



Religion, Conflict, and Stability

in the
Former Soviet Union



Volume Editors: Katya Migacheva, Bryan Frederick

For more information on this publication, visit www.rand.org/t/RR2195

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available for this publication.

ISBN: 978-0-8330-9984-6

Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

© Copyright 2018 RAND Corporation

RAND® is a registered trademark.

Cover: The main mosque in Grozny, the capital of Russia's Caucasus region of Chechnya (Reuters/Said Tsarnayev); Gandzasar monastery (Creative Commons/Mushegh Ghulyan).

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of its research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.

The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.

RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

Support RAND

Make a tax-deductible charitable contribution at
www.rand.org/giving/contribute

www.rand.org

Contents

Preface	iii
Figures and Tables	ix
Summary	xi
About the Authors	xiii
Acknowledgments	xvii
Abbreviations	xix

CHAPTER ONE

Religion, Conflict, and Stability in the Former Soviet Union

Katya Migacheva and Bryan Frederick	1
About This Volume	5
Overall Themes	9

CHAPTER TWO

Armenia-Azerbaijan: Rethinking the Role of Religion in the Nagorno-Karabakh

Conflict

Artyom Tonoyan	11
Religion and Conflict Analysis	12
Politicizing Religion and Religionizing Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh	16
Religious Symbols and Cleavages in the Conflict	21
Reflections on Future Trajectories	32

CHAPTER THREE

The North Caucasus: How Islam and Nationalism Shaped Stability and Conflict in the Region

Sufian N. Zhemukhov	35
Why Young People Turn to Islam in the North Caucasus: Revival of Islam in the North Caucasus	37
What Drove People Toward Religion?	40
Nationalism and Islam in Russia's North Caucasus	43
How Different Ideological Trends Shaped Radicalization in the North Caucasus	48

Russia's Evolving Antiterrorism Concept.....	55
Reflections on Future Trajectories	62

CHAPTER FOUR

Central Asia: Where Did Islamic Radicalization Go?

Svante E. Cornell	65
The Rise and Fall of Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia	66
Cultural and Historical Determinants of Islam in Central Asia	77
External Islamic Influences	80
Government Policies	85
Reflections on Future Trajectories	96

Special Feature

Religion and Intergroup Conflict: A Social-Psychological Approach

Steven L. Neuberg and Gabrielle Filip-Crawford	99
A Social-Psychological Approach.....	99
The Global Group Relations Project and Survey.....	104
Findings: Religious Infusion, Values Incompatibility, and Resource Competition	110
Implications of Social-Psychological Approaches for Policy and Practice.....	111
Conclusion.....	114

CHAPTER FIVE

Kazakhstan: Islamic Revival and Trajectories of State-Society Relations

Nargis Kassenova	115
Islamization and Fragmentation of Society	117
State Policies Toward Islam: Changes over Time	127
Contestation Between the State and Religious Movements.....	133
Reflections on Future Trajectories	136

CHAPTER SIX

Ukraine: Religious Confessions in Competition Under the Dominance of Political Discourse

Vadym Vasiutynskyi	139
Religious Confessions in Ukraine, Past and Present.....	139
The Nature of Interconfessional Tensions in Ukraine.....	144
Sociopolitical and Psychological Differences	150
People's Perceptions of the Role of Religion in the Conflict in Donbas.....	153
Reflections on Future Trajectories	155

Central Asia: Where Did Islamic Radicalization Go?

Svante E. Cornell

In June 1999, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) launched attacks from its bases in Afghanistan on the territories of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which took the regional defense structures by surprise. Repeat attacks the following year met with more resistance, and following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, U.S. forces in Afghanistan found themselves directly confronting IMU militants aligned with al Qaeda fighters in north Afghanistan.¹ These events brought renewed attention to the rise of radical Islam in Central Asia, rekindling academic debates following independence—prompted by the role of Islamists in the civil war in Tajikistan—that suggested Communism could easily be replaced by Islam not just as the guiding belief system, but as a political ideology.² Indeed, the specter of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia received considerable attention in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The U.S. government, dependent on access to Afghanistan from bases in Central Asia, spent considerable resources on seminars covering the subject, while academics and policy analysts penned numerous studies on the subject.³

A distinct paradigm has emerged in this literature, one that argues that the combination of repressive governments and economic deprivation in Central Asia, and

¹ Ariel Cohen, “Central Asia Beyond Namangani,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, November 21, 2001.

² This paradigm was reflected clearly in the titles of some of the early books on the region: Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, London: Zed, 1994; Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad*, London: Harper Collins, 1995; Mehrdad Haghayeghi, *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1995.

³ These included Vitaly Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005; and Martha Brill Olcott, *In the Whirlwind of Jihad*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012. Other studies include Ahmed Rashid, “The Fires of Faith in Central Asia,” *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2001; Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002; Ghoncheh Tazmini, “The Islamic Revival in Central Asia: A Potent Force or a Misconception?” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2001; Shirin Akiner, “The Politicisation of Islam in Postsoviet Central Asia,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003; Richard Weitz, “Storm Clouds over Central Asia: Revival of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)?” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 27, No. 6, 2004; Eric McGlinchey, “The Making of Militants: The State and Islam in Central Asia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2005.

particularly Uzbekistan, would serve as an incubator of radicalism. Unless the Uzbek government changed its ways and opened its political system, radical Islam would only grow larger and more menacing. The Central Asian regimes advanced the opposite argument: The specter of Islamic radicalism—inspired and supported from abroad—was so severe that it legitimized their reluctance to engage in serious political reform and restrictive policies toward nonsanctioned religious groups. In fact, the 1999 events further convinced the Uzbek leadership that the more open political system in Kyrgyzstan was a serious mistake. Thus, regional governments and Western analysts clashed on the causal mechanisms at hand regarding the rise of Islamic radicalism. Yet they were in full agreement that Islamic radicalism was, indeed, a potent force in Central Asia.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that these predictions and fears did not materialize. While it is undeniable that Islamic extremist groups formed a considerable challenge in the 1990s, the widespread radicalization that was expected in the region has not occurred. In fact, its absence has led some scholars to recently talk of it as a “myth.”⁴ As will be argued in the next section, that may be going too far: There were indeed serious indications of a potential for radicalization in the region. Yet in the past decade, Islamic radicalization has swept the Middle East, including North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member Turkey, and come to strongly affect Muslim communities in Western Europe. In the same period, it has not been a serious factor in Central Asia. In fact, the academic and policy interest in Central Asian Islamism that was apparent a decade ago gradually receded, albeit receiving a new lease on life recently with concerns of Islamic State recruitment.

This chapter seeks to shed light on the relative absence, contrary to predictions, of Islamic radicalization in Central Asia. Following an overview of the emergence of radical Islamic groups in the region, it will assess factors that could explain radicalism’s limited development—ranging from the cultural and historical traits of Islam in Central Asia to external Islamic influences and the policies of regional governments.

The Rise and Fall of Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia

It has long been noted that the prevailing secularization theories of the 1950s and 1960s have not stood the test of time. The idea that modernization would necessarily “lead to a decline in religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals” has been proven wrong.⁵ In fact, in both political and nonpolitical ways, the world has seen a

⁴ John Heathershaw and David W. Montgomery, *The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics*, London: Chatham House, Russia and Eurasia Programme, November 2014.

⁵ Peter Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” in Peter Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999, pp. 2–3.

resurgence of religion, sometimes in the form of a backlash against this very modernity. As Peter Berger put it, the world is “as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.”⁶ Central Asia and the Caucasus have been part and parcel of that development; while the starting point of that process is often viewed as having begun with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is clear that it preceded the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, as the example of Poland makes abundantly clear, the return of religiosity contributed to the collapse of communism rather than being a result of it. Of course, the end of Soviet state-imposed atheism facilitated this preexisting trend of a religious revival.

This analysis takes this resurgence of religiosity as a given, but focuses on a much narrower and only partially related issue: the rise of Islamic radicalism, which is not necessarily correlated with growing religious observance in Muslim societies. Globally, political ideologies seeking religious legitimacy in Islam have been on the rise for a half-century. They have been boosted by the failure of socialist and nationalist ideologies in the Islamic heartland and empowered by the export of inherently radical and political interpretations of Islam from the oil-rich Gulf monarchies since the 1970s, something Saudi officials have belatedly acknowledged and sought to stem.⁷ This process gathered speed following the siege of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, when the Saudi leadership made a deal that allowed the jihadi groups to propagate their ideology abroad, but prohibited it inside the kingdom.⁸ Since then, Saudi Arabia has both formally and informally been the primary promoter of fundamentalist Islam throughout the Muslim world and beyond.⁹

Political Islam, of course, comes in many shades. It includes groups with a local agenda, groups with a global agenda, those that espouse violence to achieve their aims, and those that renounce it. It also includes groups with different stated aims of how far they intend to go in terms of the Islamization of society and state, and which of the two they focus their efforts on. But what Islamist groups have in common is a rejection of the secular form of government and an ambition to replace it with one based, often exclusively, on Islamic principles. This chapter differentiates between political Islam, Islamic radicalism and extremism, and terrorism, while recognizing the overlaps between the categories. Political Islam, or Islamism, is understood as any movement with political aims—stated or unstated—that is motivated by an ideology based on an

⁶ Berger, 1999, p. 1.

⁷ Zalmay Khalilzad, “We Misled You: How the Saudis Are Coming Clean on Funding Terrorism,” *The National Interest*, September 14, 2016.

⁸ Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising in Islam’s Holiest Shrine and the Birth of Al-Qaeda*, New York: Anchor, 2008.

⁹ Carol E. B. Choksy and Jamsheed K. Choksy, “The Saudi Connection: Wahhabism and Global Jihad,” *World Affairs*, May/June 2015; Sebastian Gorka, *Defeating Jihad: The Winnable War*, Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2016, p. 84.

interpretation of the Islamic religion. Political Islam may or may not be radical. A subcategory of political Islam is radical or extremist Islam: forces that advocate an ideology that is intolerant of political or religious dissent and lies outside of the mainstream of a given Muslim society's views and values. Radical and extremist groups, in turn, may or may not espouse violence, including terrorism, as an instrument to achieve their goals. Put otherwise, Islamist groups can be divided into at least three categories. The first are movements that are both ideologically radical and violent, including such terrorist groups as the IMU. The second are those that are radical but do not actively engage in violence, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. These groups tend to be at best ambivalent about violence; however, their ideology is inherently intolerant, and they tend to approve of violence in certain conditions (e.g., against Israeli civilians).¹⁰ As a result, focusing on whether groups espouse violence is only a part of the puzzle: The issue is the ideology that legitimates the violence. Ed Husain, a former Hizb ut-Tahrir member and author of *The Islamist*, observed that “addressing the ‘conveyor belt’ from ideology to terrorism is vital. We need to deal with this ideology.”¹¹ As scholar Zeyno Baran has argued in the case of Hizb ut-Tahrir, such groups are

part of an elegant division of labor. The group itself is active in the ideological preparation of the Muslims, while other organizations handle the planning and execution of terrorist attacks. Despite its objections to this description, HT [Hizb ut-Tahrir] today serves as a *de facto* conveyor belt for terrorists.¹²

In the third category are self-declared moderate groups that oppose violence, reject the most radical ideologies within political Islam, and use the rhetoric of democracy and human rights to advance their cause. This includes groups that claim to have no political agenda whatsoever—including the so-called quietist Salafis such as the Indian-based Jamaat al-Tabligh movement.

In this category, many Islamist movements, especially those connected to the Muslim Brotherhood, support the *mechanism* of democracy to achieve their purposes and tend to share a majoritarian approach in which they see themselves as representatives of a pious majority that should be allowed to set the rules by which society is governed. At the very basic level, however, many even in this category reject the notion that the people, not God, are the source of sovereignty and the legitimacy of a government. As Turkish scholar Ihsan Dağı has argued, this trend in political Islam is a form of “postmodern authoritarianism” that “is not justified by a reference to the ‘text’ but

¹⁰ See, for example, Anthony Bergin and Jacob Townsend, “Responding to Radical Islamist Ideology: The Case of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Australia,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Policy Analysis*, No. 6, March 14, 2007.

¹¹ Dominic Casciani, “Inside the Jihadi Worldview,” BBC News, May 24, 2007.

¹² Zeyno Baran, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam's Political Insurgency*, Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, December 2004, p. 11.

to the ‘people’ and the people’s ‘will,’” which is “‘democratic and representative’ in justification and process but authoritarian in content and outcome.”¹³

This chapter is concerned with all Islamist movements, but primarily with the more-radical variants of political Islam, regardless of whether or not they espouse violence.

History of Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus

Across Central Asia and the Caucasus, Islam has been thoroughly intertwined with local folk customs and pre-Islamic traditions. Scholars have linked the prominence of such traditions to the dominance of the Hanafi *madhab* (school of Islamic jurisprudence), Maturidi theological approach in the region, and the powerful role of Sufi orders.¹⁴ Among the four madhabs of Sunni Islam (Hanafi, Shafi’i, Maliki, and Hanbali), the Hanafi school is the one most open to accepting the independent reasoning of Islamic jurists (*ijtihad*), the consensus of jurists (*ijma*), and deductive analogy (*qiyas*) in cases where the Quran and Sunnah do not provide answers to particular questions of Islamic law.¹⁵ The Maturidi school of *Kalam* or theology is one of the two dominant ones in Sunni Islam along with the Ash’ari school. The Maturidi school places considerably stronger emphasis on human reason, maintaining—unlike the Ash’ari school—that humans can determine right from wrong in the absence of divine revelation.¹⁶ In practice, this led to a greater tolerance: The Hanafi madhab, which was codified in Central Asia, accepted some forms of pre-Islamic behavior and sought to integrate and cloak them in an Islamic shroud, something that stricter madhabs such as the Hanbali or Shafi’i schools would summarily reject. The Hanafi school thus sought to lessen the shock of the transformation taking place, thereby facilitating the spread of Islam across the region.¹⁷ Similarly, the Hanafi school tolerated the rise of Sufi orders, the largest of which originated in Central Asia and spread globally. The Sufi orders were based on the notion of a mystical communion between man and god, often understood to supersede Quranic injunctions. This, of course, was anathema to the stricter interpretations, particularly in the Hanbali madhab. The complex theological controversies over

¹³ Ihsan Dağı, “Pursuing Islamism with Democracy,” *Today’s Zaman*, December 9, 2012.

¹⁴ S. Frederick Starr, “Islam’s Civil War and Greater Central Asia,” *Islam: Governance, Ideology and U.S. Policy for the New Administration and the New Congress*, Washington, D.C.: Aspen Institute, 2009, pp. 33–40.

¹⁵ The Hanafi school dominates in former Ottoman lands and Central Asia; the Shafi’i school is followed in areas populated by Kurds, Southeast Asia, and East Africa; the Maliki school is dominant in the rest of Africa, while the Hanbali school is followed in Saudi Arabia and some Gulf monarchies. For more details about differences in jurisprudence, see Irshad Abdal-Haqq, “Islamic Law: An Overview of Its Origins and Elements,” *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 27, 2002.

¹⁶ Ahmad Mohamad Ahmad El-Galli, *The Place of Reason in the Theology of Al-Maturidi and Al-Ash’ari*, doctoral thesis, Edinburgh, UK: University of Edinburgh, 1976.

¹⁷ S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment: Central Asia’s Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Sufism—and the diversities among Sufi orders, with the Naqshbandi in particular situated squarely within the boundaries of Sunni orthodoxy¹⁸—are beyond the scope of this chapter. The purist Salafi movement, inspired in particular by the Wahhabi movement that emerged from the Hanbali tradition in Saudi Arabia in the late 18th century, developed a fervently anti-Sufi tendency. The Sufi worship of saints and veneration of ancestors clashed with the extreme monotheism of the Salafis, who considered such practices a form of *shirk* or polytheism, and therefore as apostasy.

Across Central Asia, the dominant institutions of Islamic learning were all Hanafi and coexisted with the major Sufi orders, especially the Naqshbandi and the Yasawi. Surprisingly, the first inroads of Salafi ideology came during the Soviet period. Influential Arab scholars brought “proto-Salafi” ideas to Central Asia in the 1920s. From the 1950s onward, contacts between Islamic scholars and Saudi Arabia—home to an important Uzbek diaspora—were established when the pilgrimage to the holy sites was allowed after World War II. This led to a gradual growth of Salafi thought in underground religious communities in Uzbekistan—particularly in the Ferghana Valley—as well as in Tajikistan, where underground Islamists operated relatively freely. The North Caucasus remained largely under the influence of the Sufi orders; yet in Dagestan, which follows the stricter Shafi’i madhab, Salafi ideas also began to gain traction by the 1970s. As scholar Vitaly Naumkin details, the Soviet leadership may in fact have not only tolerated but also facilitated the rise of Salafi thought, as it contributed to splitting and undermining the more influential, and therefore politically dangerous, traditional Islamic forces in the region. This apparently went on even in the late 1980s: Naumkin quotes a former Uzbek communist official as saying “we couldn’t have imagined into what a monster this Wahhabi movement here would turn.”¹⁹

The Wahhabi movement indeed did expand dramatically starting in the late 1980s.²⁰ A younger generation of Salafi imams and activists began to organize in Tajikistan, as well as in the Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley, particularly the towns of Andijan, Namangan, and Margilan. By this time, many Uzbeks and Tajiks were already exposed to the Islamic radicalism of their co-ethnics in Afghanistan,

¹⁸ The Naqshbandi order is a Sufi order founded in Central Asia in the 14th century. Sufi orders are built on the notion that its masters trace their spiritual lineage back through other masters in an unbroken chain going back to the Prophet Muhammad. Most Sufi orders trace this lineage through Ali, the Prophet’s son-in-law venerated by the Shi’as; the Naqshbandi differ by tracing their lineage through Abu Bakr, the first Caliph. This makes the Naqshbandi order more mainstream within Sunni Islam than other Sufi orders. See Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition*, London: Routledge, 2007; also Svante E. Cornell and M. K. Kaya, “The Naqshbandi-Khalidi Order and Political Islam in Turkey,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 19, September 2015.

¹⁹ Naumkin, 2005, pp. 48–52.

²⁰ Shirin Akiner, “The Politicisation of Islam in Postsoviet Central Asia,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003.

who fought the Soviet invasion.²¹ Radical Islamists then rose to prominence in both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the chaotic period of the Soviet Union's collapse and the transition to independence from about 1989 to 1992. This was a period of increasing lawlessness, including ethnic riots in the Ferghana Valley that led to the ethnic cleansing of the Meskhetian Turks (exiled from southern Georgia in the 1940s) in summer 1989 and ethnic riots between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Osh region in 1990. Meanwhile, in Tajikistan, political liberalization gradually led to the collapse of the communist regime, heavily dominated by the northern Leninabad region, which came to be contested by a coalition of secular as well as Islamist opponents, in which the latter formed the core element.

As a result of the general chaos, the weakening of power in Tajikistan, and the rapid succession of inept leaders in Tashkent, Salafi-inspired radicals in 1991 took over the functions of government in the city of Namangan in Uzbekistan's section of the Ferghana Valley, while a more-diverse group of Islamists made a bid for power in Dushanbe. In Uzbekistan, the Adolat (Justice Social Democratic Party) party formed the main vehicle for the power grab, which featured vigilante groups who enforced Islamic dress codes and behavior and demanded the government in Tashkent declare an Islamic state. At this point, the intricate connections between political Islam and organized crime were visible: These vigilantes were formed mainly from heavily criminalized martial arts circles.²² Subsequently, the Uzbek militants became heavily involved in the trafficking of drugs from Afghanistan; parts of the movement appeared to have been motivated and strongly affected by the drug trade.²³

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ferghana Valley became a haven—indeed a battleground for influence—for foreign Islamic missionaries from the Gulf, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and beyond.²⁴ At this point, the notorious future leader of the IMU, Tahir Yuldashev, set himself up as the de facto ruler of the Ferghana Valley, and contemporary visitors reported that the Salafis appeared convinced they would prevail in an armed struggle against Tashkent. They also gained tactical sup-

²¹ Victor Spolnikov, "Impact of Afghanistan's War on the Former Soviet Republics of Central Asia," in Hafez Malik, ed., *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 95–116.

²² Bakhtiyar Babajanov, Kamil Malikov, and Aloviddin Nazarov, "Islam in the Ferghana Valley: Between National Identity and Islamic Alternative," in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*, Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2011; and Naumkin, 2005, p. 262.

²³ Svante E. Cornell, "The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan," in Svante E. Cornell and Michael Jonsson, eds., *Conflict, Crime, and the State in Postcommunist Eurasia*, Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, pp. 68–81.

²⁴ Naumkin, 2005, pp. 66–70; Michael Fredholm, *Uzbekistan and the Threat from Islamic Extremism*, report no. K39, Surrey, UK: Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, March 2003, p. 4.

port from several secular opposition groups that shared the common aim of ousting the Uzbek government.²⁵

Faced with this challenge, the government of the newly independent Uzbekistan at first vacillated. The new leader of Uzbekistan, the relatively unknown Islam Karimov, even traveled in December 1991 to meet with the Salafis, who demanded, among other things, the declaration of Uzbekistan as an Islamic state. In a dramatic episode that has been preserved for posterity on the Internet, Yuldashev forced Karimov, in very hostile conditions, to listen to his lecture on proper governance.²⁶ This experience proved not only humiliating for Karimov but also formative: After returning to Tashkent, he managed to consolidate enough power in the next few months to crack down on the militants in Ferghana and restore control over the restive region. In the ensuing months, the government engaged in a broad repression of Islamist forces, Salafi and non-Salafi alike.²⁷ Karimov's apprehensions concerning political Islam were exacerbated by events in Tajikistan: A civil war broke out there in early 1992, which pitted the post-Soviet government against a diverse opposition force led by Islamists, who were in turn closely connected with the ethnic Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. The Uzbek militants exiled from the Ferghana Valley became an important component of that opposition but differed in their orientation. They gravitated toward the emerging Taliban movement in Afghanistan rather than the Northern Alliance. Tajikistan's descent into chaos shook the entire region and strengthened the Uzbek leadership's conviction that stability had to be maintained at all cost and radical Islam must be fought with all available means.

The Uzbek militants reconstituted themselves into the IMU and benefited from the flight of Uzbek Islamists fleeing subsequent crackdowns in Uzbekistan. The 1997 peace agreement in Tajikistan led the IMU to seek closer ties with the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan and gradually to move their base to Afghanistan. Yet they maintained a presence in Islamist-controlled territory in Tajikistan's southern-central areas. From bases in Kabul and Tajikistan, they planned a series of attacks on Central Asia. In early 1999, a series of bomb explosions rocked the Uzbek capital Tashkent and almost killed President Karimov. The IMU was blamed for these terrorist attacks, although its culpability has yet to be convincingly determined. In August 1999, the IMU conducted a military incursion into the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan, which focused on the Vorukh and Sokh enclaves in that region: small territorial exclaves belonging to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, respectively, but entirely surrounded by mountainous Kyrgyz territory. While the IMU made political demands, it released hostages for ransom: in particular, four Japanese geologists, for which the organization

²⁵ Naumkin, 2005, pp. 52–60.

²⁶ Babajanov, Malikov, and Nazarov, 2011, pp. 319–320. See “Karimov, Namangan” [“Каримов Наманганда”], YouTube video via user turkistontv, August 20, 2011, for the video.

²⁷ Naumkin, 2005, p. 70; Rashid, 2001, pp. 45–55.

extracted a sum believed to be \$2–5 million.²⁸ The IMU detachments then retreated to Tajikistan and subsequently Afghanistan, aided by the intervention of old allies from the Tajik civil war, particularly the former warlord and now–Tajik minister of emergency situations, Mirzo Zioyev. But other IMU units remained in Tajikistan, where they continued to coordinate with their former comrades in arms who were now part of a unity government. They returned the following summer better armed and managed to insert themselves into several areas of Uzbekistan, where they attacked government forces. While they were repelled, it was really only after the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan following September 2001 that the IMU was dealt a decisive blow and forced back into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, where it merged with other foreign fighters loyal to al Qaeda. The U.S. intervention also had the effect of strengthening the hand of Imomali Rakhmonov’s regime in Dushanbe in its internal power struggle with the former opposition leaders, who were gradually purged in the following years.

The overview of the rise of radical Islam in Central Asia would not be complete without treatment of the purportedly nonviolent groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jamaat al-Tabligh. Hizb ut-Tahrir is a global Islamist movement created by Palestinian Islamic scholar Taqiuddin al-Din an-Nabhani in 1953 that, while generally eschewing violence, aspires to build a caliphate uniting all Muslims in which there would be no place for nonbelievers. Adopting a three-stage approach to achieving power, the group plans to first spread Islamic education in society; infiltrate government and spread their message there; and finally, lead to the “crumbling” of secular governments, although the group never specifies how, exactly, that would happen without the use of force.²⁹

From the mid-1990s, Hizb ut-Tahrir began to spread relatively rapidly in Central Asia, giving birth to a veritable cottage industry of academic and policy studies concerning the movement. To this day, most of the literature on this global Islamic movement headquartered in London focuses on its activities in the Central Asian states.³⁰ In the mid-2000s, there was much alarm raised about the proliferation of the organization, including reports of tens of thousands of recruits joining the group, primarily in Uzbekistan but also in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, this literature appears

²⁸ David Leheny, “Tokyo Confronts Terror,” *Policy Review*, No. 110, December 2001/January 2002.

²⁹ Baran, 2004, p. 48.

³⁰ The three major works are Baran, 2004; Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb Ut-Tahrir*, London: Routledge, 2010; and Naumkin, 2005, pp. 127–200. Further studies include International Crisis Group, “Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir,” Asia Report no. 58, June 30, 2003; Emmanuel Karagiannis and C. McCauley, “Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami: Evaluating the Threat Posed by a Radical Islamic Group That Remains Nonviolent,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 18, 2006; Alisher Khamidov, “Countering the Call: The U.S., Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Religious Extremism in Central Asia,” Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2003; Didier Chaudet, “Hizb-ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2006, pp. 113–125; Svante E. Cornell and Regine Spector, “Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2002, pp. 193–206.

to have diminished around 2008. After 2010, there is little reference in academic and policy circles to the group in Central Asia, and regional governments do not raise alarm about the group. What happened to this purportedly rapidly growing movement? And if it is no longer a threat, why is that the case, contrary to earlier expectations?

A number of splinter groups came out of Hizb ut-Tahrir, some maintaining the commitment to nonviolence and some not. One of these is the curious case of Akromiya, named after its founder, Akram Yuldashev, who split from Hizb ut-Tahrir in the early 1990s. Concentrated in Andijan, Uzbekistan, Akromiya members were successful in operating a thriving Islamic community that included prominent businesses and educational institutions, which were not only tolerated but praised by the Uzbek government. As Jeffrey Hartman has noted, “early in 2004, President Karimov visited one of the Brothers’ [a term for Akromiya members] charitable causes in Kokand for a public relations event and congratulated them on Uzbek national television for their work. On various occasions, Karimov referred to the Brothers’ community members as ‘the pride,’ ‘the stars,’ and ‘the sons of Uzbekistan.’”³¹ But hardly a year later, following a change of the governor of Andijan, this governor’s falling out with the “Brothers,” and the jailing of two dozen businessmen connected to Akromiya, the movement was responsible for the violent uprising that occurred in Andijan in May 2005. The botched Uzbek government response, which ended in a shootout between hostage-taking Islamists and poorly trained interior ministry forces in which up to 200 people were killed, led to widespread condemnation of the Uzbek government, as discussed in the next section.³²

From Central Asia, but Not of Central Asia?

As previously noted, Islamic radicals from Central Asia at present appear to be located primarily outside of the region. This process of internationalization of the radical movement developed alongside the IMU’s move into Afghanistan. There, its base broadened to include Uighurs, Tajiks, and citizens of other former Soviet states. Furthermore, the Central Asian radicals came to be integrated with al Qaeda, and thus the group’s erstwhile focus on regime change in Uzbekistan began to broaden and be affected by the more-global agenda of transnational Salafi-jihadi networks.³³

This eventually led to a split by 2002. While the core IMU attracted growing displeasure from its Taliban hosts for its reluctance to take part in the fight against the United States in Afghanistan, a breakaway group, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU),

³¹ Jeffrey W. Hartman, *The May 2005 Andijan Uprising: What We Know*, Silk Road Paper, Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, May 2016, p. 20.

³² John C. K. Daly, *Rush to Judgment: Western Media and the 2005 Andijan Violence*, Silk Road Paper, Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, May 2016.

³³ Didier Chaudet, “Islamist Terrorism in Central Asia: the ‘al-Qaedaization’ of Uzbek Jihadism,” IFRI Russia/NIS Center, No. 35, December 2008, pp. 17–18.

emerged with an agenda more in line with that of the global transnational Salafi jihadi network.³⁴ The IJU was found to have a far reach; in addition to having been responsible for a series of suicide attacks in Uzbekistan in 2004, German authorities also averted an IJU plot on German government targets involving Turkish nationals and German converts.³⁵

By 2011, the agenda of the global jihadi movement had shifted to Syria, meaning that the IMU, still focused on greater Central Asia, was finding it ever more difficult to attract recruits because they had to compete with the pull of a conflict much closer to the Islamic heartland and of much greater symbolic significance.³⁶ Thus arose the main Central Asian fighting groups in Syria: the Imam Bukhari Brigade and Katibat al Tawhid Wal Jihad, both of which are aligned with al Qaeda's franchise in Syria (the Nusra Front) and with a broader coalition called Jaysh al-Fatah, in which the Nusra Front is the main force. As Syria exerted a powerful pull on Central Asian militants, the rump IMU resolved to affiliate itself with the Islamic State and plead allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in an attempt to retain relevance and secure funding.³⁷ That led to a final breakdown in the IMU relationship with the Taliban and likely spelled the end of the IMU as a cohesive entity.

Over the past two decades, the locus of Central Asian radicals has moved from the Fergana Valley through Tajikistan and Afghanistan and into the tribal badlands of Pakistan toward the Levant. Estimates of the numbers of Central Asian fighters in Syria vary widely and range from the high hundreds to several thousand. Even higher estimates exist, although their accuracy is contested.³⁸ Regardless, the number of Central Asians in Syria appears to be relatively low in international comparison. While there is considerable variation in figures cited, numbers often circulated suggest that close to 5,000 fighters from former Soviet republics had traveled to Syria. Of these, half are believed to be Russian citizens; the rest are divided among the five Central Asian states, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The best estimates suggest about 500 Uzbeks have traveled to Syria, along with up to 600 Kyrgyz nationals (including ethnic Uzbeks from south Kyrgyzstan), with numbers ranging from 100 to 300 for the other Central Asian states and Azerbaijan. These numbers should be put in context: The larg-

³⁴ Einar Wigen, "Islamic Jihad Union: al-Qaida's Key to the Turkic World," Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2009, p. 12.

³⁵ Guido Steinberg, "A Turkish al-Qaeda: The Islamic Jihad Union and the Internationalization of Uzbek Jihadism," Strategic Insights, July 2008.

³⁶ Jacob Zenn, "The IMU Is Extinct: What Next for Central Asia's Jihadis?" *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, May 3, 2016.

³⁷ Edward Lemon, "IMU Pledges Allegiance to Islamic State," Eurasianet.org, August 1, 2015.

³⁸ "Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia," International Crisis Group, Briefing no. 72, January 20, 2015; and John Heathershaw and David Montgomery, "Who Says Syria's Calling? Why It Is Sometimes Better to Admit We Just Don't Know," Cedar Network, February 17, 2015.

est contingents of foreign fighters appear to come from Tunisia (up to 6,000), Saudi Arabia (2,500), Turkey (2,000–3,000), and Jordan (2,000). Beyond these Middle Eastern states, European nations are prominently represented: 1,700 French citizens, along with 700 Germans and a similar number of Britons, as well as close to 500 Belgians and 300 Swedes.³⁹

While it is indisputable that young Central Asians are being recruited to the killing fields of Syria, an important question is where that recruitment actually takes place. Indeed, the assumption that they are recruited in their homelands is largely not borne out in fact.⁴⁰ Quite the contrary, the lion's share of recruits are radicalized and recruited while working as migrant workers in Russia.⁴¹ In fact, scholar Leon Aron estimates that between 80 and 90 percent of Islamic State fighters from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were recruited while working as labor migrants in Russia.⁴² This fact led the independent Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* to conclude that “the road to [the Islamic State] goes through Moscow.”⁴³

Thus, the current situation regarding Central Asian radical Islam is somewhat perplexing. While the problem of radical Islam was indeed a serious one in the 1990s, it seems to have abated to a considerable degree. Since the mid-2000s, the evidence of ongoing radicalization in Central Asia itself has dwindled; and where it has appeared, it has increasingly concerned incidents in south Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, rather than Uzbekistan, which the literature pointed to as the looming hotbed of extremism given its more authoritarian government and its repeated crackdowns on unofficial Islamic groups. Indeed, the most notable terrorist attacks in the region in recent years have taken place in Kazakhstan, with several incidents in 2011–2012, culminating in a much-publicized attack in Aktobe in 2016.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the mainly ethnic Uzbek jihadi milieus that dated to the conflicts in the 1990s integrated with the international jihadi networks and developed a pres-

³⁹ The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, December 2015.

⁴⁰ “Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia,” 2015.

⁴¹ Joanna Paraszczuk, “Most Uzbeks Fighting for IS Came from Russia, Theologian Claims,” *RFE/RL*, March 24, 2015; Noah Tucker, “Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses,” United States Agency for International Development and Municipal Development Institute, 2015; Ryskeldi Satke and Marta Ter, “Are Central Asian Migrants in Russia a Recruiting Ground for Islamic State?” European Council on Foreign Relations, July 27, 2015; and Daniil Turovsky, “How ISIS Is Recruiting Migrant Workers in Moscow to Join the Fighting in Syria,” *The Guardian*, May 5, 2015.

⁴² Leon Aron, “The Coming of the Russian Jihad, Part I,” *War on the Rocks*, September 23, 2016.

⁴³ Zinaida Burskaya, “The Road to IGIL Passed Through Moscow” [“Doroga v IGIL Prolegla Cherez Moskvu”], *Novaya Gazeta*, January 18, 2016.

⁴⁴ Yevgeny Pastukhov, “The Problem of Terrorism for Kazakhstan,” *Kazakhstan in Global Processes*, No. 3 (37), 2013. See also Karin Erlan, *The Soldiers of the Caliphate: The Anatomy of a Terrorist Group*, Astana, Kazhanstan: KISI, 2016.

ence first in Afghanistan and Pakistan and then in Syria. In spite of this organizational prominence, the numbers of Central Asian recruits in these theaters pale in comparison to those of more-liberal Middle Eastern countries and to Western European nations. Further, the preponderance of evidence suggests the recruitment of the relatively few Central Asian fighters in Syria occurs not in the region itself, but in Russia.

These developments leave a number of unanswered questions, but one stands out: Why have the expectations of a mushrooming of radical Islam in Central Asia not materialized? In fact, what explains the absence of more widespread radicalization in Central Asia in line with developments elsewhere in the Islamic world?

Cultural and Historical Determinants of Islam in Central Asia

The objective of this chapter is complicated by the fact that it aims to prove a negative: Why has widespread radicalization not occurred in Central Asia? Critics may retort that what should be explained is the occurrence of radicalization and not its absence. Seeking to prove its absence risks falling into the trap of assuming that a rise of religiosity also means a rise in radicalism. As scholars John Heathershaw and David Montgomery have pointed out, some analysis of the region displays an “assumed yet unproven relationship between Islamicization and radicalization.”⁴⁵ While remaining mindful of this issue, two factors make this approach worthwhile: First, it remains a fact that much of the Islamic world as a whole *has* seen growing tendencies toward radicalization, including considerable numbers of young men leaving for jihad abroad. Second, many analysts long predicted the growth of radicalization in Central Asia if the regional regimes did not liberalize their policies toward religion; these governments have, if anything, become even more restrictive.

The evidence suggests that public religiosity has risen in Central Asia, while radicalization has not. In the mid-1990s, scholar Nancy Lubin conducted a survey in Uzbekistan that showed that close to half of the population considered themselves nonbelievers, while slightly higher numbers identified as believers. Of those, many displayed a remarkable lack of knowledge about basic tenets of Islam and reported neither praying nor fasting. Lubin also found that the levels of religiosity differed strongly by age and region. Younger people were considerably less likely to define themselves as believers; and levels of religiosity were higher in the Ferghana Valley than elsewhere in Uzbekistan, with Andijan standing out for its high levels of religiosity.⁴⁶ While there have been no subsequent surveys of this kind, political scientist Kathleen Collins conducted focus group surveys in Uzbekistan in 2004–2005 in which every person

⁴⁵ Heathershaw and Montgomery, 2015, pp. 6–7.

⁴⁶ Nancy Lubin, “Islam and Ethnic Identity in Central Asia,” in Yacov Ro’i, ed., *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, London: Frank Cass, 2005.

interviewed defined himself or herself as a believer, and young people displayed greater interest in religion than older people.⁴⁷

It appeared that a surge in public religiosity took place in the region. Collins reported widespread support for laws based in part on Islamic principles, including sharia, while considerably fewer interviewees, although a visible minority, supported armed jihad in certain conditions. In contrast, the number of respondents who agreed with Islamist views on gender relations was comparatively small.⁴⁸ In a survey also conducted in 2005 in southern Kyrgyzstan, Montgomery found similar evidence of growing religiosity: One-third of respondents supported an Islamic basis for state law.⁴⁹ A 2013 Pew poll found similar results: Between one-tenth (Kazakhstan) and one-third (Kyrgyzstan) of respondents supported sharia law.⁵⁰ These numbers were lower than for Russian Muslims, two-fifths of whom supported sharia, and contrasted widely with figures for South Asia and the Middle East, where more than three-quarters of respondents supported the application of Islamic law. Thus, while the evidence suggests that religiosity in Central Asia has increased notably since the early post-Soviet period, support for religious orthodoxy remained low in comparison with other heavily Islamic regions.

However, the available data suggest that radicalization and religiosity have no positive correlation; they even appear to be negatively correlated, as radicalization appears to have abated while religiosity has clearly risen. The lack of a correlation between religiosity and political Islam is perhaps best illustrated by Pew's figures for Azerbaijan: 88 percent of respondents concur that it is necessary to believe in god to be moral, a figure higher than for any Central Asian state. Only 8 percent, however, support sharia, a figure lower than any Central Asian state.⁵¹ This raises the question whether the radicalization that took place in the late Soviet period in Central Asia was an elite phenomenon, disconnected from society as a whole and focused among particular underground groups.

An important detail in this regard is the Islamic tradition in Central Asia. Indeed, two factors are of particular relevance: the prevalence of the moderate Hanafi tradi-

⁴⁷ Kathleen Collins, "Islamic Revivalism and Political Attitudes in Uzbekistan," *National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, December 2007.

⁴⁸ Collins, 2007, pp. 36–39.

⁴⁹ David Montgomery and John Heathershaw, "Islam, Secularism, and Danger: A Reconsideration of the Link Between Religiosity, Radicalism, and Rebellion in Central Asia," *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2016.

⁵⁰ Pew Research Center, *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*, Washington, D.C., 2013. Pew was unable to include the question of support for sharia in Uzbekistan. However, results for Uzbekistan align with other Central Asian states on all other questions asked in the poll, including whether women should wear the veil and attitude toward honor killings. Because of this, there is no reason to expect the result for Uzbekistan regarding sharia to differ markedly.

⁵¹ See Pew Research Center, 2013, pp. 18, 74.

tion across the region and the long history of secularization. The less-strict nature of the Hanafi madhhab is more tolerant of diversities of belief and practice, and Hanafi societies have proven more accepting of secularization compared with other madhabs. Of course, the Hanafi madhhab is dominant almost exclusively outside the Arab world among societies that were Islamized but retained elements of their pre-Islamic culture and beliefs. This factor may have provided additional tolerance of secularization, particularly among Turkic peoples, whose national traditions have remained strong. At the same time, the Hanafi connection in part correlates with geographic proximity to Europe. Most Hanafi societies are located in the Balkans, Turkey, or Central Asia and are overwhelmingly Turkic; the major exception is the Muslims living in the Indian subcontinent. Pew's research shows that views among Hanafi Muslims in South Asia align more with the mainstream Islamic world than with their Hanafi counterparts in the Turkic world.⁵² Thus, an equally if not more important factor may be the Turkic heritage—particularly the fact that these areas were controlled largely by Turkic rulers and not by outside powers—and proximity with and exposure to Europe and European ideas including secularism. This mix of factors led to the development, among the Muslims of Czarist Russia, of modernizing ideas seeking to adapt Islamic education to new realities, a movement known as *Jadidism*. While not secular per se, the Jadid movement was decisively modern in its intention to combine secular learning with Muslim culture.⁵³

In spite of the connections mentioned, Central Asia has been largely disconnected from the Muslim heartland over much of the past century. The implication of this is that the Islamic currents that developed in the Middle East in the 20th century have not had the opportunity to become entrenched in Central Asia. For example, Montgomery's survey in south Kyrgyzstan sought to measure familiarity with Islamic scholars. While many knew of local historical figures such as Ibn Sina or al-Bukhari, few (less than 3 percent) had heard of modern Islamist ideologues such as Sayyid Qutb or Ali Shariati.⁵⁴ This raises the question of whether the lack of radicalization in Central Asia is only a result of the lack of interaction with the Islamic world—in other words, whether a “regression to the mean” of the Islamic world is likely to happen if the region gets more integrated with the rest of the world in the coming decades.

While the answer to this question cannot be known, it is clear that an Islamic renaissance is taking place in Central Asia; as such, the role of Islam in society has plenty of room to grow. That may mean that radical ideas will become more popular

⁵² Pew Research Center, 2013, pp. 18, 74.

⁵³ Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1999; Abdujabbar A. Abduvakhitov, “The Jadid Movement and Its Impact on Contemporary Central Asia,” in Hafez Malik, ed., *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 65–76.

⁵⁴ Montgomery and Heathershaw, 2016.

in the future. The trajectory undoubtedly will be affected by external as well as internal political factors.

External Islamic Influences

The external influences on Islam in Central Asia are plentiful, the main sources being the Gulf, South Asia, and Turkey. In the Soviet period, as previously discussed, connections were developed between Central Asia and both South Asian Islamic movements and those originating in the Gulf. Those connections were largely underground and had a powerful effect on the radicalization of Central Asian Islamists in the transition to independence. Yet on a broader societal scale, external influences have been able to develop connections only following the transition to independence. It should be noted at the outset that the ability of external Islamic groups to operate in the region has been affected by government policies, not least their general aversion to external religious missionaries of any stripe—with Kyrgyzstan being only a partial exception. Paradoxically, this has tended to favor two contrasting types of movements: those tolerated by the governments and underground and highly secretive groups.

Turkish Islamic movements have tended to receive a warmer welcome than others. Given the efforts by Central Asian governments to support traditional Islam, the Turkish example was initially viewed quite positively. That enabled Turkish Islamic groups to spread relatively freely in the region. The Turkish state, through the foundation of its Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), took a direct role in building or restoring mosques across the region, printing and distributing religious literature, and setting up theology departments on a Turkish model (in all regional countries except Uzbekistan).⁵⁵ In addition, with tacit support from the state, Turkish religious communities have been active in the region. These have included numerous branches of the Naqshbandi movement, particularly the Erenköy lodge led by Osman Nuri Topbaş, as well as the Süleymancı faction, which, although poorly known, operates a large number of mosques and Islamic education facilities abroad, particularly in Germany.⁵⁶ Much more well known are the activities of the Nurcu movement and particularly the movement led by Fethullah Gülen. The Gülen movement (increasingly a separate entity from the Nurcu movement)⁵⁷ has focused on the education sector, and the former Soviet space was the movement's first step outside Turkey, which subsequently led it to branch out to dozens of countries across the world. It focused on opening

⁵⁵ Bayram Balci, "Turkey's Religious Outreach and the Turkic World," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, March 2014.

⁵⁶ Yıldız Atasoy, *Turkey, Islamists and Democracy*, London: IB Tauris, 2005, p. 144.

⁵⁷ Isa Tatlıcan, "Eight Differences Between the Nur Movement and the Gülen Community" ["Nurculuk ile Gülen cemaati Arasındaki 8 Fark"], *Milat Gazetesi*, January 6, 2014.

schools, universities, and dormitories and has achieved considerable success in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan (it was shut down in Uzbekistan in 2001).⁵⁸ Since these schools provided high-quality secular education in a conservative religious environment, they soon became popular for the elites across the region. Yet the deepening conflict between the Turkish government and the Gülen movement, leading to the movement's alleged involvement in a failed coup in July 2016, shattered the Gülen movement's image as an avowedly nonpolitical movement and led to widespread closures of schools. On a broader level, developments in Turkey also indicated that Turkish Islam may be less radical than that of the Gulf or the Indian subcontinent, but no less political. In the past decade, as Turkey's government has become more overtly Islamist, the crucial role played by the Naqshbandi order in this process has been widely noted. Similarly, the Diyanet has become increasingly politicized and so has the Gülen movement, which first allied with and then opposed the government.⁵⁹

The influence of Gulf-based Islam has already been noted; suffice to say, Central Asia is exposed to similar influences as the rest of the Islamic world. The rapid spread of Salafi ideology (in its disparate varieties, including its takfiri and jihadi variants)⁶⁰ has been sponsored by wealthy forces in the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia but also Kuwait and Qatar. Many Central Asian Muslims are first exposed to Salafism on the pilgrimage to the holy sites of Islam in Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabi school has the innate advantage of being the official form of Islam in the most holy of sites in the Islamic world. Thus, to a foreign Muslim, if his or her form of Islam differs from the one practiced in Saudi Arabia, there is a natural tendency to assume that the one practiced in Mecca and Medina might be the correct form, particularly in territories such as Central Asia, where official Islamic structures were tainted by their collaboration with communist and thus atheist regimes. Of course, this misses the fact that the reform movement led by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the late 18th century altered, rather than returned, the Islam practiced by the actual *Salafs* (followers of the prophet) and was considerably more austere.⁶¹ That fact may be lost on modern recruits, who, because of their migration to cities or foreign lands, feel little attraction to the traditional "folk" Islam of their parents and are attracted instead by the simplicity of the Salafi message and its clear definition of wrong and right based entirely on textual sources (as limited as their readings of these texts might be).⁶² Indeed, the

⁵⁸ Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam," *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2003.

⁵⁹ Cornell and Kaya, 2015.

⁶⁰ Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006, pp. 207–239.

⁶¹ Stephen Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam*, New York: Doubleday, 2003.

⁶² Sadek Hamid, "The Attraction of 'Authentic' Islam: Salafism and British Muslim Youth," in Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 385.

attraction of Wahhabi ideas may rest exactly with what some have called their “extreme hostility to any form of intellectualism.”⁶³

In practice, Salafi expansion was directly linked to the funding provided by wealthy Gulf individuals and foundations. These welcomed and funded would-be Islamic scholars to study at Salafi-inspired educational institutions, from which they returned home and contributed to the spreading of Salafi ideology. Similarly, donors from the Gulf provided funding for the construction of mosques but also ensured that the imams appointed to these mosques were Salafi in orientation. This gradually resulted in a growing dominance of radical Salafi ideology in Islamic educational institutions far beyond the Gulf region itself, something Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, in a 2015 speech, blamed even the famed Al-Azhar University of having succumbed to.⁶⁴ Similarly, Turkish scholars have noted the gradually growing influence of Salafi ideas over official Turkish Islam, as well as within the Naqshbandi-Khalidi movement itself.⁶⁵ In the case of Central Asia, the Saudi influence is enhanced by the existence of a comparatively large Uzbek and Uighur minority in the kingdom, most of whom arrived a century ago but have rekindled connections with their homeland.⁶⁶

The same process appears to have taken place in Islamic educational institutions in Central Asia, including, tragically, those under the auspices of the Uzbek government. At a 2000 conference on radical Islam in Central Asia, Naqshbandi-Nazimi Shaykh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, chair of the Islamic Supreme Council of America, recalled his visit to the Islamic University in Tashkent. The school was created with the explicit objective of controlling the education of Imams in the country. Asking to visit the university’s library, the sheik, after some browsing, turned to his hosts and asked, “Are you aware that you are teaching Wahhabism here?”⁶⁷ Apparently, the library was stocked with publications from the Gulf, many provided as gifts from foundations there, which reflected the narrow selection of *hadiths* (accounts of the prophet) favored by the Salafis. This episode illustrates the pervasive nature of the spread of Salafi ideology. Of course, the Uzbek government has undoubtedly grown more adept at identifying Salafi impulses since 2000, and there is evidence that the ability of Saudi

⁶³ Khaled Abou el Fadl, “The Orphans of Modernity and the Clash of Civilizations,” *Global Dialogue*, Spring 2002, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Jacques Neria, “Egyptian President Sisi Calls for Reform of Islam,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, February 15, 2015.

⁶⁵ Hilmi Demir, “Is Naqshbandism Being Salafized?” [“Naqşibendilik Selefileşiyor mu?”], 21st Century Turkey Institute [21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü], September 14, 2014; Hilmi Demir, “Salafi Wahhabi Propaganda in a Diyanet Mosque” [“Diyanet Camisinde Selefi Vehhabi Propaganda”], 21st Century Turkey Institute [21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü], May 3, 2015.

⁶⁶ Bayram Balci, “Les Ouzbeks d’Arabie Saoudite entre Intégration et Renouveau Identitaire via le Pèlerinage,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2003.

⁶⁷ Author recollection from the conference on the Emergence of Religious Extremism in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute in Washington, D.C., April 11, 2000.

financiers to be active in the country—and the wider region—has decreased considerably as the security structures of the Central Asian states were built up.⁶⁸ Shaykh Kabani's tale suggests how the sheer ubiquity of the global Salafi movement's activities, and its incomparably greater financial prowess, ensures that its influence cannot be so easily halted. Kyrgyzstan stands out as an exception to the higher barriers erected against foreign Islamic influences, as it adopted a more-tolerant approach to nontraditional religious groups. That approach has been widely lauded by Western analysts; yet it also means that Salafi groups, including Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jamaat al-Tabligh, have been far more active in shaping Islamic development in the country.⁶⁹

The final major influence on Central Asia is South Asian Islam, particularly its Deobandi variety, itself a current influenced by Salafism.⁷⁰ Indeed, perhaps the most authoritative theologian of Soviet-era Central Asia, Muhammedjon Rustamov, was known as “Hindustani” because of his studies at the madrasa in Deoband.⁷¹ Madrasas in the subcontinent thus formed an important source of Islamic learning for Central Asian Muslims, and this only grew following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when the madrasas operated by the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam in the North-West Frontier of Pakistan became the breeding ground for the Taliban movement. This influence of jihadi groups in South Asia has been most pronounced among the extremist Central Asian groups, which mainly operate in exile. Aside from that, the Deobandi influence is visible through Jamaat al-Tabligh, a Deobandi movement that seeks to promote Islamic values and lifestyle globally. Much like Hizb ut-Tahrir, it is avowedly nonviolent and rather opaque and secretive, but it differs from its London-based counterpart in its lack of political ambitions. Hizb ut-Tahrir focuses almost exclusively on a political agenda; the *Tablighis*, by contrast, focus exclusively on the substance of the religion and individual proselytizing. They are not opposed in principle to the idea of a caliphate but do not pursue political aims.⁷² Jamaat al-Tabligh denounces Sufism as contrary to monotheism but also denounces the political movements inspired by such thinkers as Mawdudi and Qutb.⁷³ While nonpolitical, the creed of Jamaat al-Tabligh

⁶⁸ Eric McGlinchey, *Chaos, Violence, Dynasty: Politics and Islam in Central Asia*, Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011, p. 132.

⁶⁹ Babajanov, Malikov, and Nazarov, 2011; Jacob Zenn and Kathleen Kuehnast, *Preventing Violent Extremism in Kyrgyzstan*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, Special Report 355, October 2014.

⁷⁰ Arshi Saleem Hashmi, “Historical Roots of the Deobandi Version of Jihadism and Its Implications for Violence in Today's Pakistan,” in Jawad Syed, Edwina Pio, Tahir Kamran, and Abbas Zaidi, eds., *Faith-Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016, p. 137.

⁷¹ See Naumkin, 2005, pp. 43–55; and Michael Fredholm, “Islamic Extremism as a Political Force: A Comparative Study of Central Asian Extremists Movements,” Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm University, Asian Cultures and Modernity, research report no. 12, October 2006, pp. 9–10.

⁷² Bayram Balci, “The Rise of Jama'at al Tabligh in Kyrgyzstan: The Revival of Islamic Ties Between the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2012.

⁷³ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et Déclin de L'Islamisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 2000, p. 42.

is “hardly distinguishable from the radical Wahhabi-Salafi jihadist ideology.”⁷⁴ Indeed, numerous studies have shown that while the decentralized movement is not itself a violent organization, its membership has been a prime target of recruitment for violent groups from Harkat ul-Mujahideen to al Qaeda.⁷⁵ The movement’s character has led to differing responses from regional government, leading to a considerable divergence in its presence. As Bayram Balci, who has studied the movement closely, argues, “the movement is highly present in Kyrgyzstan, quite visible in Kazakhstan, hardly active in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and completely absent in Turkmenistan.”⁷⁶ Indeed, the movement was banned first in Uzbekistan and subsequently in Tajikistan but is tolerated in Kazakhstan while being accepted in Kyrgyzstan, where it has been courted by the government as an antidote to extremist groups.⁷⁷

Foreign proselytism is controversial in any society, and Central Asia is no exception. The arrival of foreign Islamic ideas has been coupled with the spread of other religious groups, including Christian missionaries.⁷⁸ All of these have generated considerable social and governmental resistance. Three Central Asian researchers went so far as to state that the radicals’

dependence on ideology and money coming from Arab religious centers all but guarantees that while their organizational structures may adapt to local circumstances, their ideology will not. The Wahhabis’ radicalism and intransigence toward the traditionalists or conservatives are therefore likely to alienate them from most believers and render them irrelevant.⁷⁹

It has been noted that Hizb ut-Tahrir deployed propaganda prominently featuring anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist themes, which may have been successful in the Middle East and among Middle Eastern–origin targets in Europe, but it fell on deaf ears in Central Asia.⁸⁰ This raises broader questions about Central Asian societies’ receptivity to novel and alien religious influences.

⁷⁴ Alex Alexiev, “Tablighi Jamaat: Jihad’s Stealthy Legions,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2005, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Susan Sachs, “A Muslim Missionary Group Draws New Scrutiny in the U.S.,” *New York Times*, July 14, 2003.

⁷⁶ Bayram Balci, “Reviving Central Asia’s Religious Ties with the Indian Subcontinent? The Jamaat al Tabligh,” *Religion, State, and Society*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2015, p. 26.

⁷⁷ Nate Schenkan, “Kyrgyzstan: Islamic Revivalist Movement Quietly Flourishing,” *Eurasianet*, October 25, 2011.

⁷⁸ Mathijs Pelkmans, “Mediating Miracle Truth: Permanent Struggle and Fragile Conviction in Kyrgyzstan,” in Simon Coleman and Rosalind Hackett, eds., *The Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism*, New York: New York University Press, 2015, p. 181.

⁷⁹ Babajanov, Malikov, and Nazarov, 2011, p. 344.

⁸⁰ Anara Tabyshalieva, “Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s Increasing Activity in Central Asia,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, January 14, 2004.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the relative lack of radicalization in Central Asia has occurred against the backdrop of a religious revival, including considerable efforts by radical foreign groups to promote their particular understanding of Islam in Central Asia. Yet these efforts, which have been crucial to radicalization elsewhere, to date have been limited, and the reestablishment of religious ties between Central Asia and the rest of the Islamic world is a process that will likely continue. Foreign movements have been restricted by the attitudes and policies of Central Asian governments, but their attention to some extent has also been diverted by the focus of all Islamist groups on developments closer to the heartland of Islam, in particular the civil war in Syria. Therefore, the question arises whether the lack of radicalization in Central Asia is simply a matter of time. Will the same patterns that have happened elsewhere repeat in Central Asia if the region's societies are more exposed to the same currents of thought that have proved influential in the rest of the Islamic world?

Government Policies

The elephant in the room in this discussion is, of course, the policies of Central Asian governments. These policies are frequently derided as authoritarian and counterproductive for long-term stability. The literature on these policies often neglects to differentiate between moral judgment and empirical observation. Because the policies are deemed to be morally repulsive, scholars appear inclined to believe that they are also counterproductive—a vicious cycle of radicalization and repression strengthening each other.⁸¹ The logic is fairly compelling: The broad repression exercised against any independent Muslim groups in Central Asia, together with the systematic crushing of other political dissidents, leaves opposition-minded forces with little choice but to gravitate toward the most extreme and radical opposition to the ruling elites, namely Islamic extremists. While this chapter does not claim to offer a wholesale rejection of this theory, the evidence nonetheless suggests that our understanding of it should become more nuanced. A dispassionate analysis of Central Asian government policies would certainly recognize the often excessive repression that is being exercised; yet it is necessary to recognize that the “repression-radicalization hypothesis” fails to explain the relative paucity of radicalization in the region or the discrepancy among the countries

⁸¹ This thesis is most succinctly argued in Kathrin Lenz-Raymann, *Securitization of Islam: A Vicious Circle—Counter-Terrorism and Freedom of Religion in Central Asia*, Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2014. Lenz-Raymann bases her conclusion upholding the hypothesis on a comparison of terrorist acts in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, claiming that the greater occurrence of such acts in the latter country, in spite of its more repressive political climate, confirms the hypothesis. But the study is based on a small quantity of cases and on a computer simulation, and it fails to seriously and empirically study other plausible explanations for this discrepancy and cannot overcome the likelihood that its correlation may simply be spurious. Furthermore, following the publication of the study, the incidence of terrorist actions in Kyrgyzstan has visibly increased, while the opposite has been the case in Uzbekistan.

in the region. Indeed, it cannot explain why radicalization appears to have decreased in heavily authoritarian Uzbekistan and especially why the epicenter of Islamic radicalization today—in direct contradiction to the expectations of the hypothesis—appears to be in the relatively more open Kyrgyzstan. In this context, the next section provides a cursory investigation of Central Asian policies regarding religion. It highlights three elements: (1) the maintenance of secular laws and education systems, (2) the restrictions in the information sphere, and (3) the restriction on nontraditional religious movements.

Maintenance of Secular Laws and Secular Education

It is an often-neglected fact that the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan constitute close to half of the slightly more than one dozen (of a total of 50) Muslim-majority states in the world that are secular. The remainder, aside from Turkey and the Balkans, are mainly in West Africa. As in the West, however, secularism comes in different shapes, and the Central Asian governments are often referred to as “militant secularist.” In a sense, they are more correctly described as *laicist* rather than secular in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the term.⁸² The governments have not primarily been concerned with the objective of securing the religious freedom of individuals from the state, which was the purpose of the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and, outside France, remains the understanding of secularism in the West today. Rather, following the French and Republican Turkish model, their main concern has been to defend the freedom of the state and its citizens *from* religion.⁸³ For that purpose, the states took upon themselves to regulate and control religion. In doing so, they inherited some Soviet institutions, including state-supported religious bodies, but they also departed from the official atheism of the Soviet Union, which sought to restrict and combat the exercise of religion. Indeed, following independence, thousands of mosques were built across the region, particularly in Uzbekistan. Instead, the Central Asian states developed policies to support the exercise of traditional religions, but explicitly and vehemently opposed the influx of new religious ideas. Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, for example, regularly urges citizens to avoid “nontraditional religions.”⁸⁴

Importantly, the state operates in association with certain religious communities. Several of the states—notably Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan—promote, both at home and abroad, the leaders of traditional religious communities. Touring

⁸² Ahmet T. Kuru, “Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles, and State Policies Toward Religion,” *World Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 4, 2007, pp. 568–594.

⁸³ See discussion in Svante E. Cornell, Halil Karaveli, and Boris Ajeganov, *Azerbaijan’s Formula: Secular Governance and Civic Nationhood*, Silk Road Paper, Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, November 2016.

⁸⁴ Andrea Berg, “Kazakhstan: An Atmosphere of Quiet Repression,” Human Rights Watch, 2008, p. 9.

their own countries and the world, representatives of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian communities across the region can often be seen together, not only in dialogue but in unison, speaking in favor of tolerance and coexistence and in opposition to any form of religious radicalism and foreign proselytism. In doing so, they invariably praise the state policies of their governments and agree on the danger of instability and schism that novel religious currents constitute. In other words, the secular governments of Central Asian states and Azerbaijan are based on what could be called an informal *concordat* between the state and the leaders of traditional religious communities, joining across religious lines in seeking to protect their flocks against foreign missionaries of all stripes. Of course, the main concern of the governments is not the comparatively small Christian and Jewish communities, but the majority Muslim community. This entails considerable resources being invested in the official religious hierarchies, such as the *muftiats* (administrative territorial entities under the supervision of a mufti), the training of imams, and the construction of mosques, as well as in supervision of the Friday prayers and activities of religious personnel.

It also means that the government maintains the ideal of a secular society and, crucially, that it inculcates this ideal through a secular education system. Furthermore, the state actively works to prevent the inculcation of religious dogma in the young generation even outside the education curriculum. This includes, in several countries, a ban on wearing Islamic garb in schools and measures aimed at preventing the religious indoctrination of youth.⁸⁵ While these restrictions are roundly criticized by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and Western NGOs, they do ensure that the state provides a check on the ability of religious groups, domestic or foreign, to influence children in the public space. The fact that the school system is secular also means that the youth are raised in an environment that stresses reason and experience (i.e., the principles of the Enlightenment) rather than divine revelation as sources of knowledge. This is why leading Turkish Islamist thinker and former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu castigates the West for its “particularization of epistemological sources” and making revelation “peripheral.”⁸⁶ By following these principles, Central Asian governments enhance the ability of their populations to partake in the modern world and in scientific enterprise. Similarly, it provides some level of protection for women and religious minorities from religious principles that would otherwise restrict their participation in society.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Alexander Sodiqov, “Bill Banning Children from Mosques Adopted in Tajikistan,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 28, 2011.

⁸⁶ Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Alternative Paradigms: The Impact of Islamic and Western Weltanschauungs on Political Theory*, Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993, p. 195.

⁸⁷ June Starr, “The Role of Turkish Secular Law in Changing the Lives of Rural Muslim Women, 1950–1970,” *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1989, pp. 497–523.

Information Sphere

It is an understatement to say that the information sphere in Central Asia is controlled. Television, the major medium through which people stay informed, remains controlled almost exclusively by governments, either formally or informally, and both print media and the Internet remain tightly regulated. Clearly, there are differences across the region: Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have the most restrictive media environments, while Kyrgyzstan has the least controlled. All regional states, however, are ranked as “not free” by Freedom House.⁸⁸ Similarly, the Internet is regulated in the region, and several states make it a practice to ban numerous websites. Most regional states’ Internet is ranked “not free,” with only Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan considered “partly free.”⁸⁹

Aside from government censorship, Central Asia is also largely a self-contained media environment; the only real alternatives to government-controlled media are Russian, and to a lesser degree Turkish, television channels available through satellite. Internet restrictions exacerbate the problem, and language barriers mean that Internet content is available only to a small urban elite, with the exception, once again, of Russian and Turkish language resources. In this sense, Central Asians face considerable challenges in linking up with the rest of the world. It goes without saying that such restrictions impede the social as well as political development of these societies and have a generally harmful effect on their prospects for the future. Yet the Internet’s role in the radicalization of individuals is well established by now and has been dramatically illustrated by the journeys of thousands of European Muslims to fight for the Islamic State or other jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq.⁹⁰ This has the effect of closing one avenue for Central Asian youth that would be vulnerable to radicalization. To be clear, this is not a value judgment in favor of restricting the information sphere. It is entirely plausible, and even probable, that the general social and political costs of such restrictive policies in the information sphere outweigh any benefits. It is equally plausible that this restrictive information sphere contributes to lessening instances of radicalization. That begs the thorny question of the effects of Central Asian government repression writ large.

Effect of Repression

Central Asian governments have tended to err on the side of repression when confronting nontraditional religious movements, whether violent or not. This has been the

⁸⁸ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Press 2015*, New York, April 2015.

⁸⁹ Freedom House, *Freedom of the Net 2015*, New York, October 2015.

⁹⁰ Marie Wright, “Technology and Terrorism: How the Internet Facilitates Radicalization,” *The Forensic Examiner*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2008; Maeghin Alarid, “Recruitment and Radicalization: The Role of Social Media and New Technology,” in Michelle Hughes and Michael Miklaucic, eds., *Impunity: Countering Illicit Power in War and Transition*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2016.

case in the regional governments' response to the rise of recruitment to Syria and Iraq, although Uzbekistan also reacted by rehabilitating oppositional clerics critical of the Islamic State.⁹¹ As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the literature on Islamic radicalism in Central Asia generally argues that political repression causes radicalization. Journalist Ahmed Rashid has been a leading and influential proponent of this theory:

With the democratic and nationalist opposition effectively crushed, the survivors have moved underground and become armed and radicalized by Islamic fundamentalism. . . . Every act of state repression has pushed these militants into adopting even more extreme positions.

His 2001 prognosis was that unless Central Asian leaders “adhere to global standards of behavior . . . Central Asia will continue to plummet into instability.”⁹² From a scholarly perspective, Eric McGlinchey has made essentially the same argument: “Radical Islam in Central Asia manifests a society’s response to the accumulated injustices of severely authoritarian rule.”⁹³ Elsewhere, he has argued that “Islamist movements in Central Asia are first and foremost a response to local authoritarian rule: the more authoritarian the state, the more pronounced political Islam will be in society.”⁹⁴ Organizationally, the International Crisis Group has been a leading proponent of this thesis and has consistently linked repression, poverty, and inequality with the rise of radical Islam in the region for over a decade.⁹⁵

This chapter argues that the benefit of hindsight indicates that these claims have, at least until now, failed to be borne out. Instead, much of the evidence from the region is incongruous with the theory. If repression causes radicalism, we would expect Turkmenistan to be the most-affected state in the region, but it appears the least affected. By contrast, Kyrgyzstan should be the least affected, but it may actually be the most affected. Equally confounding is the trajectory of Uzbekistan, which all international rankings show has gotten more rather than less repressive in the past decade, at least until the passing of President Islam Karimov in 2016. While the paradigm suggests it should have seen growing levels of radicalization, if anything, it has seen a decline.

It should be noted that the Central Asia-specific literature does not appear to take into account the divergence and nuance within the general literature on radi-

⁹¹ Noah Tucker, “Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Tajikistan,” *CERIA Brief*, No. 11, February 2016; Noah Tucker, “Public and State Responses to ISIS Messaging: Uzbekistan,” *CERIA Brief*, No. 12, February 2016.

⁹² Rashid, 2001, pp. 45, 55.

⁹³ Eric McGlinchey, “Autocrats, Islamists, and the Rise of Radicalism in Central Asia,” *Current History*, October 2005, p. 340.

⁹⁴ Eric McGlinchey, 2005, p. 559.

⁹⁵ International Crisis Group, 2003; “Syria Calling,” 2015.

calization. Indeed, studies of radicalization continue to struggle to find comprehensive explanations for the divergence of levels of radicalization among Muslim communities. Matthew Francis, editor of radicalisationresearch.org, concludes that “none of the major theorists on radicalisation suggest that there is a universal model with predictive certainty.”⁹⁶ Explanations range from poverty, discrimination, social segregation, anger at Western foreign policy, ideology and indoctrination, and individual psychological factors. Interestingly, several overviews of causes of radicalization hardly mention generalized repression at all, focusing only on discrimination against specific groups. By contrast, some scholars have suggested that repression does, indeed, work. Martin Kramer, in an article opposing what he terms a “failed paradigm” in Western academe, concluded that “repression is working. It is a tired academic sawhorse that repression only strengthens its victims.”⁹⁷ One of the few systematic studies of the role of repression on radical Islamic movements, by Mohammed Hafez, concludes that the record is mixed: “repression did work in Syria, Tunisia, and Iraq. However, in Algeria, Egypt, Kashmir, the southern Philippines, and Chechnya, repression has resulted in higher rates of violence and protracted conflicts.”⁹⁸

The policy recommendation of the dominant paradigm has been that instead of repressing political Islam, governments should open their political systems to competition; something that would, in turn, deflate the balloon of radicalism that is being created by a repressive environment and a lack of avenues for opposition. Countries that have followed these recommendations have sometimes seen the opposite occur.

Pakistan is the most obvious example: From the 1970s on, Pakistani leaders—beginning with the secular but opportunistic Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—made concession after concession to Islamists and allowed them to operate freely. Under military leader Muhammad Zia Ul-Haq, the government itself appropriated the agenda of Islamists. The rise of radical Islam in Pakistan cannot be dissociated from the events in Afghanistan. The fact remains that within Pakistan’s political system, the government’s permissive attitude to Islamism did not lead Islamists to moderate their views. To the contrary, they used this permissive environment to operate radical madrasas that generated the Taliban movement and to oppose, increasingly violently, the efforts by Pervez Musharraf and subsequent leaders to curtail their agenda.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Matthew Francis, “What Causes Radicalisation? Main Lines of Consensus in Recent Research,” January 24, 2012.

⁹⁷ Martin Kramer, “The Mismeasure of Political Islam,” in Martin Kramer, ed., *The Islamism Debate*, Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1997, pp. 161–173.

⁹⁸ Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression and Resistance in the Islamic World*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003, p. 206.

⁹⁹ See Svante E. Cornell, “Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: Islamic or Pragmatic?” in Brenda Shaffer, ed., *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006, pp. 291–323.

Turkey until the mid-2000s appeared to be a successful model of a state that allowed Islamic political activity in a relatively democratic context, but that also had checks and balances that prevented the radicalization of Islamic movements. As a result, Turkish political Islam was forced to portray itself as moderate.¹⁰⁰ Following the military intervention of 1997, the Islamist movement reinvented itself as a “conservative democrat” movement, which received the label of being “post-Islamist.” That allowed the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to obtain considerable support from liberal circles and Western powers, which provided important leverage against a state apparatus, led by the military, that sought to thwart its rise to power. Turkey’s turn to a more-inclusive approach toward political Islam appeared, at first, to produce results, given the AKP’s pro-European policies in its first years in power. As it consolidated power, this erstwhile moderation receded. Then, the AKP presided over an increasingly ideological and sectarian foreign policy, which advanced Sunni Islamist causes across the region. Domestically, the AKP began to unravel the secular safeguards in the Turkish system, most effectively through a thorough reform of the education system in 2012.¹⁰¹ And in a scenario reminiscent of Pakistan, the Turkish government’s policies in Syria have contributed to a significant radicalization of a section of the country’s youth. The Soufan Group’s 2015 report estimated that more than 2,000 Turkish citizens had joined jihadi groups in Syria. In parallel, Turkish observers have recently begun to note a strengthening of Salafi ideas among Turkey’s Islamist groups, a phenomenon that was not visible before.¹⁰² In sum, the more-permissive attitude to political Islam has accelerated rather than countered radicalization in Turkey.

The examples of Egypt and Tunisia after the 2011 revolution are equally instructive. The Muslim Brotherhood and, even more so, its Tunisian sibling Ennahda, had long been touted as examples of “moderate” Islam that deserved support because of their adherence to democratic principles.¹⁰³ When the Muslim Brotherhood achieved power in Egypt, President Muhammed Morsi moved rapidly to consolidate as much power as possible in unconstitutional ways, indicating the deficiencies in the theory

¹⁰⁰Svante E. Cornell, “The Military in Turkish Politics,” in Bertil Dunér, ed., *Turkey: The Road Ahead*, Stockholm: Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2002.

¹⁰¹Svante E. Cornell, “The Islamization of Turkey: Erdogan’s Education Reforms,” *Turkey Analyst*, September 2, 2015. Also Eric Edelman, Svante E. Cornell, Aaron Lobel, and Halil Karaveli, *Turkey Transformed: The Origins and Evolution of Authoritarianism and Islamization Under the AKP*, Washington, D.C.: Bipartisan Policy Center, October 2015.

¹⁰²The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq*, December 2015. Andrew Hammond, “Salafism Infiltrates Turkish Religious Discourse,” Middle East Institute, July 22, 2015; Veysi Sarisözen, “The Salafization of the AKP Base and the Collapse of Pragmatism” [“AKP Tabanında Selefileşme ve ‘pragmatizminin’ inflası”], *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi*, January 3, 2017.

¹⁰³Robert S. Leiken and Steven Brooke, “The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 2, 2007, pp. 107–121.

that moderate Islamists had internalized the values of the democratic process and not just the mechanics.¹⁰⁴ In Tunisia, the collapse of the Ben Ali regime led to Ennahda's assumption of power in a coalition government with non-Islamist parties. This was coupled with the release of thousands of individuals jailed under the previous regime's antiterror laws. Within months, the rapid rise of Salafi and Jihadi mobilization in Tunisia was a fact that the government proved entirely unwilling or incapable to counter.¹⁰⁵ At first, Tunisia's Salafists identified the country as a land of *dawa* (proselytism) and not jihad, but later the Tunisian Salafis focused on recruiting fighters for the killing fields of Syria, making Tunisia the leading source of jihadis in the Levant.¹⁰⁶ But soon enough, violent Salafi-jihadi attacks began to take place, including an attack on the U.S. embassy and assassinations of prominent leftist politicians. This led to the collapse of the government, the introduction of a technocratic government, and belated efforts to rein in the Salafi threat. After large-scale terrorist attacks in 2015, the state took control of more than 80 Salafi mosques in a broad crackdown that Ennahda grudgingly supported.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the opening of the political space for Islamism following the Arab Spring in no way helped moderate Islamist movements. Only Tunisia, where Ennahda never gained control of state institutions in the first place, offers some hope for continued democratic political contestation.

Many criticisms about repression in Central Asia tend to be strongly influenced by a condemnation of the policies of Central Asian regimes writ large, rather than a specific focus on the issue of radical Islam. Indeed, the criticism of policies in the field of religion is often part and parcel of a broader criticism of authoritarian and repressive policies; moreover, the criticism appears to be motivated by ethical considerations rather than political expedience. In other words, it seems that critics of repression often oppose it because they consider it wrong, not because of evidence that it is counterproductive. In the same vein, Hafez argues that whatever the evidence on the effectiveness of repression, "the sole reliance on repression must also be rejected on ethical grounds—human rights and democratic principles are ends in themselves."¹⁰⁸ Without taking issue with that statement, the examples provided suggest that the consequences of allowing unrestricted operation of radical groups may indeed in the short term be congruent with democratic principles; yet allowing these groups to operate in this

¹⁰⁴Nervana Mahmood, "Morsi's Power Grab Should Be No Surprise," *Al-Monitor*, November 26, 2012.

¹⁰⁵Samy Ghorbal, "Tunisia: Why Is Youth So Permeable to Salafist Sirens?" ["Tunisie: pourquoi la jeunesse est-elle si perméable aux sirènes salafistes?"], *Jeune Afrique*, July 8, 2015.

¹⁰⁶Stefano M. Torelli, Fabio Merone, and Francesco Cavatorta, "Salafism in Tunisia: Challenges and Opportunities for Democratization," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2012; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia's Long Game: *Dawa, Hisba and Jihad*," The Hague, the Netherlands: ICCT Research Paper, May 2013.

¹⁰⁷Carlotta Gall, "Tunisia's Secular Government Cracks Down on Mosques in Aftermath of Massacre," *New York Times*, July 23, 2015.

¹⁰⁸Gall, 2015, p. 207.

manner may cause equal if not greater harm to social peace and human rights than the repression of these groups entails.

The question addressed in this chapter is whether the theory that repression feeds radicalization is supported by evidence. Whether in the Central Asian context or in the Islamic world more broadly, this does not appear to be the case. The figures concerning foreign fighters in Syria, cited earlier, are illuminating: Considered on a per capita basis, roughly one in 100,000 Uzbek citizens is fighting in Syria and Iraq, compared with one in 10,000 Kyrgyz citizens. That stands in contrast to one in 1,800 Tunisians or one in 3,000 Jordanians. If the numbers of European Muslim fighters are compared with the total Muslim populations of Western European countries, the figures are similarly higher: one in 3,000 Swedish Muslims and one in 1,200 Belgian Muslims. These figures provide a clear pattern: In absolute as well as relative numbers, foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq tend overwhelmingly to come from liberal democracies in Western Europe or from the states in the Middle East with the most liberal political systems (Tunisia, Turkey, Jordan, Morocco). By contrast, countries considered more repressive are underrepresented. That is not only the case for Uzbekistan but also for Egypt, which is only believed to have a few hundred citizens in Syria from a population of 80 million. In the Central Asian context, the country with the highest representation per capita is Kyrgyzstan, which also happens to be the country with the most liberal political system in the region.¹⁰⁹

The recent evidence from Kyrgyzstan is particularly informative, as it was considered the exception in Central Asia: The “island of democracy”¹¹⁰ kept a relatively open political system, showcased a vibrant civil society, and provided a significant contrast to its more-authoritarian neighbors. The paradigm that repression in Central Asia would spurn radicalism would suggest that Kyrgyzstan would be exempt from this expected pattern of radicalization. Yet Kyrgyz observers anecdotally report considerable growth in Islamic extremism,¹¹¹ and a rapidly growing number of Kyrgyz citizens have been reported to travel to fight in Syria. In January 2016, officials estimated that 430 Kyrgyz had joined the fight.¹¹² By summer 2016, Kyrgyz officials sounded the alarm on a major jump in “adherents of extremist views,” while reporting the number of citizens traveling to Syria had reached 600.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Richard Florida, “The Geography of Foreign ISIS Fighters,” Citylab.com, August 10, 2016. See also Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor, “What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?” National Bureau of Economic Research, April 2016.

¹¹⁰John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* New York: Routledge, 1999.

¹¹¹Aidai Masykanova, “Radicalization in Kyrgyzstan Is No Myth,” *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2016.

¹¹²“Report: Over 400 Kyrgyz Nationals Fighting Alongside Terrorist in Syria, Iraq,” Fars News Agency, January 6, 2016.

¹¹³“Kyrgyzstan Reports Big Jump in Extremism,” *Eurasianet*, June 15, 2016; “Kyrgyz Official: 600 Nationals Fighting in Syria, Iraq,” *RFE/RL*, August 3, 2016.

The incidence of radical Islam in Central Asia does not appear to correspond with general levels of repression. A more promising explanation, more in line with the existing scholarship on radicalization, could lie in particular forms of discrimination targeted at certain groups. Indeed, Heathershaw and Montgomery have observed that

[i]f jihadism were to follow poverty and authoritarianism, we would expect to find it throughout Central Asia and to a far greater extent than in Europe. The reason for this is that the jihadist acts represent not universal struggles of transcendent ideologies, but rather specific and rare political conflicts between local groups and the state. In Tajikistan, the salience of jihadism has declined since the end of civil war despite increased authoritarianism, thus far belying alarmist reports like those of the ICG.¹¹⁴

A closer look at the geography of Islamic radicalism provides a potential window into the drivers of radicalization: Ethnic minorities appear to be a specific locus of radicalization. As political scientist Mariya Omelicheva notes, in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Hizb ut-Tahrir is seen by authorities as an “ethnic Uzbek” phenomenon.¹¹⁵ The radicalization of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan has been visible for some time, notes McGlinchey.¹¹⁶ Following the 2010 ethnic riots in southern Kyrgyzstan, reports of growing radicalization in the community have been plentiful;¹¹⁷ but it is also noted that different foreign groups target different communities. In Kyrgyzstan, the more politically oriented Hizb ut-Tahrir is almost exclusively an ethnic Uzbek phenomenon; in contrast, the less political Jamaat al-Tabligh has almost exclusively recruited among the ethnic Kyrgyz.¹¹⁸ In Uzbekistan, however, Hizb ut-Tahrir appears for all practical purposes to have ceased being an effective organization, as state policies have made the political environment too constraining for the group to operate. While most reporting on the organization’s activities dates to the early 2000s, Uzbek security services made Hizb ut-Tahrir a key target of its efforts, leading to the detention by 2007 of more than 4,000 alleged members or sympathizers of the movement.¹¹⁹ Those numbers likely overstate the number of Hizb ut-Tahrir members in the country, as the dragnet was reported by human rights observers to be so wide as to include numer-

¹¹⁴ Heathershaw and Montgomery, 2016, p. 10 (pagination in unpublished manuscript).

¹¹⁵ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, “The Ethnic Dimension of Religious Extremism and Terrorism in Central Asia,” *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2010, pp. 167–186.

¹¹⁶ McGlinchey, 2005.

¹¹⁷ McGlinchey, 2005, p. 562.

¹¹⁸ Balci, 2015, pp. 26–27.

¹¹⁹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report 2008*, Washington, D.C., May 2008, p. 179.

ous individuals who had only minor exposure to the movement.¹²⁰ In the decade that has passed since, this effectively appears to have broken the movement's growth in the country, leading it to focus energies elsewhere. Lifting the perspective further to the broader postcommunist space, it is significant that the most-serious instances of radicalization have occurred in areas coinciding with an ethnic-based grievance against an alien government. The prime example is the North Caucasus, particularly Chechnya and Dagestan; another is Chinese Xinjiang;¹²¹ a third is the experiences of Central Asian migrant workers in Russia. The Uzbeks of south Kyrgyzstan fit into this picture. South Kyrgyzstan, Chechnya, Xinjiang, and the migrants in Russia are all communities being radicalized and confronted with a government dominated by another ethnicity, and they perceive discrimination from that government. A variation on this theme could contribute to understanding the radicalization that took place in the Ferghana Valley in the late Soviet period. It has been widely noted that in intralite rivalries in the Soviet period, leaders from the Ferghana Valley were increasingly marginalized, leading to a sense of alienation from the government in Tashkent.¹²² While it would need to be tested in a serious comparative study, the hypothesis that Islamic radicalization is linked, if anything, to *specific* grievances rather than general repression appears to hold considerably greater explanatory power than the existing paradigm of radicalization. This aligns with findings in research about conflicts in the recent decade, which has emphasized the importance of horizontal inequalities—"inequalities in economic, social and political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups"¹²³—to understand the grievances that lead to conflict. As Østby puts it, "horizontal inequalities may enhance both grievances and group cohesion among the relatively deprived and thus facilitate mobilization for conflict."¹²⁴ In other words, grievances based on ethnic and religious differences are being channeled through the prism of Islamic radicalism; something that may help explain why the radicalization of Central Asians, to the extent that it exists, appears to take place outside their titular republic.

¹²⁰It should be mentioned that the possibility of the incarceration of so many alleged radicals could have a radicalizing effect in the penitentiary system down the road. This remains a subject for future research, if and when these individuals are released from sentences that were often 20 years or more.

¹²¹Yitzhak Shichor, "Blow Up: Internal and External Challenges of Uyghur Separatism and Islamic Radicalism to Chinese Rule in Xinjiang," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2005, pp. 119–136.

¹²²See S. Frederick Starr, ed., *The Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*, Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2011.

¹²³Frances Stewart, "Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: An Introduction and Some Hypotheses," in Frances Stewart, ed., *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 3.

¹²⁴Gudrun Østby, "Polarization, Horizontal Inequalities, and Violent Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2008.

Reflections on Future Trajectories

This overview of the evolution of radical Islam in Central Asia has shown that the past decade's developments did not correlate with the expectations of the dominant paradigm of the early 2000s, which assumed that a combination of poverty and repressive regimes would inexorably exacerbate the problem and lead to a growth of Islamic radicalism in the region. That this did not happen is all the more significant because the trend in the Islamic world writ large has been of growing instances of radicalization and a mushrooming of jihadi groups.

In seeking to examine the reasons why this radicalization has eschewed Central Asia, no definitive answers are possible. It is clear that the radicalization that took place in the early 1990s was a peculiar development in the Soviet period itself and not so much the post-Soviet politics of Central Asia. In the post-Soviet period, however, there has been a reassertion by Central Asian society, supported by the state, of traditional forms of Islamic belief, one that nevertheless does not appear to be linked with a significant process of radicalization. Indeed, in the past decade, radicalism has been a process involving Central Asians mainly *outside* of Central Asia, in Russia, and in the battlegrounds of Afghanistan and later Syria. Central Asia itself, meanwhile, has remained largely aloof from the broader intellectual developments in the Islamic world; the limited radicalization that has taken place appears disproportionately focused among ethnic minority populations. Whether this will change over time, as the Soviet era recedes and the region embraces closer relations with the rest of the world, remains to be seen.

Furthermore, the consequences of Central Asian regimes' policies are considerably more complex than normally portrayed. While these regimes clearly make use of repression against oppositional groups, whether Islamist or not, the effects of their policies may be multifaceted. Their official secularism, reflected in laws and education systems, may provide an important immunization effect against radicalism, particularly in combination with the resurgence of the traditional Hanafi Islam of the region. The practices of the region's governments undoubtedly have many harmful effects, and their authoritarian tendencies have been extensively detailed in the academic literature and by advocacy groups. Yet these policies also entail that young Central Asians attend secular schools and would face great challenges in locating radical clerics or mosques, much less immersing themselves in a radical Islamic milieu. Even online, their ability to access radical content is heavily circumscribed, a fact decidedly hindering radicalization.

Whether or not Central Asia will continue to be spared the radicalization taking place among Muslims elsewhere remains to be seen. It is likely to depend, to a considerable degree, on whether the region's governments are able to adapt to changing circumstances and articulate positive visions of their nations' future that are perceived as legitimate among their respective peoples. In the Middle East, where the popular

legitimacy of many Arab states was considerably weaker, and their national identities not linked to a specific ethnicity or language, authoritarian regimes largely failed to do so. As a result, while monarchies with traditional legitimacy have fared reasonably well thus far, a number of republican and revolutionary regimes have collapsed, with well-known consequences in Syria and Egypt. Such lessons are often cited to provide analogies for Central Asian states; yet as this chapter has shown, these relatively young states are very much charting their own course and responding to conditions that are unique to their region.

The author is grateful for research assistance provided by Julian Tucker.