

## KAZAKHSTAN IN THE ARAB SPRING CONTEXT

Erkin BAYDAROV

*Ph.D. (Philos.), Assistant Professor,  
Leading Researcher, R. Suleymenov Institute of Oriental Studies  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Sagynysh AMIRBEKOVA

*Ph.D. Candidate, al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Zibagul ILYASSOVA

*Ph.D. (Hist.), Associated Professor,  
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University  
(Astana, Kazakhstan)*

Bolatbek BATYRKHAN

*Ph.D., Assistant Professor,  
al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

### ABSTRACT

**T**he authors have analyzed the Arab Spring, which caused an outburst of radical Islamism and echoed in the sociopolitical and economic context of Central Asia. The subject has gathered a lot of importance because of rising extremism that threatens national security of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The authors have posed themselves with the task of delineating the general provisions and specific situations related to the problem of extremism in Kazakhstan, as well as the measures needed to lower the level of radicalization of different population groups, first and foremost, the younger generations, and prevent their involvement in terrorist activities. This is achieved by accomplishing three tasks: to

explain in which way the Arab Spring affected Central Asia, first and foremost, in the form of terrorist activities; to reveal the global nature of the problem of religious extremism, the measures needed to prevent its spread among the younger generation and the mechanisms of protecting our country against the ideas of terrorism; to create and improve the legal, normative, organizational and other mechanisms of power of the Republic of Kazakhstan designed to oppose the ideology of terrorism.

We have concentrated on the driving forces, impacts of the Arab Spring, its role in the contemporary history of the Republic of Kazakhstan and deemed it absolutely necessary to pay particular attention to the

place Kazakhstan occupies in the processes that are pushing the world towards a new world order. The type of radical activities in Kazakhstan, and in the Central Asian region for that matter, changed significantly under the pressure of the Middle Eastern crisis, which has been unfolding since 2011. Today, Syria and Iraq attract mercenaries from all corners of the world.

The events in the Middle East forced many people to ask themselves whether the Arab Spring can be repeated in Central Asia; whether Arab revolutions can be continued there, how these processes might affect the region and, last but not least, how the Arab Spring echoed in other regions, what place Kazakhstan occupies and will occupy in the near future in the international balance of power and how this will affect the region's security. The impact of the Arab Spring, which is a multidimensional phenomenon, has spread far and wide outside the Middle East. This means that what happened and is

happening there had already affected the interests of the United States, Russia, the European Union, Turkey, Iran, China and other countries which share Kazakhstan's international and geopolitical interests.

Authors of hundreds of books, thousands of articles, monographs, academic papers and collections of articles published in different countries around the world have already discussed the economic and political impacts of the Arab Spring on Central Asia as a whole, and on Kazakhstan in particular. This is a topical subject that attracts attention of politicians and analysts of many countries. This article is our contribution to the common effort. We have posed ourselves with the task of examining the lessons of the Arab Spring from a different angle: having analyzed the lessons of the Arab Spring, we should work hard to prevent all sorts of threats and the spread of extremism and terror as the main challenges created by the Arab Spring.

**KEYWORDS:** *the Arab Spring, the Middle East, Central Asia, the Republic of Kazakhstan, extremism.*

## *Introduction*

# **The Arab Spring and Central Asia**

The peoples of Central Asia were following the events in the Middle East and the Arab world that became known as the Arab Spring with gradually mounting attention; political developments in Arab countries were discussed and varied forecasts were made, while the Central Asian governments and experts in international relations compared the conditions and prerequisites of the revolutionary situation in Arab countries with the political and economic contexts of their countries.

The countries engulfed by the Arab Spring were part of the Arab world and Arab civilization, similar to Asian civilization in certain respects and different from it in many other respects. They have different histories, different economies, they speak different tongues, live in different climates, different geographic landscapes, etc. There are, however, certain cultural economic and religious similarities and external circumstances responsible for many common political, social and economic characteristics. These similarities and common features shared by some of the Arab and Central Asian states are obvious, the most apparent among them being:

- The deepening difference in incomes, the low and plummeting living standards and rising social disproportions;
- High unemployment level, especially apparent in the younger generation;
- Ethnic and clan tension;
- Confrontation between regional elites and clans;
- Low efficiency of state institutions and a low level of public confidence in power structures;
- Impossibility of transparent democratic elections in the structure of state power;
- High level of corruption.

These factors suggest that certain Central Asian countries might have been plunged into something similar to the Arab Spring. The experts and analysts who have studied the causes and vectors of political, social and economic development of the Arab countries concluded that the Arab Spring may be repeated in Central Asia and Russia. Some members of the expert community of Kazakhstan remain convinced that the possibility of an Arab Spring in Central Asia is still very high: “There are no unifying national ideas; many of the Central Asian countries are steeped in corruption; the level of social inequality, unemployment and poverty of the greater part of the population has reached a dramatic dimension; social marginalization is intensifying, religious extremism is mounting—such are the factors, which, when combined, might become a detonator.”<sup>1</sup>

The region is dotted by seats of social, economic and ethnic tension; old problems of endogenous nature are swept under the carpet:

- There are unresolved territorial and border problems between Central Asian states, first and foremost, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan;
- Water and energy issues between the states have already formed two factions—Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with ample water resources, on the one hand, and Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, with a shortage of water, on the other;
- Clan structure of local societies intensified by ethnic disagreement; nationalism is steadily mounting in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan;
- Drug trafficking, which can compete with any global natural disaster, forces mankind to seek consolidation and mutual assistance;
- Afghanistan, with the crisis phenomena steadily rising was and remains one of the gravest external challenges for Central Asia, while foreign terrorists operating in Northern Afghanistan, at the border with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are the gravest of challenges;
- The religious factor, one of the most prominent factors of influence, is spreading across the world. The number of practicing Muslims is increasing along with much stronger propaganda capabilities of Islamic organizations and associations;
- Outburst of political, including religiously motivated, extremism can be described as another challenge. From 2011 onwards, terrorism has been growing into one of the most popular methods of power struggle in all countries of the region. No Central Asian country is free from adherents of radical Islamism ready to start fighting at the first signs of political destabilization; it actively and skillfully exploits social problems to discredit the secular ruling regimes. This is an important subject that deserves closer attention.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Satpaev, T. Umbetalieva, A. Chebotarev, R. Zhumaly, Z. Karazhanov, A. Zhusupova, R. Kadyrzhanov, R. Sarym, “*Sumerechnaia zona*” ili “*lovushka*” *perekhodnogo perioda*, Meloman Publishers, Almaty, 2013, p. 264.

A considerable number of political scientists, experts, analysts, observers and members of the academic community accompanied the Arab Spring unfolding in the Middle East with their forecasts of Islamists coming to power in the Middle East and in the Muslim World as soon as the local secular authoritarian regimes are liquidated. Indeed, in the latter half of 2011, the situation in the Middle East and North Africa was gradually changing; Islamists capitalized on the results of the local revolutions: they secured political victories in Egypt, where The Muslim Brotherhood came to power after parliamentary elections; in Tunisia in October 2011, when the Islamic Ennahdha Party came to power; in Yemen, where half of the country fell under the control of radical Islamists, in Libya, where after coming to power, the National Transitional Council declared that it would be building up an Islamic state. Since the victory of Islam was complete and its right to be involved in the political process was legitimized, some people presumed that the successes of religious parties in the Arab world will inevitably affect Central Asia. Those who made this claim proceeded from the fact that the local Islamists, encouraged by the success of religious parties, may push with increased vigor towards Islamization of society and the state: the social and economic situation and the Central Asian regimes were similar to those in the Arab countries.

Amid the geopolitical chaos, many Arab countries supported extremist groups, the Central Asian fighters got a chance to increase their ranks and organize themselves into groups. When assessing the impact of the Arab Spring on the Central Asian fighters, we should bear in mind that, on the whole, the war in Syria moved the groups of Central Asian fighters from Afghanistan to Syria. The Syrian war changed the regional dynamics: Central Asian terrorist groups turned their attention to Syria. In 2012, the first Central Asian fighters reached Syria: the following armed groups from Central Asia were fighting in Syria: Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, the Islamic Party of Turkestan, the Imam Bukhari Detachment, Katib, the Jund al Khilafah, etc. People from Central Asia (mostly Kazakhs, Tajiks and Kyrgyz) fought on the side of ISIS and al-Qa'eda.<sup>2</sup> Many of the extremist movements appeared in Ferghana after the Soviet Union's disintegration, when the Soviet Central Asian republics became independent states. The Jihadist ideology is rooted in the Afghan war. Central Asian fighters flocked to Syria and Iraq mainly for ideological or financial reasons, which means they may try to organize radical groups back at home.

The Arab Spring demonstrated to the entire world that social and economic problems, unemployment and corruption inevitably end in a social upheaval. However, the Central Asian countries will not necessarily follow the Arab Spring pattern. It seems impossible that Islamist extremists will directly affect Central Asia. It goes without saying that the Central Asian secular regimes were threatened to a great extent; radical groups could increase their pressure but their potentials should not be overestimated: the events in the Arab world did not affect the situation in Central Asia to any more or less noticeable extent. The threat of gradually growing radical groups and associations is very real. If and when the ideology of extremism becomes a norm, or even legally acceptable behavior, the threat will become very real and very dangerous.

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## Religious Extremism in Kazakhstan

Today religious extremism is equally dangerous for the strong Western countries and the weak countries of the East. It is one of the serious threats to the national security of the Republic of Kazakhstan. As one of the Soviet republics, Kazakhstan officially expounded Communist and atheist

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<sup>2</sup> See: E.T. Karin, J. Zenn, *Mezhdú IGIL i Al-Qaeda: tsentralnoaziatskie boeviki v Siriyskoy voyne*, Print House Gerona, Astana, 2017, p. 9.

ideology. Today the situation is different: freedom of religion declared in Kazakhstan made the younger generation the target of ideological pressure by extremist centers operating abroad. From that time on, the country has been gradually acquiring a new element of its religious and political context, namely, religious extremism in the form of terrorism. During the first stage, there emerged a set of prerequisites for extremism created by the new political, social and economic processes unfolding in Kazakhstan. The youth as one of the demographic groups is the easiest target for those who promote extremist ideas.

Even before the Arab revolutions, the following factors played the main role in fanning religious-political extremism:

- An absence of an efficient state ideology and inability of executive power, law-and-order structures and special services to efficiently oppose religious extremism;
- Financial, material and technical problems that prevented the realization of normative and legal acts, as well as shortage of information and personnel resources needed to oppose Islamic extremism;
- The rising level of corruption in state structures;
- The absence of important social and economic results of reforms and the negative trends that are gaining momentum in the social sphere and economics;
- Increasing poverty, economic and social inequality, low incomes at rising prices;
- Growing protests and the rising predisposition to rely on Islam when dealing with everyday problems;
- Growing unemployment among the younger generation. In the absence of workplaces for young men with university diplomas and without previous work experience young people are more inclined than others to follow extremist ideas;
- Geographic closeness of Kazakhstan to unstable countries and regions with strong positions of political (radical) Islam—Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc.
- Destabilization of the religious and political situation in the neighboring countries against the background of mounting international and regional competition for natural resources and control over the extraction and transportation of energy fuels;
- The impact of the foreign factor created by Islamic missionaries and teachers of Islam, some of them promoting the ideas of radical Islam;
- The low level of religious and standard education of those who preach Islam and of the greater part of the Muslims of Kazakhstan makes them unable to separate genuine religious feelings from religious fanaticism and extremism;
- Appearance of Salafi and Wahhabi jamaats, as well as groups that pursue purely commercial aims throughout the republic;
- An increase in the number of Islamic organizations, including madrassahs, mosques and other Islamic cultural and education centers, where non-traditional Islam was preached;
- Religious education that the younger generation received in Islamic educational establishments abroad (in Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, etc.).

An analysis of the above reveals the highly sustainable nature of external and internal impacts. The revolutionary storms in the Arab world undermined Central Asian stability and security. In fact, all countries irrespective of their geographic location have similar problems. It is hardly correct to state that the Arab Spring will reach Central Asia if the preconditions are in place.

Revolutions in the Arab world inspired extremists in Kazakhstan, who switched to terrorist methods (explosions, suicide bombers, attacks on law-and-order structures, courts, prisons; mass rioting with the use of arms, etc.). The series of terrorist acts of 2011-2012 confirmed the existence of an armed terrorist underground in Kazakhstan. The 17 May, 2011 terrorist act in Aktobe, the first in the republic's recent history, was followed by terrorist acts in big regional centers (Atyrau, Astana, Almaty and Taraz). Between May 2011 and the fall of 2012 there were 14 terrorist acts that killed 70 people (6 of them civilians, 13 members of the law-and-order structures and 51 terrorists).<sup>3</sup> The Jund al Khilafah, the terrorist organization connected with al-Qa'eda and engaged in training fighters for this international terrorist organization, assumed responsibility. In recent years, fighters (many of them young people) were transferred from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Kazakhstan to conscript new members and put pressure on authorities. According to expert assessments, 80% of extremist organizations' members are young people between 18 and 19 and not older than 30. According to the information supplied by the Committee for Legal Statistics and Special Records of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan gathered in the last five years, terrorists in Kazakhstan are young people who tried and failed to find their place in life: they have no jobs, no money, no adequate education and, therefore, no future.<sup>4</sup> In 2012-2016, some of the extremist movements in Kazakhstan were persistently increasing their ranks with young people. The younger generation is radicalized because of the economic crisis, the absence of prospects and jobs and highly corrupt local authorities. This is more typical of Southern and Western Kazakhstan.

Extremism can be described as an ideology of racial, national, religious and political intolerance that crops up in different forms, which is a fairly vague description of extremism as a social phenomenon. Youth extremism should be defined by its manifestations in real life: aggression, intolerance of and negative attitude to certain social groups, propaganda of extremist ideas, demonstration of symbols of extremism, insistence on their superiority, rejection of social norms, values and laws, and mass demonstration of extremist ideas.<sup>5</sup>

## **Monitoring of the Spread of Extremism among the Young People in Central Asia**

The level of religiosity of the Republic of Kazakhstan's younger generation generally corresponds to the regional level, while the slightly differing social empirical data suggest absolutely clear conclusions. The material quoted here and related to the level of extremist threat was obtained from the polls of students of Kazakhstan's higher educational establishments (both full- and part-time departments in Almaty). The sample consisted of 1,012 students between 18 and 25 years of age who answered the following questions among others: the level of religiosity; whether there is a danger of extremist actions in Kazakhstan and how migrants from neighboring countries affect the level of extremism in Kazakhstan.

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<sup>3</sup> See: M. Shibutov, V. Abramov, "Terrorizm v Kazakhstane—2011-2012," REGNUM Information Agency, 27 November, 2012, available at [<https://regnum.ru/news/1598478.html>], 28 November, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> See: A.E. Chebotarev, "Ekstremizm v Kazakhstane: sovremennoe sostoyanie i voprosy protivodeystviia," in: *Natsionalnaia bezopasnost Respubliki Kazakhstan*, Almaty, 2016, p. 88.

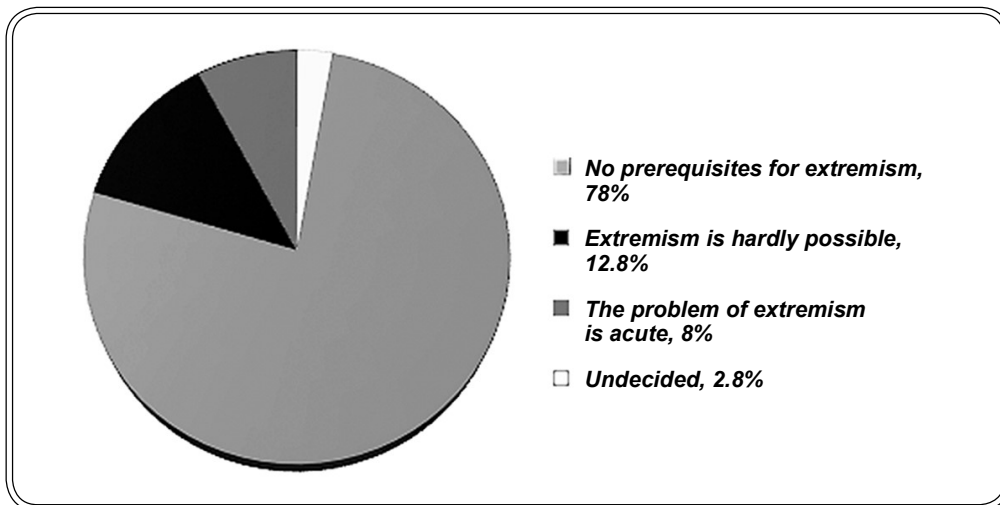
<sup>5</sup> See: A.I. Kirsanov, D.V. Davydov, A.V. Zavalsky, N.A. Skribtsova, "Ekstremizm v molodezhnoy srede i ego profilaktika v obrazovatelnoy organizatsii," E-journal *Psikhologicheskaya nauka i obrazovanie*, psyedu.ru, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2014, p. 89, available at [[http://psyedu.ru/journal/2014/1/Kirsanov\\_Davydov\\_Zavalskij\\_Skrib.phtml](http://psyedu.ru/journal/2014/1/Kirsanov_Davydov_Zavalskij_Skrib.phtml)], 22 January, 2014.

Kazakhs constituted 75.6% of the sample, Russians—16.2%, while members of other nationalities (Uyghurs, Dungans, Tatars, etc.) account for 8.2%. The majority of the respondents spoke of themselves as religious people; 82.1%—as religious people who do not observe religious rites; 8.4% spoke of themselves as religious people who observe religious rites; 7% were undecided, while 2.5% spoke of themselves as atheists.

The majority (85.7%) spoke of the inter-ethnic relationships in Kazakhstan as generally friendly, which could be expected in a multinational republic with an ethnic structure being the result of its long history. Nearly 84% of the respondents believed that the multinational nature of the republic's population positively affects the relations between confessions, which were described as stable.

Figure 1

**Distribution of Answers to the Question about the Real Prerequisites of Extremism in Kazakhstan**



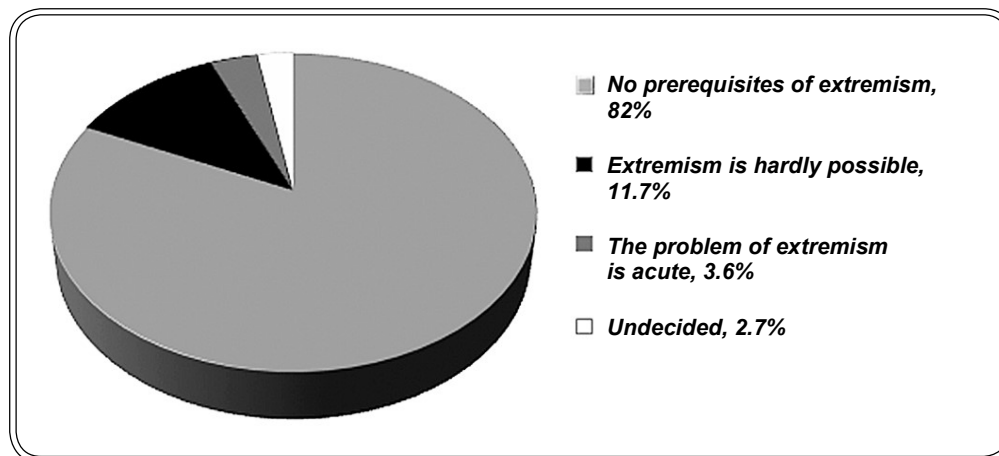
An analysis of the data obtained speaks of sustainable relationships in the republic. According to 78% of the polled, there are no prerequisites for extremist sentiments; about 12.8% believe that there is a threat of extremism, albeit insignificant; 8% of the polled described this threat as acute. The polls supplied us with a much more exact picture of the spread of extremism among the young people of Kazakhstan: the problem of extremism is relatively small, which means that there is no sense in overstating the threat of radicalization (see Fig. 1).

There is another problem: the risks of extremism caused by an increase of migration flows.

External players spare no money to move religious emissaries to Kazakhstan; they rely on social inequality in the republic and intend to establish a belt of instability in the region. Today, there are two centers of terrorist activities in Kazakhstan: its western and southern regions, both with the predominantly Kazakh population. The predominantly Russian north of the republic is relatively calm. The west, which neighbors the Northern Caucasus, where the struggle against radical groups has been waged for many years, is currently growing more and more extremist. In the south, with its big Uzbek diaspora, Islam is promptly radicalized under the pressure of illegal labor migrants coming from Uzbekistan. This threatens the stability of Kazakhstan, which cannot protect itself against religious extremism brought into the country under the guise of labor migration.

Figure 2

**Distribution of Answers to the Question about the Impact of Migrant Flows  
on the Spread of Extremism in Kazakhstan**



Migration and the threat of extremism are interconnected: 3.6% believe that the problem of extremism in the republic is acute; 82% believe that migration does not affect the inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan (see Fig. 2).

This means that an insignificant share of the respondents saw migration as one of the channels of extremism. In fact, the fears of the growing external impact of the Islamic factor should be treated with a great deal of skepticism. The Arab Spring scenario is impossible in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

A comparison of the results of the sociological polls suggests that the majority of the republic's younger generation (82%) is secular-minded and the number of active or "real" believers (those who obey religious rules in their everyday life) is not higher than 8 or 9% of the total number of young people in Kazakhstan. This figure shows no trend towards increasing, which is typical of all generations.

According to the 2009 national population census there were 11,237,900 followers of Islam in the republic, or 70.2% of the total population.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the social basis of religious extremism in Kazakhstan is comparatively small and we should not overestimate the level of radicalization in Kazakhstan.

However, the fact that young people from Kazakhstan joined radical groups and fought in Syria and Iraq should be described as a threat to the country's security. This means that we should pay more attention to the younger generation and to practical issues such as education and upbringing and standards of living of families. The state should improve its youth policy by providing, first and foremost, affordable housing for young families, affordable high-quality education, new jobs and support of the socially vulnerable categories of young people. It is even more important to teach young people to oppose destructive influences of religious and extremist organizations.

Students regularly meet with representatives of religious organizations; there are open lessons and seminars teaching to separate the right religious trends from extremist. Young people learn more

<sup>6</sup> See: *Analytical Report "Itogy Natsionalnoy Perepisi naseleniya Respubliki Kazakhstan 2009 goda,"* ed. by A.A. Smailov, Agentstvo Respubliki Kazakhstan po statistike, Astana, 2011, p. 25.



about the values and practices of different religions and acquire respect for and tolerance of different confessions.

## The Comprehensive Plan of Opposing the Ideology of Extremism in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2013-2018 as the Conceptual Foundation of the Prevention of Terrorism and Extremism

In view of the above, the state has revised the methods used to oppose religious extremism and terrorism. Our leaders are moving towards a secular state that would take into account the current orientation of the new Kazakh national elites towards the European legal, political and cultural norms. The Arab Spring complicated the religious and political situation in the country that had enough social and economic problems of its own: the low level of knowledge about religions, the urgent problem of moral and patriotic education of the younger generations, as well as corruption, etc.

The level of religious extremism reached its peak in 2011-2012 with 14 extremist attacks and armed clashes with the law-and-order structures in different parts of the republic. Thirteen officers of law-and-order structures, 6 civilians and 51 extremists were killed. Today, 32 terrorists are serving life sentences.<sup>7</sup> Starting in 2013, the law-and-order structures prevented 27 acts of terror (8 in 2013, 3 in 2014, 4 in 2015 and 12 in 2016).<sup>8</sup>

The state and the law-and-order structures resolutely responded to the outburst of terrorist activities, while the acts of violence in Taraz, Mangystau and Aktobe in 2011 and the riots in Zhanaozen were not outcrops of radicalism, but criminal acts. On 11 October, 2011, the state passed the Law on Religious Activities and Religious Organizations to bring more order into the religious sphere of social life in the republic.<sup>9</sup> Monitoring of Islamic associations of all sorts was improved, the activities of religious (missionary, in the first place) organizations were better organized, while prevention and undercutting the dissemination of radical Islamic ideas by religious organizations and associations received more attention. Those of them that spread religious radicalism and thus threatened the republic's social and political stability were closed down; the rules of exit, entry and stay in the republic for foreign citizens were tightened. The republic established the Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Religious Affairs. Starting in 2014, the Committee on Religious Affairs has been cooperating with experts, theologians and the clergy on different issues, including prevention of religious extremism. The law-and-order structures started pouring more efforts into the prevention terrorist and extremist crimes; more people were sent to jail for crimes of radical and extremist nature.

The Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan that endorsed the State Program of opposing religious extremism and terrorism for 2013-2017 on 24 October, 2013, focused on the prevention of such crimes. Today, more than 200,000 are involved in the information and propaganda

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<sup>7</sup> See: A. Serenko, "Bumerang radikalizma v Kazakhstane," *NG-Religiya*, 14 August, 2018, available at [[http://www.ng.ru/problems/2018-08-14/14\\_448\\_kazakhstan.html](http://www.ng.ru/problems/2018-08-14/14_448_kazakhstan.html)], 14 August, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Natsionalnaia bezopasnost: proverka vremenem* (Official Site of the National Security Committee), available at [<http://knb.gov.kz/ru/news/nacionalnaa-bezopasnost-proverka-vremenem>], 11 September, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> See: The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 11 October, 2011 No. 483-IV on Religious Activities and Religious Organizations (with amendments and additions as of 11.12.2016), available in Russian at [[https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=31067690](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31067690)].

efforts started within the program.<sup>10</sup> The National Security Committee of Kazakhstan created a new state program of opposing religious extremism and terrorism for 2017-2020.

The state structures acting within their competencies are doing the following to prevent extremism:

- (1) the state structure responsible for contacts with religious associations studies and analyzes the activities of religious associations and foreigners engaged in preaching and/or promotion of religious teachings; it bans those religious organizations that violate the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan on opposition to extremism;
- (2) it monitors the mass media to prevent propaganda and justification of extremism, to identify extremist materials and efforts of educational or informational nature;
- (3) the central executive structures in the field of education approve and realize the programs designed to teach the students to reject the ideas of extremism, control the fulfillment of international student exchange agreements, etc.;
- (4) the national security structures of the Republic of Kazakhstan are engaged in operational and investigatory measures to prevent infiltration of the republic by foreigners or stateless persons who might threaten or undermine the security of society and the state;
- (5) the structures of the Ministry of the Interior are engaged in operational-investigatory activities, executive and organizational efforts to protect social order and social security;
- (6) the local executive structures interact with public associations, they study activities of religious organizations and foreigners engaged in promoting religious teachings and analyze the religious situation in the republic;
- (7) much effort is poured into a comprehensive plan of measures to cut short or prevent terrorism and extremism in Kazakhstan.<sup>11</sup>

This means that this law defines the legal and organizational foundations of opposition to terrorism and extremism to ensure national security of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In view of the laws designed to oppose religious extremism and terrorism, Kazakhstan revised, to a certain extent, its approaches, anti-terrorist methods and mechanisms. The state is determined to suppress the very possibility of extremism and terrorism emerging in its territory. Anti-terrorist struggle has become one of the priorities of the republic's national security policy, calling for close cooperation with other states in the military-technical sphere, at the political level and interstate cooperation at the global and regional levels. Today, Kazakhstan is actively and efficiently cooperating with the U.N., NATO, the European Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organizations and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. It is working hard to fulfill the demands of the resolution of the U.N. SC and presents its annual reports to the U.N.

Neither the authorities, nor the people of Kazakhstan are ready to repeat the Arab Spring scenario in their country. The extremist acts of 2011-2017 sprang up rather than being planned in advance, which explains why they never developed into an ideology. Religious extremists in Kazakhstan had no coordinating center, no leaders, while their associations were not cooperating among themselves. They had no clear-cut strategy and no ultimate aims; their activities could be defined as acts of jihad or acts of crime to an equal extent.

<sup>10</sup> See: State Program of Opposition to Religious Extremism and Terrorism for the Years 2013-2017: Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbaev, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 258 (1164), 2 October, 2013, pp. 2-8.

<sup>11</sup> See: The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Opposition to Extremism, No. 31 of 18 February, 2005 (with amendments and additions as of 28.12.2016 ), available in Russian at [[https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=30004865#pos=90;-47](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30004865#pos=90;-47)], 28 December, 2016.

On the whole, everything the leaders of Kazakhstan are doing to oppose radicalism and extremism allows them to control the religious and political situation; common people are assured that the country will remain a secular state. Much is done to realize the social, economic and political reforms under the fairly complicated internal and external conditions; the leaders of the republic, on the whole, are working hard to oppose the threat of terror and religious extremism. The formerly higher level of threat has been suppressed, while the religious and political situation is improving. The current level of radicalization is not high, yet we should never forget that the attitude to radicalism held by the common people, who prefer peaceful manifestations, is the main factor of struggle against radicalism. The state should consolidate it by its support of social justice, religious politics, traditional Islam and its firm positions among the younger generation.

Kazakhstan is involved in the global process of the Syrian settlement; our country believes that it is highly important to take part in the global summits on the Syrian process; it invariably supports international negotiations with important practical contributions. President Nazarbayev offered Astana as the platform for the talks on the discontinuation of armed struggle in Syria. In 2017, Astana hosted eight international meetings on the Syrian settlement; in May 2018, it hosted the ninth, and in November 2018—the eleventh round of Syrian talks. The contribution of Kazakhstan to conflict settlement through a diplomatic dialog was highly appreciated by the U.N. and many of the world leaders. The Astana process complements the Geneva process, and both are carried out to arrive at a peaceful and stable settlement of the Syrian crisis.

This vector realized by President Nazarbayev summed up, to a certain extent, the republic's role in raising international relations to a new level, at which all misunderstandings and disagreements between countries will be resolved and conflicts settled at the negotiation table. Throughout the years of its independence Kazakhstan has been consistently promoting its peaceful foreign policy principles, viz. its multi-vectoral and balanced nature, peace and agreements. Kazakhstan's authority as an active supporter of the Syrian process that earned it international confidence has been recognized. An international recognition of President Nazarbayev's achievements is the result of his thoughtful and weighted actions. At the dawn of the country's independence he made a weighty contribution to international settlements, which today allows the country to pursue an active foreign policy and fulfill some of its foreign policy projects.

President Nazarbayev has repeatedly pointed out that peaceful and constructive talks based on the sides' equal responsibility for peace and security, mutual respect and noninterference in domestic affairs of countries are the sine qua non of peaceful settlement of all conflicts. In recent years, this has become especially important for the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, where extremism has become everyday reality. It is equally important to reform the system of international relations since only concerted efforts of all countries can stop extremism.

## *Conclusion*

Hundreds of young people from Kazakhstan fought in the ranks of all sorts of radical armed groups in Syria and Iraq. On the one hand, this is a warning that should be taken into account; on the other, we should admit that the absolute majority of Kazakhstani Muslims not only demonstrate indifference to religious extremism, but also denounce it resolutely as a social evil. Kazakhstani Muslims have remained loyal to the norms of traditional Sunni Islam. Until recently, the attempts at extremist propaganda and recruitment of local Muslims into the ranks of radicals were few and far between. Today, under the pressure of the civil war in Syria Kazakhstan demonstrates a trend, apparent in all Central Asian countries, towards a massive outflow of radical Muslims to the Middle East. Disintegration of radical groups that disappeared from the information space pushed aside the problem of the

outflow of Kazakhstanis to the combat zone, Syria and Iraq in particular, and the problem of anti-terrorist struggle. The law-and-order structures managed to radically change the situation: the main cells of radical structures have been identified and liquidated; the system of anti-terrorist and anti-extremist struggle has been revised together with the strategy that united the efforts of state, as well as the public structures designed to prevent radicalism.

It should be said in conclusion that

- The leaders of Kazakhstan have taken and continue to take timely and adequate measures to prevent threats of terrorism and religious extremism;
- According to sociological polls of the younger generation, the threat of radicalization of the Kazakhstani youth has practically disappeared thanks to the efficient anti-extremist measures taken by the law-and-order structures;
- Kazakhstan should deepen its involvement in anti-terrorist and anti-extremist struggle at the global level under the aegis of the U.N. and NATO and at the regional level within the CSTO and SCO. This means that the Arab Spring affected the national security of Kazakhstan, yet it will probably be never repeated in it.

Kazakhstan should take into account everything that is going on in the Middle East and North Africa. Indeed, the Arab Spring has taught us that the state security system may be affected by a set of internal and external factors. The wars and revolutions in the Middle East have demonstrated that any country's state system may be destroyed by inefficient social and economic or political actions and that the leaders of all countries should be ready to address these problems efficiently and on time. The policy of social and state security should be geared towards an efficient system of protection of the interests of society, each of its members and the state.