

# documentos

## CIDOB

**Asia**  
**26**

## ISLAMIC REVIVAL IN CENTRAL ASIA The cases of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan

**Saodat Olimova** Head of the Sociological Service, Research Centre SHARQ  
**Farkhod Tolipov** Associate Professor, National University of Uzbekistan

### Foreword

*Carmen Claudín*

Director of Programmes at CIDOB

*Aurèlia Mañé*

Director of the Central Asia Observatory (OAC)

This book is the result of a workshop held at CIDOB on 1 December 2009 on the topic of “Islam and Democracy in Central Asia”, an event that brought together leading Spanish experts and Central Asian experts from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The meeting took place within the framework of the Central Asia Observatory (in Spanish, OAC), a joint project promoted by CIDOB, Casa Asia and Real Instituto Elcano.

The goal of the meeting was to debate the complex relationship between Islam and the Modern State, an equation in which Central Asia is a key component, given that throughout its particular history, the region has developed a hybrid, moderate form of Islam, marked by the still recent experience of Communism, an autochthonous religious substratum and the nomadic culture that spread along the Silk Route and exchanged multiple influences.

One of the starting points for the debate, was the affirmation that the Islamic Hanafite School was predominant in Central Asia. This is a school that is characterized by being moderate and deliberately separated from political power. It was also stated that after the period of Soviet rule, this traditional Islam re-emerged in the region, though this time it had an official nature and was sometimes used as an instrument of social control. In some regions, such as in the Ferghana Valley (where in the past, violent confrontations took place between communities), a radical sector has sprung up with links to

the Salafite school (which was also the origin of the Wahabite sect in Saudi Arabia) and which sought the introduction of a *caliphate*, the supranational body ruled by Islamic law. This radical interpretation of Islam took the form of armed insurgency with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), but also as a subversive movement, with the Hizb ut-Tahrir. Their existence –albeit in a minority form at present– has been used by the region’s states to justify to their citizens the authoritarian nature of their control and their fight against so-called external influences. Within this network of religion and politics, the country of Uzbekistan is of vital importance to our understanding of the past, present and future of Islam in Central Asia. Tajikistan is the other country analysed more deeply in this book, observing the evolution of Islam in the country from its earliest days in the Post-Soviet period.

One of the conclusions resulting from the debate was precisely that Central Asia societies possess unique factors which, as we will see, create an ideal laboratory for reflecting on the relationship between the corners of the triangle comprised of Islam, democracy and authoritarianism. This produces questions such as: rather than a clash of civilisations, would it not be more accurate to speak of a clash of institutions? Who are the sides in this clash, theocracies and secular states, or democratic and authoritarian systems?

If this was the case, the most suitable approach would be one that observes the dichotomy, not between democracy and Islam, but between an incipient democratic Islam and an authoritarian Islam; a dichotomy which, perhaps, more than in any other place in the world, serves to explain the events taking place in today’s Central Asia.

Barcelona, February 2011

## CONFRONTING OR ENGAGING ISLAM: Are there different approaches in Central Asian countries?

Saodat Olimova,

Head of the Sociological Service, Research Centre SHARQ

**Abstract:** This article presents an overview on the topic of Islam in Central Asia, assuming that it is possible to identify some common trends for the whole area, but also many particularities that depend on their own historical, social and political background, and that will condition the nature of the state's relations with Islam. Denying the hypothesis that the Islamic revival in the 1980's-1990's in Central Asia was a result of external influence of proselytism, and that it simply landed in the region after the downfall of Communist ideology, the author underlines the existence of a deep-rooted local Islam, moderate in nature and alien to political struggle. Nonetheless, we should not think of a cohesive and homogeneous Islam. On the contrary, it is an Islam that has faced strong debates amongst traditionalists and revolutionaries, as well as the different currents, traditions and schools that compete in Central Asia today to attract the interest of the many believers. Traditionalists are guided by a combination of nationalist and Islamic ideas, and they consider national interests to be more important than global Islamic integration. The projects for reviving the Silk Road, which include the construction of roads, bridges, and also feature plans to construct railways that would connect Central Asian countries with Afghanistan, China, Iran and Pakistan will lead to a major development of contacts with the Near East and South Asia, and will increase transportation, commodity and human flows, stimulating at the same time the exchange of ideas. As a consequence, there is a significant increase in the influence of the international Islamic movement in Central Asian countries that is very welcomed by the governments, who are willing to expand official, business, cultural and inter-personal contacts with other Muslim countries. Nonetheless, this is also a gateway for external influence on Central Asian states that could in some way undermine the power of traditional elites. In response, national governments rely on traditionalists and cultivate local forms of Islam. The civil war in Tajikistan was an extreme manifestation of this conflict within Islam, and in this respect, the country becomes the subject of an in-depth analysis from which we can extract some valuable conclusions about the Islamisation process in Central Asian countries. The article also includes the results of surveys conducted by the author in Tajikistan that help us to gauge important topics such as the leadership among Muslim communities, the extent of radicalisation and how to deal with social and economic problems.

### Introduction

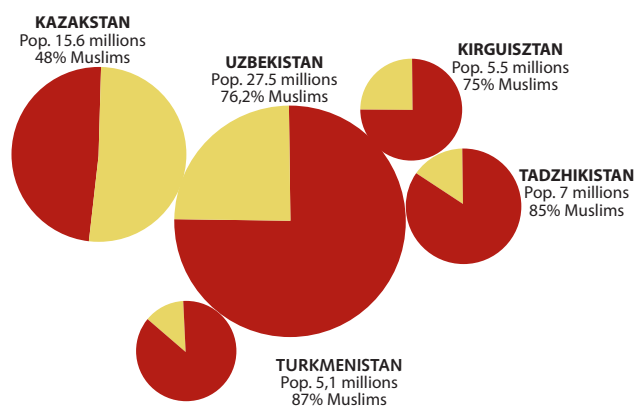
The relationship between secular regimes and Islam has become a commonplace theme in the majority of research studies about Central Asia. Nevertheless, relations between Central Asian regimes and democracy and between Islam and democracy in the region have received less attention and consequently are less studied.

At the same time, Central Asian countries play an increasingly active role in international Islamic organisations and have closer contacts with Islamic countries. Islam plays a more substantial role in the internal life of these countries. This poses the questions of whether Islam plays a confrontational or engaging role in post-Soviet Central Asia, and

whether there are differences in approaches to Islam in different Central Asian countries.

Before answering these questions, let us recall that the Central Asian countries are Muslim countries, since a considerable part of their population worship Islam. For example, according to a public opinion poll in May 2009, 94.8% of people polled in Tajikistan described themselves as Muslims, although the degree of adherence to religious norms varied quite widely. Around 89.2% of Tajikistan population are followers of the Hanafite branch of Sunni Islam, 3.9% of the population are Shi'a Muslims (including 1.4% of Ismaili Muslims), and 0.2% are Christians, who are comprised of mostly ethnic Russians and other ethnic minorities. According to some estimates, there are about 20,000 *Salafiyya* followers. The Ministry of Culture reports that there are currently 3,242 officially operating mosques, including 259 Friday (cathedral) mosques in addition to 18 religious educational institutions. Almost the same picture can be seen in Uzbekistan. The situation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is considerably different. In these countries there are fewer people worshipping Islam than in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan a considerable part of the population worships Christianity. Besides, the territories of what is today Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were one of the world centres of Islamic thought, science and culture, whereas in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Islam emerged as a dominant religion much later.

Graph 1. Muslims in Central Asia



Source: *Asia Pacific Yearbook 2009 (2010 Edition)*. [www.anuarioasiapacifico.es](http://www.anuarioasiapacifico.es)

### "Re-Islamisation" in Central Asia as a result of internal development

Despite the variety of historical and cultural legacy in Central Asian countries, all these countries are subject to the process of "re-Islamisation." The use of popular terms such as "revivalism", "islamic renaissance", "re-Islamisation", "secondary islamisation", and the spread of the term "fundamentalism" has been a matter of debate among researchers (Abdujabbarov, 1993; Olcott, 1995). Animated discussions also persist as to whether the revival of Islam in Central Asia was a result of the independent spiritual, social and political development of the region, or a phenomenon imposed from outside. Similarly divergent positions are held by researchers with regard to the

question of whether Soviet Central Asia can be considered a part of the unified Islamic world, or whether it developed autonomously from other parts of the Islamic world but within atheistic boundaries of the Communist experiment<sup>1</sup>.

Until now there has been a prevailing opinion that as a result of mass elimination and emigration of institutional clergy in the early years of the Soviet regime, Islamic thought in Central Asia virtually came to a halt, and Islam in Central Asian societies started to function predominantly as a way of life and the basis for cultural identity, but not as a world view or an ideology. If we depart from this point of view, we need to concur with the overwhelming majority of researchers who believe that the revival of Islam in the 1980's-1990's in Central Asia was a result of external influence, favored by proselytism. It is assumed that the activities of international Islamic organisations were particularly successful in the spiritual vacuum that appeared in the region after the downfall of Communist ideology. However, this explanation is hardly satisfactory, since it does not offer the key to understanding the scale and diversity inside the Islamic movement in the region, and does not account for the spread of such obscure Islamic trends as *Hizb ut-Tahrir* in Central Asia.

It appears that in order to make it possible to understand the nature of the Islamic movement in Central Asia we first need to study the role and place of Islam in the social, political and spiritual life of contemporary societies in the region. The analysis of biographies of Muslim spiritual leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as monitoring the religious situation and public opinion about religion provides sufficient evidence to reach a number of conclusions. First of all, and despite the severe atheistic pressure, Islam and Islamic thought gained weight in Central Asia during the Soviet period. The tradition and succession were never discontinued. Islam existed as a way of life and as an identification of the indigenous population of Central Asia. Starting with Kokand *Mullahs*, who found refuge in Eastern Bukhara in 1920's-30's, and through the *Ishans* and *Hojas*<sup>2</sup>, who supported the Islamic intellectuals who had fallen out of grace in 1950's-60's, the Islamic theological and legal world view continued to develop in different forms, including reformation. In the course of this development, the most vexed and pressing issues of Islamic existence in Soviet Central Asia were addressed, such as relations be-

**Despite the severe atheistic pressure, Islam and Islamic thought gained weight in Central Asia during the Soviet period. The tradition and succession were never discontinued**

tween Islam and authorities, Islam's connection with society, and the place and role of Islamic spiritual leaders in social and political life. As both Islamic paths developed, more spiritualists and those representing a total world view not only flourished, but they occupied an increasing amount of space within society, sometimes entering into poignant conflict with one another. In the 60's-70's, there was discord in the Islamic community that led to the advent of a new generation of Islamic intellectuals and spiritual leaders of various trends, who subsequently formed Islamic political organisations such as the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), *Adolat* (Fairness), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), etc.

The members of this generation of Islamic intellectuals also formed the *mudjaddadiya* (updating or reform) movement. The main objectives and purposes of this movement were to introduce changes into local *Hanafi* rituals and even dogmatic issues, to initiate and direct the process of Islamisation as part of an "updating and cleansing" of the original Islam from later "innovations", to create a political platform for people who worship Islam. The most "revolutionary" objective of this movement was the request by some of its *Ulema* to reject local forms of Islam, in particular the *maturidit* school. In exchange, they suggested adopting *Salafite* rituals and interpretations in an attempt to reinstate

the laws and customs of the early Islamic communities. Apart from these, there was a large group of *mullahs* opposed to the idea of updating or reforming autochthonous Islam. These *mullahs* were known as traditionalists. They continue the *maturidit* traditions, recognising the separation

between religion and the state. As such, traditionalists are the key support for the functioning political and social system in all Central Asian countries.

Traditionalists are guided by a combination of nationalist and Islamic ideas, and they consider national interests to be more important than global Islamic integration. Consequently, they support their national governments in every possible way. In response, national governments rely on traditionalists and cultivate local forms of Islam. This creates conflicts between these two movements in Islam in Central Asia. The civil war in Tajikistan was an extreme manifestation of this conflict within Islam.

### Islam in post-Soviet Tajikistan

One could argue that the history of the Islamic movement and relations between Islam and the state in Tajikistan is a unique case in post-Soviet countries, where Islamists became one of the parties in an armed conflict. But at the same time, it is also true that it demonstrates some general traits of Islamisation in Central Asian countries. Below we will analyse the case of Tajikistan in more detail, identifying four stages of the development of Islamic movement in the country:

1 The rigid position in these arguments is often maintained by American researchers, like Allen Hetmanek and Muriel Atkin (see for instance, Hetmanek, 1994.; Atkin, 1992 y 1997). Stephane Dudoignon's view that the Islamic revival in Central Asia had roots of its own seems to be fairly sound: see Dudoignon, 1998.

2 Editor's Note: *Ishan* is the local name assigned to a spiritual guide or master who used to live with his followers in a dervish monastery. By *hoja* (also *khoja* or *khwaja*) the author refers also to a master of a particular tradition inside Sufism, which emerged with Ahmad Kasani in the 15th Century. Both titles are hereditary, from one master to another.

**1988-1992:** The process of Islamic revival surely started several years before the collapse of the former USSR, but it was then that the majority of the population (who in the Soviet period had to conceal their beliefs) had the opportunity to openly manifest their commitment to Islam. This period was characterised by the trend of enlightenment. At that moment, the Islamic movement was basically made up of:

- a) Official clergy, who included members and local representatives of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Tajikistan or *Qaziyat* of the Republic
- b) Islamic reformers from the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT)
- c) Sufi Sheikhs or *Ishons*
- d) Wahabis
- f) Young enlighteners

It was also in this period when a lot of study groups and societies emerged independent one of another, led by young Islamic enlighteners. The latter believed that the foremost task in independent Tajikistan was to teach Islam. Ismaili theologian *Domullo* Haknazar Sobir confirmed to the author of this paper that from 1989 up to 1995 a study group existed called *Ihvon-us-Safo* in a school under his supervision. This study group, which included both boys and girls, discussed issues related to Islam and philosophy.

#### **1991-1997 (Inter-Tajik Conflict):**

During the second stage of political Islamic movement, which is characterised by the escalating civil war in Tajikistan and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam became a mobilising force in the political process, and an integral part of opposition forces against the political establishment. The logic of struggle unified all trends of the Islamic movement in Tajikistan. The Islamic movement demonstrated its uniform position during the presidential elections of 1991. At that time the Islamic movement took its first practical steps towards establishing a new Islamic political organisation –the Islamic Revival Movement of Tajikistan (IRMT), which was later to become the core of Unified Tajik Opposition (UTO). In early 1993, the IRPT announced its voluntary dissolution and the founding of the IRMT (which functioned from early 1993 until late 1999).

During the period of civil conflict, leaders of the IRMT and above all Said Abdullo Nuri shifted their agenda from demanding the abolition of the secular state and the introduction of Islamic radicalism to a more pragmatic, tolerant stance. The loss of financial, material, and human resources in the course of the conflict forced leaders of the IRMT to abandon the goal of recreating a theocratic state in Tajikistan and to move towards a more tolerant Islam. Thus, in the process of strife and conflict in Tajikistan, a broad alliance of Islamic forces of different orientations appeared.

**From 1997 till 2004:** The main characteristic of the third stage of Islamic political movement in Tajikistan was the legalisa-

tion of political Islam in the country. This became possible as a result of peace agreements signed in 1997 and in their aftermath. The IRMT representatives actively participated in the work of the Commission for National Reconciliation (CNR), and in the preparing of amendments to the Constitution of Tajikistan, and received 20 % of posts in all executive agencies. The IRPT was legalised and it participated in presidential and parliamentary elections, securing two seats in Parliament.

At the same time, the fragmentation of the Islamic movement, the dissolution of the IRMT and the weakening of the IRPT took place. The IRPT started to position itself as a nation-wide Islamic party which primarily pursued national interests rather than the agenda of the global Islamic movement. The IRPT –under the leadership of Said Abdullo Nuri–took the stance of constructive democratic opposition and implemented the politics of dialogue and compromise with the secular government of Tajikistan. On the one hand, this led to the strengthening of peace in the post-war period, but on the other, it led to the split of the more radical IRPT members from the main party. The latter joined the ranks of the illegal party of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which strengthened its influence during this period of time. Moreover, during the elections the IRPT had to face structural difficulties due to very poor preparation by party organisers and the absence of lower-level functionaries. IRPT leaders acknowledge today that

**Traditionalists are the key support for the functioning political and social system (...) who are guided by a combination of nationalist and Islamic ideas, and consider national interests to be more important than global Islamic integration**

the incompetence of most of their representatives in the government and the parliament allowed authorities to replace them later. Many failures in the presidential and parliamentary election campaigns and extreme weakness in the IRPT's analytical work bear testimony to the insufficiency of the intellec-

tual capacity of political Islam in Tajikistan.

The government, which was struggling against the UTO and striving to split the Islamic political movement, took several steps to achieve its goals. In 1998, it abolished the *Muftiyat* and the institution of *Sar-Khatibs* (heads of regional and district mosques responsible for the *Muftiyat*). It also replaced the *Muftiyat* by the Council of *Ulamahs*, which from now on played a strictly advisory function.

**From 2005 till 2008:** This period can be characterised by the expansion in all directions of the Islamic political movement in Tajikistan (including the IRPT, *Salafiyaya*, *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) and a growing discord among various groups.

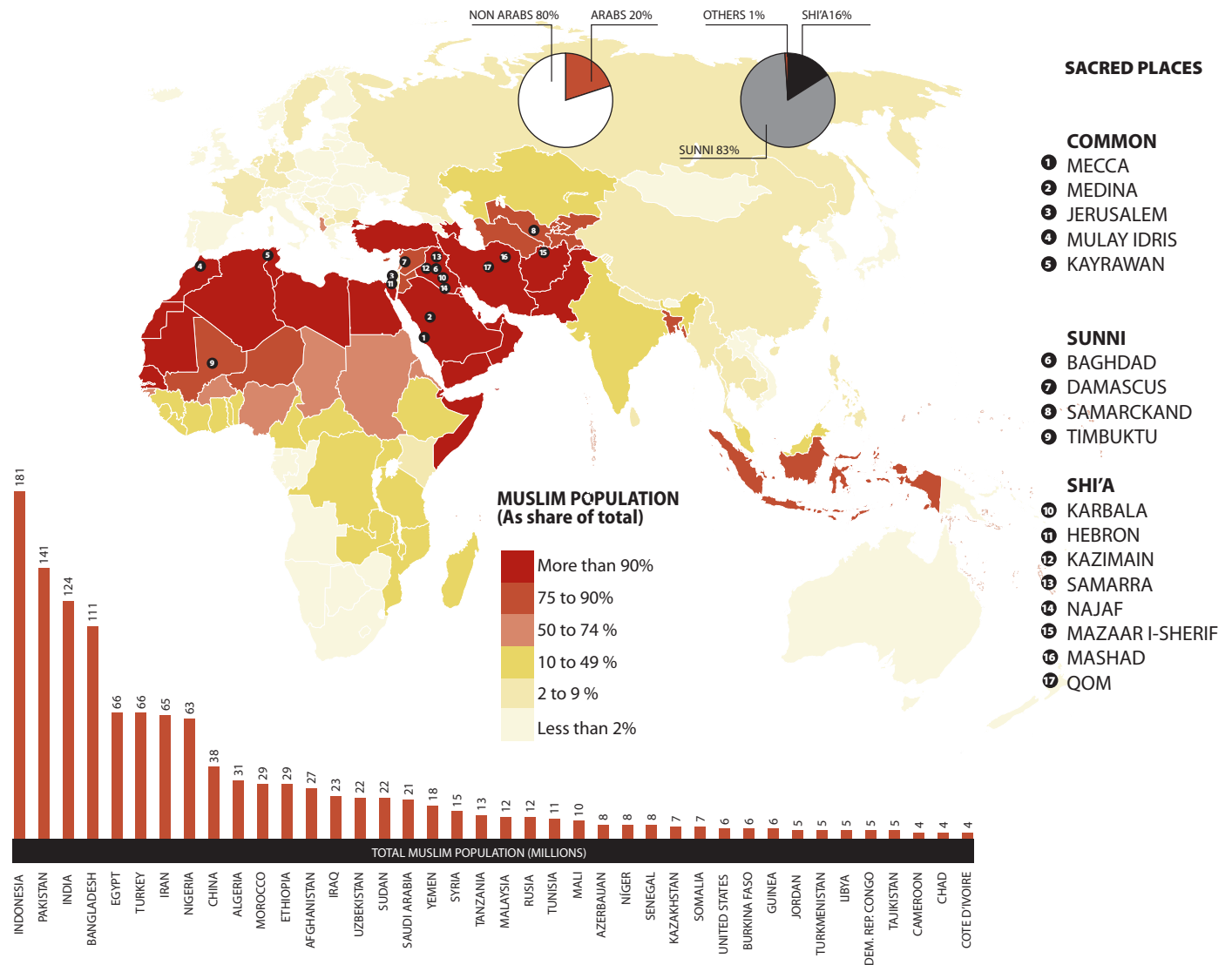
The problems, which dogged the IRPT during its transformation from military movement to political party with representation in the parliament, were exacerbated by the death of its leader Said Abdullo Nuri on 9 August 2006. Leadership of the party was then taken on by Muhiddin Kabiri, an Islamic intellectual with democratic views. Kabiri's attempts to transform the IRPT into a political party of moderate Islamists operating in a democratic political arena faced cer-

tain obstacles. First of all, the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004 strengthened the authoritative power of the president of Tajikistan for the next 14 years, which resulted in the curtailment of democratic reforms, the expansion of authoritarianism and more difficulties for opposition political parties to express themselves and operate. Secondly, the ideological separation between the democratically oriented leadership of the IRPT and its members grew deeper. Several sub-groups with distinct views on the goals of Islamic political movement appeared within the IRPT. Nevertheless, the

time, the absence of centralised bodies regulating and coordinating religious communities and the weakness of municipal and regional governing bodies led to a wide diversity of opinions about what the future form of development of Islam and its relations with the state should be.

The legalisation of the Islamic party in Tajikistan in accordance with peace agreements in 1997 and the introduction of religious freedom eased tensions within society and facilitated the reconciliation process in the post-conflict period in

Map 1. Islam in the world



Source: Asia Pacific Yearbook 2005, Casa Asia, CIDOB and Real Instituto Elcano. www.anuarioasiapacifico.es

IRPT remained as the only legal Islamic political movement in Tajikistan.

It is important to keep in mind that the expansion in a variety of Islamic political movements took place against the backdrop of rapid Islamisation of society in Tajikistan and the emergence of national self-identification, as an inherent element of the Islamic and Iranian worlds<sup>1</sup>. The fact that by 2005 the social life of local communities had been transferred to mosques resulted in the growing influence of local religious leaders and traditional Islam in general. At the same

Tajikistan. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that this process of post-conflict reconciliation was transitional. Currently, the relations' network between the state and religious institutions and leaders in Tajikistan follows the general pattern of a Central Asian countries scenario, meaning by this that the ruling elites try to use Islam to strengthen its grip on power within a context of an acute legitimacy crisis. For example, Tajikistan's President Rahmon follows the path of *Turkmenbashi*, who tried to deify his cult in Turkmenistan using the local traditions of Islam. How to solve the problem of the role and place of Islam and Islamic leaders in the grow-

ing authoritative political systems? This is proving to be the main problem in modern Tajikistan, as well as in other Central Asian countries.

### The identification of the Central Asian countries as an integral part of the Islamic world

The process of the identification of societies in Central Asian countries as an integral part of the Islamic world is a process that it is currently taking place. The natural dynamics of opening up the Central Asian countries to the world has also stimulated the process of Islamisation. Local governments enthusiastically cooperate with international Islamic organisations such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Islamic Development Bank, the Sports Federation of Islamic Solidarity Games etc. and are willing to expand official, business, cultural and inter-personal contacts with other Muslim countries.

The projects for reviving the Silk Road include the construction of roads, bridges, and also feature plans to construct railways that would connect Central Asian countries with Afghanistan, China, Iran and Pakistan, something that will lead to a major development of contacts with Near East and Southern Asia, and will increase transportation, commodity and human flows, stimulating at the same time the exchange of ideas. As a consequence, there is a significant increase in the influence of the international Islamic movement in Central Asian countries.

The development of new technologies such as the Internet and mobile communication, as well as expanding economic, cultural and human contacts with other Muslim countries will lead to the growing inclusion of Central Asian countries into the network of the international Islamic movement.

More and more Central Asian inhabitants have become familiar with the leaders of the Islamic world. According to a survey conducted in Tajikistan in December 2008, the most popular Muslim politician was the president of Iran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad. He was supported by 90% of those polled. The second most popular Muslim leader was the king of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah (supported by 71% of those polled). The third place in popularity was occupied by the secretary general of the Lebanese movement Hezbollah, Hasan Nasralla –capturing the positive views of 47% of those polled. It also should be remarked that Osama Bin Laden was supported by only 4% of those polled, while an overwhelming 80% were against him.

The data from surveys comprises the last five years and concludes that while the local society in Tajikistan is undergoing a rapid Islamisation, most of the people still prefer to worship moderate Islam. According to the results of a survey in Tajikistan in December 2008, more than a third of those polled consider Islam as the only way to handle social and economic problems.

But there is also a persistent group of 24.6% who still rely on secularism, as they are disturbed by the growing influence of

radical Islamists. At the same time, the group of individuals who support radical and extreme views on Islam is gradually increasing. A substantial group of those who support extreme views are mostly people from business circles and the young. But of course, not all young people are in support of radical readings of Islam. There is also a significant group of people that represents a growing trend of “privatising” or individualising Islam, a perspective that has spread especially among young people in Tajikistan. This trend reflects the deep socio-cultural shifts within the society of Tajikistan and the inability of traditional Islam to cater to new intellectual, spiritual, social and political needs and interests of younger believers. The mass consciousness and solidarity of Muslim believers is in conflict with the growing individualism, which is emerging hand-in-hand with the market reforms. This conflict stimulates the diversification of Islamic thought and produces new young religious leaders, who consider Islam not only as a tradition and a way of life but as an ideology and a philosophical construct.

The conflict between communal consciousness and the growing individualism also implies a diminishing role for traditional Islam as a source of social control. Subsequently, this allows the radical Islamic international movements, such as Salafiyya and Hizb ut-Tahrir, to increase their influence. In Tajikistan today,

there is a growing conflict between traditionalism and new movements of Islam that goes along with the efforts by the government to expand its control over religious life. In turn this leads to an increase in supporters of the radical Muslim movements.

For example, banning children and women from entering mosques<sup>3</sup>, or the ban on

wearing headscarves (*hijabs*) in official institutions<sup>4</sup> and the closing of mosques<sup>5</sup> and other restrictions have inflamed the opposite reaction –the number of adherents to radical Islam emblems (such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, Salafiyya, and other radical religious organisations)– has increased. Over the last several years the influence of the Salafiyya movement has been growing particularly fast among younger believers, and the Salafiyya movement has been transforming into a potent political movement. The rejection of other movements and schools in Islam by Salafiyya followers resulted in a deep religious conflict among believers in Tajikistan. To resolve the conflict, the government of Tajikistan banned the Salafiyya movement in Tajikistan and formally supported local imams.

**[In Tajikistan], over the last several years, the influence of the Salafiyya movement has been growing particularly fast among younger believers. [It could become] a potent political movement**

3. In 2004 the Council of Ulamo issued a *fatwa* prohibiting women from praying in mosques. The *fatwa* is still in effect, although a number of unregistered mosques allow women to pray. The Council of Ulamo justified the *fatwa* by arguing that traditionally women did not pray in mosques.
4. In 2007 the Minister of Education announced that according to the new dress code, female students could not wear *hijabs* in public educational institutions. This announcement followed the official ban on wearing *hijabs* in educational institutions, which was introduced in 2005. Although the implementation of the ban in 2005-2007 was not uniform in different regions of Tajikistan, since 2007 many female students and instructors were expelled from educational institutions for wearing *hijabs*.
5. In 2005-2008 the government authorities closed down many unregistered mosques and prayer rooms and demolished three unregistered mosques in Dushanbe. Most of the previously closed down mosques were allowed to operate later.

In addition to these steps, the government banned Tabligi Jamaat and intensified their persecution of Hizb ut-Tahrir<sup>6</sup>. Over the past three months (between April and June 2009) 40 followers of Salafiyya, 93 members of Tabligi Jamaat, and 19 followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir were arrested. Despite these government actions, the recognition and support for political Islam is expanding in Tajik society.

During research conducted in 2008, we studied the attitude towards various Islamic paths and the role of Islam in politics. The data that emerged showed clearly that the majority of those polled (65%) would support a political party that was promoting moderate Islamic ideas. 44% of them would support a party that could unite all the Muslim clergy, while 52% would not be supporting this party. An Islamic extremist party would be supported just by 10.7% of those polled, against an overwhelming 83.8% that would not support it. Nonetheless, 23% still believe that Islamic parties should also combine their political struggle with some kind of armed action (exceeded by a flagrant 70% that was in opposition to that).

Thus, political Islam has strong potential support in Tajik society, and local authorities have to take it into account. However, attempts to pre-empt and intercept slogans and ideas of Islamic opposition, and the attempts to ideologically deactivate the protesting electorate by officially adopting the moderate *Hanafi* school of Islam and to expand official support for traditional clergy has caused the opposite reaction towards a further Islamisation of Tajikistan's society. Therefore, many religious leaders, including IRPT members, have stayed loyal to the government, being convinced that the government will create an Islamic state without the need of a "green revolution" that would imply an Islamisation from above.

### Islam, society and state religious policy: national differences and common regional trends

Despite the fact that interactions between the state and Islam in Central Asia are designed by a sort of common pattern, the particular religious policy of every state differs considerably from one to another. In Uzbekistan, there is strict control over religion and a lot of pressure against the so-called "unofficial" Islam. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, religious policies are unclear. In Tajikistan, the government is attempting to lead the Muslim movement. How to explain such different approaches to Islam?

The study of transformations in social life caused by Islamisa-

6. Despite the fact that Hizb ut-Tahrir has been banned since 2000, in 2008 the Supreme Court ruled to restrict punishment for use of mass media and the Internet for propagation of Hizb ut-Tahrir and its ideas. On 8 January 2009, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan ruled to ban the religious movement of Salafiyya.

tion shows that the main factors affecting different approaches to Islam in Central Asia are the following: social organisation, type of government of local communities, and the level of participation of Muslim leaders in social life.

In the Soviet period, Islam played a very important role in organising the internal social and spiritual life of people in Central Asia. This internal life existed along with the external life common for all USSR republics.

Through its spiritual leaders, Islam determined not only spiritual and social spheres, but also cultural and partly even the economical life of communities in Central Asia. The analysis of biographies of formal and informal Central Asian Muslim leaders shows that the main task of those spiritual leaders, apart from purely religious functions, has been to preserve the collective identity of society and to assure its survival even under the most adverse circumstances. The main attention is paid to the preservation of spiritual selfness within the society and a dense system of coordinates wherein it exists as well as to ensure collective understanding of the meaning of life.

Thus, spiritual leaders (representatives of formal or informal clergy, Islamic intellectuals, hereditary *Ishans*, *Hojas* or *Pirs*) are:

**There is also a growing trend of "privatising" or individualising Islam among young people in Tajikistan. This trend reflects (...) the inability of traditional Islam to cater to new intellectual, spiritual, social and political needs of younger believers**

– The tradition's bearers, keepers and communicators, guardians of spiritual values, ordinances, rites and knowledge, handing them down from generation to generation.

– The bearers, keepers, communicators and elucidators of ethics, the system of moral values generally recognised by society.

– Organisers of spiritual life of

communities.

– Those who regulate the social life of communities and bring the life of the *socium* within the bounds of established tradition and law.

Secondly, Spiritual leaders exert their influence through:

a) The organisation and participation in rites which represent the main organising force in personal and public spheres and, to a greater extent, the political life of Muslim society.

b) The system of private religious education, which moulds adherents of Islamic movement and who enjoy immense authority in society. The example of *Talibs*, Iranian *madrassa* students, shows that the traditional system of private religious education is, at the same time, an important part of traditional self-organisation of Central Asian societies.

Today, the developmental processes in the societies of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are to a large extent determined by spiritual leaders. Their influence on society is still significant enough.

Currently, the rising influence of spiritual leaders goes along with two processes: changes in societies – mentioned above, and changes in outer parameters in social life organisation in the Central Asian countries.

In Uzbekistan, the main form of social organisation is a neighbours' community called *mahalla*. Included into the system of state government by authorities, *mahalla* has become a very effective instrument of social control by the government. Committees of *mahalla* took some functions from spiritual leaders, and, therefore, weakened the spiritual leaders' influence on society. As a result, Islam in Uzbekistan is subordinated to secular authorities at all their levels.

In Tajikistan, social organisation is based on communities formed by patrilineal kinship. These communities are difficult to control by state government. Moreover, many adult males participate in labour migration. These adult labour migrants are key figures of economic, social, and religious life. Since they work abroad, they are also difficult to control by the state authorities of Tajikistan. Therefore, the state government cannot control Islam in Tajikistan. In the opposite sense, the current state authorities try to use Islam as a political resource in an attempt to maintain their power. Given the lack of legitimacy and significant autonomy of people, state authorities in Tajikistan use Islam as a tool to give their power more of a sacred sanction. As a result, the government in Tajikistan implements the policy of totally Islamising their population for the good of nationalism.

In September 2008 President Emomali Rahmon made an official speech commemorating the 17<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Tajikistan's independence. The speech contained a number of new formulations, terms, and ideas that were previously absent in official statements. President Rahmon underlined the inter-connection between Islam and the national culture and claimed that it would be wrong to separate Islam from the national culture. After this speech, the government authorities embarked on a series of new projects that would lead to a general adoption of Islam. The year 2009 was entirely devoted to celebrating the figure of the Great Imam Abu Hanifa, the founder of the *Hanafi* branch of Islam (in the 8<sup>th</sup> century). In March 2009, the Hanafi branch of Islam was legally recognised as the principal branch of Islam in Tajikistan in the new law "On Freedom of religion and Religious Organisations." Thus, the *Hanafi* branch of Islam virtually became a state religion in Tajikistan. At the same time, the government of Tajikistan followed the example of Uzbekistan by gaining more and more control over all aspects of religious life.

According to that law, the government extended its control over administrative procedures that deal with religious communities. For example, the imams of mosques can be appointed only with the supervision of the authorising state body. Government officials, including members of the State Committee on National Security, control operations in mosques across the country. Earlier, the government implemented a "certification" of imams. The "certification" of imams involved testing them on their knowledge of Islam and religious principles. Imams could be dismissed if they failed to pass the test. Following the adoption of the new law, all Muslim clergy fall under the strict control of state authorities. Under the new law, the position of

Imam-Khatib can be taken only by the graduates of the Islamic Institute in Dushanbe and the appointment of the Imam-Khatib and imams of mosques must be coordinated with the authorities. Thus, the power and Islam in Tajikistan are henceforth inseparable.

## Conclusions

Currently, all Central Asian countries are experiencing a strong Islamisation. This process takes place at three main levels: a) the national level, characterised by integration into the Islamic world; b) the social level, characterised by connections between religious and secular institutions in societies; c) the personal level, characterised by the transformation of the *homo soveticus* into *homo islamicus*;

Until now, it seems that none of the Central Asian countries has shown adequate responses to these processes. This is not surprising, since none of the countries has undergone the process of secularisation and therefore, has not adopted a religious policy. National legislations on religion are full of contradictions, and there is no clear convention on how the freedom of religion should be sustained, and what the boundaries of this freedom are, or what the government redlines are for the activities of religious organisations and the personal lives of citizens. The prospects of religious education are also unclear. The question of Islamic economics, including banking, charity, and other issues, remains open.

Nevertheless, political elites in Central Asia realise the importance of connections with Islam, because this connection may grant them power. Therefore, the choice between cooperation, control, or struggle with different branches of Islam is based on the situational characteristics of each individual country. The choice of how to interact with Islam depends on the available resources and tools of social control in the country, but not on ideology. This happens for the following reasons:

Therefore, the choice between cooperation, control, or struggle with different branches of Islam is based on the situational characteristics of each individual country. The choice of how to interact with Islam depends on the available resources and tools of social control in the country, but not on ideology. This happens for the following reasons:

a) The processes of rapid transformation of Central Asian countries, particularly re-Islamisation, are characterised by a lack of clear goals for the state formation and a lack of strategic plans in these countries. Political elites in Central Asia are experiencing a serious crisis of legitimacy, which drives them to reinforce their authoritarian behaviour. Under the aforementioned conditions, Islam may be used as an effective tool for mobilising the people. However, the leaders of the religious opposition pose a potential threat to current political regimes. Therefore, under conditions of political uncertainty, authorities in Central Asia prefer to use and control the religious sphere.

b) Although in all Central Asian countries religious aspects are regulated by the state, the main still issues remain unsolved. At the same time, all Central Asian governments take measures of a legislative nature to limit the institutional potential of religious communities. Under strong governmental control over

**Political elites realise the importance of connections with Islam, because this may grant them power. (...) The choice between cooperation, control, or struggle with different branches of Islam is based on the situational characteristics of each individual country**



religious life, the institutional potential of religious communities remains very weak.

c) Thus, there are no grounds to believe that, according to Adeb Khalid's book *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (2007), harsh religious policies and persecution of Muslims in Central Asian countries are caused by Communist influence on their government. Without denying the influence of this factor in the design of religious policies and their implementation, it is very clear that the current relationship between the state and Islam in Central Asian countries is to a large extent a result of their own unique development.

d) The current ruling elites in Central Asia consider themselves to be faithful Muslims and support Islam in the way that is most beneficial to them. Harsh religious policies towards non-official forms of Islam are caused, not by hatred toward Islam itself, but by the increasing authoritarianism of Central Asian politicians. Anti-terrorist and anti-extremist policies sometimes merely demonstrate the current political authorities' aversion to religious freedoms. *Democracy vs. Islam in Central Asia* becomes *Authoritarianism+Islam vs. Democracy+Islam*. In any case, Islam continues to be one of the most significant factors affecting the future development of Central Asia.

### **Bibliographical references**

ABDUJABBAROV, A. "Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan". In: EICKELMAN, Dale F. (ed.) *Russia's Muslim Frontiers*. Indiana University Press, 1993.

ATKIN, M. "Religious and Other Identities in Central Asia". In: GROSS, J.A. (ed.) *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, Durham, NC: Duke University, 1992.

— "Tajikistan: Reform, Reaction and Civil War". In: BREMMER, I, and TARAS, R. (eds.) *New States, New Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

DUDOIGNON, S. "Political Parties and Forces in Tajikistan, 1989-1993". In: Djahlili, M. R. Grare, F. and Akiner, S. (eds.) *Tajikistan: The Trials of Independence*, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998.

HETMANEK, A. "Islamic Revolution and Jihad come to the former Soviet Central Asia: The Case of Tajikistan". *Central Asian Survey*. Vol. 12. No.18 (1994).

KHALID, A. *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. University of California Press, 2007.

OLCOTT, Marta B. "Islam and Fundamentalism in Independent Central Asia". In: Yaacov Ro'i, Y. (ed.) *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, London: Frank Cass, 1995.

## ISLAM, STATE AND SOCIETY IN UZBEKISTAN: How traditional Islam has influenced the present political culture of the Central Asian elites and societies

Farkhod Tolipov

Associate Professor, National University of Uzbekistan

*“La-a iqroha fid-din”  
(There is no coercion in religion)  
Koran, Oyat*

**Abstract:** The Central Asian States represent in themselves a quite unique case for the study of the phenomenon of Islam as a religion as well as the revitalisation of Islamic thought and life in the very specific and complicated post-Soviet context. The restoration of Islamic values and their application in everyday life in what are called the NIS (Newly Independent States) of Central Asia has created various controversies and complexities in the public consciousness and in state activities, and also reveals the confusion of identities in public consciousness. Islam itself creates a very sophisticated background on which the socio-political process is unfolding in Central Asia today. Despite the common designation of the overwhelming majority of Central Asian peoples as Muslims belonging to a single region, Islam is differently-rooted and is developing differently in all countries concerned. This article will help to identify those differences and to place them in a general framework of a growing re-Islamisation process that will be defined by three major stages: Identity-oriented, knowledge-oriented and action-oriented, in a path that leads from an initial reconnaissance of the Islamic roots themselves, which then goes on to a real understanding of Islamic precepts –rather than just following them– and thirdly, an action-oriented stage that would emerge when Muslims demand a state organised in accordance with Islamic Rules and ethics, and which, the author points out interestingly, should not necessarily mean the abandonment of the state’s secularism. Nonetheless, this path would be plagued by major challenges. The first big challenge lays in the fact that the current political elites were educated in the spirit of the “vulgar Soviet understanding of atheism”, and have only just begun to shed this old concept of secularism, which is only understood as the separation of religion from the state whereas, according to the European reading of the principle, it merely means the separation of the church from the state. In this respect, the author remarks that the word ‘secularism’ does not mean atheism, and the word ‘Islamic’ does not mean theocratic. In his view, the second challenge is the growing risk of a religious radicalisation, a phenomenon that comes from an explosive mixture of the deprived, fanaticised, and criminalised people that creates the social, moral and financial space for a radicalised version of Islam, which in Central Asia will be fuelled by bad governance and autocracy, Soviet-like biased ideology and shortcomings in religious policy and strategy. Following this analysis, the author sketches out some possible scenarios of political activation of Islam in Central Asia, in analogy with other countries also on the run. In the final conclusions, the author expresses his conviction that Central Asia will turn into a positive scenario, thanks to the moderate Hanafi branch of Islam peculiar to Muslims of Central Asia. Still, negative scenarios cannot yet be ruled out, and will depend on the regimes’ ability to avoid legitimising the radicals with an incorrect state policy on Islam, society and people.

### Pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet political culture

Pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet political cultures coexist in contemporary Uzbekistan and Central Asia in general. A sophisticated juxtaposition of such features is revealed in all spheres of state-society relations, including religious life. This triple political culture has been brought about the con-

troversial threefold political process of de-construction, re-construction, and construction of the national identity and the statehood. Soviet identity and statehood are being de-constructed; the pre-Soviet identity and statehood are being re-constructed; and the new post-Soviet identity and statehood are being newly constructed in Uzbekistan. And religion is perhaps the only sphere where all the controversies of the transition period are being manifested very intensely.

### Controversies of re-Islamisation

The five Central Asian Newly Independent States (NIS) –Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan– represent in themselves a quite unique case for the study of the phenomenon of Islam as a religion as well as the revitalisation of Islamic thought and life in the very specific and complicated post-Soviet context. On the one hand, the Central Asia region is believed to constitute a part of the Muslim world. But on the other hand, geopolitically, socially, culturally and historically, the peoples of the region have for centuries been exposed to immense external influences.

The restoration of Islamic values and their application in everyday life in what are called the NIS of Central Asia has created various controversies and complexities in the public consciousness and state activities. For example, on the one hand, all states proclaimed secularism and the separation of religion from the state. But on the other hand, the rapidly increasing significance of the Islamic way of life for citizens produces an increasing “ideological friction”.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought not just independence to these 5 countries, it also revealed a confusion of identities in the public consciousness. Nationalism versus regionalism, democracy versus autocracy, Islam versus secularism– these are but a few of the dichotomies that fill the minds of those who seriously think about the future development and prospects of the region. Islam itself creates a very sophisticated background on which the socio-political process is unfolding in Central Asia today.

Despite the common designation of the overwhelming majority of Central Asian peoples as Muslims belonging to a single region, Islam was differently-rooted and is developing differently in all countries concerned. Uzbekistan represents, in itself, a centre of Islamic culture in the area, and it was Uzbekistan that was the first target of Islamic extremists and terrorist organisations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In Tajikistan, members of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) were incorporated into the government despite their involvement in terrorist activities. Kazakhs identify themselves as Muslims but say that Islam is not strongly developed in their country. Until recently, Kyrgyzstan “democratically” allowed the HT to operate on its territory although, at the same time, the country remains extremely vulnerable to any extremist and terrorist actions. Very recently –in 2007– Tashkent was dubbed by the Organization of Islamic Conference “a capital of Islamic culture”; however, it is in Tashkent where modernisation often takes the form of Westernisation which, in turn, contradicts the Islamic way of life. These are just a few of the many paradoxes and controversies

that can be observed in what is generally considered Islamic thought and life in the countries of Central Asia.

Moreover, the overall future role of awakened Islam in this part of the world will, undoubtedly, have profound international and geopolitical implications. Central Asia borders with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China where, among other things, the interpretation of Islam and the Koran is far from being identical to that of Central Asian countries.

Interestingly, Central Asia is perhaps the only region in the Muslim world where there is no anti-American sentiment among the people; no religious resentment about, or resistance to the American presence. That is why the US, and the West in general might gain more friends and allies in Central Asia. Moreover, the West can improve its relations with the Muslim world through its suitable attitude toward Central Asia. On the contrary, bad relations between any Central Asian country and the West (especially Uzbekistan) is tantamount to giving the green light to Islamists who can only dream of such alienation from the West. Islamists only need Uzbekistan to have bad relations with the West because they themselves see the West as the great enemy.

### The principle of secularism

The secularism *versus* re-Islamisation controversy sometimes takes on dramatic forms. For example, students are not allowed to leave their schools and universities on Fridays if their classes are over by 12-12:30 in order to prevent them from going to mosques for the Friday prayers, which start at 13:00. Women and young girls are not allowed to wear religious clothes in public places, especially universities, a policy that contrasts, for instance, with the practice of international organisations in Uzbekistan, where local female employees are allowed to wear such dresses.

TV shows, advertisements for alcohol, even the Internet and mobile phones become tools in the hands of secularists. At the same time, given the undeniable reality and irreversibility of the re-Islamisation of society, the state and elites use the Islamic rhetoric – formally, at least. Catherine Poujol noted that by closing family planning clinics, banning billiards in bars and restricting excessive expense on weddings, President Karimov was trying to demonstrate that his policy was “Islamically correct” (Poujol, 2005: 57). However, such measures didn’t work. The contrast between religious life and modern city life (discotheques, night clubs, *maishat*<sup>7</sup> –on the one hand, and mosques, the Koran, prayer, religious ceremonies– on the other) revealed the very simplistic and straightforward understanding of the principle of secularism in Uzbekistan.

7. Editor’s note: the word *maishat* could be translated to English as ‘pleasure’ or ‘leisure’.

As a result, on one hand modern city life takes its own “non-Islamic” way because objectively the Western style is penetrating quite offensively, and yet on the other hand, the elites and the government, whether deliberately or not, tolerate such trend because it educates the youth, as they might think, in a “non-Islamic” manner and diverts them from becoming more radicalised Muslims. As a result, again, the Uzbek society finds itself lost between *maishat* and *ibodat*<sup>8</sup> (between having fun in the ‘*chaihana*’ [tea house] and praying in the mosque).

### The desecularisation of social life

Meanwhile, the secularisation policy goes hand in hand with the desecularisation of social life. For example, more and more people need and go to the mosques to pray. The celebrations of Ramadan and Qurban in Uzbekistan become more and more scaled and demonstrative. It has to be acknowledged that Islam, like all world religions, is a philosophical system, a total worldview; it is all about the meaning of life and way of life. From this viewpoint, three types of socialisations of people can be distinguished: secular, religious, and secular-religious. This means that the Uzbek society represents, in itself, a sophisticated composition and interaction between people who are secularly socialised, those who are religiously socialised and people who are secular-religiously socialised.

Against this background, the re-Islamisation process, as such, goes through several stages:

Against this background, the re-Islamisation process, as such, goes through several stages:

**The first stage** is associated with the revitalisation of Islamic culture, recalling the people’s Islamic identity. It is, so to speak, an *identity-oriented* stage. During this stage, the atheistic system is dismissed; political rhetoric is saturated with religious expressions; historical places related to the Islamic past are rebuilt; Islamic universities are established, and the road is opened for Muslims to Mecca and Medina on pilgrimage.

**The second stage** could be characterised more specifically as to be *knowledge-oriented*. During this period, understanding the meaning of Islam, the Koran and Sunna will become vital. More people will not simply make ritual prayer but also try to understand what is being said in Arabic during prayers. More people will have read the Koran and understand its precepts. In short, more Muslims will be devoted Muslims.

When the “critical mass” of knowledgeable, mature Muslims emerge while entering the **third stage** –the one which will be *action-oriented*– Muslims will be ready to demand that state policy be conducted and the country ruled in accordance

8. Editor’s note: the word *ibodat* could be translated to English as ‘prayer’ or ‘religious ceremony’.

with Islamic rules. This does not necessarily mean that the secularism will be questioned at this stage, but it does mean that secularists will face a new challenge from their fellow countrymen who will debate this issue.

The current political elites were educated in the spirit of the “vulgar Soviet understanding of atheism”, and just begun to shed this old concept of secularism. The ongoing Tajik experience of nationwide discussions on the model of cooperation between secularists and Islamists, launched after the civil war of 1992-1997, is proof of this (Zeifert, 2004: 38). In the course of these discussions, the sides came to the perception that the old principle of secularism was understood as the separation of religion from the state whereas, according to the European reading of the principle, it merely means the separation of the church from the state. So, the Tajik debates “discovered” that the state and religious organisations are separable from each other, but religion and the state are not.

### Challenges of religious radicalisation

Against this background, in the process of transition, some people have been radicalised. The “radical strata”, albeit very thin, are composed of different types of religiously-motivated groups. Some people from these strata found themselves to be deprived of necessary living standards; some people became religiously obsessed, others are involved in organised crime. The explosive mixture of deprived, fanaticised, and criminalised people created the social, moral and financial space for the radicalised version of Islam.

Thus, independence and restoration of Islam not only brought about controversies in public consciousness, it also revealed its vulnerability to religious extremism. It should be noted, however, that extremist and fundamentalist waves penetrated Central Asia from outside the region rather than awoke as an immanent feature of the local branch of Islam. Islamism as a destructive political movement pursues the ultimate goal of establishing a theocratic state, the Caliphate. Islamists totally deny democracy and any form of secular state. They use all their means to achieve their goal, from propaganda to terrorism.

Particularly, the discontent among a big portion of society over hardship and declining living standards, and the unfair way the national wealth is distributed in the country, can all be exploited by radical Islamists in their zealous attempts to discredit the current secular political regimes and replace them with theocratic ones.

As is well known, Islamic extremism in Central Asia has already revealed and manifested itself as a serious destabilising factor in a number of cases, such as:

– The appearance of the first extremist groups in Namangan, Andijan and other towns in the Ferghana province of Uzbekistan (late 1990s);

- The civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997);
- Terrorists attacks on the Cabinet of Ministers and other buildings in Uzbekistan (February 1999);
- The Batken events in Kyrgyzstan (July 1999);
- The IMU fighters’ incursion of Uzbekistan (2000);
- The Taliban threat to Central Asia (from 1998 until 2001);
- The Andijan events of May 2005;
- Small-scale incidents on the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in May 2009.

Initially, religious radicalism manifested itself in the early 1990’s. In 1991 the first Islamists groups began to act openly: they attacked the hated police, established “fair order” in some provincial towns like Andijan and Namangan, and called for the creation of a *Caliphate*. Many mosques turned into places of *Wahabi* teaching and ideology.

Currently, the defenders of political Islam or Islamism in our region are mostly two organisations: the HT and the IMU. The former officially declares its adherence to a non-military, peaceful means of activity, claiming that Caliphate will evolve in the wake of their propaganda. The latter resorts to military means which take the form of terrorist acts. While

the former tries to spread leaflets and hire followers, the latter tries to spread violence and hire fighters. The HT claims a membership of 15,000 and 100,000 sympathisers. The IMU, according to some estimates, can claim

a membership of about 1,000.

The IMU maintains close contacts with a number of international terrorist organisations from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, as well as some secret services such as the ISI of Pakistan. The IMU gets financial support from Europe-based foundations as well. Nowadays, Islamists adapt themselves to modern conditions and actively use the Internet as a tool for reaching and influencing the public consciousness.

In 2004, what is called the Rehabilitation Commission was created under the aegis of the President’s Apparatus. This Commission was authorised to consider special cases of those people who were detained and imprisoned on charges of extremism and terrorism. On the recommendation of the Rehabilitation Commission, 700 detained Islamists were released in 2006. Currently about 2,200 remain in prison.

There are a number of reasons for Islamic radicalisation:

- Criminal elements exploiting Islamism;
- Military Intelligence Agencies abuse of law in places (provinces) in their attempts to teach a lesson to Islamists;
- Transformation of secular opposition to religious opposition;
- “External irritator” (Afghanistan, Middle East, geopolitics);
- Socio-economic hardship of population, poverty;
- Mercantilist rationale;
- Sincere (devoted) Islamists;
- Post-Soviet awakening of the Muslim way of life;
- Hatred toward the state (injustice)

And still, the potential for further radicalisation remains as a result of bad governance and autocracy; Soviet-like biased ideology and the shortcomings of religious policy and strategy. All of them are factors that would contribute to spreading radicalisation.

### Counter-radicalisation policy

The potential for keeping Islamic extremism at bay is certainly greater. The Rehabilitation Commission determined that there are a large number of detainees who are remorseful for what they have done, and who wish to return to a normal life. The state's religious policy in general has been positive since the beginning of independence. The evidence includes: the founding of the Islamic University, pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina<sup>9</sup>, the publication of thousands of works of Islamic literature, building new mosques, the restoration of historical places and monuments of Islamic culture, the restoration of great names such as Al-Bukhari, At-Termizi, Yassawi, Nakshbandi, and many others. One of the five original Korans is kept in Tashkent. In most public places special rooms were opened to Muslims for the purpose of prayer. Even in some prisons, prayer rooms were provided for Muslims.

On the subject of the state's control of the religious sphere, experts highlight the issues related to religious/ethnic/racial profiling, as well as the surveillance and security of religious sites and communities. These two sets of issues are quite specific and differ from country to country. In Uzbekistan, for example, profiling can be higher with respect to people from Ferghana province, especially from the towns of Andijan and Namangan. Women wearing special religious clothes –such as the *hijab*– may also be the object of profiling. Surveillance of religious sites and communities is an important measure to control the religious situation. For example, by the end of the 1990s, more than 2,000 out of 5,000 mosques were shut down in Uzbekistan on the suspicion that they were promoting Wahabi propaganda. By 2006, about 2,222 religious organisations and 17 faiths were registered in Uzbekistan (10 times more than in 1990). Most of them (2,042) are Muslim organisations.

Regarding the challenge of Islamism to security in Central Asian countries (especially Uzbekistan) and the ways of preventing Islamic extremism and terrorism, some experts and analysts contemplate the possibility of dialogue with Islamists and their incorporation into state structures. In other words, they talk about the legalisation and legitimisation of Islamic political parties and Islamists. However, it has to be said that political positions and the ideology of Islamists have been inflexible so far and limited to the specific compiling of Koranic passages, examples from *Sunna* and sacral interpretation of the history of Islam (Babadjanov,

2005: 323-336). Moreover, in the current situation, nobody can foresee the future behaviour of politicised Islamic elites should they be given a legal opportunity to create religious political parties and struggle for power, and for at least two reasons: 1) they will seriously lack special “technical” expertise that is badly needed for the process of governance; 2) they will definitely alienate the non-Muslim, non-religious and non-local ethnic strata of Central Asian society.

To better understand the religious situation in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries, one has to look not only at mutual antagonism of the state and Islamism but also at contradictions between Islamists and most local Muslims. The latter perceive “political Islam” as an alien ideology.

Finally, it has to be underlined that NATO and OSCE/ODIHR are playing a significant role in the prevention of religious radicalisation, extremism and terrorism in the region concerned. NATO's mission serves, among other things, as a means of deterring Islamic extremism from the south. The neglecting of this task could lead the international community to a pre-9/11 situation and even to some new versions of 9/11 in the future. At least, the understanding of the likelihood

of such a worst-case scenario must convince us not only to acknowledge the NATO presence in Afghanistan, but also to think of what else the international community, the UN, can do in terms of both military and non-military actions in Afghanistan, as well

as how to isolate Islamists from Islam.

As for the OSCE, on one hand Muslim countries of Central Asia –the only Muslim countries in the OSCE area (except for Turkey)– could contribute significantly to mutual confidence and the achievement of the common goals of OSCE members. This is really a unique time to test and push forward the possibility of Muslim-non-Muslim coexistence. On the other hand, the OSCE could contribute to the prevention of religious radicalisation, extremism and terrorism in the region concerned by promoting the democracy-building process. These are two interrelated long-term tasks which stipulate each other. That is why we have to find political, legal, financial, technical mechanisms to accomplish this twofold task.

To achieve this goal, the OSCE must, above all, become more “aggressive” in terms of the implementation of its own mission, primarily its three “baskets” –economic-environmental, political-security, and the human dimensions of activity.

### Scenarios of political activation of Islam

Meanwhile, in the wake of increasing challenge of Islamism to Central Asian peoples, states and societies, some analysts rightly point out the growing threat of Islamic extremism to the regional security, warning about the possibility of the advent of one of the following social and political scenarios in the region:

9. About 5,000 Muslims from Uzbekistan make pilgrimage every year.

- *Algerian* scenario: Islamists win elections but are denied power by the military and civil war occurs.
- *Palestinian* scenario: terrorist organisation wins elections and comes to power.
- *Iranian* scenario: Islamic revolution breaks out and theocracy is established.
- *Pakistani* scenario: geopolitical involvement of Islamism and its permanent resistance to democratic development.
- *Afghan* scenario: Talibanisation
- *Tajikistani* scenario: legalisation of the Islamic Party which merges with criminal elements and is involved in inter-clan power struggles in the country; civil war occurs which is resolved by means of the incorporation of Islamists into state structures.
- *Turkish-Malaysian* scenario: some form of incorporation of Islam into a democratic political process.

Nonetheless, the above scenarios –for good or ill, seem unlikely to happen under Central Asian conditions. There is one common reason for thinking of a good scenario, namely the Hanafi branch of Islam which is peculiar to Muslims of Central Asia. This branch is, perhaps, the most tolerant and adaptable one. Paradoxically, there is one common reason for those bad scenarios to have come true, namely intolerance that can be caused by the legitimisation of radicals that, in turn, can occur due to incorrect state policy on Islam, society and people.

In any case, considerations of scenarios of Islamic evolution of countries of the region should take into account their basic peculiarities, which in the case of Uzbek Muslims can be described as follows: a) political absenteeism of the populace; b) Hanafi branch of Islam; c) Soviet background; d) minor role of the military in political life; e) democratic choice. These are all endogenous factors. There are a number of exogenous factors affecting Central Asian Muslim countries' international status as a part of the Muslim world. They are: a) a new geopolitical Great Game over Central Asia; b) globalisation; c) religious influence from the representatives of the Muslim world.

At the same time, there is one specific problem in dealing with political Islam, namely: the unreadiness of the state and secular ideologists to respond to Islamists on the issue of the political role of Islam. The matter is the period from independence until now has been the first stage of Islamists' offensive on newly independent secular states. It took mostly the form of a battle between terrorists and states. No one doubts the importance of Islam for the peoples of Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, and the trend is that it will only increase in the near future. In the growing context of Islam in Central Asia, Islamists will find more opportunities to influence Muslims. This is a kind of side-effect caused by the process of the awakening of religious consciousness of Muslims of Central Asia. That is why the next stage will be more related to an ideological struggle for which the secular governments and even clergy are less prepared.

## Conclusions

– Uzbekistan as an Islamic country will hardly escape from being affected by the global “geopolitics of Islam”. External radical-extremist forces will continue their destructive activity against Uzbekistan. In other words, the geopolitical transformation of Central Asia will have not only an economic or military-strategic context but also a religious-civilisational one.

– But in the short-term perspective, the degree of threat to Uzbekistan's security caused by religious extremism will remain low from the viewpoint of state capability to neutralise the threat. This gives the state and its leadership a time limit to retain the political and ideological initiative in their competition with political Islamism.

– Uzbekistan is not only a geopolitical centre of the region but also a religious-cultural centre. That is why the development of Islam and the growth of its influence in society will have a major impact on the general religious situation in Central Asia. There is no doubt that the further development of countries and their policies will take place in the context of a rising Islam. Therefore, sooner or later some form of engagement of Islam in social and political life will become an unavoidable choice.

– From this viewpoint, Islamic ethics can be envisioned as principle of state-building and the organisation of civil society. It says: religious values (just because they are sacred) should be regarded as superior to other values and norms. This doesn't mean

that the secular system will be replaced by a theocratic one; this only means that everyday functioning of state and socio-economic systems should match religious precepts and values. Otherwise, God's precepts would look of secondary importance against those of a man on Earth. In other words, secularism should not turn into secular fundamentalism (or dogmatic secularism). After all, the word 'secularism' doesn't mean atheism, and the word 'Islamic' doesn't mean theocratic.

Catherine Poujol's arguments sound interesting in this regard: “What strategy can the current Central Asian powers use to keep their position, except from jailing Islamic activists, or killing them in anti-terrorist actions? One possible answer is to placate their moderate Muslim electorate by adopting an Islamic rhetoric on justice, with a set of new laws in accordance with traditional Islamic norms. Still the question remains: would it be sufficient to answer the growing social demands?” (Poujol, 2005: 62)

– That is why the implications of re-Islamisation of Central Asia for the countries of the region and for the world will be so significant.

## Bibliographical references

BABADJANOV, B. and OLCOTT, M.B. "Sécularisme et islam politique en Asie centrale". In: Laruelle, M. and Peyrouse, S. *Islam et politique en ex-URSS (Russie, d'Europe et Asie centrale)*. Paris: "L'Harmattan", 2005. P. 323-336.

POUJOL, C. "Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Democracy versus Justice". In: Morozova, I. (ed.) *Towards Social Stability and Democratic Governance in Central Eurasia: challenges to regional security*, IOS Press, Amsterdam, within the NATO Science Series, 2005.

ZEIFERT, A. K. "On the advantage of establishing confidence between Islamists and secularists". In: Bitter, J.N. Geran, F.; Zeifert, A.K.; Rahmonova-Shvartz, D. (eds.) *Confidence building between Islamists and secularists – the Tajik experience*, Dushanbe: "Devashtich", 2004. P. 38. (in Russian).