

Religious Extremism in Ferghana Valley

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Abstract

A series of disturbing events— from the Tashkent bombing in February 1999 to the May 13, 2005 incidents in Andijon city in Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan— have drawn attention to the growing role of the religious extremist forces in Central Asia. The Islamic Movement of Turkistan (IMT), also known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) until the middle of 2003, and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) – the two leading extremist groups— have openly declared their objective of overthrowing the constitutional system and to create an Islamic state in Central Asia. While declining economic conditions, corruption, sense of injustice and non-accommodative polity have given more space to IMT and HT to operate, the ideological onslaught by often foreign-backed religious forces, an unremitting flow of foreign funds and the unresolved conflict in Afghanistan are the principal factors for the growth of extremism in the Ferghana Valley.

Introduction

Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, some scholars ventured to predict that the Ferghana Valley would become the most volatile region in Central Asia. The merit of the assessment has become clear over the past decade from the rise of religious extremism and the activism of the Islamic Movement of Turkistan (IMT) and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), the two most powerful religious extremist groups in the Central Asian region.¹ The clash between secular and extremist forces in the Ferghana Valley has been around since 1991 and many violent incidents have occurred. Some Central Asian analysts attribute the rise of extremism to political deprivation, deteriorating economic conditions, corruption, and a steep drop in living standards, unemployment and poor governance in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. One may agree partially with this generalisation. However, it is also true that the Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Islamic Movement of Turkistan have the goal of setting up a Caliphate, a revivalist objective that rejects

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the modern state. The developments in Andijon City in Ferghana Valley (May 12-15 2005) of Uzbekistan, clearly were not driven merely by social and economic demands. There are strong religious and political motivations² and reveal a power struggle with secular forces that will continue for some time to come. Experts have, also, pointed to external financial support to these extremists.³ The organisers of the Andijon protests appear to have been impressed by the “Colour Revolutions” which had taken place in several of the former Soviet republics in recent times. Hall has suggested that these “Revolutions” have cast their shadow, now, over the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley.⁴ This appears to be an extrapolative leap from an inadequate data base. However, the case for continuous watch and study of developments is valid because Uzbekistan is a key country in the region and traumatic changes would have major geopolitical implications for Central Asia and its neighbouring region.

Islam in the Ferghana Valley

The Ferghana Valley was the nucleus of an independent *Khanate* under the Khans of Kokand in the 18th century. For most of its history, the Valley has been a single geographical and political entity. But today the Valley is divided between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Further, in Uzbekistan it is split between the Namangan, Andijan and Fergana provinces (*viloyatlar*). In Tajikistan it is part of *Soghd* Province, with the capital at Khodjent. In Kyrgyzstan the Valley forms a part of Batken, Jalalabad and Osh provinces. Soviet cartographers drew up borders in Central Asia in the 1920-30 periods and were indifferent to ethnicity. Many feel it was a deliberate attempt on the part of Stalin to keep the region divided. Complicating the geopolitical divisions are several enclaves. For instance, the anomaly of Uzbekistan’s Shakhimardan enclave is a case in point. Shakhimardan is Uzbek territory but surrounded by Kyrgyzstan. Ferghana Valley is the most fertile and most densely-populated region in the whole of Central Asia. It owes its fertility to two rivers, the Naryn and the Kara-darya, which unite near Namangan, to form the Syr Darya. The Ferghana Valley is ringed by mountain ranges — to the south in Tajikistan, to the east the Kyrgyz-Chinese border, to the north by the range that cuts Kyrgyzstan in half, and to the west by the lower range that shelters Uzbekistan’s section of the Valley from the rest of that country.

During the 8th century, The Valley was the focus of fierce rivalry between the Tang Dynasty of China and the expanding Muslim power.

This led to the Battle of Talas in 751 AD which marked the victory of Islam and the disengagement of China from Central Asia. Historical records show that the ruler of "Ferghana" paid taxes to the Abbasid Caliphate. The Caliphate sent Islamic scholars to the Ferghana Valley and in the ninth century AD local officials had been converted to Islam. Thereafter, the Valley has remained a home to a moderate form of Islam. The Valley endured invasions by the Mongols in the 13th century better than most other areas, while many of the invaders settled down and embraced Islam. When the Mongol influence waned, the Kokand khanate, one of the three major khanates of Central Asia in the last 400 years, took shape in the Ferghana Valley. Much later, in the early 19th century the troops of Tsar started their drive into Central Asia and the Khiva Khanate and Bukhara Emirate fell to them in the 1860s. But Kokand held out until the late 1870s.

The 1897 census figures revealed sharp anomalies between a largely Tajik-speaking area around Khodjend and a settled, Turkic-speaking population in the main body of the Valley. This linguistic and cultural divide is roughly reflected the borders drawn after 1924. One exception is the town of Osh, which has a majority 'Uzbek' population but ended up in Kyrgyzstan. Modern historical accounts of the region have one significant, missing element. This relates to the Sarts.⁵ This term was abolished by the Soviet Union in 1920 as 'derogatory'. However, there is no denying of the fact of a clear distinction between long-settled, Persianised Turkic peoples, speaking a form of Oghuz Turkic that is very close to Uighur and those who called themselves Uzbeks, who were a Kipchak tribe speaking a Turkic dialect much closer to Kazakh. The Uzbek arrived in the region with Shaibani Khan in the mid-sixteenth century. That this difference existed and was felt in Ferghana is documented in Timur Beisembiev's translation of the *Life of Alimqul* (London, 2003). There were very few Uzbek-Kipchaks in Ferghana, although they had at various times held political power in the region. In 1924, however, Soviet policy decreed that all settled Turks in Central Asia would henceforth be known as "Uzbeks". The Ferghana Valley is now perceived as an Uzbek 'heartland'.

Shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution occurred, it became clear to the people of Central Asia that the Soviet idea of equality meant further Russian rule. Revolt broke out in the Ferghana Valley. A group called the Basmachi, considered heroes to this day by many Central Asians, appeared in the Ferghana Valley and fought the Soviet Army. They were bound by the Islamic faith, and local Muslim leaders played a key role in providing aid

to the Basmachi. They were eventually defeated and driven into the south of the valley but continued to their visits into the region till the 1930s.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a revival of Islam in Central Asia. Ferghana Valley, naturally, was seat of this revival. A number of Muslim missionaries also arrived in Central Asia, mostly from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Funds flowed in for building mosques. Their focus was the Ferghana Valley. Today, apart from having a dense concentration of people, the Ferghana Valley also has a dense concentration of mosques⁶. It is not surprising, then, that most of the religious extremist groups got their start or found their greatest support in the Ferghana Valley.

Ideologues of extremism are determined to promote and ultimately establish their faith in this region. However, this is in sharp contrast to the historical realities of the region. The new Islamic groups, parties and organisations in Uzbekistan have advocated a kind of Islam that does not seem to follow the moderate form of either the Hanafi School⁷ or the Sufi traditions.⁸ This has ignited a long drawn struggle between the supporters and opponents of this ideology. In other words, contestation over Islam has become a security issue in the Ferghana Valley today. It is simultaneously a tool in a wider geopolitical struggle, one of the forms of anti-modernization, as well as a result of the ineffective nature of political and economic systems that increase the level of political risk.⁹

During the Soviet era, restraints were emplaced on the practice of Islam since the social and personal significance of religion was devalued.¹⁰ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, political Islam began to assume importance in Ferghana Valley. Before turning to the history of the emergence of the religious extremists groups, organisations, movement and parties, a brief analysis of the roots and causes of religious extremism may here be useful.

Roots of Extremism

Some Central Asian watchers believe that political deprivation, and corruption have led to frustration and discontent, which has in turn given birth to religious extremism. Economic approaches emphasise the importance of socio-economic conditions as the cause of extremism. Graham Fuller has been stressing the relationship between the economic condition and the rise of extremism in Ferghana Valley.¹¹ The assumption is that unemployment, poverty, monetary inflation and underdevelopment are the causes behind the resurgence of extremism. But it fails to explain

why extremism is on the rise in some countries but not others where economic conditions are equally dire.

It is known that some schools of thought (ideological approaches) and movements within Islam are orthodox, uncompromising and strict. They are critical of Muslims who violate “authentic norms” of Islam. Salafism and Wahhabism are the movements which refuse to accept the religious, cultural and traditional practices in Central Asia.¹² John Esposito argues that religious extremists ignore classical Islamic criteria for a just Jihad.¹³¹

Many Islamic scholars have also criticised “global Mujahideen” in Kashmir, Tashkent, Chechnya, Andijon and elsewhere for violating basic Islamic principles. They argue that Islam does not justify suicide attacks and cite passages from the Hadith of the Prophet Mohammed, “Whoever kills himself in any way will be tormented in that way in hell” and “Whoever kills himself in any way in this world will be tormented with it on the day of the resurrection”.¹⁴ Psychological and behavioral motivations, some argue, are the key elements behind the suicide attacks. Psychological approaches stress that people behave emotionally rather than rationally. Emotions become a stronger factor in taking decisions than logic and reason. Meanwhile behavioral approaches view religious extremism as a particular type of behaviour based on intolerance and exclusion.

To analyse the emergence of the religious extremists groups, movements, parties and organisations we need to apply a synthesis, however difficult, of their religious, cultural, sociological, political and ideological underpinnings.

Islamic Parties and Groups

Followings are the groups and parties in Central Asia which have Islamic moorings. They are:

- Islamic Renaissance(Revival) Party of Uzbekistan (IRPU);
- *Adolat* (Justice);
- Islam *Lashkarlori* (Warriors of Islam);
- *Tovba* (Repentance);
- *Imonchilar* (Believers) or *Akromiylar*, or *Khalifatchilar*(Caliphate Supporters);

- Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU);
- *Hizb-Ut-Tahrir* (Party of Liberation);
- Islamic Movement of Turkestan (Central Asia);
- Islamic Renaissance(Revival) Party of Tajikistan (IRPT)

Religious extremists are opposed to the traditions of Sufism¹⁵ which have characterized Islam in many parts of Central Asia and they seem to have found some resonance in the Ferghana Valley.

These groups have converged on a set of demands:¹⁶

- Return to the basic principles and commandments of Islam, purification of Islam of all later heresies and ‘distractions’;
- A political system based on *Hakimiya* and caliphate;
- A legal system based on Shari’a, with administration of Shari’a of justice taking the priority over legislative and executive power.

The roots of religious extremism in Ferghana Valley can be traced back to the 1950s. Muhammad Hindustani Rustamov or Haji Domla (teacher) was a very influential and unofficial spiritual leader in Central Asia. Born in Kokand in Ferghana Valley in about 1892, he studied in Bukhara, Afghanistan and Deoband¹⁷ in India. He returned to Uzbekistan in 1929 and was arrested on the charges of propagating Salafism. He spent 15 years in Siberia.¹⁸ He moved to Dushanbe in 1947 and worked at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan, and finally died in Dushanbe in 1989. In the 1970s, some of his followers¹⁹ joined Wahhabism.²⁰ Their recorded speeches are still in circulation among Wahhabis and are being used to recruit new members. Recently, women are being recruited into Wahhabi groups in an effort to widen the social base. The adherents of “Wahhabism” in the Central Asia thrive on the support of contacts with counterparts and *gurus* abroad. To evade scrutiny, citizens of Central Asia are given the cover of tourism to be imparted indoctrination and training in Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Secondly, monetary doles are given as seed capital for trainees to engage in some gainful business of their own on return.²¹

The Islamic Revival Party (IRP) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) was established on June 9, 1990, in Astrakhan in the Russian Federation. It became active in Uzbekistan. However, the Uzbek branch of the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) could not function for long as it was banned by the government. But party members and supporters continued

their work clandestinely.²² The Imam at the Ata Wali Khan Tura mosque in Namangan and follower of Rahmatulla Qori, Abd al-Ahad, along with his supporters called for the rule of Sharia law. They argued this would solve all the social-economic problems and end despotism, inequality and criminality.²³

Supporters of the banned IRP created the Adolat (Justice) Party in 1991. Two underground groups *Islam Lashkarlari*²⁴ (Warriors of Islam), and *Tovba*²⁵ (Repentance) were also established in 1991 in the provinces of Namangan, Andijon and Ferghana with the goal of establishing an Islamic State.²⁶ Adolat staged demonstrations in Namangan for the establishment of an Islamic State. An important incident occurred in December 1991 in Namangan city, when the members and supporters of the Adolat Party took over the headquarters of the then Communist Party of Uzbekistan. The Namangan city mayor did not give them permission to build a new mosque at a place of their choice. This prompted the Adolat party cadre to capture the Communist Party headquarters.²⁷ *Imonchilar* (Believers), *Akromiyilar* and *Khalifatchilar* (Caliphate Supporters), in one or other way, were also helping the 'cause' of creating a Caliphate. Akrom Yuldashev is considered the founder of this group.²⁸ Activities of these groups and parties mark the beginning of religious extremism in post Soviet Ferghana valley.

Tohir Yuldashev Abdulhalilovich²⁹ has emerged as a 'strong' leader in Ferghana Valley by 1995 and religious extremists believed they could start a war to overthrow Islam Abduganievich Karimov's government in Tashkent. Alarmed, the Uzbek government effectively implemented Article 31 and Article 61 of the Constitution. Article 31 of the Constitution states: "Freedom of conscience is guaranteed to all. Everyone has the right to profess any religion or none. The compulsory imposition of religious views is not permissible. It is prohibited to establish secret societies and associations." Article 61 states that religious organisations and associations are separate from the State and are equal before the law. The State does not interfere in the activities of religious associations. Constitution of Uzbekistan was adopted on the 8th December, 1992 in Tashkent at the eleventh session of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

It is important to remember that so far all the extremist groups have emerged in the Ferghana Valley which accounts for 4.5 per cent of the territory of Uzbekistan but nearly 25 percent population of the country.³⁰

Historically the roots of Islam have been strong here, as stated earlier, whereas the other areas such as Bukhara, Samarkand and Khiva which had been traditional learning centres of Islamic and Sufi orders were less influenced by Wahhabism. Difficult social situation, high density of population and high unemployment provided fertile ground for the missionaries from Saudi Arabia. Already 5-10 per cent of the population in the Valley follows the Wahhabi school.³¹

Another aspect which requires attention here is the relationship between the transnational drug trafficking lobbies and the religious extremist parties. Members and supporters of these extremists groups were involved in transporting opium from Afghanistan to Central Asia and beyond. This nexus continues while the area of operation and volume of trade had increased. According to the United Nations estimate, Afghanistan is the world's largest source of opium. The Drug money accounted for \$ 2.3 billion in 2003- half the nation's economy. The country's total production of opium exceeded 4,000 tons in 2004.³²

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was created by Tohir Yuldashev in 1996 soon after realizing that the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) would sign a peace accord with Tajik government.³³

He and his field commander Jumaboy Ahmadjonovich Khojiyev also known as Juma Namangani and Tojiboy were instrumental in expanding and strengthening the base of the IMU. Juma Namangani, a native of Namangan province joined the Soviet military service in 1987. He served for a short time in Afghanistan when Soviet forces were present there. From 1989 on he took up the study of Islam and received spiritual education from the well known Abdulvali Mirzoyev. From 1991 he became an active supporter of Wahhabism. The stated aims of the IMU and its present form are to overthrow the Government of President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan and establishment of an Islamic State. Since its beginning IMU has been involved in transporting drugs from Afghanistan to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on way to destinations in Russia, Eastern Europe and the West. Thus the drug business has been playing an important role in the sustenance of the IMU.³⁴

Juma Namangani, who underwent special military training under Arab and Pakistani instructors in Afghanistan, commanded an armed formation.

He took active part along with the United Tajik Opposition³⁵ (UTO) forces against the Tajik government troops. He has been an instrumental figure in training Uzbek militias to carry out sabotage and terrorist activities. It has been reported that he was killed in Afghanistan while fighting for the Taliban. Since then, Tohir Yuldashev has been taking both ideological and military command of this Movement. IMU has been responsible for carrying out killings of senior police officials in Namangan in December 1997.³⁶ This has prompted the Uzbek government to pass “Laws about Religious Practices” in the Oily Majlis (parliament) in May 1998 which put certain restrictions on the illegal religious mosques and Madrasas (*Madaris*) which were used by the IMU in carrying out their attacks in Namangan. These laws are aimed at tightening the government grip on the illegal religious practices.

The IMU leadership was held responsible along with the leader of the Erk (Freedom) Party Muhammed Solih by the Uzbek government for a series of bomb blasts in Tashkent on February 16, 1999 which left sixteen people dead and more than a hundred wounded. Uzbek President Islam Karimov survived this attack. This further intensified the government’s hunt for the religious extremists. However, Uzbek government has been criticized for using this incident to marginalise genuine democratic opponents. A British expert believes that although the IMU was blamed for the Tashkent bombings in 1999, “the evidence has never been conclusive. In fact, there are strong indications that the Tashkent bombings were perpetrated by one of Karimov’s political opponents who had ties to powerful organisations.”³⁷ (The author was present in Tashkent when the blasts took place; and following discussions with the Uzbek scholars concluded that the possibility of IMU’s involvement along with some transnational terrorists is very high). An important outcome of the trial which followed these bombings was that the leader of the *Erk* party was also found guilty of organising the blasts and was convicted along with the IMU leaders. The conviction of Salih left no hope that the Uzbek president would ever reopen dialogue with the Erk party.

In August 1999, IMU attempted an incursion into Uzbekistan. The objective of this incursion was destabilization in Uzbekistan and creation of Islamic state in the Fergana Valley.³⁸ Second incursion took place in August 2000. These IMU fighters were trained at Tavildara region in Tajikistan. This has caused tensions between Dushanbe, Tashkent and Bishkek. In July 2001, IMU fighters attacked government forces in southern

Uzbekistan. This series of events from Tashkent bombing in February 1999 to incursions into Kyrgyzstan in the same year as well as into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2000, and in July 2001 have caused a significant change in the threat perceptions from the extremist forces. Experts hold extremists responsible for May 13, 2005 events in Andijon city in Ferghana Valley.³⁹ Andijon is next door to Kyrgyzstan's Osh and Jalalabad provinces where the successful March 2005 demonstrations against the Kyrgyz President, Asker Akayev, culminated in his flight to Moscow. The movement was christened the "Tulip Revolution". The arrest of 23 businessmen or as the Uzbek government says "Akromilar" (followers of Akram Yuldoshev), were arrested under Article 159 of the Uzbek Criminal Code which pertains to unconstitutional activity. Their arrest followed by trial seems to have provoked revolt in Andijon. Supporters of 23 arrested "businessmen" were able to seize the buildings of the regional assembly for a short while, which were taken back by Uzbek security forces after a swift operation against "Akromilar". Here clashes between the "Islamists" and Uzbek security forces took a bloody turn. In all 187 people died in the clashes, as the Andijon Regional Prosecutor, Bakhtiyar Dekhkanov, told a news conference in Andijon City on July 13, 2005. This includes 94 "terrorists", 20 police officers, 11 military personnel, 57 civilians and 5 bodies are yet to be identified. Earlier, the Uzbek authorities listed 176 people killed and 295 wounded⁴⁰. However, media reports put the death toll at more than 400. The unrest has also spread to Korasuv town from nearby Andijon. This has highlighted the question of international development and maintaining stability and security in the Central Asian region.

The Islamic Movement of Turkestan known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) until the middle of 2003, has declared objective of overthrowing the constitutional system and to create the Islamic state.⁴¹ It was placed by the United State Department of States on the list of the 34 most dangerous international terrorist organizations. Islamic Movement of Turkestan (IMT) draws sustenance from financial support of international movements and donations from Uzbek diaspora in Islamic countries. In addition, IMT also periodically receives funds from special services in Pakistan and some other foreign countries. IMT comprises of several separate groups drawn from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Chechnya and Xinjiang Uigur autonomous region of China. After the reported death of Juma Namangani during the military action against Taliban in Afghanistan led by the United States, the

post of the leader of IMT was taken up by Tohir Yuldashev. The leaders of IMT collaborate with a number of international and regional Islamic terrorist organizations and movements, in the first place, with Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Hizb Ut-Tahrir and Ikhvan-al-Muslimin. Some analysts believe IMT was backing the acts of terror in Uzbekistan in March 2004.⁴²

After the Civil-war broke out in Tajikistan, Tohir Yuldashev started traveling to Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey where he established contact with the Islamic parties and government agencies. Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) provided funds and shelter to him and his supporters during 1995-98 in Peshawar, "the center not only of Pakistani and Afghan Islamic activism but also of pan-Islamic jihadi groups."⁴³ Pakistan's Jamiat-i-Ulema Islami (JUI) extended full support to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Funds were raised by the JUI to cover the cost of Madrasa education for the young Uzbek students.⁴⁴

This clearly suggests that support to religious extremism has become an integral part of Pakistan's regional strategy. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's financial and ideological support to the religious extremists in Ferghana Valley continued through 1990s. After the traumatic September 11 incident the Saudi government took some measures to control this assistance. However, financial and ideological assistance is still continuing to IMT through the large Uzbek Diaspora settled in that country. There is little doubt that Pakistani and Saudi linkages have been the important factors in promoting religious extremism in the Ferghana Valley.⁴⁵

Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT)

This Party was formed in 1953 in Bayt-ul-Maqdis in Jerusalem by Sheikh Taqiyuddin Nabhani. It is said to have had its connections with the Central Asia region as well.⁴⁶ However it reappeared in the 1990s in Central Asia as a transnational and potentially far more powerful Islamist organization. It soon became popular with a number of followers in West Asia, North Africa and South East Asia. But it was banned in a number of countries and its followers were imprisoned.⁴⁷ The head office of the Party was for a while based in London. After London bomb blasts in July this year, the HT has come under tremendous pressure from western countries. Whether it will be asked to wrap up from London is yet to be seen. The financial sources of the Party are not known but it publishes books, small

booklets and reams of pamphlets to spread its ideology. It has got its website also.

HT works at two levels. First, with the Muslim community; it explains the duty to work for the Khilafah (Caliphate) State and in living by Islam without losing one's identity. Second, it propagates Islam as a political and intellectual system to a wider audience.⁴⁸ HT is banned in all Central Asian countries. It is estimated that around 7000 to 8000 members of this party are in prison in Central Asia most of them in Uzbekistan.⁴⁹

This figure appears to be exaggerated. HT leaflets were found in Tashkent in 1992-93. But today, it has become very active all over Central Asia. The main purpose of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir is to restore the Islamic way of life and to propagate the call (da'vat) of Islam in the world.⁵⁰

The influence of "Hizb ut-Tahrir" is widespread in Osh, Dzhalsalabad, Batken regions of Kyrgyzstan; Turkestan and Almaty regions of Kazakhstan; in Sogd region of Tajikistan, in the Uzbek part of Ferghana Valley and Tashkent region of Uzbekistan. During 1990-98, the Party's focus was on religious propaganda and recruitment of new members. Small cells (Halqa) of 4-5 people were formed to carry out the activities of the party in various parts of the Ferghana Valley.

The Tashkent bombing of February 16, 1999 marked a new phase of activism. Party members started disseminating extremist leaflets in crowded places openly. The new form of the information propaganda also included the distribution of the audiocassettes among the people, that was not common earlier. Books such as *Muslim Brotherhood, Islamic State, Caliphate*, are being used as the manuals by the party members and workers. The aftermath of September 11, 2001, saw a temporary weakening of contacts between extremist and the terrorist organisations. But soon Hizb ut-Tahrir aligned with Al-Qaida, Taliban, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The common cause became creation of a 'Caliphate'.⁵¹ This position testifies that the radical methods of achieving the final goal seems to be more accepted in the activity of party.⁵²

Both the IMU and the HT have common goals to overthrow the present-day secular Uzbek government. In early 2004, HT got divided in Central Asia. A splinter group of the HT known as *Zamots* was reportedly behind the attacks in Tashkent in Uzbekistan during March 28 - April 1, 2004 in which more than 46 people were killed and tens of others were wounded.

The suicide bombers have carried out attacks in Tashkent followed up by bloody clashes between the Uzbek security forces and terrorist who are believed to be members of the *Zamots*.⁵³

The recent suicide bomb attacks in front of US and Israeli embassies in Tashkent on July 30, 2004 in which seven people were killed and several others were wounded is also believed to be the handy work of this organisation.⁵⁴ However HT has denied its involvement in these attacks while Islamic Jihad⁵⁵ and IMU had claimed responsibility.⁵⁶ The suicide attacks of March, April and July 2004 and May 12-13, 2005 in Uzbekistan is clear pointer to an escalation of security threats and continued activism of religious extremist organisations.

The common uniting objective of all the named religious extremist groups is the creation of theocratic States in Central Asia. Whether it is planned or not, this objective find resonance in countries like Saudi Arabia where Islam is religion, government and society. Religion is not a private matter between man and his creator. Official Islam should govern a muslim individually and his interactions with society at large.

It can be summarised from the above mentioned analysis that the goals of religious extremist groups in Ferghana are similar. These are as followings:

- To overthrow the existing constitutional system and establish an Islamic Caliphate;
- Politicisation of Islam;
- To establish stable communication channels with foreign Islamic centers and organisations with similar political purposes;
- To mobilise funds for the Islamic parties for political purposes;
- To ensure participation in the State bodies for undermining political stability and discredit the secular form of government.

There are, inevitably, internal factors which tend to support the activity of extremist religious groups and parties, either directly or indirectly. These are:

- Socio-economic problems especially in the rural areas of the Ferghana Valley;
- Lack of reliable information and transparency on ongoing social, religious and political programme of the government;

- Absence of informed interaction and coordination between the various Muslim Boards (*Muftiyat*) of the Central Asian Republics;
- Inadequate coordination and cooperation between the law-enforcement agencies of the Central Asian countries at the regional level about on effective intelligence exchange and control over illegal/banned religious extremist organizations.

International and Regional Cooperation against Religious Extremism

The Central Asian states especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are dependent on Russia to fight this menace. Russian focus so far has been on military methods. We now turn to an examination of the regional initiatives against religious extremism in Central Asia.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

Cooperation within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) among the member countries against religious extremism and international terrorism is important. In the SCO summit held in Tashkent on June 17, 2004, all the member countries i.e. Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have expressed their determination to eliminate religious extremism. In June 2001, SCO member states signed "*The Shanghai Convention on fighting Terrorism, Separatism and Religious Extremism.*"⁵⁷ By opening an Anti-Terrorism Centre in Tashkent the process has been institutionalised. The summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) held in Astana on July 5-6, 2005 reiterated its commitment to fight against religious extremism. The summit's call to the US-led "anti-terrorist coalition" to declare a deadline for its military presence on the territory of SCO member countries was a strong signal which the United States could hardly ignore. The message seems to be that the SCO countries are concerned about the effects of US policies on the politics of the region and would like to fight religious extremism and terrorism in Central Asia through regional organizational initiatives. Washington did try to deflect SCO's call by claiming that it was guided by bilateral agreements with Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. However, Uzbek officials notified the United States on July 31, 2005 that US forces would have six months to vacate the Karshi-Khanabad (K-2) air base, located 90 miles north of the Afghanistan border. Kyrgyzstan's Foreign

Minister Roza Otunbayeva also joined issue with Washington: "All of us are part of the anti-terrorist coalition, including our country. However, there is a time limit for everybody who comes to stay somewhere. We are members of the SCO. We raised this issue together with other member states."⁵⁸ This clearly shows that Central Asian countries are coming close to Russia and China in economic and security arrangements.

Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)

Though Uzbekistan is not a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), cooperation between Russia and the other Central Asian countries within the framework of the Treaty is another step in containing religious extremist forces in the region. Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have been taking part in joint military exercises along with Russia every year. The last one was conducted in Tajikistan early this year. The Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation signed on July 17, 2004 is a major development and is expected to contain the activities of extremist forces in this region. It signifies that both Russia and Uzbekistan are determined to join hands against destabilising forces in the region.

The Post-Taliban Phase

Kyrgyz and Uzbek governments have cooperated with the US in its fight against the Taliban and Al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Khanabad air base in Uzbekistan, or K2, and Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan support the United States' air force to conduct air raids against Taliban targets. IMU fighters fought along with the Taliban against the US forces in Afghanistan. Though US led military action against Taliban has dealt a serious blow to Islamic Movement of Turkistan's presence in Afghanistan, there are reports that the Islamic Movement of Turkmenistan fighters are regrouping in Central Asia.⁵⁹ Clashes between the Uzbek security forces and the religious extremist in Andijon City in Ferghana valley on May 12-13, 2005 is a pointer to this.

It has been claimed that United States presence in Central Asia has played a positive role in neutralising extremist forces. Clearly, the destruction of the international terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan has considerably reduced the threats from the religious extremists to Central Asian States. But some analysts⁶⁰ have expressed reservations about the

effects of a prolonged stay of the US forces in Central Asia.⁶¹ The nature of the 'colour revolutions' in the former Soviet Republics indicate that these reservations are not entirely unfounded. The Central Asian states have joined hands with Russia and China to counter the US moves in the region. The implications for Uzbekistan are becoming clear as Islamic figures and opposition leaders are receiving warm welcome in Washington.

Religious Extremism in Ferghana Valley and Implications for India

Will religious extremism in Ferghana Valley become a threat to India's security? From the Indian perspective, Central Asia has immense strategic and economic significance. The presence of Islamic extremists in Ferghana Valley has serious implications for the security of India. The outcome of confrontation between secular and extremist forces in Ferghana valley is bound to effect all countries which have embraced a democratic, plural and secular form of governance. Extremist elements from Central Asian Republics have reportedly been found fighting along the Pak Mujahideens in Jammu and Kashmir. The nexus between the Islamic Revival Parties, the Islamic Movement of Turkistan, Jamat-e-Islami of Pakistan, Taliban and Al-Qaida has been clear for some time. Victory of extremist forces in Ferghana valley will give a major boost to the extremist forces not only in Pakistan Afghanistan but also in India's Jammu & Kashmir and else where. Geographic proximity of the region makes India an important stakeholder.

Conclusion

Religious extremism in Ferghana Valley is a serious threat to security and stability in Central Asia. Declining economic conditions, corruption, sense of injustice and non-accommodative polity will attract followers to IMT and HT. Therefore, imaginative and creative initiatives by the governments to arrest the deteriorating economic conditions in the region are essential to weaken the appeal of religious extremism. The local population in the Central Asian countries (except a sizeable number in Namangan, Andijon and Ferghana provinces) is not in favour of radical Islam. However, they wouldn't resist if Islamic prohibitions are imposed on them in conditions of discontent. The consequences of the unresolved conflict in Afghanistan and transnational character of drug trafficking complicate the issue. Drug trafficking and organised crime is thriving along with extremism in Central Asia Therefore, speedy reconstruction of Afghanistan and restoration of peace would also help addressing the issue

of extremism in Ferghana valley. The role of external powers will remain an important part of the unfolding dynamic. Pakistan for example has strategic interest in creating centrifugal forces in both Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Central Asia is part of the “immediate and strategic neighbourhood’ of India. The activities of Islamic extremists in Central Asia have serious implications for the security of Central Asia countries, India and Russia. Islam *per se* is not a threat to security and stability in the Central Asian region. However, Islamisation of politics and politicization of Islam on the line of IMT and Hizb-Ut-Tahrir is a serious threat to stability, development and modernisation. A comprehensive, cooperative and coordinated plan of action is required on the part of all Central Asian countries to counter the threat. Also, the funding sources of extremist groups need to be plugged. As far as the issue of democratisation is concerned, one should welcome the emergence of genuine secular political opposition in the Ferghana Valley. However, these must not be prescribed and promoted from abroad. Human Rights, civil society and democracy are perceived locally as new instruments for perpetuating outside interference. Imposed from outside, these concepts will not work. They have to be home grown taking account of the historical, social, economic and political processes.

References/End Notes

- ¹ Extremism does not square with the norms of generally accepted behaviour or the reality. Religious Extremists put the belief beyond everything else including factual evidence and logic. In case of Ferghana Valley religious extremists are the supporters of orthodox way and have deep commitment to rid Islam of all kinds of influences from Bahauddin Naqshband (1317-89), Ahmed Yasawi (d. 1166) and Kuvrabi. The three most popular Sufi orders in Central Asian region. This ideology is being preached and promoted by the Islamic Movement of Turkistan and Hizb-ut- Tahrir which have been trying to gain political power in Central Asia.
- ² Shirin Akiner, “Violence in Andijon 13 May 2005: An Independent Analysis” at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/0507Akiner.pdf> (Accessed on June 25, 2005)
- ³ Ibid
- ⁴ Michael Hall , ‘Amid Western apathy, Uzbekistan can expect more violence’ at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=5&article_id=16344, (Accessed on June, 30, 2005)

- ⁵ Sarts was a name for various sedentary Turkic tribes of Turkistan that settled by Syr Darya, known as Ak-sart in old times. Sarts did not have any particular ethnic identification. The term was used as early as in the Turkic book *Kudatku Bilik* ("Blessed Knowledge") dated by 1070. In literature of Imperial Russia the term was used to denote Turkic-speaking people of *Bukhara, Samarkand* and *Ferghana* areas.
- ⁶ The author visited Ferghana Valley recently and found out that every Mahalla has a mosque which is not the case in the whole of Central Asia.
- ⁷ Abu Hanifeh al-Numan ibn Thabit ibn Zubta (699-767A.D.), the founder of the School has emphasised more on ra'y (opinion), qiyas (analogy) and jima (consensus) in the interpretation of Islamic laws and principles.
- ⁸ The Naqshbandiya and Yasawiya Sufi orders.
- ⁹ Shirin Akiner, "The Politicisation of Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia", *Religion, State and Society*, 31(2), 2003, London, p. 119.
- ¹⁰ Alexandre Bennigsen and Marie Broxup, no. 1, pp. 44-45
- ¹¹ Fuller G., "Central Asia: The Quest for Identity," *Current History*, 93 (582), April 1994, p. 147.
- ¹² Interview with M Sharafuddin, former chairman of the religious committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, January 10, 2001.
- ¹³ John L Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002, p. 157.
- ¹⁴ Bernard Lewis, *Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, the Modern Library, New York, 2003, pp. 153-154.
- ¹⁵ Sufism or *Tasawwuf*, as it is called in Arabic, is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. However, *Wahhabi* school of thought doesn't agree with this definition.
- ¹⁶ Rashid Ahmed, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Orient Longman, pp. 247-249, as cited in Poonam Mann, "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan: Will it Strike Back", *Strategic Analysis*, 24 (2), 2002. Interview with the former Deputy Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan, Prof Abdusamat Khaydarov, New Delhi, January 29, 2005.
- ¹⁷ *Deobandi* Movement developed as a reaction to British action against Muslims and the influence of Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan, who advocated the reform and modernization of Islam. Named after the town of Deoband, where it originates, the movement was built around Islamic School (Darul Uloom).
- ¹⁸ Oliver Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*, I B Tauris Publishers, London, 2000, p. 154
- ¹⁹ Rahmatullah Qari Allama (Fergana), Abdulvali Qari Mirzoyev (Fergana), Ishaq Qori, Ismail Domla, Ibrahimjan Khukandi, Hikmatullah Qori (in Dushanbe), Muhammad Ali Marginani, Ubaydullah Makhsum (in Namangan), Abd al-Latif

Andijoni, Muhammad Sodiq qori (Mufti of Muslim Board of Uzbekistan 1989-93). See Ashirbek Muminov, "Traditional and Modern Religious Theological School in Central Asia," in Lena Johnson and Murad Esenov (eds.), *Political Islam and Conflicts in Russia and Central Asia*, Swedish Institute of International affairs, Sweden, Conference Paper 24, 1999, p. 109.

- ²⁰ This movement was started by Muhammed ibn Abdul Wahhab in the eighteenth century in Saudi Arabia. This is a puritanical sect. The chief feature of this sect is the call for a return to the 'pure' faith and practice of the seventh century as was practiced by Prophet Muhammad and his followers in Medina.
- ²¹ Rashid Ahmed, "Taliban Exporting Extremism", *Foreign Affairs*, New York, November-December, 1999.
- ²² Interview with Dr Bakhtiyor Abidov, Al-Beruni Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, January 10, 2001.
- ²³ Interview with Prof Baba A. Khojaye, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, May 28, 2005.
- ²⁴ Islam Lashkarlari was active till 1992. Uzbek government's action against the members of this group forced the leader and members of this group and Adolat Party leader, Tohir Yuldashev Abduhalilovich to leave the country in 1992. Most of the members went to Tajikistan and joined the Civil-War on the side of the UTO. On December 9 1991, there was an encounter between Tohir Yuldashev and the Uzbek President Islam Abduganievich Karimov in Namangan where Yuldashev has demanded Karimov's resignation and asked him to declare Uzbekistan an Islamic State. See www.uzreport.com
- ²⁵ This party was formed by Tohir Yuldashev and Juma A Khojiyev together with the declared goal of Islamisation of Uzbekistan.
- ²⁶ During my visit to these provinces I was told about these groups. Also see Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Yale University Press, London, 2002, p. 139
- ²⁷ Interview with Prof Satimov Gafurojon, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, October 12, 2000.
- ²⁸ Shirin Akiner, no. 9.
- ²⁹ Born in 1967 in Namangan province of Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan. He was leader of Adolat Party. He is talented speaker and organiser. Uzbek government has named him as one of the conspirators behind the attempted assassination of Uzbekistan's President Karimov in February 1999. In May 1999, He obtained the Taliban permission to establish a military training camp for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan which he was leading in northern Afghanistan. After Taliban defeat and reported death of his field commander Jumaboy Ahmadjonovich Khojiyev in Afghanistan during US operation against Taliban, he has moved into the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan. He was reported to have injured in the last year (2004) Pakistani military operation in Waziristan areas.
- ³⁰ "Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central

Asia", (Report of the Ferghana Valley Project of the Council on Foreign Relations, Century Foundation Press, New York, 1999, p. 5.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Rampant production and cultivation of opium in Afghanistan", at http://english.people.com.cn/200509/06/eng20050906_206792.html (Accessed on September 8, 2005)

³³ Sulton Khamadov, *Mezhdunarodniy Kontekst-Afghanskii Faktar, in Religiozniy Extremizm v Tsentralnoi Azii: Problemy I Perspektivy*, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 2002, pp. 130-150.

³⁴ Rashid Ahmed, no. 22.

³⁵ A coalition of Tajik Islamists and democratic forces who fought against the Tajik government forces in the Tajik Civil war during 1992-97. Tens of thousands people were killed in this war which ended in June 1997 under a peace accord between both the parties. Since then UTO is sharing power.

³⁶ *Pravda Vostoka* (in Russian), Tashkent, May 25, 1998

³⁷ Tamara Makarenko, "The Changing Dynamics of Central Asia Terrorism," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 2002, 1-2.

³⁸ *Interfax*: August 24, 1999, 1618 h (Kyrgyzstan/terrorism/militants)

³⁹ Shirin Akiner, no. 2.

⁴⁰ 'Prosecutor's Office presents report on Andijon to Parliament commission' at <http://www.uza.uz/eng/news/?id1=5054> (Accessed on September 7, 2005)

⁴¹ Prof Abdusamat Khaydarov, no. 16.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Rashid Ahmed, no. 22.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The founder was a prominent Palestinian, a graduate of Al-Azhar University in Cairo and a member of Muslim Brotherhood. The leadership of this party was passed to Abdul Qadir Zallum.

⁴⁷ It was banned in the Russian Federation in 2003 and Germany on January 15, 2003.

⁴⁸ As told to Mahan Abedin for the James Foundation by the HT Executive Committee member Jalaluddin, www.jamestown.org, (Accessed on August 12, 2004).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org> (Accessed on August 12, 2004)

⁵¹ www.uzreport.com (Accessed on August 6, 2004).

⁵² Rashid Ahmed, no. 22.

- ⁵³ *www.uzreport.com* (Accessed on August 6, 2004).
- ⁵⁴ *www.uzreport.com* (Accessed on August 12, 2004).
- ⁵⁵ This is a known militant Sunni terrorist “brand” in use in Egypt , which was spawned by the Muslim Brotherhood movement. In 1990s this movement was, led by Ayman Al-Zawahiri, merged with Bin Laden’s Al-Qaida.
- ⁵⁶ Ariel Cohen, “Terror in Tashkent”, *The Washington Times* (Accessed on August 5, 2004).
- ⁵⁷ <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/06/14/eca13545.htm> (Accessed on July 25, 2005)
- ⁵⁸ “Foul play in the Great Game” at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/GG13Ag01.html (Accessed on September 5, 2005)
- ⁵⁹ For detail see *www.uzreport.com* (Accessed on May 29, 2005)
- ⁶⁰ Babajanov, Bakhtiyor, “Replay of Great game in Central Asia,” Paper presented at the International Seminar on *Recent Developments in Central Asia*, New Delhi, August 10, 2005.
- ⁶¹ Farkhod Tolipov, “Regional Security in Central Asia in the Context of the Fight against Terrorism”, in K Santhanam and Ramakant Dwivedi, (eds.), *India and Central Asia: Advancing the Common Interest*, IDSA & Anamaya Publishers, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 26-32.

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