

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

**KYRGYZSTAN'S ISLAMIC REFERENCE POINTS:
THE ROLE OF FOREIGN RELIGIOUS TRENDS**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Kyrgyzstan's Islamic reference points that formed under the influence of the Islamic movements coming from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the states of the Indian Peninsula. It identifies the institutionalization aspects of these Islamic movements and how Kyrgyz society perceives them.

KEYWORDS: *Sunnism, Shi'ism, Hanafi madh'hab, Nurcular, Salafism, jamaat, daawat, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan.*

Introduction

Islam came to Kyrgyzstan in the form of the Hanafi madh'hab. Sufism played a significant role in its spread among the nomadic Kyrgyz. During Soviet times, the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan were not well acquainted with the other Islamic movements that emerged in other Muslim countries in response to the historical, political, and cultural processes (for example, as national liberation movements). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, various Islamic movements formed under the influence of different factors began penetrating into the Kyrgyz Republic (KR) from Muslim countries.

The current religious situation is distinguished by the fact that almost all the Islamic trends coming from the outside acquire their followers in Kyrgyzstan. The geopolitical interests of particu-

lar Central Asian states largely define the religious situation and processes going on in the KR. These states take advantage of religious organizations and movements to realize their geopolitical interests.

Today, there are Islamic movements in Kyrgyzstan that came from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Indian Peninsula. Of these countries, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia claim to have an ideal and successful development model of a Muslim country and leadership in the Muslim world. What is more, all of these countries are relatively close geographically to Central Asia (CA), and this means that instability in the region will have an effect on the security of these states. So they are interested in the region's stable development. This also explains their involvement in and attempts to influence the regional processes, as well as their vying for leadership in the Muslim world. Control over CA would give them additional economic, political, and energy advantages over competitors. Religion is one of the main levers for achieving their goals in the region.

It should be immediately stipulated that most of the religious movements that come to the KR from the outside are not officially registered as organizations. They are often represented as learning and educational establishments, funds, cultural representative agencies, and so on. They began actively penetrating into Kyrgyzstan and spreading after the country gained its independence. During the 24 years of its sovereignty, these distinctive ways of understanding and explaining the Islam coming from various Muslim countries have acquired their own followers in the KR.

It is impossible to determine the precise number of followers of any particular movement in the KR today, since many of them do not openly admit their affiliation to a particular jamaat, trend, or movement. Due to their religious illiteracy, many of them do not know what trend they belong to. Neither religious organizations, nor government bodies have yet to define precise criteria for determining affiliation to a specific trend.

Those who know they belong to a particular jamaat confess to it in private conversations and only anonymously. Law enforcers note that there are more than 20 different Islamic jamaats in the KR at present: the Tablighi Jamaat, Adyl Mansur's Jamaat, the Karasu Jamaat, Uzgen Jamaat, Abdushukur Narmatov's Jamaat, and others.

When writing this article, the author used documents and the results of her empirical studies in the form of in-depth interviews with experts, law enforcers, and representatives of other government structures, theologians and representatives of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK). The documents of an expert survey of a pilot study called "Religious Security of the KR" were partially used under a contract with the National Institute of Strategic Research of the KR Government carried out with E. Nasritdinov, Doctor of Anthropology of the American University of Central Asia.

Turkey

The collapse of the Soviet Union put new geopolitical players on the political stage who strove to fill the vacuum formed in CA, mainly for raising their status on the international arena.

One such country was and still is Turkey, which offers its own model of social development and claims leadership in the Muslim Turkic-speaking world. Turkey's open claims to the role of Eurasia's "energy switchboard" form the fulcrum of its foreign policy.¹ In order to achieve its geopolitical goals, Turkey is employing a foreign policy strategy based on neo-Panturkism and neo-Ottomanism.

¹ A.B. Burashnikova, "Neopantiurkizm i neosmanizm vo vneshnei politike Turtsii," *Proceedings of Saratov University, New Series: History. International Relations*, Vol. 13, Issue 2, 2013, p. 65.

According to researcher A. Burashnikova, the foundation of neo-Panturkism was laid by means of the following principles: unification of nations according to their ethnic affiliation to the Turks, adherence to Islam, common language, historical culture, and Eastern mentality. Neo-Ottomanism, on the other hand, presumes a significant revision of the above-mentioned provisions, as well as several innovations in the foreign policy sphere.²

M. Laumulin notes that the neo-Ottomanism doctrine was formed by means of the following factors. "Turkey is surrounded by Middle Eastern, Caucasian, and Balkan countries. Instability is seen in all of these regions, particularly since the end of the Cold War. Territorial disputes are still unresolved in the post-Ottoman area. None of this was evident during the time of the Ottoman Empire, when stability reigned. Moreover, the Ottoman Empire, although it was similar to a theocratic state, corresponded more to a contemporary secular model from the viewpoint of relations between the state and religion."³ The gist of neo-Ottomanism lies in "intensifying Turkey's foreign political role in the region for the sake of stability."⁴

It should be said that the West encouraged the idea of the Central Asian states adopting the Turkish model as an alternative to Communism or Iranian-style Islamism. Turkey was endowed with forming "a bridge between the Western world and the CA countries, which should have promoted the integration of these countries into the world community and the formation of Western values."⁵

There is no denying that Turkey has its specific geopolitical goals in Kyrgyzstan and in the Turkic-speaking countries of the post-Soviet region as a whole. However, some experts in Turkey itself doubt that it has enough resources to maintain the above-mentioned projects. As Professor of Istanbul University Ilter Turan notes, "Turkey has set off on the road to revisionist rhetoric and pragmatic everyday actions in foreign policy. An average kind of nation is forming with an ambitious leader, which at times overestimates its potential."⁶

When carrying out its policy of influence, Turkey places the main emphasis on cultural-civilizational factors: common language, religion, and origin of the people. On the whole, Turkey's religious influence in the KR encompasses the following spheres: religious education and building mosques in the KR. The largest project (amounting to \$20 million) funded by Turkey is building a central mosque in Bishkek, which will be completed in 2016.

The most widespread Turkish Islamic trends in the KR include Hizmet, the followers of Turkish official Fethullah Gülen, Nurcular, the followers of the Turkish academic Said Nursi, and Sulaymancılar, the followers of Turkish academic Süleyman Hilmi. All of these trends are among the most influential in the religious sphere in Turkey itself. It should be noted that Hizmet is the most influential of them in the KR.

Hizmet is perceived ambiguously in the KR. On the one hand, it is seen as a religious organization spreading ideas of religious modernism and appealing to liberal values, while on the other, it is represented as a social-civil movement that unites Gülen's followers.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the activity of Hizmet in the KR has been focused on opening educational institutions of the Sebat network, the main founder of which was Fethullah Gülen. "From 1992 to 2012, Fethullah Gülen's supporters opened 22 educational institutions of the Sebat network,

² See: A.B. Burashnikova, op. cit., p. 67.

³ M. Laumulin, "Turkey and Central Asia," available at [<http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/10/22/%D1%82%D1%83%D1%80%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B8-%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%8F/e8p0>].

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Zh.B. Samanchina, *Uchebnaia migratsiia v razvitii mezhgosudarstvennykh otnoshenii Kyrgyzstana i Turtsii*, Synopsis of a thesis for a PhD in Political Science, Bishkek, 2014, p. 17.

⁶ Quoted from: S. Tarasov, "Neosmanizm' vo vneshnei politike Turtsii slabeet," available at [<http://www.iarex.ru/articles/48013.html>].

as well as the international Silk Road school, and the private university Atatürk Ala-Too⁷ in Kyrgyzstan.” According to the information at the end of 2013, “more than nine thousand people are taught in the institutions of the Sebat Association in Kyrgyzstan. Their main advantage over the local schools is that they emphasize the study of exact sciences and English. For example, in 2012, six people from Kyrgyzstan were sent to the international physics contest: five of them were representatives of Turkish lyceums.”⁸

It cannot be denied that lessons in the Sebat schools are taught in English and Turkish, at a high level, and in keeping with world standards. However, it is mainly children of the elite and wealthy Kyrgyz citizens who attend them, since the tuition is very high.

Foundations. In addition to educational establishments, the Adep Bashaty Public Foundation and journals belonging to and financed by Gülen’s followers are active in the KR.

The Adep Bashaty Foundation is officially registered and has branches in every region of the KR. According to some expert data, this Foundation has tens of thousands of consolidated followers in every region of the KR. However, the Foundation directors deny its affiliation with Gülen’s followers.

According to researcher D. Berdakov, “the high prestige of the participants of this movement among the population (particularly of the southern regions and new housing developments) is ensured by their qualitative distinction from the political class, their willingness to assume social responsibility, and their business entrepreneurship.”⁹

At the same time, Turkish and local researchers say that the Adep Bashaty Foundation belongs to the Nurcular movement.

It should be noted that in Kyrgyzstan, Gülen’s followers are also called Nurcular, meaning that Gülen is one of Nursi’s students. This may be because that S. Nursi’s teaching is presented as one of the fundamental ideological principles of the Hizmet movement. However, there are also followers of S. Nursi in Kyrgyzstan who are representatives of the classical trend of his teaching and spread his ideas.

Another Turkish trend that is widespread in Kyrgyzstan, called Sulaymancılar, consolidates the followers of Süleyman Hilmi in its ranks. It was also formed under the influence of S. Nursi’s teaching. The Sufi order of *Sulaymaniyah* has formed a network of Sufi madrasahs, schools for studying and reciting the Quran, as well as for teaching Arabic grammar.¹⁰

Whereas the Hizmet movement was institutionally registered as a system of educational institutions and foundations, the ideas of the latter two movements are mainly taught in rented private apartments for a certain fee and are not yet institutionally registered. The fee for Nurcular’s courses is twice as high as that for Sulaymancılar’s courses and amounts to 5,000 soms.¹¹

In the past few years, the F. Gülen’s teaching in Turkey itself has been officially banned. However, at the same time, according to several experts, the movement itself and its ideas are unofficially encouraged by Turkey for advancing Turkish foreign policy interests. According to M.N. Davydov, “despite the restrictions imposed in Turkey on the activity of the sect as threatening the secular system of the state, Nurcular continues to enjoy the unofficial protection of high-ranking state and political officials of the Turkish Republic. In so doing, by encouraging and directing the sect’s ‘enlightening’

⁷ See: R. Veytsel, “Vliianie Turtsii na islam v gosudarstvakh Tsentralnoi Azii,” available at [http://www.islamsng.com/sng/analytics/7367#_ftn2].

⁸ D. Berdakov, “Srovnitelnyy analiz turetskoi, rossiiskoi, kitaiskoi, amerikanskoi SoftPower v Kyrgyzstane,” available at [<http://enw-fond.ru/ekspertnoe-mnenie/5830-denis-berdakov-srovnitelnyy-analiz-tureckoy-rossiyskoy-kitayskoy-amerikanskoy-soft-power-v-kyrgyzstane.html>].

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ See: K. Malikov, *Kratkoe posobie no Islamu*, Bishkek, 2013, p. 74.

¹¹ From an interview with an expert.

activity beyond Turkey, where the movement realizes the idea of Turkic supremacy and the need for uniting the Islamic world under Ankara's aegis aimed at creating a 'pure state' based on the 'enlightened Sharia,' the Turkish authorities are also pursuing the goal of reducing the sect's activity in their own country.¹²

Despite certain differences and their own special features, all three movements derive from the official Turkish model of religious-state relations.

Perception in Kyrgyzstan. The perception of Turkish religious movements by the Kyrgyz state and society is ambiguous. The following points of view exist:

- Some see the Turkish model as being the ideal alternative for Kyrgyzstan and representing an effective model of religious-state relations. This model meets contemporary requirements and reduces risks to religious security since the main emphasis is primarily placed on high-quality secular education. The idea of implementing the Turkish model also seems attractive to the official authorities and representatives of the Kyrgyz clergy.
- Others are suspicious about the Turkish model and Turkish influence in Kyrgyzstan and think that the Turks are "working for the future." The results of their influence will not be seen until the generation of graduates from Turkish schools and universities matures and begins to occupy high posts in the administration, and pro-Turkish and Islamic political parties form. The risk is that political forces, politicians, and civil servants might fall under the control of external forces, which will use them to advance their interests (geopolitical, economic, etc.).

So the attitude toward Turkish movements in the KR is ambiguous. On the one hand, part of society is suspicious of them and accuses the Turks of forming a fifth column and promulgating their ideology among young people. While on the other hand, there are supporters and followers of these movements who laud Gülen's ideas as a model of progressive and enlightened Islam. These are primarily the graduates of Turkish schools, as well as local and Turkish theological universities. The influence of Sulaymancılar has spread in the KR and is also being disseminated via students studying at Turkish religious educational establishments.

Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) is another country that sees itself as a leader and ideal model of development for other countries of the Muslim world. Iran's foreign policy is also based on pragmatism, striving to gain advantages from cooperating with the Central Asian countries, primarily economic, energy, and transport. Iran's geopolitical interests also focus on security issues accompanied by withdrawal from isolation, and it is actively appealing to the general cultural and historical traditions of the region's countries to achieve these goals.

Iran understands that it cannot put the emphasis on spreading its religious ideology in Kyrgyzstan. According to researcher V.V. Khutorskaia, "it stands to reason that Tehran would also like to spread Islamic values in Central Asia, since Iran has leadership ambitions in the Islamic world, but the Iranian leadership is sensible enough not to stress political and ideological issues in its relations with these countries."¹³

¹² M.N. Davydov, "Deiatelnost turetskoi religioznoi sekty 'Nurdzhular'," available at [<http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2007/03-11-07b.htm>].

¹³ V.V. Khutorskaia, "Vzaimootnosheniia IRI i stran Tsentralnoi Azii," available at [<http://farsiiran.narod.ru/analitics/iranasia.htm>].

In our opinion, this is related to the fact that the IRI is a Shi'ite country, in contrast to Kyrgyzstan, where there is no significant Shi'ite influence; there is only one Shi'ite mosque in the entire republic. Cultural and linguistic features are another obstacle; in this respect, Kyrgyzstan is part of the Turkic-speaking world. In addition, after the country gained its independence, students from the KR went to study and obtain a religious education in the theological centers of Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon, with only a few going to the IRI. During their education, they mainly referred to Sunni works, and not those of Iranian thinkers.

There is also a psychological factor. We agree with V.V. Khutorskaia's opinion that "Iran often emphasizes its superiority over the Central Asian republics and tries to present itself as a 'big brother,' competent to give these countries lessons in Islam, culture, and language, as in the case of Tajikistan, which irritates the Central Asian states."¹⁴ This was seen at universities where Islamic and Persian departments were established and differences between students and professors arose.

In this respect, the IRI is largely placing the stakes on reviving the common cultural and historical traditions of the past, but not on common religious grounds. In the KR, Iranian religious trends are institutionally registered and mainly represented through the educational and culture structures: the Cultural Representative Agency at the Iranian Embassy in Kyrgyzstan; Iranian Study Centers at Kyrgyz universities; and the Islamic Kousar Cultural Enlightenment Foundation.

As mentioned above, Iran's influence in the KR is manifested in the educational and cultural spheres, and it stands to reason that it is much smaller in scope than Turkey's.

The main goal of the activity of the Cultural Representative Agency at the Iranian Embassy consists of implementing a policy of cultural-historical rapprochement and mutual influence, as well as reviving historical traditional ties by spreading and promulgating the monuments of Iranian cultural tradition: the Persian language, poetry, and study of the Quran in Farsi.

The Cultural Representative Agency of the IRI in the KR is carrying out work in the following areas: book stores of Iranian publishing houses are opening; students studying Persian are being sent to Iran on internships; cultural meetings and events are being held; conferences and symposiums on different topics, primarily religious, are being arranged; days of Iranian culture are being held; a magazine is being published; and language courses are being given, while celebrations of Nowruz, Ramazan, book exhibitions, folk crafts, etc. are also being organized. Information on the events held by the Cultural Representative Agency at the Iranian Embassy in Kyrgyzstan can be found on this organization's official website page on Facebook.

Experts are concerned that the diplomatic status of the Cultural Representative Agency at the Iranian Embassy in Kyrgyzstan will provide it with immunity and make it possible for it to bring in its imams and engage in hidden religious propaganda.

Iran carries out much of its cultural and enlightenment work through education. Iranian study centers and departments at several KR universities have opened and been operating since the 1990s:

- an Iranian study center was opened at the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University in July 1997 on a grant from the Iranian embassy;
- a Center of Islamic and Iranian Studies was opened at Bishkek Humanitarian University on 20 March, 2012 with the active cooperation of the Iranian side;
- an agreement on cooperation in training teaching and scientific-teaching staff of the highest caliber and implementing joint study, methodological, and research projects was signed between the Kyrgyz Arabaev State University and the Iranian Embassy on 7 February, 2007;

¹⁴ Ibidem.

- in 2002, the Institute of Integration of International Educational Programs of the Kyrgyz Balasagyn National University and Iranian Kousar Enlightenment Foundation signed an agreement on cooperation in education (the same year, under this agreement, an Islamic Studies division was opened at the Oriental Studies Department of the Institute and students were enrolled in the first course, while in 2008 a Kyrgyz-Iranian scientific educational center was opened at the Institute engaged in a scientific research program, as well as in training specialists in various fields);
- on 6 February, 2009, *Danaker*, a youth cultural and educational magazine, began coming out at the Kyrgyz Balasagyn National University.¹⁵

The Iranian side is fully financing the repair of classrooms for the study centers and providing material and technical assistance, as well as a library of scientific literature and fiction in Farsi. It is sending Persian-language teachers to the republic's universities, organizing advanced training courses and internships for professors and practical courses for students, holding seminars, and so on.

Iran's educational and cultural activity in the KR is also manifested in the opening and functioning of Islamic cultural and enlightenment foundations. However, sometimes their cultural and enlightenment activity turns into religious and propagandistic efforts, which violates the regulations of a secular state and arouses a response from the government structures.

For instance, the activity of Iran's Kousar Cultural Enlightenment Foundation, which was in operation from 2002 to 2014, was stopped by an interdistrict court of Bishkek on a claim from the State Commission for Religious Affairs On Elimination of the Kousar Public Islamic Cultural and Enlightenment Foundation and Kousar Public Cultural and Enlightenment Foundation.¹⁶

The Foundation's double name is due to the fact that when it first began functioning, this organization was called the Kousar Public Islamic Cultural and Enlightenment Foundation. In 2012, according to the results of an inventory of the register of religious organizations, centers, foundations, and educational establishments carried out by the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the KR, it transpired that the Kousar Public Foundation was carrying out its activity in violation of KR legislation.¹⁷ On 11 January, 2013, it was re-registered with the KR Ministry of Justice as a legal entity and became known as the Kousar Public Cultural and Enlightenment Fund, which excluded any kind of religious activity.¹⁸ However, during the customary inspections, instances of illegal religious activity were discovered once more, whereby the State Commission drew up a statement of claim on its elimination.¹⁹

The results of an expert survey reveal that there is a negative perception and assessment of the Iranian influence in Kyrgyzstan.

This might be related to the cultural and civilizational characteristics of Iran and Kyrgyzstan, as well as to the classical opposition between Sunnism and Shi'ism, which sometimes goes beyond confessional boundaries and acquires more vivid geopolitical hues.

Moreover, Iran's presumed destabilization efforts aimed at splitting the global Sunni community are seen as the main geopolitical threat. One of Iran's main goals in Kyrgyzstan and in the region as a whole is to improve the image of Shi'ism among ordinary Muslims, gain their trust, and introduce deference of the deceased in keeping with Iranian religious tradition into the local religious practices.

¹⁵ See: A.L. Saliev, "Vostochnyy vector vneshney politiki Kyrgyzstana: Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskiy region i Blizhniy Voskok," 2011, available at [<http://4i5.ru/library/uchebnik-mejdunarodnie-otnosheniya/vvedenie20169.htm>].

¹⁶ See: S. Moiseeva, "Sud prinial reshenie o likvidatsii dvukh religioznykh organizatsiy," available at [<http://www.vb.kg/260545>].

¹⁷ See: *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ See: *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ See: *Ibidem*.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia also sees itself as a leader and center of the universal Muslim umma. According to researcher G. Kosach, "Saudi Arabia considers itself to be 'the central link in the Muslim community' and gives primary attention in its foreign policy to developing relations with countries it defines as Muslim. The Saudis include Azerbaijan and the Central Asian states among these countries (correspondingly interpreting historical facts), which is why they strive for full-fledged contacts with these states and for incorporating them into the 'universal Muslim *umma*'."²⁰

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia regarded the CA Muslims as Muslims who have lost Islam and saw its main mission to be assisting the revival of Islam in the region. "The Saudi interpretation of the purpose of this assistance implied 'awakening Muslim consciousness'."²¹

Saudi Arabia's religious influence in Kyrgyzstan is manifested in the following:

- building mosques;
- teaching students;
- the activity of various foundations.

Building mosques, Islamic organizations, and Saudi Arabian foundations in the KR. There are no precise data about the number of mosques built in the KR at Saudi Arabia's expense. However, it finances the building of mosques through a variety of different foundations and organizations.

An expert from one of the government structures notes that the World Assembly of the Muslim Youth (WAMY) under the supervision of Omar al-Bayoumi is one of the main institutions financing the building of mosques in the KR. According to unofficial data, around 70% of the mosque building in the KR has been financed by this organization, and the other 30% by the local population.²²

Some media representatives think that "WAMY allots around \$5 million annually to the building of religious facilities. More than 400 mosques have been built in the south of Kyrgyzstan with the help of these funds."²³

According to the data for 2012, WAMY has built more than 300 mosques in the south of Kyrgyzstan. "During this period, new mosques accommodating from 500 to 2,000 parishioners have been built using WAMY's funds in the villages of Tepakurgon, Chertak, and Mangit in the Aravan district of the Osh Region. And at the end of August 2012, construction of a new mosque in the village of Teskei-Kozhok in the Nookat district of the Osh Region financed by WAMY was finished. WAMY also built a new mosque in the Jalalabad Region opposite the Safed-Bulan Shah-Vazil mausoleum in the Ala-Bukin district. WAMY allotted \$150,000 to its construction. Another new mosque accommodating 4,000 parishioners was built in the village of Karazhygach in the Suzak district. It cost WAMY \$100,000. On the initiative of WAMY's directors, construction began of a new mosque on the grounds of an old-age pensioner's home in Bishkek, which will hold more than 500 parishioners."²⁴

²⁰ G. Kosach, "Politika Saudovskoi Aravii na postsovetском 'musul'manskom' iuge: tseli i itogi kursa," *Vestnik Evrazii*, No. 2, 2005, p. 151.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

²² From an interview with the expert.

²³ Zh. Usenov, "Kyrgyzstan—kak osnovnoi importer chuzhdoi kultury," available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1416209580>].

²⁴ A. Osmonaliev, "Kyrgyzstanu nuzhny vrachi i inzheneri, a ne mully i imamy," available at [<http://www.paruskg.info/2012/12/28/73098>].

In 2014, “several more religious facilities were built in the Osh, Jalalabad, and Chui districts. And another prayer room is being set up on the third floor of the government building at an accelerated rate using \$200,000 allotted by WAMY.”²⁵

In addition to this organization, other institutions are also engaged in mosque building. For example, the Umm al-Qura University of Saudi Arabia funded the building of a mosque in Uzgen and provided free schooling for children from poor families. The International Islamic Foundation has also expressed its willingness to finance the building of several mosques in Kyrgyzstan.²⁶

Other organizations, such as Muassasatul Haramain, Al Waqf Al Islami, the International Center of Islamic Cooperation, and the Youth Initiative Foundation,²⁷ are also doing their part.

In 2014, Saudi Arabia asked for four hectares of land in Bishkek to build an Islamic cultural center. According to Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Kyrgyzstan Abdurahman bin Saeed Al-Juma'ah, “the Saudi side will take full responsibility for the financing, while both sides will supervise the project. In practice, such centers include a mosque, school, gym, conference hall, and other facilities.”²⁸ The ambassador also noted that “unfortunately, many countries are under the impression that an Islamic center means a mosque and propaganda. But we would like to show that an Islamic center can bring together a gym, medical center, school, library, and so on.”²⁹

Education sphere. Since the country gained its independence, there are no specific figures on the number of students going to Saudi Arabia from Kyrgyzstan to attend religious schools. Although the law requires that the corresponding structures must be informed, most people leave the country on a tourist visa and do not always provide notification that they are leaving to study at a religious institution. According to the data for 2013 alone,³⁰ around 150 students from Kyrgyzstan studied at religious establishments in Saudi Arabia.

In 2014, ten Islamic institutions functioned in Kyrgyzstan; most of them were opened with the direct support of a variety of different foundations from the Persian Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia. One of them functions under the SAMK. Most of them function according to the madrasah principle with an extensive curriculum.³¹

Perception in Kyrgyzstan. The influence of Saudi Arabia in the KR is also perceived unequivocally. Experts and the public see the threat of the influence of Saudi Arabia and other countries in the following.

The widespread activation of different trends of Salafism is one of the consequences of Saudi Arabia's influence in Kyrgyzstan. The religious influence from Saudi Arabia largely comes from various Salafi teachings, both moderate and radical. Our survey showed that all the experts unanimously saw Salafism as a threat to the state's security. Although some experts noted that a distinction should be made between moderate and radical Salafism, most of the experts polled think that any manifestation of Salafism is potentially dangerous and requires special attention in Kyrgyzstan and CA as a whole.

The main radical features of Salafism are the following: literal understanding and following of the ayats of the Quran, calling to return to the time of the righteous ancestors, calling to reject the

²⁵ Zh. Usenov, op. cit.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ S. Keldibekov, “Kyrgyzstan. ‘Arabizatsiia’ pod prikrytiem islama,” available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1415864520>].

²⁸ [<http://ansar.ru/rfsng/2014/09/23/53485>].

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ See: A. Kasybekov, “Zhusupbek Sharipov: Korol dal 3 milliona na stroitelstvo posolstva KR,” available at [<http://www.vb.kg/255555>].

³¹ See: U. Nazarov, “V Kyrgyzstane zaimutsia nauchnym issledovaniem islama,” available at [<http://centralasiaonline.com/ru/articles/caii/features/main/2014/06/04/feature-01?mobile=true>].

later developments in Islam, and so on. All Muslims who do not carry out these requirements are considered to be infidels. The “Islamic State” that functions in Iraq and Syria could be a vivid example of this.

The contradictions between Salafism and the local clergy are extremely important. The representatives of the local clergy present no authority for Salafis and they are constantly arguing with the representatives of other jamaats, as well as calling for rejecting national traditions and Islam localizations. Salafis are also known for their non-recognition of local academics and madh’hab, as well as orientation toward sheikhs from Saudi Arabia who are popular on the Internet.

The most radical and main goal of Salafism is building a caliphate and calling for transforming the secular state into a theocratic one, whereby violent, aggressive, and terrorist methods are to be used for implementing this goal.

At the moment, many extremist and terrorist ideologies come from Russian cities, such as Ekaterinburg, Astrakhan, and others. Influence also comes from Kazakhstan, where Salafism has become extremely active and is gradually acquiring increasingly aggressive and violent forms. Today, the fact that many who leave to earn a living end up in extremist networks and are recruited in the Salafi mosques in these countries. There is information that extremist organizations are helping these people to draw up their documents and find work. The attraction of the Salafi ideas in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan also lies in their protest rhetoric.

Radical Salafis (Wahhabis) are among the extremists in the KR, just as throughout the entire post-Soviet expanse. According to French academic Fabrice Balanche, “many leaders of al- Qa’eda were trained in Saudi Arabia’s Jeddah, where Salafi imams are put on the training conveyer and then sent throughout the Islamic world as far as the central regions of Africa. Thanks to Saudi Arabia’s financial assistance, they are easily able to oust the traditional imams and spread the Wahhabi ideology.”³²

Experts do not think well of the opening of the Saudi Arabian embassy in 2011 and the Qatar embassy in 2012 in the KR. According to well-known expert K. Malikov, “the opening of Saudi Arabian and Qatar embassies and the cancellation of visas has made it possible for the supporters of Wahhabism from these countries to advance their ideology more actively in our republic. The Kingdom is rendering financial aid to Kyrgyzstan’s Islamic institutions. Priests and religious experts are invited to study and funds are allotted for building mosques directly in the republic.”³³

According to the polled experts, moderate Salafis in the KR are not striving for power today; they have chosen the tactic of ubiquitous infiltration of their people. Salafis are also working actively among prisoners in Kyrgyz prisons.

However, despite the fact that Saudi Arabia’s influence is largely evaluated as negative, some people also regard this country as the custodian of the two main Muslim shrines, Mecca and Medina, and as a protector of Islam and the Muslims.

Countries of the Indian Peninsula (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh)

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is one of the countries of the Indian Peninsula that shares cultural and civilizational features with Kyrgyzstan. Researchers note that Pakistan is one of the

³² A. Sadykov, “Aktivizatsii ekstremistov v Kyrgyzstane sposobstvuiut zarubezhnye fondy,” available at [http://www.vesti.kg/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=27069&Itemid=125].

³³ Ibidem.

U.S.'s key allies in Central Asia, seeing itself as a leading regional power and Central Asia's gateway to the world markets through the Indian Ocean, where Iran is its main competitor.³⁴ One of Pakistan's main geopolitical goals is to engage in economic integration with the region's countries and draw them into its political orbit.³⁵ Pakistan is also trying to make use of the cultural-civilizational factor to achieve its goals in the region.³⁶

According to B. Narbaev, former adviser of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the attempts to take advantage of religion were related "primarily to the active role and activity in Pakistan itself of well-known international extremist groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Jamaat-i-Islami, which have close ties with several Pakistani political parties and radical groups."³⁷ This aroused a response in the CA countries. "Throughout 2001 and the first half of 2002, the special services of these countries carried out a series of arrests of the active participants of these organizations. The operations and investigation efforts showed that the leading centers are located in Pakistan. So Islamabad's plans to take advantage of the Islamic factor regarding the CA states proved to be not entirely viable, since their leaders put economic interests first, thus essentially rejecting the idea of "Islamic unity."³⁸

However, Pakistan's cultural and civilizational influence is being manifested not only at the radical level, but also by moderate trends, such as Tablighi Jamaat, which "do not present any threat to Kyrgyzstan's national security in the mid-term."³⁹

The religious influence coming from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is mainly manifested by the Tablighi Jamaat movement, which is better known in Kyrgyzstan as "Daawat" (the call to Islam).

Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi was the founder of the Tablighi Jamaat movement. The movement emerged in India, near Mewat not far from Delhi, in the 1920s. It has since spread throughout the world and is now present in almost every country. However, the main centers of the movement are still India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In India, the center is located in New Delhi, in the Nizamuddin district. In Pakistan, the center is in Raiwind, and in Bangladesh it is situated in the capital of the country, Dakka. *Ishtimayi* (congresses) are held in Raiwind and Dakka, to which hundreds of thousands of Tablighi Jamaat followers come from all over the world.

The main principles of Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi's teaching were formed in the conditions of colonial India. According to him, the Muslims' problems cannot be resolved by political methods. The position of the Muslim community and society as a whole can only be improved by *ibadat*—worship, correction of moral behavior, and *daawat*—the call to religion.⁴⁰

The *Dawaat* movement espouses the revival of Islam, and those who call for Islam and belong to the Tablighi Jamaat movement are called *daawatchiks* in Kyrgyzstan. In the 1990s, *daawatchiks* from Kyrgyzstan often traveled to Pakistan where a visa could be obtained upon arrival. A stricter visa regime was introduced around 2002, making travel more difficult, so people began going to India and Bangladesh.⁴¹

Most of the movement's members are ordinary Kyrgyz citizens who have never studied in a madrasah. They go to *daawat* in order to acquire basic religious knowledge—the fundamental prin-

³⁴ See: G. Yuldasheva, "The Iranian-Pakistani Factor in the Geopolitics of Central and South Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, 2014, p. 33.

³⁵ See: *Ibidem*.

³⁶ See: B. Narbaev, "Islamskaia Respublika Pakistan v kontekste razvitiia geopoliticheskikh protsessov v Tsentralnoi Asii," available at [<http://kisi.kz/img/docs/1095.pdf>].

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ K. Malikov, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

⁴⁰ See: E. Nasritdinov, N. Esenamanava, *Religioznaia bezopasnost v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike*, Bishkek, 2014, p. 46.

⁴¹ See: *Ibid.*, p. 54.

principles of faith, namaz, recital of a few short surahs from the Quran, and study of Islamic etiquette regarding nutrition, sleep, and washing. After acquiring the basic fundamentals, many members stop going to daawat, but continue to read the namaz at home, attend the juma namaz (Friday namaz) at the mosque, and so on. Those who do keep going to daawat continue to increase their religious knowledge by studying the hadiths in the two main books used by the daawatchiks—*Fazail-e-Amaal* and *Collection of Hadiths*—while the book *Stories of the Sahaba* is also sometimes used.⁴²

During their trips, the participants replenish their practical Islamic knowledge and exchange information throughout the day. The absence of extensive knowledge is compensated for by daawat-chik methodology. When preaching, their sermons are built on six main concepts, which they call the six sifats (qualities): faith, namaz, knowledge/zikr, relations with Muslims, sincerity of intention, and daawat-call. These concepts and their basic definitions are recited during the talims, while it is strictly recommended that inexperienced daawatchiks do not depart from this simple structure and do not say anything superfluous. In addition, over time, the number of daawatchiks who gain a full-fledged religious education increases. According to the information obtained from Sirazhidin-domle, one of the movement's leaders and the head of 52 madrasahs in the borough of Archa-Beshik near Bishkek, there are already more than 150 Islamic daawat-chik academics living in Kyrgyzstan.⁴³

The Tablighi Jamaat movement is not officially registered with the corresponding state structures in Kyrgyzstan. However, the SAMK has a daawat department and Maksat Toktomushev, the current mufti of Kyrgyzstan, "is known among the Muslims as the leader of the Tablighi Jamaat movement."⁴⁴

Issues relating to Tablighi Jamaat have been raised at the highest state level in the KR. For example, at the KR Defense Council, where the question of state policy in the religious sphere was discussed on 3 February, 2014; "the activity of the 'Tablighi Jamaat' movement in the republic was designated as a threat. However, a final decision regarding it was not made."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, according to experts, Toktomushev's arrival in the SAMK to some extent signifies legalization and that the authorities recognize Tablighi Jamaat as a moderate movement.

Experts have different opinions about the characteristics of the movement itself. Some note its exclusively positive influence, while others are more critical. The movement's positive characteristics include work with the Muslim community at the level of the ordinary population, efficacious rehabilitation influence on people with addictions, and de-politicization of a large part of the Muslim community.

The negative characteristics include the fact that Tablighi Jamaat is limited in size and does not offer opportunities for intellectual Muslim development. The members of the movement itself do not have sufficient religious knowledge, so representatives of other more radical movements can worm their way in. They irritate the secular part of the population with their appearance and dress.

Experts also question the functioning of the movement's administration center beyond Kyrgyzstan. The movement's instability should also be noted, because its adherents often transfer to other religious organizations. Experts explain this by the fact that Tablighi Jamaat cannot offer anything other than daawat, and those who want to go further and are looking for answers to political questions move on to such organizations as Hizb ut-Tahrir or join Salafism. In this respect, the number of permanent adherents of this movement changes, even though most believers come to Islam through

⁴² See: *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴³ See: *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁴ U. Egizbaev, "V Kyrgyzstane izbran vremenny mufti," available at [<http://rus.azattyk.org/content/article/25223449.html>]; "Osmonaliev: Predstavitel 'Tablighi dzhamaat' stanet muftiem?" available at [http://www.knews.kg/dajdzhest_kyrgyzskoj_pressy/zhany_agym/43252].

⁴⁵ R. Veitsel, "V Kyrgyzstane proiskhodit kardinalnoe izmenenie gosudarstvennoi politiki v otnoshenii religii," Part 2, available at [<http://easttime.ru/analytics/kyrgyzstan/v-kyrgyzstane-izmenenie-gosudarstvennoi-politiki-ch2/6787#sdfootnote1sym>].

Tablighi Jamaat. However, the question of whether they remain faithful to daawat to the end remains open.

It is impossible to reveal the number of permanent members of Tablighi Jamaat in Kyrgyzstan today. According to experts and theologians, the movement has members in essentially every population settlement today. "According to the information of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, in 2011 6,270 went to daawat (sermons) throughout the whole republic, while in 2012 this number had already reached 9,313 people. As for 2013, there are only precise data for Bishkek. Whereas in May 2012, 243 people from the capital went to sermons in the regions, by May 2013, this number had risen to 1,325 people."⁴⁶

However, according to our latest observations and according to members of Tablighi Jamaat themselves, it can be said that the mass inflow of people to daawat has ceased and the backbone that organizes and performs daawat on a systemic basis has already formed. The social composition of the movement consists mainly of the poor strata of the population with secondary education. At the movement, people go to daawat who are in need of rehabilitation from alcoholism, drug addiction, and so on. Some medical drug addiction rehabilitation centers use daawat as one of the effective methods of treatment.

It is a well-known fact that the Tablighi Jamaat movement is banned in the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. According to expert K. Malikov, "the Tablighi Jamaat movement is banned as an extremist organization in the Russian Federation and Tajikistan more for political reasons. However, this movement is neither extremist nor even political in its characteristics and ideology, and is not a threat to the security of these countries, including Kyrgyzstan."⁴⁷ All the local⁴⁸ and Russian⁴⁹ experts polled confirm that Tablighi Jamaat does not present a threat to security in Kyrgyzstan in the religious sphere.

Conclusion

The government structures and secular part of Kyrgyz society have an ambiguous and even suspicious attitude toward religious movements from different countries. The countries representing these religious trends are even accused of penetrating the country primarily in pursuit of their own interests. Nor are there entirely friendly relations among the religious trends themselves; there have even been instances of disputes among them.

One of the reasons the Kyrgyz government and society has this attitude toward these religious movements is that the countries they come from are trying to play the role of "big brother" and proposing their own model of how relations between Islam and the state today should develop. They are also teaching correct Islam and how to become a true Muslim, for, in their opinion, Kyrgyzstan lost its connection with the Muslim world during the years of Soviet power and is in need of the necessary assistance to revive Islam.

It should also be noted that competition, geopolitical rivalry, and the struggle for leadership in the Muslim world among Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the countries of the Indian Peninsula in the republic are also being manifested in the form of a dispute among the jamaats of the KR. Worldviews are clashing, and debates and discussions are going on. In so doing, the members of each trend believe

⁴⁶ R. Veitsel, "Pravda i vymysly o 'Dzhamaat Tablig' na primere Kyrgyzstana," available at [<http://www.islamsng.com/kgz/analytics/7471>].

⁴⁷ From an interview with K. Malikov and A. Malashenko.

⁴⁸ From an interview with PhD. (Polit. Sc.) O. Moldaliev, D.Sc. (Polit. Sc.) K. Malikov, and PhD (Hist.) A. Saliev.

⁴⁹ From an interview with A. Malashenko.

that precisely their way of understanding Islam is the correct and true one and should be seen as a model for emulation.

The Kyrgyz government structures favor the Turkish model of relations between the state and religion. The Turkish influence today is generally seen as positive and moderate, although in the longer term, the prospects for evolution of the Turkish political system toward its Islamization are not entirely clear.

It is not yet possible to identify the opinion of the broad public regarding the religious influence from Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Indian Peninsula. This is mainly due to the population's low awareness about the different ways to understand and explain Islam and the current religious trends. Most of the Kyrgyz population is unable to distinguish among them.

Most of the Kyrgyz population perceives all the trends from other Muslim countries as true Islam. This uncritical, direct perception of Islamic methods of understanding other Muslim countries is primarily related to the fact that since gaining its independence, Kyrgyzstan has only just begun to form its own local method for understanding Islam.
