



CENTRAL ASIA GOING ON “HYPER-ISLAMISATION”: BETWEEN ADAPTATION TO POST-COMMUNISM AND CALLS FOR RADICALIZATION

Catherine Poujol¹
INALCO

Abstract

Post-Soviet Central Asian states celebrate their 26 years of independence in 2017 in a context marked by fear of terrorism and the significant impact of jihadist issue in the former USSR. The sensitive topic is now widely publicized among the civil society, at least in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan echoing the situation in the Russian Federation, but also in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan where it has become an obsession for the ruling power in recent years. This article aims to present the current situation of the jihadist radicalization issue in Central Asia, mostly from the social point of view, trying to highlight the path from re-islamization to radicalization in the region and some political means that the current power try to implement in order to solve the problem

Keywords: Islam in Central Asia, Re-islamization, Radicalization, Djihadism, Terrorism

Título en Castellano: Asia Central se mueve en dirección a la "hiperislamización": Entre la adaptación al postcomunismo y los llamamientos a la radicalización

Resumen:

Los Estados postsoviéticos de Asia Central celebran sus 26 años de independencia en 2017 en un contexto marcado por el miedo al terrorismo y el impacto significativo de la cuestión yihadista en la antigua URSS. El tema sensible es ahora ampliamente difundido entre la sociedad civil, al menos en Kazajstán y Kirguistán, haciendo eco de la situación en la Federación de Rusia, pero también en Uzbekistán y Tayikistán, donde se ha convertido en una obsesión por el poder en los últimos años. Este artículo pretende presentar la situación actual del problema de la radicalización djihadista en Asia Central, principalmente desde el punto de vista social, tratando de destacar el camino de la reislamización a la radicalización en la región y algunos medios políticos que el poder actual intenta implementar con el fin de resolver el problema.

Palabras Clave: Islam en Asia Central, Reislamización, Radicalización, Yihadismo, Terrorismo

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¹ Catherine Poujol is professor at INALCO, Regional Director of IFEAC, Bishkek.
E-mail: ifeacd@gmail.com
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1. Introduction

Post-Soviet Central Asian States celebrate their 26 years of independence in 2017 in a context marked by fear of terrorism and the significant impact of the jihadist issue in the former USSR. The sensitive topic is now widely publicized among the civil society, at least in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, echoing the situation in the Russian Federation, but also in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan where it has become an obsession for the ruling power in recent years.

However, while the number of terrorist acts in Central Asia undertaken by “real Islamist terrorists”² is still less significant than in the Middle East, Africa and Western countries³, the impact of radical propaganda calling to join the Islamic State (ISIS) or at least to build the Global Caliphate, or the Khorasan Caliphate, seems to become a social concern openly discussed among families, neighbor communities, parents, academic circles and media. Many people in Kyrgyzstan know someone who was directly or indirectly aware of a radicalized candidate to Jihad in Syria or Iraq, either for economic reasons, or for ideological ones, such as individuals outraged by corruption and social inequalities and calling for justice.⁴

Thus, the increasing number of terrorist attacks in Western countries and Russia in recent years, many of which have citizens of Central Asia implicated, the relatively large number of fighters in the Islamic State ranks (ISIS) who are Kyrgyz or Tajik and above all Uzbek⁵, project a quite overestimated image of a region as a manufacture laboratory of Jihadists. This image is further relayed by international and local NGOs that carry out projects on the field. Nevertheless, it does not receive the acceptance of numerous experts⁶ on this topic and it is difficult to evaluate, as the sources of information are contradictory, incomplete and significantly instrumentalised by the ruling elites.

In any event, it is important to note that the US official perception of the Islamist threat in Central Asia, linked in a special way to the situation in Afghanistan, has changed recently and seems to lose prominence in the face of the economic and political risks of destabilization. As it has been stated by Daniel R. Coats, Director of US National Intelligence Service in May 11, 2017, “Central Asian states [...] remain concerned about the threat of extremism to their stability, particularly in light of a reduced Coalition presence in Afghanistan [...] Economic challenges stemming from official mismanagement, low commodity prices, declining trade and remittances associated with weakening economies of

² The Jihadi origin of the bloody social unrest in June 2016, in Aqtobe, Kazakhstan is still questionable. The kazakh authorities seem to mix social unrest under the cover of Islam with terrorist issues.

³ Since the beginning of the war in Syria in 2012, there have been almost no terrorist attacks in Central Asian countries except in 30 August 2016 in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) near the Chinese Embassy., at <https://lenta.ru/news/2016/08/30/bishkek/>

http://www.vb.kg/doc/346048_terakt_v_posolstve_kitaia: kto_i_zachem_organizoval_vzryv.html

⁴ See: Poujol, Catherine: “Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Democracy versus Justice”, in Morozova Irina (ed) (2005): *Towards Social Stability and Democratic Governance in Central Eurasia, Challenges to Regional Security*, IOS Press, pp. 50-63.

⁵ According to 2015 report of Soufan Group, Uzbekistan had 500 fighters in the ranks of ISIS, Tajikistan 386, Kyrgyzstan 500, Kazakhstan 300, Turkmenistan 360. According to the Director of the Antiterrorism Center of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the General Andrei Novikov (2015), there were about 5000 “Russian citizens” who fought for jihad in the ranks of ISIS, at : <http://www.interfax.ru/interview/447811> (consulted on 09.05.17). More than 85% of them are citizens of Central Asia. See the article by Ahmad Rakhmonov <https://www.novastan.org/fr/ouzbekistan/terrorisme-pourquoi-voit-on-autant-douzbeks-dans-les-attentats/>

⁶ <http://thediplomat.com/2017/01/understanding-islamic-radicalization-in-central-asia/>
Heathershaw, J., and Montgomery, D.: “The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics,” Chatham House (November 2014).



Russia and China⁷, ethnic tensions, and political repression are likely to present the most significant threats to stability in these countries”.⁸

On the other hand, local intellectual circles attributed to the US and their English allies the responsibility of creating a growing instability in Central Asia to better balance the Chinese and Russian challenges there. One of the targeted States for the diffusion of instability is Kyrgyzstan, known for its very resilient political scene since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and which is paradoxically the one so-called weak state. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been chosen by the Russian Federation to maintain Russian influence in the region through soft and non-soft power.

Another element linking Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Russia is the presence of million of migrant workers coming from these two countries (and from Uzbekistan as well), in Moscow, St Petersburg and Siberian Towns, who constitute the main source of recruitment for the Islamic State. Given that migrants from Central Asia are economically and socially enfeebled, are easily attracted by proposed better salaries, high social recognition, new achievements for their own life and maybe for some of them direct access to Paradise, even if it is not necessarily advocated at the first step.

Nobody knows what will be their situation if they come back to their own countries, especially after the recent territorial defeats of the Islamic State in Irak, in particular in Mossul, and Syria. Moreover, their number outside says nothing about the radicalized fellows living inside their society who develop underground practices of Islam mostly non-violent, but are able to become more aggressive facing the growing injustice of the ruling circles. All of this has dramatically split the “post-soviet *ummah*” into three unequal parts:

- The historical Hanafi Sunni Muslims, which represent the majority of the Central Asian Muslims coming back in various ways (including the secular one) to religion after the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- “The others”, Salafi, Wahhabi Muslims, calling for various forms of radical pietist practices, mostly non-violent, spreading their propaganda in mosques, prisons, hospitals, medressehs, bazars, homes and through social networks.
- The Sufi adepts which are also a part of the historical Islam in Central Asia, based on a wide developed popular practice of pilgrimage to holy shrines that survive to Soviet anti-religious propaganda and have undergone a spectacular development since the independence, especially in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It's not surprising that the religious Suni authorities included them in the “orthodox Islam”, even in the “national Islam” as a “natural shield against Salafi groups, tenants of Shafeit and Hanbalit trends, forbidding “shamanist, animist, associassionist” practices on the ground considered an unacceptable *shirq or bid'a*.

This sinusoidal approach was in use during the last Soviet decades when the chief of Islamic religious board in Tashkent would accept them (as Mufti Shamsuddin Babakhanov was himself a sufi) or reject them under the pressure of Moscow. Furthermore, this can be seen

⁷ The « weakening economies of China » seen by the US expert probably through the slight drop of GDP to 6,7% in July 2016, must be reconsidered .See <https://tradingeconomics.com/china/gdp-growth-annual> : from 7,5% in July 2014 to 6,9% in February 2017.

⁸ See: <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/SSCI%20Unclassified%20SFR%20-%20Final.pdf>



until today when the current Mufti of Kyrgyzstan maybe one day will be strong enough to prohibit them⁹.

At this point, we must admit that this process is not new in the region. The Salafi and Wahhabi currents have been attested in the Fergana valley in the 19th century and during the Soviet rule.¹⁰ Therefore, we can easily speak about the rise of “neo-Wahabi movements” since the end of the Soviet Union, directly conducted by Saudi, Pakistani etc... preachers which called toward a radical change of behavior and values for the “newborn Muslims” since Perestroïka. They demand a return to the retrospective Prophet golden age time, and suggest its fulfillment in the case of men through wearing beard and in the case of women wearing black niqabs.¹¹

Yet, it is well-known that “the others” cannot be seen as a homogenous group of actors. They are divided into groups depending on the local origin and foreign countries. The Uzbek example with the history of MIO, and the Tajik example with the IRP are well documented. Even among the foreign groups, the most popular are the Hizb-ut Tahrir calling for the Global Caliphate or the “Tablighi djama’at” from India which is an organization forbidden in all Central Asian States except for Kyrgyzstan.

Nevertheless, the post-Soviet societies experience social bifurcation, dividing them between those who continue to accept the idea of a secular state and those who have definitely looked forward for the advent of an Islamic State, whether national or international. It comes that this bifurcation could really have occurred after the 9/11 global trauma.

2. The Rise of ISIS and the Changes in the Mental Geography of the Radicalization path.

After a first phase of reactivation of Islam that followed the collapse of the USSR and which lasted for about two decades, marked by a chronology specific for each country¹², the 9/11 events in 2001 in the USA and then the 2003 US campaign against Saddam Hussein was a turning point and finally the appearance of the Islamic State of the Levant in Syria and Iraq, took place in June 2014 (ISIS). This created a new polarity of Islamism by proposing:

- a geographic and even “spiritual destination” alternative (Paradise being the best option) to solve economic, existential, moral problems, the proposed salary being a real attractive issue
- a new orientation and expression of radicalism,
- an apology of self-sacrifice in the use of violent acts in any point of the planet, including in their homeland after the return of jihadist from Syria or Iraq.

⁹ Here it will be interesting to monitor the situation in Kyrgyzstan where the current great mufti Maksat Aji Toktomushev supposedly belonging to the tablighi djama’at, but who told in an interview that this trend does not exist in Kyrgyzstan, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27376986.html>. We can also notice that according to a picture published in turmusk.kg, the young girls graduated from Osh Saiida Khadidja medresseh, celebrating their graduation in “national clothing”, in the presence of Saudi Arabia representatives: <http://www.turmush.kg/ru/news:1393782?from=portal&place=topread>

¹⁰ See the narrative of the American diplomat and traveler, Schuyler, Eugene (1877): *Turkistan, notes of a journey in Russian Turkestan, Khokand, Bukhara and Kuldja, 1840-1881*, New York, Scribner, Armstrong & Co.

¹¹ This reminds the author of the present article, meeting with people working in the medresseh Barak Khan, Spiritual Board of Muslims in Tashkent in the years 1994-95, following independence, claiming being themselves « wahabi ».

¹² Poujol, Catherine: “L’islam en Asie centrale: une visibilité accrue après un long confinement”, *Questions internationales*, n°82, La Documentation française, novembre-décembre 2016, pp. 63-76.



This constitutes a source of anxiety for the local authorities who redouble the so-called prophylactic measures and try to combat radicalization by different methods, not hesitating, in some republics (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan), to confuse fundamentalist practitioners and “radicalized” or future terrorists.

The question raised here is that this phenomenon clearly appears in the region, as we said before, mainly in its periphery, in particular, the large cities of the Russian Federation, where millions of migrant workers from Central Asia reside, economically and psychologically weakened, marginalized within the Russian society, which rejects them. Not identifying themselves with their original homeland nor with the moderate patriotic national Islam that their countries advocate, the migrants reject their corrupt and selfish political elites and become easy prey for ISIS's recruiters.

This opens a great breach in the social fabric in which they find themselves, in a double periphery, both geographical and social, deprived from any consistent religious knowledge, at the periphery of their original community. Some will thus choose to leave their difficult and unrewarding life in order to go beyond their status described by the sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar¹³ as "quasi-Muslims" (or quasi-individual) by adopting that of the "supermuslims" according to the definition of the psychoanalyst Fethi Benslama¹⁴.

One observation must be done at this point: different causes lead to the same effect, the departure of thousands of people, generally young people, to Syria and Irak. Concerning the former Soviet Union, the candidates coming from Russia and join ISIS are generally already “Muslim by their nationality” inherited from the Soviet administrative governance. They radicalize their uncomfortable psychological status of Muslim migrant workers, to become a super Muslim fighter for justice (including a salary), either money, either eternal glory as *shahid* in Paradise.

Even more, the few who manage to leave from Central Asia do so more by a political adhesion, having been convinced (*verbovka* in Russian), at the mosque by the imam himself (hence the recent measures taken by the authorities, see below), in prison, in their sports hall that the current elite is not keen to provide justice in society.

3. From Islamization to Radicalization

In each Central Asian State, a specific religious situation has been developed over the past 25 years, marked by the discrete coexistence of several forms of return to Islamic practice after seven decades of Soviet rule. Despite the banning of Islamist parties and most preacher movements (except in Kyrgyzstan), there is a diversification of the offer proposed by pietist, fundamentalist, radical movements (endogenous, but especially exogenous). It responds to the demand for re-Islamization of a society that has largely lost confidence in its political leaders (and mostly in its national religious leaders), against the backdrop of passive resistance from a part of the urban elites attached to the idea of a secular state.

Everywhere the state must solve the equation of its management of the religious issues and its political agenda, taking into account the Soviet atheist heritage and the particular conditions of local Islam and foreign involvement in the re-islamisation process.

¹³ Khosrokhavar, Farhad (2014): *Radicalisation*, Paris, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.

¹⁴ Benslama, Fethi (2016): *Un furieux désir de sacrifice, Le surmusulman*, Paris, Seuil. This essay wants to question to the symptomatic aspect of radicalization, not only through the securitarian prismus.



In Kazakhstan, it seems that the Kazakh society took its time to consider its coming back to Islam as a necessary option, especially after 2011, the drop of economic performances and the events in the western region, which definitely was under the influence of Caucasus Muslim activists. The position of the ruling circles on this question also has changed and tried more closely to answer the growing social demand on Islamic official posture. The debates on Islamic dress code was harsh these last years, also between the tenants of Sufism and of Salafism who accused the first ones of being terrorists. The government has undertaken several laws and *ukaz* to prevent terrorism and closed suspicious websites. Its policy lies on inter-confessional tolerance and inter-ethnic dialogue, trying to use all mass media tools to focus on prophylactic measures against radicalization. It has obviously taken Islam into one single official structure (which derives from the soviet model) and in November 2016 was about to forbid the activities of the Salafi movements in the country as if they were the natural incubator of terrorists (considered to amount to 16 000 adepts).¹⁵ As in other countries, the low level of religious knowledge and the lack of skills in Russian by the Muslim clerics is seen as a key problem in the society, which makes e-Islam websites more attractive and pragmatic for the young generation.

In Uzbekistan, the situation is quite different, as the process of reislamisation begun during the Perestroika and even before. The politicized Islam appeared at the end of the 80s and the harsh relationships between President Karimov and Political Islamist opposition were in the agenda of the first 25 years of independence, with various tragic events and consequences at the international level. The new president Shavkat Mirziyoev, elected in December 2016, is ready to change the previous approach and to accept Islam in Uzbek society as a religious fact, not only cultural, as it has demonstrated it in its “virtual commission for citizens” where they are allowed to raise religious concern.¹⁶

In Tajikistan, the question of reislamisation was crucial at the very beginning of independence when a bloody Civil War took place from 1992 to 1996, with a clear Islamic tropism in the society beside the clearly secular basis of the state. This led to a very special political situation of a coalition government including a moderate Islamic Party, (IRP) until September 2015 when the Supreme court of Tajikistan banned this party accused of military coup attempt¹⁷ followed by the May 18 Referendum which definitely banned political Islam from the constitution.¹⁸ The Tajik social scene today is certainly free from political Islam, but irrigated by radical youth, which reacts to the « anti-Islamic laws » of banning beards and hijab by joining ISIS and extremist actors, some of them coming from Afghanistan with the flow of refugees. The government has tried to establish a salary for religious personnel in order to better control it, but it is not certain that the measure would be effective. It is ready to fight by all means against ISIS because, according to Faysullo Borodzade, Director of the Islamic Center under the Presidency of Tajikistan, “ISIS is determined to liquidate Tajikistan”, as he told the journalist Mirza Salimpur on 30 March 2016.¹⁹ Until today, we can notice the high involvement of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates in this country.

¹⁵ <https://www.zakon.kz/4825693-zapreshhat-li-v-kazakhstane-salafizm-za.html> and https://informburo.kz/novosti/v-pravitelstve-ozvuchili-usloviya-zapreta-salafizma-na-zakonodatelnom-urovne.html?_utl_t=fb. Quotation from the Report Almaty Klub, 2017, “Politika i islam v strannax Central’noj Azii”, kindly transmitted by Sanat Kuchkumbaev before publication in septembre 2017.

¹⁶ <https://com.ozodlikradiosi/abdulaziz-mansur-dindor-mabuslar-dardiga-ulo-solish-kerak>. *Ibid.*

¹⁷ <https://news.tj/ru/node/215519>. *Ibid.*

¹⁸ <https://news.tj/ru/news/v-tadzhikistane-prokhodit-referendum-po-izmeneniyu-konstitutsii-respubliki>. *Ibid.*

¹⁹ <http://www.toptj.com/m/news/2016/03/30/fayzullo-barotzoda-celyu-islamskogo-gosudarstva-yavlyatsya-likvidaciya-tadzhikistana>



Islam in Turkmenistan is still the dominant religion today. However, the practice of religion is more tightly controlled by the state than in other Central Asian countries. Many experts and political scientists recognize that unlike neighbors, Turkmenistan managed to avoid the appearance of Wahhabi groups and their agents of influence on its territory. In many ways, this happened, of course, thanks to strict controls by the authorities and special services, but also because of the Turkmen religious environment: the people's mentality organically do not accept religious fundamentalism. Therefore, there are not enough prerequisites for the growth of fundamentalist Islam in Turkmenistan.²⁰

In the law of Turkmenistan "On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations", teaching of religion is prohibited in state educational institutions (Article 8), private teaching of "spiritual dogma" is prohibited (Article 9), teaching of religion of minors is allowed only with the consent of not only parents and with the permission of the special Commission for work with religious organizations and expertise of resources containing religious information, publishing and printing products in Turkmenistan. The law of 2016 has strictly forbidden the creation of political parties on a religious basis, as well as the creation and activities of religious organizations, "whose actions are aimed at the establishment in the state of the supremacy of one religion" (Article 7)

At this stage, President Berdymukhammedov concentrates more on economic and development issues, but maintains strict regulation of religion by the state. Experts note that until now, the isolation strategy may have contributed to the fact that Turkmenistan is the only country in Central Asia where there are no obvious problems with Islamic militancy. But such a punitive approach of the State can lead to the risk of the emergence of resistance and, possibly, lay a favorable ground for the future of radicalism. However, on 22 June 2017 it was reported that on the border between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan there were battles with the militants of ISIS²¹. And cases of dismissal of employees of State organizations and military structures for refusal to stop making *namaz* have become frequent in Turkmenistan²². The officers of the 22nd Motorized Rifle Division named after Atamurat Niyazov were accused of spreading unconventional Islam; 70 people were detained during the investigation²³.

Among the Central Asian States, the position of Kyrgyzstan which enjoyed greater religious freedom and political openness is quite original. As we have said before, it is the only country where the foreign religious organization of "Tablighi djama'at" is not forbidden yet. On the contrary, it is currently positively considered by the President Almazbek Atambaev and exerts a good influence on the society through the voice of his religious expert Kadyr Malikov who consider the organisation as a "counter-weight against extremist organizations."²⁴ The president seems to be more religious than his predecessors, and he himself with his son, has carried out a "small *haj*" in December 3rd, 2014, at Mekke.

Nevertheless, in a country like Kyrgyzstan where the public debate is still vivid, some citizens are worried about the consequences of the quick spread of "*davaatchi*-proselytism" in the country. The current situation of the country, which confronts an activism on the part of

²⁰ Мұрат Бабаев, http://gundogar-news.com/index.php?category_id=4&news_id=272, 05 Июль 2013 г.

²¹ <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/28571186.html>

²² <http://w.islam-today.ru/novosti/2017/03/21/v-turkmenistane-nacalis-uvolnenia-za-namaz/>

²³ <https://ca-news.org/news:1391338> thanks to Zhanigul Kaparova, intern at IFEAC in July 2017 from Academy of OSCE for her help to prepare datas on Turkmenistan, July 2017.

²⁴ Articles Alikbek Mamataev, Fergana.



Salafist and radical movements²⁵, is troubling given that the next presidential elections take place in October, a high level of financial and moral involvement of Saudi Arabia, in the South. It is the country in which the NGOs that work openly for the re-Islamization of society are the most numerous (such as Mutakallim). It is also the only country in which the Turkish Fethullah Gülen network called International Sebat (which provided education to more than 11,000 children until July 2017 with 21 private schools and colleges,²⁶), is still in place, despite the protest of the Turkish government. The network was very active in Central Asia except in Uzbekistan where it had been ousted quite early after independence as well as throughout the former USSR, in addition to the rest of the world and was closed down after the July 2016 coup in Istanbul.

Regarding the growing number of mosques in Central Asia since the collapse of USSR, official data are the following: There are 2100 mosques in Kazakhstan, 2700 in Kyrgyzstan, 4500 in Tajikistan and 1350 in Uzbekistan²⁷. The number of imams per habitants, has been provided by the forthcoming study on Islam in Central Asia as such: Kazakhstan - 3611 imams, 1 for 4916 inhabitants, Kirghizstan - 2500 imams, 1 for 2407, Tajikistan - 3914 imams, 1 for 2210, Uzbekistan - 4100 imams, 1 for 7824.²⁸

It shows the growing impact of reislamisation over all of the region, despite the government attempt control it at the internal and external level.

4. The Means Used by the Powers to Counter Radicalization, or What is Considered as Such

In the context of the globalization of information on terrorist actions undertaken "in the name of Islam", the State services, national security and local societies have taken up this problem, which is increasingly openly discussed in the media. Yet appearances are deceptive, at least in the capitals, in the center of Dushanbe where one can see more traditional scarves than Islamic scarves. The number of women wearing the hijab is still relatively low in Almaty and Astana except in the west of the country where wearing the *niqab* veil was observed after the events of 2011. They are starting to multiply in Bishkek.²⁹ Radicalization is not visible to the naked eye. Some local experts even say that it is a Western invention, instrumentalized by the powers in place to eradicate any social protest.

State management of the religion and its control is therefore always on the agenda and is clearly reactivating, in all Central Asian States, in particularly in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan where the monitoring by state bodies of imams and practitioners is reinforced since 2015. Few hotlines are settled down to help population in case of trouble with a radicalized person, in Kazakhstan (Hotline 114, director Yulia Denisenko), and in Kirghizstan (within the Commission of Religious affairs (312). Conferences, round tables are organized at the universities, as well as meetings with parents at school, special TV show concerning

²⁵ See for example, the movement Yakyn inkar which is a split in September 2015 of the pietistic movement Tablighi Djama'at calling for radicalization against the corrupt power, through the method of da'ava.

²⁶ www.sebat.edu.kg

²⁷ Data received in the meeting with the director of the Islamic Studies Center for the Presidency of Tajikistan, Fajzullo Barotzoda, on 26 May 2017. Other data can be provided but they are quite similar, *op.cit*, Almaty Klub 2017. Kazakhstan, 2516, Kyrgyzstan, 2669, Tajikistan, 3930 and Uzbekistan, 2065. According to an unofficial Tajik source, two-thirds of the Tajik mosques have been closed in recent years, with mullahs replaced by young people under the age of 30, who had been graduated in Saudi Arabia or Arab Emirates.

²⁸ Almaty Klub, *op.cit*. p. 7.

²⁹ Observations by the author in the quoted towns between January and May 2017.



religious topics to explain the nature of the threat and the places where it can be found (homes, bazars, sport club, mosques, madrasas, prison, hospitals).

Thus, the common Soviet ideological heritage of a "fighting atheism" that weighed on society (at least until *perestroika*) left traces that are not fully erased in governance practices and attitudes. The post-Soviet "techno-political toolkit" re-uses well-established methods in the following areas:

- A series of laws aimed at regulating religious practices, especially in Tajikistan, the most re-Islamized republic in the region with Uzbekistan.
- Implementation of a discourse of social concord in order to manage post-Soviet diversity. After "friendship among peoples", inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue was promoted, notably by the People's Assembly (mainly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan).
- Social surveillance by the national security services, including surveillance of the Internet and social networks, and the establishment in each country of an Anti-Terrorism Center linked to the CIS Anti-Terrorism Center.
- Prophylaxis through the control of imams by the state³⁰, through information campaigns, conferences, meetings in schools, universities that are organized to raise awareness of the dangers of radicalization, especially since 2015. In Tajikistan, children, wives and mothers of migrant workers in Russia must call them regularly to convince them not to go to jihad.³¹
- The prohibition of wearing Islamic beards, short pants and hijab in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the controversy over the hijab in Kazakhstan during the year 2016-2017 and the billboard campaign against the hijab in Kyrgyzstan.³²
- The hunt for politicized Islamist opponents in Central Asia in the 1970s was prolonged in Uzbekistan by the direct confrontation between power and Islamist parties that emerged after independence (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir, etc.). In Tajikistan, the episode of the civil war introduced a post-Soviet "anomaly" with the entry of the Islamic Renaissance Party into a coalition of government in 1996 followed by its phasing out until its total ban in 2015 on the grounds of being a "terrorist movement" having organized a coup d'Etat.

Each of the Central Asian republics has produced a list of prohibited political and religious organizations, suggesting the formation of a more or less important clandestine Islamism. In Kyrgyzstan, the 10th section of the Ministry of the Interior has created an online patrolling project and destruction of videos with radical content. President Atambaev himself took stock of the danger that the lack of control of the imams' sermons in the many mosques of the country and their low level of religious knowledge could constitute a danger. It therefore imposed an audit of the knowledge of the Kyrgyz religious leadership. According to Bakytbek Osmomov, director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs, of 1,300 religious representatives who passed the certification test by the Spiritual Direction of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan in 2016, 800 did not obtain it.³³

³⁰ See: <http://www.planet360.info/rapid-islamization-in-kyrgyzstan/>, 6 August 2016.

³¹ According to a respondent in Douchanbe, 26 May 2017.

³² Nasritdinov E., Esenamanova, N.: "The war of billboards: hijab, Secularism and Public Space in Bishkek", paper presented at the American University of Central Asia, at the conference "Reimagining Civil Society in a Period of 'Uncivil Societies'", March, 24th, 2017.

³³ <http://www.planet360.info/rapid-islamization-in-kyrgyzstan/>, 6 August 2016.



5. Conclusion: What About the Social Answer to the Issue?

For sure, the society is aware of the issue. This is also the proof of the globalization of information and threats in recent years. A broad sociological study in Central Asia should necessarily be undertaken to quantitatively identify the processes that trigger radicalization:

- According to countries, the nature of governance as well as monitoring what they practice, depending on the region (Western and Southern Kazakhstan since 2003, Southern Kyrgyzstan, Southern Tajikistan being more affected by this phenomenon), depending on the economic conditions of individuals (labor migration), according to their social position.
- According to the degree of connection of the population to Internet and social networks, given the immoderate taste for technological innovations in the region. In the two poorest countries, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the number of connected households is lower than in the other countries where urbanized middle-class children have a mobile phone with Wi-Fi from elementary school.
- According to the impact of informal communication and wide rumors about a particular individual who supposedly left his homeland to join ISIS, or a particular family of Osh (the second most populous city in southern Kyrgyzstan) which supposedly received a salary in the amount of 1000 USD to pay a future ISIS fighter.
- The radicalization in its visible part also has similar operative patterns in each country, ranging from the brutal withdrawal of the secular society to a return to the fundamental values of Islam. The type of Islam here is considered as non-perverted by history and not contaminated by Western societies' modernity. It finds its anchorage in the "mythical Islamic state" represented by ISIS, which, in general, escapes the social supervision exercised by families who are still very strong in Central Asia.

Thus, by comparing the causes of radicalization and the trajectories followed, in the present state of our knowledge we can consider that the jihadists in Europe or in western countries in general follow a path that leads them to the Islamic State of the Levant, according to Olivier Roy's theory of "islamization of radicalism"³⁴, while those that originate from the former USSR correspond more to a theory of "radicalization of Islam"³⁵ expounded by Gilles Kepel, in particular, considering the possible repressive use by regimes that seek to fight any Islamist opposition, such as the existing regimes in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The power in each Central Asian State has taken measures to control the threat of terrorism. They have created anti-terrorist committees at the national level, as a tool for the CIS anti-terrorist committee, founded in 2000, in order to take preventive measures against the growing impact that religious extremism poses on political stability in the whole region.

In addition to the Soviet social surveillance practices, these countries had the particularity of consolidating their Internet network at the same time as their State sovereignty. Therefore, these countries adhere to "preventive measures" in controlling web

³⁴Roy, Olivier (2016): *Le djihad et la mort*, Paris, Seuil.

³⁵ Kepel, Gilles (2008): *Terreur et martyre*, Paris, Flammarion.



sites and individuals deemed harmful, a fact that used to distinguish these States from European countries until recent times.

Then, it will focus in particular on the social responses to the media coverage and rumors circulation about ISIS and on the social reactivity to integrate prophylaxis measures to protect young generation from jihadist propaganda, taking into account the remaining influence of the family elders on teenagers.

But as a conclusion one paradox must be pointed out: as we know more about the ISIS from the worldwide “opposition to ISIS”, we know more about prophylactic measures against radicalization than about Central Asia’s own and distinctive radicalization.

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