonnost_rossii_k_agressii_-_eto_opasnyy_mif .

reputation took a serious hit when it entered the aforementioned “grey zone”. This shortcoming will be remedied by the introduction of new al-Qaeda figures in the information space. Despite Ayman al-Zawahiri’s obvious strategic successes, he is considered a non-charismatic leader, and this could hinder the further growth of al-Qaeda’s popularity.

In this context, the return of Hamza bin Laden to the media space is of interest. Since early 2017, he has regularly appeared in al-Qaeda propaganda videos and has made statements confirming his readiness to follow in his father’s footsteps.¹³⁶ It is hard to estimate the probability of al-Qaeda changing its leader in the near future, but Hamza bin Laden’s immediate relation to the former leader of the movement makes him a figure symbolizing continuity among the ranks of jihadists. Furthermore, his charisma and personal history of “martyrdom” make Hamza bin Laden an excellent candidate to become the new face of al-Qaeda.

In addition to al-Qaeda’s “return”, one of the factors determining the current terrorism threat is the process of ISIL’s transformation. Experts suggest that terrorist groups affiliated with ISIL will move from Syria to the zones controlled by its foreign affiliates. The Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and Afghanistan have already become host territories. It is also likely that the leadership of ISIL will resort to the tactics of the 2000s – in particular, the “desert approach”, which involves hiding some of the terrorists in a desert in Iraq.¹³⁷

Three scenarios stand out in the general array of assumptions – the first two scenarios are a consolidated version of expert assessments, while the third was officially announced in a report of UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

¹³⁶ Dearden, L. “Osama bin Laden’s Son Calls for Terrorists to Avenge his Father’s Death”, *Independent*, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/osama-bin-laden-son-revenge-terror-attacks-calls-hamza-avenge-fathers-dead-al-qaeda-resurgence-a8044571.html>.

¹³⁷ Серенко, А. «Халифат при смерти, терроризм не сдаётся. Чего ждать миру после разгрома ИГ», *Коммерсантъ*, 28.08.2017 [Serenko, A. “Caliphate Is Close to Death, Terrorism Is Not Giving Up. What the World Should Expect After the Defeat of the IS”, *Kommersant*, 28 August 2017], <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3391474>.

The first scenario foresees a situation where the return of the ISIL to Syria will be welcomed by the Sunni population, which, as expected by terrorists, will face reprisals from the Kurds and Shiites. Experts feel that ISIL will try to recreate the situation of 2013 by destabilizing the situation in Iraq.¹³⁸

The second scenario involves terrorists exploiting the theory of the “death of the Caliphate” at the hands of “infidels”, and using this myth and the “canonization of martyrs” to uphold and promote ISIL ideology. According to this scenario, we can expect the emergence of a new major player in the field of terrorism that will position itself as ISIL’s heir.

The third scenario foresees the reintegration of ISIL and al-Qaeda as a result of the weakened positions of both of these groups in a number of regions.¹³⁹ According to the report, there are no serious conflicts between these groups, and, as practice has shown, the fighters can easily move from one group to another, which greatly facilitates the reunification process. In practical terms, it is expected that both organizations “will focus primarily on a smaller and more motivated group of individuals willing to fight or conduct attacks.”¹⁴⁰

Obviously, each of the above scenarios has both strengths and weaknesses. In the first scenario, the future of ISIL leaders is unclear. There are regular reports in the information space on the arrest or liquidation of high-ranking ISIL “officials”. One of the key issues is the fate of ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The media periodically report about his death or arrest, but there is no exact information. Though al-Baghdadi is presumed to be alive, “no public message has been heard from the group’s senior leadership since

¹³⁸ «Несмотря на ослабление ИГИЛ, борьба с террористами продолжается», *Деловой аналитический украинский портал Эксперт*, 16 Июля 2018 [“Despite the Weakening of ISIL, the Fight Against Terrorists Continues”, *Expert. Ukrainian business portal*, 16 July 2018], <http://expert.in.ua/mezhdunarodnaya-analitika/0/463-nesmotrya-na-oslablenie--borba-s-igil->.

¹³⁹ «Шестой доклад Генерального секретаря об угрозе, создаваемой ИГИЛ (ДАИШ) для международного мира и безопасности, и о масштабах усилий Организации Объединенных Наций по оказанию поддержки государствам-членам в борьбе с этой угрозой», Совет безопасности. Организация Объединенных Наций, Январь, 2018 [Sixth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, UN Security Council, January 2018], <https://undocs.org/ru/S/2018/80>.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

September 2017.”¹⁴¹ However, with ISIL’s loss of vertical links with individual groups and their geographical dispersion, as well as its losses in leadership, the likelihood of the first scenario playing out in the foreseeable future is remote.

The weak spot in the second scenario is the lack of a resource base to maintain and preserve the basic tenets of ISIL ideology. According to the UN, “ISIL’s revenues have fallen by more than 90 per cent since 2015.”¹⁴²

The Munasir networks and fighters returning to their homeland will probably become the main mechanism for conveying ISIL values. The aura of belonging to the “big jihad” and using the dogma of “victimhood” will give returning fighters the authority they need among potential followers from sleeper cells, and allow them to pursue their expected goal of creating a network of sleeper cells. Meanwhile, groups of fighters who continue on in ISIL *wilayats* (Afghanistan, Sinai, Gaza, etc.) will probably change their narratives in an attempt to adapt to new conditions.

In the case of fighters who relocated to Afghanistan and constantly compete with the Taliban movement, partition of ISIL ideology can be considered in the context of identity background. In addition, stability in the struggle for spheres of influence in Afghanistan is highly dependent on the support of local population, so ISIL fighters should offer some narratives –based on ISIL ideology – that motivate the local population to contribute. Another latent carrier of ISIL ideology is the next generation of jihadists – first and foremost, children of fighters who were brought up by the organization in the territories under their control.

The strength of the second scenario is the fact that ISIL initially focused not so much on an information war, but on a war of narratives. As a significant share of the narratives generated by

¹⁴¹ Comerford, M. “Al-Qaeda’s Long Game”, *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 3 April 2018, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/al-qaedas-long-game>.

¹⁴² Sixth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, UN Security Council, Report number: S/2018/80, 31 January 2018, <https://undocs.org/ru/S/2018/80>.

ISIL have a religious background (irrational nature), it is logical to assume that the promoted narratives have achieved their targets and “settled down” in the minds of some citizens who had previously been subjected to their propaganda.

As for the third scenario, it seems unlikely that any meaningful agreement will be reached between the leaders of the organizations due to their significant ideological differences. It is not only about different approaches to the timeframe for construction of the caliphate. The organizations simply view their missions and perceive the enemy differently.

Al-Qaida and ISIL Information Strategies

Al-Qaida and ISIL are not the only major terrorist organizations, but they are the only ones that managed to create their own original information strategies; the implementation of these strategies has transformed the entire landscape of terrorist activities. Given the fact that ISIL grew out of al-Qaida, it seems logical to have common base points in the ideological foundations of both organizations. Indeed, both have built their ideological models based on the Salafi doctrine, supplementing its postulates with their own interpretation of takfiri and jihad. However, the organizations have differences in their ideological approaches and methods, as can be seen in how they position themselves in relation to the *ummah* and how they view their mission. For example, al-Qaida and ISIL have different criteria for charging someone with *kufir*, and this has led to the formation of different images of the enemy.

Despite the fact that jihadism is the cornerstone of the ideology of both organizations, they set different limits for what is permissible in jihad. How the organizations treat the terrorist attacks that have been committed is emblematic. Al-Qaida pays more attention than ISIL does to maintaining the appearance of complying with theological trends. For example, after the September 11 attacks, al-Qaida focused the accompanying information campaign on maintaining the perception of a successful attack on symbols of American trade

and financial power, carefully sidestepping the death of over 3,000 civilians, including Muslims. Meanwhile, ISIL, applying death penalty by burning, not only did not make attempts to find excuses for the actions condemned by Islam, but also actively broadcasted scenes of executions in the global information space.¹⁴³

The different approaches to justifying their actions also indicate that the organizations position themselves differently. While al-Qaeda presents itself in the information space as the global jihad leader, ISIL tends to measure itself in categories of power, seeing itself not only as the only legitimate power over the *ummah*, but also narrowing the *ummah* down to the confines of its supporters. This thesis can be confirmed by ISIL's reaction to criticism from Muslim theologians regarding violation of the procedure for the creation of the caliphate and the proclamation of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as caliph. ISIL had established the caliphate without the approval of all Muslims, which was deemed by theologians as a manifestation of *fitnah*. ISIL responded with the following logic: "Only we are Muslims, and we decide who will be the caliph. We have chosen him, and whoever denies his power is not a Muslim."¹⁴⁴

Another component of ISIL's ideology is the theory of Ba'athism in its late, post-Aflaq interpretation, which is quite natural, given the role of Ba'athist generals in the development of the organization.¹⁴⁵ Combined with the takfiri jihadist ideology, Ba'athism allowed ISIL to successfully exploit – at the very first stages of outreach activities – both the supranational component, where the *ummah* stands above racial and ethnic identities, and the national component, which provides for historical succession and the idea of national rebirth.

¹⁴³ Shackle, S. "What is Salafi Jihadism?" *New Humanist*, 19 September 2016, <https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/5087/what-is-salafi-jihadi> m.

¹⁴⁴ Султан Мухаммад Са'ад Абубакр и др. «Открытое письмо 126 ученых исламского мира, адресованное лидеру ИГИШ», *AzanKZ*, 09.12.2014 [Sultan Muhammad Sa'ad Ababakr et al. "Open Letter from 126 Scholars of the Islamic World Addressed to the Leader of ISIL", *AzanKZ*, 9 December 2014], <https://azan.kz/maqalat/read/otkryitoe-pismo-126-ucheniyih-Islamskogo-mira-adresovannoe-lideru-6900>.

¹⁴⁵ Barrett, R. "The Islamic State", *The Soufan Group*, November 2014, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TSG-The-Islamic-State-Nov14.pdf>

Chronologically, al-Qaeda was the first terrorist organization to announce that it had its own information strategy, symbolically naming it “Death by a thousand cuts”. This is a reference to a form of execution once used in China, where body parts were cut off over an extended period of time, ultimately leading to death. Al-Qaeda used this name to emphasize that the organization intended to wage a long war against the countries of the West, aimed at the gradual “exsanguination” of democratic regimes.¹⁴⁶

The terrorists expected the strategy to produce consequences in both the political and the economic spheres, and as a result – in the social sphere as well. In the political sphere, it was expected that the governments of democratic countries would be forced to cut back on guaranteed political rights and freedoms in response to the sporadic and unpredictable attacks. The terrorists felt that this response would show the “true essence of democracy”. In the economic sphere, they assumed that law enforcement expenditures would increase. Al-Qaeda’s strategy noted: “You don’t need a big blow to bring the West to its knees ... We will force our enemies to create additional, costly security mechanisms and procedures. The already unstable economy will not be able to bear the additional burden.”¹⁴⁷ Finally, the consequences in the political and economic spheres, combined with the atmosphere of fear generated by the inability to predict where and when a terrorist attack will take place, would then ensure the desired effect in the social sphere as well.

The main elements of al-Qaeda’s strategy are the transitioning of terrorist activity into the information space and the “deprofessionalization” of terrorists. Improved monitoring capabilities have made it easier to detect terrorist training camps located in hard-to-reach places, so al-Qaeda’s physical

¹⁴⁶ Hoffman, B. “Al Qaeda Has a Strategy. We Need a Better One”, *Twin Cities*. Pioneer Press, 16 January 2010, <https://www.twincities.com/2010/01/16/bruce-hoffman-al-Qaeda-has-a-strategy-we-need-a-better-one/>.

¹⁴⁷ Смолин, А. «Тысяча ножей индивидуального террора в спину правому обществу», Российское агентство правовой и судебной информации, 20.08.2011 [Smolin, A. “A Thousand Knives of Individual Terror in the Back of a Law-Governed Society”, *Russian Agency for Legal and Court Information*, 20 August 2011], http://www.rapsinews.ru/international_publication/20110820/254719179.html.

infrastructure has become more vulnerable. In an effort to counter this vulnerability, Ayman al-Zawahiri has resorted to “sower tactics” for training terrorists. The global information space has become replete with calls for small-scale jihad against “infidels”, as well as methodological guidelines for manufacturing explosive devices and carrying out terrorist attacks. As a result, the amount of “expeditionary terrorism¹⁴⁸” has decreased, while “home-grown terrorism” has spread. However, the methods for committing acts of terrorism have remained largely the same, with a focus on explosions in crowded places.

Al-Qaeda is unique in that it does not have a single control centre with the presence of an inspirational figure. The leaders of al-Qaeda – first Osama bin Laden, and then Ayman al-Zawahiri – had long been the source of inspiration. They were also the main ideologists and generators of propaganda. From a technical point of view, al-Qaeda’s propaganda evolved gradually, using new opportunities in the global media space. Thus, in the early stages, the propaganda seemed rather primitive and was limited to speeches made by the leaders of the organization, distributed as printed material or video recordings. According to Dr Marcin Styszynski, this lack of sophistication was due to difficult logistical conditions.¹⁴⁹ As a rule, the speeches made by al-Qaeda’s leaders had the format of liturgical sermons, which traditionally consist of two parts. The first part involved short prayers and reciting verses from the Quran. The second part contained a conceptual core in the form of reflections on the social problems generated by the West, and calls for a holy war to combat them. These sermons are characterized by the use of rhetoric containing religious and historical symbols;¹⁵⁰ they also used non-verbal mechanisms, such as the speaker’s clothes, gestures, facial expressions and physical location.

¹⁴⁸ This term is understood by the author as the antithesis of home-grown terrorism or by analogy with the terms “expeditionary army” or “expeditionary force.”

¹⁴⁹ Стышинский, М. «Джихадистская пропаганда в Интернете и социальных медиа», Политическая лингвистика №5, 2016, с. 158-164 [Styszynski, M. “Jihadist Propaganda in the Internet and Social Media”, *Political Linguistics No 5*, 2016, pp. 158-164.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Over the years, propaganda mechanisms have expanded through the use of the Internet. The range of propaganda material itself has also expanded. Websites such as Ansar al-mujahidun, Shabakat al-jihad al-alamiyi and Shabakat ash-shumukh al-islamiyya, as well as media centres such as as-Sahab, Furqan, al-Fajr and Kataib, have filled cyberspace with often explicit video material about terrorist attacks. Since 2011, “educational” propaganda has become more prominent, providing methodological recommendations and instructions for preparing and executing terrorist attacks. *Inspire* magazine also plays a major role in al-Qaeda’s ideological propaganda. The lack of absolute certainty that al-Qaeda owns the magazine is not even important, since the mere suggestion that the magazine is affiliated with al-Qaeda already works in the organization’s favour.

It is hard to say what the information strategy of the revived al-Qaeda will look like. On the one hand, it is likely that al-Qaeda will take ISIL’s experience in the information space into account and expand the range of mechanisms used. On the other hand, the network nature of the organization creates certain difficulties in identifying small terrorist organizations that position themselves as al-Qaeda units. In this case, the logical question is whether they are really a part of al-Qaeda, or if they are declaring this to achieve their own goals. In addition, the innovation introduced by ISIL of involving ordinary terrorist fighters in the propaganda process has proven to be highly efficient and has become widespread as a result. This means that the main body of information and propaganda material that is currently available in the information space is generated by active fighters independently. Since al-Qaeda uses a franchise model, it can be assumed that the generated content will be geographically localized and will reflect local practices in terms of appearance and placement techniques.

It is obvious that al-Qaeda’s return to the public space is not of an “explosive nature”, as was the case with ISIL. However, al-Qaeda’s leader published six speeches in the first half of 2018 alone. According to Milo Comerford, a senior analyst at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, al-Zawahiri’s rhetoric has not undergone

any fundamental changes – his messages refer to “a golden age when the movement focused on attacking the ‘first enemy of the Muslims’ rather than engaging in sectarian factionalism in the Middle East.”¹⁵¹

Al-Qaeda also uses modesty to create a positive image, with its affiliates “twice as likely to depict themselves as underdogs in their propaganda as ISIS was.”¹⁵² This approach may form a perception among the target audience that al-Qaeda is a more “mature” structure that adequately assesses the situation. Furthermore, the concept of a “distant enemy” adopted by al-Qaeda is in sharp contrast to the extreme cruelty used by ISIL, even with its own supporters, and al-Qaeda has benefited from its moderate approach to *fasiqs*. Some may be under the false impression that al-Qaeda is a more properly oriented organization that does not encourage looking for enemies within their inner circle, but, on the contrary, gives everyone a chance and encourages fighting the people who destroyed al-Baghdadi’s caliphate.

Meanwhile, the information strategy developed by ISIL fundamentally differs from anything that international terrorism has even been able to offer. ISIL gave the global terrorist movement a new paradigm of activity, proposing both a new image of the enemy, and a new role for the terrorists themselves. ISIL introduced the concept of the “close enemy”, in the form of *kafirs*. According to ISIL, a *kafir* is not only an apostate who has openly declared his refusal of faith, but also any Muslim suspected of *kufr*. Furthermore, ISIL requires Muslims to prove their faith, which is in violation of the practices adopted by Islam. In the eyes of ISIL supporters, anyone who refuses to recognize a person charged with *kufr* as a *kafir* becomes a *kafir* himself and is subject to punishment. This means that virtually anyone – including the family of the terrorists themselves – can become the enemy. Another innovation in ISIL’s ideology was the practice of declaring *takfir* on large groups of people, including entire nations, which is also considered unacceptable in Islam.

¹⁵¹ Comerford, M. “Al-Qaeda’s Long Game”, *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, 3 April 2018, <https://institute.global/insight/co-existence/al-qaedas-long-game>.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

The implementation of ISIL's information policy can be divided into three stages: formation of the organization, proclamation of the caliphate as an "established state", and the post-caliphate stage that began after ISIL lost its positions and territories in Syria and Iraq.

During the first stage, the methods used by al-Qaeda were still followed. Thus, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's first public speech had clear similarities to the liturgical sermons of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri in the form of a verbal address with non-verbal components. The tasks that ISIL faced during the first stage also defined its tactical approaches to propaganda activities. The main goal of the first stage was to attract as many supporters as possible. Therefore, the information policy at this stage relied largely on what could be called "vacuum cleaner tactics". This was continued for most of the second stage, when ISIL needed to strengthen the demographic component in the territories under its control. During the first two stages, ISIL's information policy was implemented by waging an information war and a war of narratives. Though they do have external similarities, these types of wars also have fundamental differences. For example, an information war is aimed at reinterpreting facts, while a war of narratives reinterprets values. An information war is focused on the short term and disappears together with the communicator, while a war of narratives is focused on the long term, and its impact continues even after the communicator disappears.

The information war, which began with scenes of extreme cruelty being posted online, allowed ISIL to solve a number of tactical issues. In particular, the propagation of extreme cruelty allowed the structure both to disengage from the "ineffective pseudo-jihad" of al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and to ensure the absolute loyalty of the population in controlled territories. It also allowed ISIL to secure a constant influx of sociopathic personalities from around the world to conduct military operations on its behalf. In the two years following ISIL's declaration of a new caliphate, the media resources used by terrorists expanded significantly, both in terms of media infrastructure and the range of topics used.

In addition, ISIL was the first organization in the history of international terrorism to build a multi-level structure for broadcasting information, using a variety of media resources ranging from “official channels” to the personal social media accounts of its fighters. The organization also worked actively within its own media apparatus, including the al-Furqan Institute for Media Production, the Ajnad Foundation for Media Production, the Al-Hayat Media Center and Furat Media. ISIL always paid special attention to the broadcasting language, initially releasing propaganda in Arabic, English, German, Kurdish and French, and later expanding the range to include Russian and the Turkic languages.

By employing an extensive network of media resources, ISIL was able to generate a tremendous amount of information. By mid-2015, its propaganda had moved beyond just the glorification of jihadism and recruitment into the ranks of the “builders of the caliphate”, and began to include coverage of “peaceful life in the caliphate”. This gradually became the dominant theme. Charlie Winter, a senior researcher at the Quilliam Foundation, estimates that in 2015, the amount of propaganda material devoted to “peaceful” life in ISIL-controlled territory was almost double that of messages focused on military themes and scenes of extreme cruelty.¹⁵³

For a while, ISIL’s propaganda stood out for its targeted nature. Each of the media resources focused on a target audience and used social media and various instant messaging services in its work. However, since 2016, propaganda has been moving back in favour of uniformity and increased religious rhetoric, emphasizing the upcoming apocalypse. The change in approach is probably related to the “dusk” of ISIL.

Even though the information war conducted by ISIL was highly effective, its ideological interventions caused major damage. In principle, all of the narratives generated by ISIL can be divided into two groups – one to fill the space of secular thought, and the other to

¹⁵³ Уинтер, Ч. «Исламское государство: как работает его пропаганда», *BBC Русская служба*, 5 октября 2015 [Winter, C. “The Islamic State: How Its Propaganda Works”, *BBC News Russian*, 5 October 2015], https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/10/151005_is_propaganda_war.

fill the space of religious thought. Obviously, the boundary between the narratives filling these spaces is, to a certain degree, conditional. The secular narratives are not much different from those that underlie al-Qaeda's ideology. Basically, they reflect the inferiority of *kafir* regimes, as evidenced by the crises that periodically shock them. However, the religious narratives represent a fundamentally new vision of the logic of Islam.

Another mechanism that ISIL relies on is "cyber jihad". Attacks on information resources for terrorist purposes had begun even before the emergence of ISIL, but ISIL was the one that mainstreamed this type of jihad. The United Cyber Caliphate (UCC) is currently at the forefront of the electronic jihad. On 26 July 2018, the UCC published an infographic about their activities between 23 May 2018 and 21 July 2018, claiming to have crashed 770 websites using DDoS attacks, disrupted over 900 other websites, and hacked more than 1,500 social media accounts.¹⁵⁴ Yet despite the UCC's apparent intensity and success rate, experts say that its hackers are far from perfect in terms of their qualifications. Furthermore, the activities of the "cyber caliphate" are limited to periodic DDoS attacks, hacking social media accounts, and defacing poorly protected sites for the purpose of self-promotion. Attacks of this kind do not require special skills and can even be done by novice hackers. However, it is safe to assume that it is only a matter of time before cyberterrorism becomes more effective. This thesis is supported by the fact that the "cyber caliphate", inspired by ISIL's ideology, is expanding on an organizational level. In 2016, the United Cyber Caliphate consisted of at least five separate large groups, including the Cyber Caliphate itself and the Islamic Cyber Army.¹⁵⁵

It is difficult to determine what motivates these hackers due to the nature of their activities. On the one hand, there are now special

¹⁵⁴ "Pro-ISIS Hacking Entity United Cyber Caliphate (UCC) Claims Hacking Of Over 900 Websites, 1,500 Social Media Accounts", Jihad & Terrorism Threat Monitor, MEMRI, 27 July 2018, <https://www.memri.org/jttm/pro-isis-hacking-entity-united-cyber-caliphate-ucc-%E2%80%8Eclaims-hacking-over-900-websites-1500>.

¹⁵⁵ Парамонов, О. «Как устроена киберармия Исламского государства», *Хакер*, 2016 [Paramonov, O. "How the Islamic State's Cyber Army is Arranged", *Hacker*, 2016], <https://xakep.ru/2016/04/30/isis-flashpoint/>.

fatwas condoning cyberattacks as a method of performing jihad. The first known *fatwa* on cyber jihad was issued in May 2000. When asked whether sending viruses to disable or destroy websites that are hostile to Islam and are spreading immoral materials, Saudi Grand Mufti Sheikh Abd Al-Aziz Al-Sheikh replied: “If such a website is hostile to Islam and you counter its evil with good, and respond to it, refute its falsehood, and show its void content – that would be the best option. But if you are unable to respond to it, and you want to destroy it, and have the ability to do so, it’s okay to destroy it, because it is an evil website.”¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, it may be that some hackers are members of the UCC not because of religious fanaticism or ideological convictions, but because they want to hone or show off their skills. In light of how inefficient the UCC’s activities currently are, one might conclude that it is, for the most part, just a part of the propaganda. For propaganda purposes, terrorists are using new technical capabilities for carrying out attacks in real space. One example is the drone attack on Russia’s Khmeimim Air Base¹⁵⁷.

The post-caliphate stage of ISIL’s activities began in 2017. Its qualitative characteristics directly correlate with changes in the financial and infrastructure capabilities of the organization. The search for funding and the resolution of issues concerning the new “residence” contributed to the further virtualization of ISIL and a change in tactical approaches to propaganda, replacing the “sower tactics” with “vacuum cleaner tactics”. In principle, the “sower tactics” used by ISIL were very similar to what al-Qaeda used – they also focused on stimulating the domestic terrorist underground in various states and de-professionalizing terrorism. In practical terms, ISIL’s approach was implemented through the use of “lone wolf” tactics. Back in 2016, ISIL advised its supporters “not to insist on traveling to Iraq and Syria, but to concentrate on organizing individual terrorist attacks in the community. The weapons offered were not

¹⁵⁶ “Saudi Grand Mufti Issues Fatwa Permitting Cyber-Jihad”, *MEMRI Cyber & Jihad Lab*, 9 May 2013, <http://cjlal.memri.org/lab-projects/monitoring-fatwas-on-hacking/saudi-grand-mufti-issues-fatwa-permitting-cyber-jihad/>.

¹⁵⁷ Минобороны России обвинило США в координации атаки дронов на Хмеймим, 25 октября 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-45975410>

improvised explosive devices, but knives, axes, screwdrivers and heavy trucks.”¹⁵⁸ This seems to be the beginning of the era of low-budget terrorism. The extremely low cost of preparing and carrying out a terrorist attack – with no special skills or major efforts required – greatly increase the risk.

Even though the concept of autonomous jihad is not something that ISIL invented, the organization did manage to propose a new mechanism for its promotion in the global information space. In the second half of 2017, compensating for lost opportunities to independently carry out ideological support on a global scale, ISIL initiated a new strategy based on “*munasirun*”. The *munasirun* are not officially a part of ISIL – they are isolated groups united in their support for the organization. The practice is not new, but the traditional role of the *munasirun* in the form of relaying official ISIL channels and archiving historical content is now complemented by new activities. For example, modern *munasirun* generate their own content, supply inspiration and ideological incubation, and sometimes also provide logistics support for terrorist attacks. Almost all of the terrorist attacks committed in Europe in 2016–2017 with cars and cold weapons were autonomous, i.e. not coordinated or managed directly by ISIL.¹⁵⁹ Rather, the terrorists were motivated by the *munasir* network.

Challenges in Countering Terrorist Ideology and Propaganda

Apparently, *munasirun* activities will present one of the main problems in stopping the spread of terrorist ideology in the near

¹⁵⁸ Серенко, А. «Халифат при смерти, терроризм не сдаётся. Чего ждать миру после разгрома ИГ», Коммерсантъ, 28.08.2017 [Serenko, A. “Caliphate Is Close to Death, Terrorism Is Not Giving Up. What the World Should Expect After the Defeat of the IS”, *Kommersant*, 28 August 2017], <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3391474>.

¹⁵⁹ Гвоздева, Е. «Индивидуальный джихад. Трансформация ДАИШ после поражения в Сирии», Международный дискуссионный клуб Валдай, 12 февраля 2018 [Gvozdeva, E. “Individual Jihad. The Transformation of DAISH After the Defeat in Syria”, International Valdai Discussion Club, 12 February 2018], <http://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/individualnyy-dzhikhad/>.

future. The essence of the problem lies in the fact that the information and discussions in *munasir* forums usually do not go beyond the legally admissible boundaries, which makes it impossible to apply law enforcement measures to thwart them. On the contrary, the members of the network can critically evaluate the activities of any terrorist group except for ISIL. Discussion participants “reflect” on theological topics, criticize *kafirs*, and so on.

Social media remains the main platform for the *munasir* networks. The process of ideological incubation takes place on multiple levels. A number of pages are focused only on capturing the audience and contain common theological and ideological narratives, as well as “inspiring” texts claiming that the caliphate did not disappear after the loss of territories – that this was just a test that “the Almighty sent down”. Other pages are Muslim seminars, where mentors work with the audience and horizontal links are stimulated. The third page category focuses on “advanced” supporters. The terminology used on these pages assumes that the user has specific knowledge. These are closed forums that are not accessible to occasional readers.

Unlike social media, instant messaging is more focused on providing users with prompt information and communicating within the network. In fact, most of the information concerning the security of the terrorists themselves is sent through instant messaging, since this service offers end-to-end encryption technology. In light of this, we can assume that instant messaging will become the main channel of communication and logistics for terrorists, and unless the application owners agree to co-operate, all counter-terrorist efforts will be nullified.

The range of information used by terrorists as propaganda is rather broad and takes the form of multimedia communications containing ideological or practical instructions, explanations, and other information that has emotional impact. Stylistically, the material generated by terrorists corresponds to modern trends in the media industry. Terrorists are actively using the mosaic approach to inform consumers, offering text, videos and a large number of infographics. Audio is focused on arousing the required emotions

and includes not only sermons, but also a line of propaganda music. Images can be comic-book style, anime style, or even cat-themed. Video games are also widely used – these can be specially designed games or knock-offs of well-known computer games, where the characters are replaced by famous terrorists.

For the people who generate terrorist propaganda, the distribution of material demonstrating how terrorist attacks are prepared for and implemented is of great importance. Gabriel Weimann, professor of communications at the University of Haifa, explains this as follows: Modern terrorism can be understood in terms of the same production requirements as any theatrical engagement: meticulous attention paid to script preparation, cast selection, sets, props, role-playing, and minute-by-minute stage management. And just like compelling stage plays or ballet performances, the media orientation of terrorist activity requires careful attention to detail in order to be effective.¹⁶⁰

At the same time, it is obvious that the effectiveness of a terrorist attack is measured not by the number of victims, but by the number of intimidated people. This brings us back to Bruce Hoffman's observation that ...terrorism's success is best measured not by the accepted metrics of conventional warfare – number of enemy killed in battle, amount of military assets destroyed, or geographical territory seized – but rather by its ability to attract attention to the terrorists and their cause and by the psychological impact and deleterious effects that terrorists hope to exert over their target audience(s).¹⁶¹

Like any theatrical production, terrorism uses media to arouse emotions. Back in 2010, al-Qaeda's leader in Libya Abi Yahya al-Libi wrote instructions for recruiting: Emotions and enthusiasm are very important and cannot be ignored. The reaction of ordinary people to the impact of emotions is much stronger than the influence of reasonable arguments and scientific debate. The majority of

¹⁶⁰ Weimann, G. "Mass-Media Theater", *Countering the Terrorist Mentality*, eJournal USA, vol 12, No 5, 2008.

¹⁶¹ Хоффман, Б. «Разновидность психологической войны». Террористическая ментальность. Контрмеры. eJournal USA. Т.12, №5. (2008): 8 [Hoffman, B. "A Form of Psychological Warfare", *Countering the Terrorist Mentality*, eJournal USA, vol 12, No 5 (2008): 8], <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0507/ijpe/hoffman.htm>.

ordinary people are unfamiliar with scientific discussions and political analysis. They act according to their emotions.¹⁶²

For terrorist organizations that exploit religious dogma, emotional impact is a prerequisite because their ideology is, in principle, based on irrational argumentation. This circumstance greatly complicates the process of building and promoting counter-terrorism narratives. In this context, attention should be paid to two points.

First of all, when presented with information, an individual only absorbs the information that is of interest to him and that enables him to further develop his virtual image of the objects or situations that concern him. Captured by the ideology of terrorism, a person is unlikely to search for counterarguments independently. Countering such a situation is only possible by developing the individual's critical thinking skills in the early stages of his development and socialization, or by deliberately immersing the individual in a counterargument environment, which requires an individual approach, a highly qualified professional staff, and quite a bit of time.

Secondly, the principles of social communication are not always taken into account when creating and promoting counter-terrorist narratives. As a rule, it is assumed that the concepts transmitted by the communicator are perceived by the audience in full and adequately. At the same time, there are two types of understanding: cognitive and communication. Cognitive understanding implies a deep understanding and reflection on the information received. In this case, the recipient of the information is able to grasp the cause-and-effect relationships, behavioural motives, general and specific features, and so on. When there is cognitive understanding of a message, the recipient is able not only to relay it, but also to produce new knowledge on its basis. In the case of communication understanding, the recipient only registers the text of the message,

¹⁶² "This is how Osama bin Laden recruited Al-Qaeda cadres", Clarion Project, *Eenadu India*, 3 March 2018, <http://www.eenaduindia.com/news/international-news/2018/03/03065823/This-is-how-Osama-bin-Laden-recruited-AlQaeda-cadres.vpf>.

without any epistemological understanding.¹⁶³ It should therefore be recognized that the proposed counter-narrative may not always be “heard” or provide the right type of understanding.

In terms of building an effective model for countering terrorist propaganda, the challenge is to address the end of “linearity” in the change of terrorist ideologies. History has shown that conceptually, the system for countering global terrorism is developing at a slower pace than terrorism itself. Audrey Kurth Cronin provides an illustration of this problem in her article “ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group”. She notes:

After 9/11, many within the U.S. national security establishment worried that, following decades of preparation for confronting conventional enemies, Washington was unready for the challenge posed by an unconventional adversary such as al Qaeda. So over the next decade, the United States built an elaborate bureaucratic structure to fight the jihadist organization, adapting its military and its intelligence and law enforcement agencies to the tasks of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.¹⁶⁴

However, ISIL has now emerged as a major jihadist threat, and as Cronin puts it – ISIL is not al-Qaeda. The past five years have been dedicated to studying ISIL’s methods and looking for mechanisms to counter its ideology in the information space. However, the current situation is characterized by the presence of a “voluminous” model of violent extremist and terrorist propaganda, where the people generating information are relying on fundamentally different ideological attitudes, forming different narratives, focusing on different target audiences, and using different tools and channels for disseminating information.

¹⁶³ Соколов, А. «Введение в теорию социальной коммуникации», СПб.: СПбГУП, 1996, с. 320 [Sokolov, A. “Introduction to the Theory of Social Communication” SPb.: SPbGUP, 1996, p. 320].

¹⁶⁴ Кронин, О. К. «ИГИЛ не Аль-Каида», *Foreign Affairs*, № 2, 2015 [Cronin, A. K. “ISIS Is Not a Terrorist Group”, *Foreign Affairs*, No 2, 2015], <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/IGIL--ne-gruppa-terroristov-17447>.

**SESSION IV:
THE RETURN OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS:
WAYS FOR RE-INTEGRATION?**

**Terrorist Fighters from Kyrgyzstan:
Fighting Foreign Wars**

Tatyana Dronzina

Why do young people leave a liberal country where they enjoy religious freedom to join foreign terrorist organizations? This is the main research question that we will try to answer.

This paper will use the results of a field study conducted in Kyrgyzstan in early 2015. The field study was carried out with help from the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center (CIS ATC), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Kyrgyzstani law enforcement agencies. Search for Common Ground also provided logistical and financial support. The paper will also use fighters' life stories as later recreated based on published materials.

Methods of Collecting Empirical Data

The collection of empirical data, which is the most critical aspect of the research, was carried out in two ways: by analysing available published documents and by collecting information from primary sources during interviews with relatives of fighters or with fighters themselves.

The process was implemented in three stages: collection, categorization and recreation of fighters' life stories.

During the first stage, information was collected about individuals who had allegedly left the country to participate in terrorist activities, based on a list provided to me by the CIS ATC Central Asian regional office in Bishkek.

During the second stage, the collected information was categorized, placing the individuals in different groups: those who had left to fight in Syria for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

(ISIL), the al-Nusra Front or al-Qaeda; those who joined the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) – most of whom are now located in Waziristan; and returnees who have either served their term and been released, or are still in custody.

During the third stage, the life stories of the fighters were recreated (reproduced) to reflect several groups of variables. The first group concerned demographic factors: age, education, place of residence, family, parents, socioeconomic status, satisfaction with their own financial situation, degree of religious commitment. The second group concerned the circumstances of departure: logistics, organization and financing, as well as the reaction of their family and loved ones to their decision. The third group of variables concerned the personal characteristics of the fighters. This was introduced in order to understand whether personality traits such as a propensity to violence or aggression, emotional instability, etc. influence an individual's decision to leave the country and take part in someone else's war. The fourth group of variables was aimed at identifying the motivations of the fighters.

Research Methods

Our basic research method was the recreation or reproduction of life stories. This method was selected as it provides the opportunity to learn specific cultural peculiarities about the subject of study and conceptualize views on everyday human experiences.

In its traditional form, the life story method allows the subjects to present their understanding of their own life or that of others. This approach, which is based on a narrative, through the understanding of natural human activity, helps us to understand how different life trajectories influence individual perceptions of their own personal significance. Since we have limited space and time, I will not elaborate any further, but a detailed discussion can be found in my book entitled *The Female Face of Terrorism*, published in Kazakhstan in 2011.

Problem Statement

Before proceeding to the research results, I would like to review the literature on this subject and identify the main points in the international scientific debate.

First it should be noted that the number of sources is limited compared to sources dealing with the issue of radicalization in the Middle East or other regions of Asia. There are many reasons for this, such as the fact that this is a relatively new challenge for Central Asian societies, and there is little written work based on empirical studies by Central Asian scientists. The language barrier should also be taken into account. However, there is growing interest in this issue, which may continue in the future, and this survey was one of the first empirical studies in this area.

In 2017–2018, interesting studies were published by foreign authors and international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Crisis Group. In general, these studies confirm my conclusions, which were first made public in Kyrgyzstan in March 2015.

Radicalization is a complex process that must be considered from various points of view. In an interview with Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska, Bhavna Davé says: Radicalisation is being talked about as if it were a single phenomenon, but in fact it is related to so many different processes, including the nature of the government, its inability to provide welfare and proper education, development, respect for freedoms, as well as security and stability. It is also related to propaganda and the lack of education, the lack of proper knowledge about Islam which is opening opportunities for all kinds of groups with different interests in supporting the growing industry of radical Islam. So, radicalisation is a result of many different factors, psychological ones as well. Stress pushes people to look for refuge in response to the false propaganda about what Islam is. I would therefore suggest that we focus on what radicalisation is and how it is taking place rather than whether radicalisation presents a trend. Radicalisation is connected to numerous social, economic and political problems.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Davé, B. “The Complex Reality of Radicalisation in Central Asia”, Interviewer: A. Pikulicka-Wilczewska, *The New Eastern Europe*, 31 October 2017, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/10/31/complex-reality-radicalisation-central-asia/>.

Some analysts believe – and I concur – that the nature of the political regimes in the Central Asian countries cannot fully explain the decision to join a foreign terrorist organization. So why do people go to fight someone else’s war? Svante Cornell thinks that most of them are radicalized not in their home countries, but when working as labour migrants in Russia: Over 80 percent of Central Asians that travelled to Syria were recruited there [in Russia]. As the liberal Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* concluded, “the road to ISIS goes through Moscow”. This means that if we truly want to understand why Central Asians are attracted to extremist groups, it is not enough to point at the governance systems in the region, or their economic situation.¹⁶⁶

This is a fairly consistent statement, although the author does not indicate the source of information. Cornell later developed upon this, adding that the process of radicalization takes place not only in Russia, but in the battlegrounds of Syria and Afghanistan as well.¹⁶⁷ He also touches upon the importance of young people’s pursuit of identity and meaning in life: The Soviet legacy of atheism means that many young people in Central Asia ... did not grow up with a strongly rooted religious tradition that could form a counterweight to extremism. Meanwhile, their societies are changing at a furious pace. The new states of Central Asia are trying to develop new and compelling national identities, but that process takes considerable time.¹⁶⁸

The study of radicalization in Central Asia has created lively discussion, and opinions sometimes vary widely. This is illustrated by the open letter from Central Asia scholars regarding the International Crisis Group’s report entitled “Kyrgyzstan: State

¹⁶⁶ Cornell, S. “Central Asia Is Not a Breeding Ground for Radicalization”, *The Diplomat*, 15 November 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/central-asia-is-not-a-breeding-ground-for-radicalization/>.

¹⁶⁷ Cornell, S. E. “Central Asia: Where did Islamic Radicalization Go?”, *Religion, Conflict and Stability in the Former Soviet Union*, eds. K. Migacheva and B. Frederick, Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Cornell, S. “Central Asia Is Not a Breeding Ground for Radicalization”, *The Diplomat*, 15 November 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/central-asia-is-not-a-breeding-ground-for-radicalization/>.

Fragility and Radicalization”, which the scholars sharply disagreed with.¹⁶⁹ However, this should be taken in stride, bearing in mind the novelty of the problem for Central Asian¹⁷⁰societies.¹⁷¹

Research Results

As a result of the study, the life stories of 30 men and women who left were reproduced, with 22 stories recreated based on interviews with family members, three – based on interviews with the fighters themselves, and five – based on media material.

Age

The majority of the Kyrgyzstani citizens who left to fight someone else’s war were adults aged 22 to 28. The youngest was 16 years old and the oldest was 39. There were 16- and 17-year-olds among the women. Thus, we can conclude that men and women under 40 years old are at the highest risk.

Place of Residence

Seven of the people interviewed live or lived in Chui Oblast, while the others were from the southern region of Osh. This suggests that the south should be the focus of prevention measures, while keeping in mind that the experience of other countries has shown that no regions are immune to this threat.

Marital Status

Most of the fighters were married and had at least two or three children. This suggests that family duties and duties to parents and other relatives are not a factor that could stop these individuals from taking part in someone else’s war.

With regard to marital status, there are three details that need special attention. The first is that many fighters leave the country with

¹⁶⁹ Abashin, S. et al. “Understanding Islamic Radicalization in Central Asia (UPDATED) An open letter from Central Asia scholars to the International Crisis Group, along with Crisis Group’s response”, *The Diplomat*, 20 January 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/understanding-islamic-radicalization-in-central-asia/>;

¹⁷⁰ International Crisis Group. “Kyrgyzstan: State Fragility and Radicalisation”, Briefing No 83, Europe & Central Asia, 3 October 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/kyrgyzstan-state-fragility-and-radicalisation>,

¹⁷¹ Kangas, R. “Redefining Extremism in Central Asia”, *ISPSW Strategy Series: Focus on Defense and International Security*, Issue No 541, April 2018, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/resources/docs/ISPSW-541%20Kangas.pdf>.

their wife (or wives, in some cases) and children with the intention of settling in a new place as a family. The second is that the relatives left behind claim that they were not informed of the decision. And the third is that the fighters leave in groups from certain localities, which suggests that there are probably recruiters helping to arrange trip financing and logistics.

Education

Despite the widespread belief that it is only ignorant or illiterate people who are leaving, our research established that 18 of the people who left finished 11th grade and have a secondary education. Four people studied at university. Eight people finished 9th grade, i.e. they have incomplete secondary education. Some studied in madrasas in Kyrgyzstan or got a religious education abroad. Almost no one had a professional education. To a large extent, this corresponds to the results of studies by other researchers, who also note a relatively high level of education among terrorists. For example, Nasra Hassan interviewed nearly 250 people from 1996 to 1999 and noted that “none of them were uneducated, desperately poor, simple-minded, or depressed.”¹⁷² Similarly, Daniel Brennan and Miguel de Corral wrote in 2018 that “the case of Tunisia shows that the anger of disappointed middle-class youths is driving radicalization more than poverty or unemployment.”¹⁷³ Bhavna Davé, an undisputed expert in Central Asia, shares the same opinion, saying: Some of the available research shows that many who have been recruited by ISIS and other networks are not necessarily uneducated, some of them may have received quite decent education. ... In other words, it would be inaccurate to say that only those lacking proper education and opportunities are attracted to radical ideologies.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Hassan, N. “An Arsenal of Believers”, *The New Yorker*, 19 November 2001, pp. 36-41.

¹⁷³ Brennan, D. & de Corral, M. “The Fight Against Terror Needs Better Data”, *Foreign Policy*, 2 October 2018.

¹⁷⁴ Davé, B. “The Complex Reality of Radicalisation in Central Asia”, Interviewer: A. Pikulicka-Wilczewska, *The New Eastern Europe*, 31 October 2017, <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/10/31/complex-reality-radicalisation-central-asia/>.

Socioeconomic Status

The socioeconomic status of the fighters was determined based on the self-assessment of the people interviewed (the fighters or their families), as well as on the observations of the researchers who conducted the interviews. The majority of respondents considered themselves to be middle-class. Two individuals claimed to have excellent living conditions, while four said that their living conditions were below average. Only one was in debt, after losing someone else's livestock and not being able to compensate the damages, even with the help of his wife's parents. There were people, both men and women, whose earnings were rather high for Kyrgyzstan. For example, one of the people who left Chui Oblast had been making around USD 1,000 per month. A young woman from Kara-Balta had worked as a hairdresser with a salary of approximately KGS 1,000–2,000 per day. In addition, most fighters were recruited in Russia, where they were earning enough to live and send money to their families. Information about the others is not available. The observations of the interviewers confirm the opinions of the respondents. In most cases, the houses we visited were average or above average for the respective location; they were large, well-kept, warm and comfortable.

At the same time, we must note that the social services in the places we visited were extremely underdeveloped, with no conditions for sports or leisure, and almost no options for spending time in a healthy and pleasant manner. Especially for women, there are very limited opportunities for education and socializing outside of the family. This, together with the experience of other countries, suggests that the poor social services or complete lack thereof may be a relatively strong motive for an individual's decision to leave.

Personal Characteristics

As mentioned previously, this variable was introduced to investigate the influence of personality traits on an individual's decision. We were specifically interested in whether there were people among the fighters who were aggressive, violent, emotionally

unstable or hot-tempered. The research data indicate that none of the people who left had ever shown a particular propensity to violence or aggression. However, two of them were described by their relatives as being unbalanced and prone to making spontaneous and not always well-thought-out decisions. Interestingly, many of the young men who left had been involved in sports.

Degree of Religious Commitment

This question is always of particular interest, since it is often assumed that the people who left were deeply religious, and that they left to fight because they felt that it was their duty as Muslims.

To measure the degree of religious commitment, we evaluated several indicators: changes in appearance, changes in the circle of friends (breaking ties with old friends and establishing friendships with new people), and changes in relations with family and parents. The majority of fighters (14) were moderately religious. One 40-year-old nurse whose son had gone missing after leaving claimed that although her father-in-law was an imam, he did not force anyone to pray five times a day; however, he did teach his family to follow the morality of Islam. A relative of a recently deceased young man (who had a higher education and was an accountant by profession) argued that no one in their Russian-speaking family ever observed religious rituals, but that they consider themselves to be good Muslims because they try to live according to the requirements of Islam.

It appears that some people became particularly religious under the influence of certain radical elements. For example, the father of two young women who followed their boyfriends to Syria said that although he was against it, his daughters had begun wearing hijabs and denying themselves the pleasures of youth, such as watching television and socializing with friends. Other families were very devout and were not taken aback when their children began to emphasize their religious affiliation by wearing a hijab or a beard, abstaining from alcohol, and praying regularly. On the contrary, this made them happy, since they believed that their children had ridden themselves of certain evils. However, the fact that their children

began to interact more with new friends and less with their parents was not lost on their families and made them worry to a certain extent. In any event, the families did not contact the authorities for fear of harming their loved ones. They did not know who to turn to – they were not aware that there are organizations that provide help and support to people in their situation. They also found themselves outcast from their *mahallas* and local communities, especially in small places where people know everything about each other. Left on their own, some families tried to respond somehow, but the majority remained inactive. The father of a man fighting for ISIL in Syria said in despair: “My son does not want to return for fear that he will be put in prison. There is no help from the state. In the *mahalla*, people keep away from me. What else can I do but follow him to Syria?”

Religious Commitment: Level of Religious Literacy

In addition to the degree of religious commitment, we also examined the level of religious literacy. This was defined by whether they had received religious education in the home country or abroad, as well as their answer to three control questions: 1) What is jihad? 2) Is it possible to join jihad without parental consent? 3) Under what conditions can you become a *shahid*?

The answers given by three jihadists were of particular interest. One had already been released from prison, while the other two were still in custody. They all replied that jihad was to participate in the war against disbelievers. None of them knew the concepts of “small jihad” and “big jihad”, and none of them had heard the parable about what explanations the Prophet Muhammad gave his followers in this regard. Influenced by their radical mentors, they had only adopted the military aspect of the term, but had no idea that jihad, first and foremost, means fighting the evil within ourselves.

Similar answers were given to the second question. They all said that they had left without parental consent, and none of them were aware that such consent was required in Islam. Incidentally, this is in line with the instructions that can be found on social media accounts managed by ISIL’s PR specialists. We monitored the Twitter accounts

of three women of European origin who the scientific community feel are involved in contacting potential recruits. It was found that many of the potential recruits asked for advice on what to do when your family does not agree with you joining a terrorist organization. The advice was the same across the board: leave against all odds, and the Almighty will take care of the rest. It is assumed that they received the same guidance from their recruiters as well.

As for the third question, the respondents said that they did not know that one could only become a *shahid* once war is declared and that the conflict in Syria is not considered a war.

Apart from these control questions, the interviewers also asked: “Why did you go to Syria and not to Palestine, where Muslims are also suffering?” However, they did not get a convincing answer, since the respondents said that they did not know what was happening in Palestine. This supports the findings of Kyrgyzstani security officials on the existence of networks recruiting militants specifically to certain organizations – in our case, to ISIL and related terrorist organizations operating in Syria and Iraq, as well as to the IMU, which has traditionally been influential in the region.

The Radicalization Processes

The respondents answered almost unanimously that the radicalization of fighters is mainly influenced by material published online. It is undeniable that social media and new information technologies play a significant role in this process. Furthermore, terrorist organizations generate professional propaganda which, despite its direct and sometimes rude suggestions, has a significant impact on certain social sectors. However, we have identified only two cases of online recruiting, which may indicate that new social media only creates an attitude toward radicalization, but that this attitude only turns into a recurring type of behaviour after interacting with like-minded people on the spot. In addition, no evidence was found that the logistics and organization of moving fighters is done online. Our researchers repeatedly visited the accounts of well-known ISIL radicals, asking for specific instructions on how to get

to Syria, but no clear information was ever given except for general instructions on what to take and not to take along, and what to do if your family disagrees.

Some Salafi centres also serve as a base for radicalization. Madrasas – especially those led by radical imams and mullahs – should be added here as well.

The question of where the radicalization process is carried out geographically is no less interesting. Most of the Kyrgyzstani fighters who we investigated were recruited in Russia. We can only assume how this process went, as we do not have any scientific data available.

Personal Motivation

Several layers can be distinguished in terms of personal motivation. The first is composed of ideological motives related to religion. These include the struggle against *kafirs*, enemies of Islam, sinners and rulers, and the desire to help build the Islamic State. The aspiration to become *shahids* and participate in jihad (as they understand it) also plays a role.

The second layer is composed of ideological motives unrelated to religion, such as the need to have a social ideal (in this case, the construction of a caliphate) and the desire to build your own life and society, resist the regime of Bashar al-Assad, and fight for freedom and justice. These motives are very similar to that of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s that researchers are so familiar with. Incidentally, after Afghanistan, this is the largest concentration of foreign fighters in the world. But not the only one. The inspiring power of the social ideal was clearly visible during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), when people flooded in from around the world – including celebrities such as the American writer Ernest Hemingway. Evidently, the strength and attractiveness of the social ideal are extremely effective means of political mobilization.

The third layer of motivation is likely to be economic. Although the families and the fighters themselves denied that they went for money, the stagnation in Russia, where the Kyrgyz have traditionally

gone to work, may have forced some of them look for other sources of income.

The fourth layer of motivation is associated with integration problems. It is no secret that the integration of immigrants from Central Asia in Russia is a complex process, especially with the growing xenophobic sentiments in this country. In Kyrgyz society, Uzbeks are the least integrated minority, so it is not surprising that ethnic Uzbeks made up a large percentage of the fighters.

The fifth layer of motivation is related to the “shabbiness of local life”. A significant part of the fighters and their wives had never lived in a society with well-established social services and attractive recreational activities. They went straight from school to immigrant life in Russia, with all of its hardships and difficulties. Understandably, they got to the point where they wanted to escape the narrow horizons of everyday life and see the world – they were looking for an adventure that would make their life interesting and exciting. And last but not least, many of them were probably guided by romanticism and the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

The women who left were characterized by a desire to follow their husbands or find a fiancé in the new world and start a family according to the laws of Islam, as they understand them. The yearning to fulfil their feminine identity and live in love and harmony was probably a strong motivator for them. Hence, two young women from Chui Oblast followed their boyfriends to Syria, and a woman from the region of Osh went to be with an ethnic Turk. Yet another Kyrgyz woman moved with her child from Istanbul to Syria in the hopes that the Islamic State being built there would save her son from modern evils such as alcohol, smoking, drug addiction and premarital sex.

Another motive that should not be overlooked is the fear that the fighters will be convicted for their participation in a terrorist organization if they return to their homeland. Many families tried to get in touch with their relatives and even went to Syria, but only a small number actually contacted them, either because of their

reluctance to communicate, or because they were unable to find them in the territory controlled by the radical Syrian opposition.

It should be noted that each individual's decision to leave was likely not determined by a single motive. Take, for example, the story of the young man who left the country because his girlfriend's parents did not allow her to marry him. His family described him as a shy young man with low self-esteem who was struggling with unemployment and rejection. Going to Waziristan allowed him not only to cope with his personal issues, but also to realize himself professionally. He turned out to be a talented journalist who created and posted 17 half-hour videos about his organization online. Analysis of his verbal and non-verbal behaviour revealed a young man who had grown both professionally and personally, and who was happy and satisfied with his current status. We expect that he could hardly be persuaded to return to his homeland, as is supported by the fact that he has never responded to his mother's attempts to contact him.

Some Conclusions

Based on the obtained information we can make the following conclusions:

1. An individual's decision to join a foreign terrorist organization is influenced by a number of factors, both internal and external.
2. The decision is probably not related to the individual's young age, but it can be seen as a consequence of certain social or educational immaturity.
3. Marital status is not a meaningful factor in an individual's decision.
4. People who leave the country to fight cannot be considered disadvantaged, illiterate people. However, many of them do not have vocational training or an occupation.
5. Socioeconomic status is not a governing factor for the majority of fighters.
6. The degree of religious commitment can hardly be considered a determining factor for an individual's decision.
7. Religious illiteracy is a factor because it creates conditions for misleading potential fighters.

8. Radicalization usually occurs abroad (labour migration, religious education in other countries).

9. Social media strongly influences personal attitudes toward radicalization.

10. In our opinion, recruitment is probably carried out by a recruiting network operating in the country and abroad; this network is also responsible for logistics and travel arrangements.

11. Motivation is complex and consists of many layers. The main motives are ideological ones (both related and not related to religion), economic factors, the desire to make life more interesting and exciting, and fear of conviction upon returning to the homeland.

12. An individual's decision is usually determined by a number of motives.

13. When they leave, Kyrgyz fighters have reached different degrees of radicalization.

14. It can be assumed that by the time they return to their homeland, they are more radicalized than before departure, but the degree of radicalization may vary.

*So Why Do Kyrgyzstani Fighters Go to Fight
Someone Else's War?*

The short answer is because they are affected by various internal and external factors. But the real answer is much more complex. They are motivated by ideological motives (both related and not related to religion), economic factors, the desire to make life more interesting and exciting, and fear of conviction upon returning to the homeland. Fighters leave because they get drawn into recruiting networks that exploit their desire to live the life of a real Muslim; because they seek the social justice that they feel is missing in their homeland; and because they want to be the main characters in their own lives, which in their patriarchal societies are governed by traditions and the authority of elders and men. They leave because they do not want to live with corruption, which blocks the road to prosperity and a decent life. They leave because they believe the deception of the Islamic

State, which serves the interests not of Muslims, but of the radical elite, who pay for their profits with the lives of others.

Some Recommendations

Based on the above, the following recommendations can be given:

1. Consider the consolidation of a civil, democratic nation of Kyrgyzstan and the effective functioning of public administration as the basis for efforts to limit the participation of Kyrgyzstani citizens in foreign wars.

2. Consider the rule of law (judging people by their actions) as the basis for counter-terrorist efforts, in order to create an understanding among the public that participation in foreign terrorist activity is a crime under national law and subject to legal proceedings. At the same time, explain – especially to the families of fighters and, if possible, to the fighters themselves – that it is better for fighters to return to their homeland, accept punishment and reintegrate into society than to die or worsen their situation by continuing to participate in terrorist activities.

3. Consider the provision of high-quality social services as a condition for identifying citizens with their nation, which, together with other measures, may contribute to limiting the participation of Kyrgyzstani citizens in foreign wars.

4. Create a sense of patriotism and pride in belonging to the Kyrgyz nation.

5. Increase the competence and qualifications of moderate clergy, which is a critical factor in combatting radical interpretations of Islam.

6. Create an understanding among the population that radical interpretations of Islam are alien to the traditions and customs of Kyrgyzstan.

7. Provide journalists who report about fighters with opportunities to improve their skills through distance learning and e-learning in order to help them more objectively inform their readers.

8. Support co-operation between security agencies and academia, in the spirit of the best international practices and experience. In

Kyrgyzstan, as in all developed countries, scientists and security officials must work together to ensure national security.

9. Set up a free hotline for anyone who feels threatened by radical networks.

10. Establish rehabilitation and reintegration centres for people who were influenced by radical religious or other groups so that they can make a smooth transition back into society as law-abiding citizens.

11. Create an understanding in society about the difference between traditional Islam and its radical interpretations. We recommend developing brochures with simple and clear explanations, focusing on the following points: What is jihad? What are the conditions for taking up jihad? What is *shahada* (martyrdom)? Who can become a *shahid* and under what conditions?

12. Involve former fighters who have served their sentences and successfully reintegrated into society in counter-terrorist efforts.

13. Employ relevant agencies and departments, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, to prevent children from leaving for terrorist zones together with their parents.

14. Monitor and neutralize radical websites.

15. Send official representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs to Turkey to work with Kyrgyzstan citizens who have gone to search for and bring back their loved ones, or to stop them from going to Syria.

16. Support non-governmental organizations – especially those involved in gender issues – in their efforts to explain to women the criminal and dangerous nature of joining foreign terrorist organizations.

17. Conduct awareness-raising activities and give clear instructions on how to travel safely to other countries. For example: do not go alone to risky areas, always give your relatives the address of where you are going, look online beforehand to make sure that the organization that invited you exists, and keep in constant contact with your family.

Uzbek-Born Members of Terrorist Organizations in Syria and Iraq: Current State and Prospects

Bahtier Ergashev

Introduction

The success of eastern coalition forces in Iraq and Syria combined with the coordinated operations of the Syrian, Iranian, Russian and (to some extent) Turkish governments in Syria against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the al-Nusra Front (al-Qaeda in Syria) have raised the question of the likely withdrawal of a significant number of fighters from these countries.

Though it solved part of the problem locally, the defeat of terrorists in Iraq and Syria has also created a number of problems for other countries. Members of terrorist organizations who were trained and gained real combat experience can potentially become strike forces in other parts of the world. For the moment, the main migration routes for these fighters are clear: Afghanistan, North Africa and Europe. But the countries that could be directly affected by the relocation of fighters are aware of the pending danger. For example, Uzbekistan president Shavkat Mirziyoyev stated: “The countries neighbouring with Syria are talking about victory over the terrorists. Good. But what next? Where will they [the terrorists] go next? We don’t know.”¹⁷⁵

Continuing this line of reasoning, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov remarked on 15 December 2017: As regards Afghanistan, we are concerned that ISIS is increasing its presence on the borders with our neighbours and allies, the Central Asian

¹⁷⁵ «Исход боевиков из Сирии не решает проблему терроризма, заявил Мирзиёев», РИА Новости, 7 декабря 2017 г. [“The exodus of militants from Syria does not solve the problem of terrorism, Mirziyoyev stated”, *RIA Novosti*, 7 December 2017], <https://ria.ru/syria/20171207/1510457248.html>.

countries. In Afghanistan, they are pushing to the north. This suggests that Central Asia is going to be their next target.¹⁷⁶

There is clearly a real danger that fighters affiliated with ISIL and al-Qaeda will shift their activities from Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan, destabilizing the Central Asian countries as a result.

At the same time, there is an understanding of what combatting ISIL involves. In addition to military and special operations, which can be combined under the general concept of “forceful resistance”, a coherent policy must also be implemented to counter the ideology of religious fundamentalism and extremism. This policy must include measures for the deradicalization and reintegration of citizens – particularly youth – who have been influenced by extreme and violent ideologies. Speaking about this, President Mirziyoyev has noted that the use of mainly harsh methods of dealing with terrorists is not justified. Rather, the focus should be on educating young people about the true goals of Islam, which has nothing to do with terrorist groups and extremists. In addition, the country must provide vulnerable youth with conditions for self-realization. This is particularly critical for Uzbekistan, where 60 percent of the population is under 30 years old.

A review of the literature devoted to the study of the internal structure and ideology of religious extremist and terrorist organizations makes it possible to draw several conclusions. 1) The very nature of the topic creates major problems with accessing statistics on the number of terrorist organizations. 2) The statistics available to researchers through information resources (primarily online) directly or indirectly affiliated with terrorist organizations are often inaccurate. These sources tend to provide deliberately exaggerated data on membership and the number of attacks/operations carried out, with figures often double or triple that of data provided by intelligence services and non-governmental

¹⁷⁶ “Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and replies to media questions during the Government Hour in the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Moscow, December 15, 2017”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 15 December 2017, http://www.mid.ru/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/2992396.

organizations engaged in monitoring and counteracting the practice and ideology of terrorist organizations. 3) As a result, research papers on the genesis and activities of various terrorist organizations often contain serious discrepancies in the methods and approaches (and, accordingly, the results) to the actual assessment of the potential of terrorist organizations.

And these are not academic mistakes. The flaws in the calculations done by researchers dealing with this topic are possible errors in predicting potential threats, their scale and consequences within the state policy for countering terrorist threats. In addition, such mistakes (deliberate) are an opportunity to manipulate public opinion, either downplaying or exaggerating the scale of threats from terrorist organizations.

Therefore, I would say that researchers working in this direction must treat material and statistics with caution and vigilance and use Occam's razor when they need to be able to identify and reject one-sided approaches and exaggerated statistics, and distinguish between real research and the product of information manipulation and propaganda.

In Uzbekistan –due to the existing approaches in the media and the information policy, by which the topics of religious extremism and terrorism are tightly controlled by the state – there are no related studies and publications that would allow the formation principles, current membership and ideological aspects of the activities of terrorist organizations operating in Uzbekistan and its neighbouring countries to be reviewed in an academic format (beyond propaganda stereotypes and clichés).

This article uses comparative analysis and the post-Soviet experience to identify the main aspects and potential of the state policy for countering religious extremist and terrorist ideology, and to evaluate the policy for the deradicalization and reintegration of citizens – particularly youth – who have been influenced by extremist preachers in Uzbekistan. Various print and Internet sources published in Russian and other languages were used as a basis for the research.

Among the publications devoted to the analysis of the formation and determination of the number of fighters and members of terrorist organizations originating from Central Asia, “Between ISIS and Al-Qaeda: Central Asian Fighters in Syrian War” – a publication co-authored by Yerlan Karin and Jacob Zenn – is of great interest.¹⁷⁷ Based on an in-depth study of various sources and comparative analysis, the authors present a complete picture of the existing terrorist organizations fighting in Syria as part of ISIL and al-Qaida, as well as the dynamics of their numbers and the transformation of their ideological views.

Also of interest to researchers is a series of works from post-Soviet countries, where the authors review the ideological aspects of countering extremism and terrorism. Of note is an article by Russian researcher Damir Shagaviev, who, from the point of view of Islamic theology (Hanafi madhab), studied the main methods used by preachers of extremist organizations to radicalize young people, based on the falsification and distortion of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed. Shagaviev also proposes a number of solutions to better counteract these sermons.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Marat Ibraev used extensive statistics from sociological research to examine the relationship between Islamic education and youth radicalization and form a portrait of a modern supporter of the ideology of radical extremist organizations.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Карин, Е. И Зенн, Дж. *Между ИГИЛ и Аль-Каидой: центральноазиатские боевики в Сирийской войне*,

^{Print} House Gerona, Алматы, 2017 [Karin, Y. & Zenn, J. *Between ISIL and Al-Qaeda: Central Asian Fighters in the Syrian War*, Print House Gerona, Almaty, 2017].

¹⁷⁸ Шагавиев Д. «Теологические концепции как фактор формирования личности религиозного радикала», Противдействие распространению идеологии экстремизма и терроризма среди молодежи: материалы Межрегиональной научно-практической конференции по профилактике экстремизма. Уфа, 2017, с. 62-69 [Shagaviyev, D. “Theological Concepts as a Factor in the Formation of a Religious Radical”, Countering the Spread of Extremist and Terrorist Ideology Among Youth: information package for the Interregional Scientific and Practical Conference on the Prevention of Extremism, Ufa, 2017, pp. 62-69].

¹⁷⁹ [Ibraev M. “Deficit of Islamic Education as a Reason for Spreading the Ideology of Extremism and Terrorism”, Ideals and Values of Islam in the Educational Space of the 21st Century: Information package for the 10th International Research-to-Practice Conference, Ufa, Russia, 2-17, p. 50-53].

A separate layer of research includes studies and publications of Western researchers analysing the formation and evolution of the ideological attitudes and activities of terrorist organizations in Central Asia in the post-Soviet era. These analyses are largely based on the assumption of the internal, immanent nature of the emergence of terrorism in the countries of the region as a reaction to the features of the newly formed political systems and social challenges (youth unemployment, crisis of ideology, education, etc.) in the post-Soviet era.

Douglas Green wrote an article about the fact that extremists coming from the Central Asian countries have already been involved in a number of serious terrorist attacks in different countries (Turkey, Sweden, United States) and have therefore become a threat to international security.¹⁸⁰ This necessitates a more detailed and in-depth study of this phenomenon.

Józef Lang – who is studying Islam in the post-Soviet states of Central Asia, the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism and terrorism in Central Asia and Afghanistan, the social and political situation in Central Asia, and related issues of stability and security in the region – has analysed the genesis and development prospects of terrorist organizations that emerged in Central Asia in a number of publications.¹⁸¹ Based on an in-depth analysis of the current situation with terrorist organizations made up of Central Asian citizens participating in the Syrian war, Lang comes to the important conclusion that the Syrian campaign has led to a qualitative change in terrorist organizations from Central Asia.¹⁸² Previously, they may have been limited in their ideological base and practical actions to the Central Asian region and opposing the existing regimes in these countries. However, now that they have experience fighting outside

¹⁸⁰ Green, D. "Kazakhstan and Central Asia: International Terrorism Without Borders", *Stratfor Worldview*, 27 November 2017, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/kazakhstan-and-central-asia-international-terrorism-without-borders>.

¹⁸¹ In particular, https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/report_the-radical-islamic-fighters.pdf.

¹⁸² Lang, J. "Exporting Jihad – Islamic terrorism from Central Asia", *OSW*, 12 April 2017, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2017-04-12/exporting-jihad-islamic-terrorism-central-asia>

the Central Asian region, they have become active participants in the global jihadist movement. These organizations have significantly expanded in theory and practice, which will lead to the development of globalist tendencies in their terrorist activities.

In his 2014 article entitled “Moderate Islam? Look to Central Asia”, renowned Central Asian expert S. Frederick Starr reviewed the situation in the broad historical perspective and concluded that one of the main reasons for the emergence of religious extremism in Central Asia is incomplete modernization in the countries of the region.¹⁸³ Furthermore, the key to countering religious extremism in the Central Asian countries, where Islam has historically played a major role in spiritual and cultural life, is ensuring their successful modernization in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres.

Estimates of the Number of Uzbek-Born Members of Terrorist Organizations

Estimating the number of people who have fought for various terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria since 2011 is no easy task. According to the Soufan Center, there are nearly 9,000 people from the former Soviet republics fighting for ISIL in Syria, including nearly 3,500 Russians, over 1,000 Tajik citizens, and more than 1,500 Uzbeks.¹⁸⁴ The Soufan Center estimates that at the beginning of 2017, nearly one-third of foreign ISIL fighters had already returned to their countries of origin after a series of defeats suffered by the organization in Iraq and Syria.

Other sources provide other numbers. For example, Karin and Zenn report 500 Uzbeks, 360 Turkmen and 200 Kyrgyz in 2013, and estimate that in 2014, the total number of fighters from Central Asia

¹⁸³ Starr, S. F. “Moderate Islam? Look to Central Asia”, *The New York Times*, 26 February 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/27/opinion/moderate-islam-look-to-central-asia.html?_r=0.

¹⁸⁴ «Иногда они возвращаются: что ждет боевиков ИГ после исхода из Сирии», *Спутник*, 27.10.2017 [“Sometimes they come back: what awaits IS fighters after the exodus from Syria”, *Sputnik*, 27 October 2017], <https://ru.sputnik-tj.com/analytics/20171027/1023727014/inogda-oni-vozvrashchayutsya-chem-grozit-iskhod-boeyevikov-blizhnego-vostoka.html>.

– including Kazakhs and Uyghurs – was somewhere from 1,500 to 2,000, with this number jumping to 4,000 by the end of 2015.¹⁸⁵

Table 1. Approximate data on the number of fighters originating from the Central Asian countries

Country	According to open sources	According to intelligence services	Killed	Returned	Convicted for participation in military operations in Iraq and Syria
Uzbekistan	3,000–3,500	300	900	-	11
Turkmenistan	500	-	2	6	-
Tajikistan	2,000	Over 1,000	300	100	16
Kazakhstan	500	200	80	33	33
Kyrgyzstan	500–600	Over 600	70	40	47

This table demonstrates how greatly the figures vary depending on the source. There is a considerable difference between the official and unofficial data, i.e. between the data from intelligence services and open sources. This makes it very difficult to assess potential threats.

However, according to all of the sources, both official and unofficial, the largest number of fighters from Central Asia participating in military operations in Iraq and Syria were natives of Uzbekistan. Analysis of open sources shows that fighters from Uzbekistan were primarily recruited in three ways:

A significant part are members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), which is based in Waziristan, Pakistan and is affiliated with the Taliban. These fighters went to Syria and Iraq together with their families and formed two basic Uzbek militant groups: the Imam Bukhari Jamaat (IBJ) and the Katibat al-Tawhid wal Jihad(KTJ), which is affiliated

¹⁸⁵ Карин, Е. И Зенн, Дж. *Между ИГИЛ и Аль-Каидой: центральноазиатские боевики в Сирийской войне*, Print House Gerona, Алматы, 2017 [Karin, Y. & Zenn, J. *Between ISIL and Al-Qaeda: Central Asian Fighters in the Syrian War*, Print House Gerona, Almaty, 2017, p. 174].

with the al-Nusra Front (al-Qaeda). According to various estimates, at least 400 natives of Uzbekistan with ties to the IMU and the IJU moved from Pakistan and Afghanistan to Iraq and Syria in 2011–2016, many with their families in tow. It should also be noted that part of the ethnic Uzbeks who went to Iraq and Syria are actually citizens of Kyrgyzstan (from regions in southern Kyrgyzstan) and Tajikistan.

The second source of recruits is labour migrants – citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan working in the Russian Federation (and, to a lesser extent, Kazakhstan). Official data show that there were nearly 1.9 million citizens of Uzbekistan legally working in Russia in 2017. Some independent experts estimate that there were another 200,000 working there illegally (many of whom had expired and invalid documents). In Kazakhstan, the number of labour migrants from Uzbekistan is somewhere from 400,000 to 500,000, with only half of them there legally. And as the most economically vulnerable, this group is the most responsive to fundamentalist propaganda.

There are no official estimates of the number of labour migrants from Uzbekistan who have gone to Syria via Turkey (the most popular route). However, according to unofficial information obtained by the author, there may have been 300–400 from 2013 to 2016.¹⁸⁶

The third group are Uzbek citizens who joined the ranks of ISIL and al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq directly from Uzbekistan (some of them with families). According to the unofficial estimates of independent experts and journalists from Uzbekistan¹⁸⁷, there may have been 60–70 such cases from 2013 to 2016.

However, even with all of the different figures, we can say that:

¹⁸⁶ During expert interviews (17 in-depth interviews, based on standard guidelines) with leaders and activists of Uzbek national cultural centres and non-profit organizations specializing in the protection of the rights of migrant workers, conducted in Moscow, Novosibirsk, Almaty and Shymkent in 2016–2017 as part of a study on “Labour Migration in the post-Soviet Space as Viewed by Migrants” (NNO Khamurtar (Russia, Novosibirsk), NNO Centre for Legal Protection of Labour Migrants (Russia, Moscow)).

¹⁸⁷ Центр исследовательских инициатив Ма’но (Ташкент, Узбекистан), исследовательский проект «Теория и практика противодействия религиозному экстремизму на современном этапе» (2018 г.). Были опрошены, с использованием метода углубленных интервью, 21 эксперт (эксперты, журналисты, теологи, государственные служащие, сотрудники правоохранительных органов, представители органов самоуправления граждан).

- Central Asian natives have actively participated with various groups in military actions in Iraq and Syria.
- These fighters received serious combat training and have experience in combat operations (primarily urban warfare).
- This mobilized and ideologically coached force might be used to destabilize the situation in the Central Asian countries.

Fighters Redeployed to Central Asia Is Just the Beginning

In 2015, ISIL emerged in Afghanistan under the name “*Wilayah Khorasan*”. By 2016–2017, it had expanded to northern Afghanistan and had a presence in 30 districts in seven provinces, making it one of the most serious threats to regional security in Central Asia. The seizure by ISIL fighters of several territories at the borders with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in the provinces of Faryab, Sar-e Pol, Samangan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan (where a number of training facilities and centres already exist, including ones for female terrorists) presents a real threat for the countries in the region, as it creates ground for increasing ISIL’s social and ideological base in those countries.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, destabilization in northern Afghanistan is likely to become a detonator for major clashes in neighbouring countries.

At the same time, most experts believe that the existing potential of ISIL fighters in Afghanistan rules out the scenario of direct armed invasion of the Central Asian countries. Nevertheless, Andrey Novikov, head of the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center, has said that “the so-called inspiration attacks made by international terrorist organizations from the territory of Afghanistan to the territories of other states, that is, ensuring the lone wolf tactics, are a serious danger to the CIS states.”¹⁸⁹ Director of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation Alexander Bortnikov also draws attention to this, stressing that “the leaders of international terrorist organizations are orienting their supporters to the implementation of

¹⁸⁸ <http://chvk.info/analytiks/ukreplenie-igil-v-afganistane-ugrozy-i-zakazchiki/>

¹⁸⁹ <https://rg.ru/2018/02/20/novikov-terroristy-ispolzuiut-taktiku-odinokih-volkov-kak-v-kizliare.html>

the so-called ‘autonomous jihad’.¹⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Evgeny Sysoev, head of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (SCO-RATS) executive committee has noted that “of particular concern is the situation in Afghanistan, where in the northern provinces there are as many as 3,000 ISIL fighters who previously fought in the Middle East. 80 percent of them are foreigners, including immigrants from Russia, Central Asia and China.”¹⁹¹

In light of the growing threat to the countries of Central Asia, the leaders of the SCO countries signed the Qingdao Declaration at the SCO Summit in Qingdao (China, June 2018), including a special paragraph stating that “in relation to the developments in the Middle East, the Member States note the growing threat of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) who are returning to their countries of origin or finding refuge in third countries in order to continue their terrorist and extremist activities within the SCO space.”¹⁹²

The activities of extremist jihadist organizations prohibited in Uzbekistan (the IMU, the IJU, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Akromiya, etc.) have always been a major threat to national security. However, the tough stance taken by law enforcement and security services and the comprehensive policy implemented by the government to improve the organization of measures to counter religious fundamentalism after the 1999 Tashkent bombings, the 2000 Batken events, a number of terrorist attacks in 2003–2004, and the 2005 Andijan unrest led to the cessation of organized activities carried out by clandestine cells of these organizations in the country. Furthermore, the collapse of

¹⁹⁰ «Бортников предупредил о смене тактики террористов в сторону «автономного джихада», ТАСС, 19 Дек 2017 [*Bortnikov warned about a change in terrorist tactics towards ‘autonomous jihad’*”, TASS, 19 December 2017], tass.ru/politika/4823670.

¹⁹¹ «ИГИЛ стремится создать новое квазигосударство в странах Центральной Азии», *Ритм Евразии*, 28.02.2018 [*“ISIL is looking to create a new quasi-state in the countries of Central Asia”*, *EurasiaRhythm*, 28 February 2018], <https://www.ritm Eurasia.org/news--2018-02-28--igil-stremitsja-sozdat-novoe-kvazigosudarstvo-v-stranah-centralnoj-azii-zavili-v-rats-shos-35184>.

¹⁹² «Лидеры стран ШОС приняли декларацию по итогам саммита в Циндао», *Ритм Евразии*, 11.06.2018 [*“Leaders of the SCO countries adopt a declaration on the results of the summit in Qingdao”*, *Rhythm of Eurasia*, 11 June 2018], <https://www.ritm Eurasia.org/news--2018-06-11--lidersy-stran-shos-prinjali-deklaraciju-po-itogam-sammitya-v-cindao-36953>.

the IMU and the IJU in Pakistan brought their terrorist activities in Uzbekistan to an almost complete stop.

However, the real threat is currently the IJB and the KJF (approximately 400 fighters from Uzbekistan and southern Kyrgyzstan). Created in Syria in 2014 and operating in the north-western part of this country, both organizations are branches of the IMU and affiliated with the al-Nusra Front (al-Qaeda). Their goal is to assist in the creation of an Islamic emirate in Syria and to fight the “holy war against the Uzbek regime” in order to build an Islamic emirate in Uzbekistan.

The possibility that supporters of ISIL in Afghanistan will relocate there and establish contact with organizations affiliated with al-Qaeda is a particular threat. This connection was observed in Syria at certain points in the struggle against Syrian government forces. The scenario is quite possible in Afghanistan, and will increase the scale of the threats, especially in the context of existing partial interaction of ISIL groups with individual detachments of the Taliban.

The defeat of ISIL and attacks on the al-Nusra Front in Syria and Iraq may lead to some of the most active IJB and KJF fighters being redeployed not to Uzbekistan (since they understand that they will not be able to carry out active operations in Uzbekistan), but to Afghanistan. And from there, by destabilizing the situation in northern Afghanistan, they will try to reach Uzbekistan through Turkmenistan and Tajikistan (since the Afghanistan–Uzbekistan border is one of the most heavily guarded borders in the world).

During the post-Soviet period, the states of the region have gained considerable experience in dealing with the threat of terrorism and interference in their internal affairs. However, the Central Asian countries have not yet managed to develop a unified strategy to combat terrorism, including terrorism based in Afghanistan. However, the gradual, largely informal formation of an anti-ISIL front between the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan, supported by the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, is making matters more difficult for Uzbek extremist organizations.

At the same time, the only way to combat the threat of terrorism is to strengthen anti-terrorism and military co-operation to get the countries of the region even more involved in stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, and to work together on socio-economic development and raising the standard of living in order to destroy the social base for terrorism in Afghanistan. Due to geographic factors, Uzbekistan is one of the key players in resolving the situation in Afghanistan. And without taking this factor into account, projects for settling the situation in Afghanistan cannot be fully implemented. In light of this, Uzbekistan has actively participated in the development of political and economic solutions aimed at resolving the conflict in Afghanistan throughout the post-Soviet period.

In July 2012, the Oliy Majlis (parliament) of Uzbekistan reviewed and approved the Concept of Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan, which defines the foreign policy strategy in the medium and long term. As noted in the Concept, the main priority in Uzbekistan's foreign policy is the region of Central Asia, with which its vital interests are connected. The Concept also specifies that the problems of Central Asia should be solved by the states of the region themselves, without the intervention of external forces. Contributing to resolving the situation in Afghanistan and ensuring peace and stability in the region are singled out in the Concept as key objectives.

The position of Uzbekistan regarding resolution of the Afghan conflict was initially based on two main principles:

1. Recognition of the fact that the situation cannot be resolved by military actions alone.
2. Strengthening the role and importance of the economic component in the programme for conflict resolution and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan consistently operates in two interrelated areas – through participation in the implementation of economic projects and parallel diplomatic activities in order to unite the efforts of both the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and the US/NATO, the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation.

In resolving the situation in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan has always strived to tone down the emphasis on the military component and pay more attention to economic recovery, as only this will reduce the level of conflict-generating potential inside Afghanistan. The provision of targeted economic assistance to Afghanistan must become a priority.

In this sense, Uzbekistan has a lot to offer. Uzbekistan has amassed considerable experience in the implementation of joint projects for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, especially in the areas of road construction and repair, power generation, railway construction, mining, education, and specialist exchanges. Uzbekistan has been actively co-operating with Kabul in the economic sphere since 2002, and has built and repaired 11 bridges on the highway between Mazar-i-Sharif and Kabul as part of the Afghanistan reconstruction programme. In addition, a 442-kilometre high voltage transmission line was built from Kabul to the Uzbekistan border; the 220 kV line, which cost over USD 198 million to build, now supplies Afghanistan with electricity from the Uzbek power system.

One of the main problems hindering economic growth in Afghanistan and, in particular, domestic production growth, is the lack of infrastructure – transport, communications, water and power supply, etc. Projects to develop the rail network in Afghanistan may therefore be important. In 2009–2010, Uzbekistan’s state-owned railway company (JSC O‘zbekiston Temir Yo‘llari) implemented a project valued at USD 129 million to build a 75-kilometre rail link connecting Hairatan to the city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

As for the current situation, we can see that after more than 15 years of US and NATO military presence, Afghanistan has still not managed to resolve its security issues and create a viable government, and conditions for sustainable economic development have not been ensured. The withdrawal of the bulk of Western coalition troops from Afghanistan under these conditions has not improved the intra-Afghan dialogue, and this could be a catalyst for destabilization in both Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Based on the current situation with resolving the situation in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan's foreign policy in this area will be focused on:

- intensification of efforts to establish political dialogue with Afghanistan (with all political forces inside Afghanistan), its neighbouring countries, and the leading centres of forces interested in maintaining a single Afghan nationhood;
- reliance on bilateral formats, since multilateral formats have unfortunately turned out to be ineffective in resolving the Afghanistan conflict;
- rendering all possible assistance in solving Afghanistan's socio-economic problems, and supporting projects aimed at helping Afghanistan create a viable and developing economy. Uzbekistan has gained considerable experience in carrying out reconstruction projects in Afghanistan, and it is only natural that it can initiate projects for the socio-economic development of Afghanistan as well.

Implementation of a project for the construction of a 2,000-kilometre railway line running from Mazar-i-Sharif through Kabul, Kandahar and Herat and back to Mazar-i-Sharif is of paramount importance. This project will cost nearly USD 3 billion, but will create the railway equivalent of the trans-Afghan transport corridor from Europe with access to India, China, Iran and Pakistan.

There has been a significant breakthrough in the humanitarian sphere as well. In November 2017, the Government of Uzbekistan issued a resolution by which an education centre for training Afghan citizens will be established under the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of Uzbekistan. The new centre will be located in Termez (Surxondaryo Region) and will provide higher, specialized secondary and vocational education programmes for personnel, as well as retraining and advanced training for Afghan specialists.

Thus, Uzbekistan's policy concerning Afghanistan is based on the recognition that the conflict in Afghanistan can only be resolved by rendering full assistance in solving Afghanistan's socio-economic

problems, and supporting projects aimed at helping Afghanistan create a viable and developing economy.

Improving the System for Countering Religious Fundamentalism and Extremism in Uzbekistan: Forms and Directions

Of the 32 million people who make up the population of modern Uzbekistan, some 3,000 (at the highest estimate) have fought for terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq. At the lowest estimate, their number was no more than 1,500. Given that over 2 million citizens of Uzbekistan are labour migrants in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan, these figures cannot be described as catastrophic. However, the fact that a number of citizens of Uzbekistan have been influenced by religious fundamentalist and extremist campaigns is a sign that work must still be done to improve and optimize efforts to counter this propaganda.

The policy for the deradicalization and reintegration of citizens who have been influenced by extremist ideologies in Uzbekistan: [is based on the] necessity to fight against terrorism and the threat of extremist expansion. One of the focus areas is the activity of law enforcement bodies and security services. But it is a mistake to assume that they will cope with this method of hard counteraction. An idea can be opposed only by an idea, ideology – only by ideology. And in order to fight efficiently with fairly well-trained Islamic extremist preachers, we need detachments of well-trained theologians and supporters of the idea of enlightened Islam.¹⁹³

Changing the System of Islamic Education in Uzbekistan at All Levels

The state system for countering the ideology of religious fundamentalism and extremism in Uzbekistan was formed gradually, by generalizing its own experience and studying foreign experience

¹⁹³ «Гуманистический ислам и поиск Узбекистаном своего пути развития: глобальные перспективы» <http://press-unity.com/analitika-stati/10952.html>

in countering extremism. Meanwhile, the understanding of the role and place of Islam in society and in the system of social values has also changed, from the initial enthusiasm for Islam and its positive role in society in the early 1990s, when Islamic education was largely influenced by supporters and preachers of radical Salafi ideas, to caution and mistrust of the system of religious Islamic organizations, when religious activity was often viewed through the lens of potential terrorism and extremism that influenced government policy and, in particular, the commitment to state-controlled religious education since the late 1990s.

In general, the system of Islamic education institutions that was created in Uzbekistan in the post-Soviet period was focused on the formation of an Islamic intellectual class, based on secular education and religious knowledge obtained in state-accredited educational institutions. This system included the Tashkent Imam al-Bukhari Islamic Institute, the Mir-i-Arab Madrasa, and nine specialized Islamic schools of secondary education, and provided students with a secular education along with religious and theological studies.¹⁹⁴

A new stage in the improvement of the Islamic education system in Uzbekistan began in 2017, when Shavkat Mirziyoyev was elected president. President Mirziyoyev set out the key points of the new policy in a speech at the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2017. During the speech, he repeatedly referred to the growing Islamophobia in the world and the need for a fundamental distinction between the concepts of “Islam” and “terrorism”. The Uzbek head of state emphasized that these words cannot be equated, and that in the modern world, in the context of growing religious extremism, information is required about the humanistic essence of Islam. These statements were supported by a comprehensive programme of measures implemented in Uzbekistan in 2017. The essence of this policy lies in the understanding that the enlightened,

¹⁹⁴ According to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 22 August 2003, certificates issued to graduates of religious educational institutions are equated to the corresponding state certificates of education.

humanistic Islam needs to be helped and strengthened, and that conditions must be created for its development.

The new policy was put into motion in June 2017 with the establishment of the Imam al-Bukhari Centre of Hadith Science in Samarkand. The *Sahih al-Bukhari* hadith collection compiled by Imam al-Bukhari enjoys unquestioned authority in the Muslim world. This collection of authentic hadith was the first to be compiled on a thematic basis, and is considered to be an outstanding guide to *fiqh* (the theory of Islamic law). Islamic education based on *Sahih al-Bukhari* can promote the ideas of enlightened Islam.

The next critical step in implementing the policy was reorganization of the famous Mir-i-Arab Madrasa, which was the only institution in the Soviet Union that provided full Islamic education. It was decided to create a higher madrasa on its basis to train theologians to teach theology at specialized Islamic schools of higher and secondary education. Thus, the Mir-i-Arab Madrasa obtained the status of a school of higher religious education.

In addition, the Centre for Islamic Civilization is planned to be built in Tashkent. This centre will include a library, an archive and a manuscript fund to house ancient manuscripts, lithographs, historical documents and artefacts from Uzbekistan and abroad that are related to the scientific and religious schools founded by great figures who lived in the territory of modern Uzbekistan; it will also house modern scientific research papers in this sphere. Nine specialized schools of secondary religious education and two specialized schools of higher religious education will be put under the supervision of the centre.

In December 2017, the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan was established by decree of the President of Uzbekistan. This non-state school completes the formation of a coherent system of religious educational institutions. The academy is tasked with training highly qualified teachers to work at the country's specialized schools of higher and secondary religious education. The academy, which was founded by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan, began offering 16 master's degree programmes during the 2018–2019 academic year.

The Mahalla as a Key Element in the Deradicalization and Reintegration of Citizens who have been Influenced by Extremist Ideologies

After fulfilling local self-government functions for thousands of years (based on urban divisions and rural settlements—*kishlaks*), the institution of *mahalla* was enshrined in the 1992 Law on Citizens' Bodies of Self-Government. As a historical form of local self-government, *mahallas* have gradually become an institution ensuring state-society relationships.

One of the most important functions assigned to *mahallas* is now combating the spread of extremist ideologies, especially among youth. Each *mahalla* has a “citizens’ assembly” with five deputy chairs, one of whom is responsible for working with young people and countering the spread of extremist ideologies by organizing targeted information campaigns. *Mahallas* are also tasked with providing financial and employment assistance to persons who have served sentences in correctional institutions, including for crimes related to anti-state activities.

In addition, each *mahalla* also has a “*posboni*” —an organization of young people who have completed military service. The *posboni* acts as an important tool in helping law enforcement agencies protect public safety and order.

By developing an integrated system for the deradicalization and reintegration of young people who have been influenced by extremist ideologies and including *mahallas* as the key tool in this process, Uzbekistan has managed to stop the wave of terrorist activity that began in the late 1990s and culminated in an attempted coup in Andijan in May 2005. Since 2005, Uzbekistan has not had a single major terrorist incident with casualties.

At the same time, it is important to understand that the policy of openness currently being pursued by the leadership of Uzbekistan should not lead to an increase in religious extremism in the country. And this is the main challenge that the government now faces.

It used to be easier to combat religious radicalism, since the previous system involved a strict border regime and closed borders with several neighbouring countries that were importer of preachers, forbidden literature, finances, etc. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies combatted public demonstrations of adherence to Salafi fundamentalist ideas (special clothing, wearing a beard or a hijab, unofficial mosques, etc.).

Now the challenge is to contain the spread of the ideology of religious fundamentalism and extremism, but within the concept of greater openness and with strict adherence to procedural norms and ensuring respect for human rights. And this is a serious challenge for the entire Uzbek political system, in both the short term and the long term.

Continuing the theme of the spread of enlightened Islam in the country, it would be advisable to concentrate on changes in the Islamic world as a whole. For various reasons, the Islamic world became an outsider in the industrial (machine) age and is now divided and fragmented. There are a large number of dividing lines in the Islamic world –between rich and poor countries, Sunnis and Shias, and so on.

Modernization in most Islamic countries is slow. The list of the world's 22 largest economies only includes three Muslim states: Indonesia, Turkey and Iran. This weakness makes Islamic countries vulnerable to the influence and manipulation of non-Islamic powers.

And now, Muslim countries and the Islamic world as a whole must accept the challenges of the new age of innovation and information. What is the role of Muslim countries in this process? Outsiders, once again? Or will the Islamic world be able to respond to the challenges of the new era?

The Islamic world is presented with a great opportunity to successfully implement a policy of modernization and occupy a more serious position in the global economy. This will enhance the role of these countries in geopolitical processes and in the international arena and, more importantly, enable them to transition from being an

object of manipulation to a self-sufficient entity. However, achieving this without assistance is difficult, so joining forces is essential.

In the summer of 2017, leaders of Islamic countries gathered in Astana for a summit, where they talked about the development of innovation and science. An agreement was reached to create six supercomputers to be used by all Muslim countries. The President of Uzbekistan also proposed holding an international competition in the exact sciences in honour of Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi, the “father of algebra”. These are excellent examples of how Muslim leaders can work together and set mutual goals. Muslims are gradually learning to join their efforts and put forward common ideas and initiatives that contribute to the development and modernization of the Islamic world.

Modern cybernetics and algebra are largely based on ideas proposed by the great scholar Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (who participated in the activities of the Khorezm Ma'mun Academy and introduced the concept of the algorithm), as well as the achievements of the Mirzo Ulugbek mathematical and astronomical school in Samarkand in the 15th century. This legacy should provide a serious basis for Uzbekistan to make a breakthrough on the path of innovative development.

And Uzbekistan is already taking steps in this direction, as evidenced by the establishment of the Mirzo Ulugbek Innovation Center in Tashkent, the declaration of 2018 as the Year of Supporting Active Entrepreneurship, Innovative Ideas and Technologies, and the creation of specialized schools in mathematics, physics and cybernetics for gifted children. Clearly, Uzbekistan is an example of how a Muslim-majority country can take active measures to ensure development in the context of global geoeconomic and geopolitical transformations, and, if necessary, development based on enlightened Islam.

Information about the OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan

The OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan started working in Kazakhstan in 1999. According to its mandate, the Office:

- promotes the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments as well as co-operation of Kazakhstan in all three OSCE dimensions within the OSCE framework approach to cooperative security and in the regional context;

- facilitates contacts and promotes information exchange between the authorities of Kazakhstan and the Chairman-in-Office and OSCE executive structures and institutions, as well as cooperation with international organizations;

- establishes and maintains contacts with central and local authorities, universities and research institutes of the host country, as well as representatives of civil society and NGOs;

- assists in arranging OSCE regional events, inter alia, regional seminars and visits to the area by OSCE delegations, as well as other events with OSCE participation;

- provides assistance to the Government of Kazakhstan, such as raising awareness on OSCE activities, training of designated Kazakh officials, and providing advice on the OSCE to relevant official structures, facilitate information exchange between OSCE institutions and relevant state agencies on OSCE activities.

Following the mandate, the Office conducts its programmatic activities based on Annual Program Outlines developed under close consultation with the host country and the OSCE Institution. The Office supports Kazakhstan in promoting OSCE values and principles, facilitates security and confidence building measures within the OSCE area, transparent economic and environmental policy and the implementation of human rights in line with the OSCE commitments.

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