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ISLAM IN THE DEMOCRATIC CONTEXT OF KYRGYZSTAN: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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I n t r o d u c t i o n

In Kyrgyzstan, Islam is developing along its own lines—in this respect our republic does not differ from other post-Soviet states. The democratic changes have encouraged the building of numerous mosques and madrasahs. Here are several circumstances of obvious importance.

First, religious slogans are used to camouflage political activities. This is true, first and foremost, of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an extremist religious party engaged in destructive activities, and of the active opposition to its ideas recently launched by society and, most importantly, by the clergy. We should always bear in mind, however, that Hizb ut-Tahrir will not shun cruelty.

Second, the clerics across the country have become aware of the need to adjust their methods to society's current demands, to strengthen the horizontal and vertical structures, to establish stable contacts with the faithful, and to become involved in dealing with the urgent social problems.

Third, the radical Islamic ideas brought to the country by all kinds of missionaries and

preachers are gradually replacing traditional Islam with previously unknown madhabs. The Kyrgyz educated abroad in radical religious institutions might add to the tension in the religious community if they try to spread their ideas in Kyrgyzstan.

Fourth, the network of religious organizations is growing at a fast pace—this is one of the dominant local trends. It is obviously important to help the faithful become aware of their spiritual requirements, yet the current trend is mainly quantitative rather than qualitative. This may undermine the position of traditional Islam in the republic. Aware of the danger, the clerics are trying to modernize teaching methods in order to educate a spiritual elite of their own.

Islam in Kyrgyzstan

Islam has deep roots in Kyrgyzstan; but it took it several centuries to become the main local religion. It ultimately became accepted, among other things, due to the trade and economic ties between the Kyrgyz tribes and the Muslim East, the similar nomadic lifestyle of cattle-breeders, and the fact that the country was far removed from the developed Christian states. Moderate Sunni Islam (akhli Sunnat val Jamaat, the Hanafi madhab) predominates in the country for certain historical reasons, while Shi'a Islam is mainly practiced by Azeris and some other peoples.

The religious situation across Central Asia underwent considerable changes when the region joined Russia. Islam's position depended on the way the Russian authorities (whose policies could not be described as consistent) treated it. Russian and Ukrainian peasants, who migrated to Kyrgyzstan in great numbers, created a Christian Orthodox community, a fact that never caused tension or religious conflicts with the local Muslims. Metropolitan Vladimir of Bishkek and Central Asia pointed out that Muslim donors funded construction of three village churches in Turkestan.

The Russian Christian Orthodox Church did nothing to promote Christianity among the local people: only 8 Kara-Kyrgyz, 2 Turkmen, 3 Uzbeks, and 1 Persian (probably a Tajik) embraced Orthodox Christianity during the entire imperial period. Ten Russians (one of them Orthodox Christian priest Gromov) adopted Islam during the same period. It seems that they changed faiths because of their convictions, rather than because of the contacts between Christian Orthodoxy and Islam as a whole.¹ A Kyrgyz iurta (ethnic portable homes of Kyrgyz nomads—*Ed.*) served the first Christian church in the town of Karakol; later it was replaced by a wooden church covered with felt Kyrgyz rugs. Christian priests mainly worked among the Orthodox Christians, while the local Muslims were left in peace to follow their faith.² In fact, the governor of Turkestan issued a decree banning missionary activity among the local people.³

¹ See: Archbishop Vladimir, *...A družey iskat' na Vostoke (Pravoslavie i Islam: protivostoianie ili sodruzhestvo?)*, Tashkent, 2000.

² See: A. Bedelbaev, "Iz istorii deiatel'nosti evropeyskikh missionerov na severe Kyrgyzstana v XIX-nach. XX vv.," *Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii "Buddizm i khristianstvo v kul'turnom nasledii Tsentral'noy Azii,"* Bishkek, 2002.

³ See: E. Ozmitel, *Pravoslavie v Kirgizii. XIX-XX vv. Ist. ocherk*, Bishkek, 2003.

In Soviet times, religion was treated either negatively or very negatively, even though at the very beginning of the communist regime local clerics still retained their role. Beginning in the 1920s, however, the state became very aggressive: religious communities had their temples destroyed or confiscated to be turned into clubs or schools. The number of Muslim communities dropped. Numerous Muslim theologians were subjected to repressions; therefore Islam's intellectual potential and its ability to develop were impaired. Closed mosques and persecuted clerics caused a rapid decline in religious education; religious festivals and rites were strictly limited. The people never completely submitted to the bans: Muslim rites and festivals survived.

During the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, the state relieved its pressure on religion: in 1943, the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan acquired their Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (CASAM) with its headquarters in Tashkent. It is believed that the organization gradually gained weight to finally become the most authoritative among the four spiritual Muslim administrations in the U.S.S.R.⁴ Late in 1945, after a long interval, hajj was permitted again, albeit for small numbers. The faithful were returned several of the previously confiscated mosques.

For nearly forty years the local Muslim communities lived under the jurisdiction of the CASAM. It coordinated the activities of the religious organizations in five union republics—Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenia (the kaziats in the latter four were the CASAM's structural parts). The CASAM had two educational establishments: the Madrasah Mir Arab in Bukhara (opened in 1945) and the Islamic Institute in Tashkent (opened in 1971). Until 1990, they were the only two Islamic educational institutions in the Soviet Union. Duyshonbek azhy Otonbaev, advisor to the mufti of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, reminded us that the extended CASAM kurultay (congress) of 18 October, 1943 appointed Shakir Kozho uulu Alimkhan toro and Shabdan uulu Kamal Moldo the republic's first kazis. During their terms in office, the republic acquired no fewer than 30 cathedral mosques in which namazes were regularly held on Fridays.

Confessional Development of Islam

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the first radical changes in the socialist system were accompanied by revived confessional activities in Kirghizia. Together with other Central Asian republics, it set off on the road to sovereignty, while the republican kaziats began drifting away from the CASAM.

Between 1987 and 1990, prominent theologian S. Kamalov headed the Muslims of Kirghizia; K. Abdurakhmanov came after him and filled the post in 1990-1996 and 2000-2002; between 1996 and 2000, the post belonged to Moldo A. Majitov; and since 2002, M. Zhumanov has been the republic's highest Islamic cleric. Today, religion is playing an increasingly greater role in all spheres of public life in the country populated by representatives of about 30 large ethnic groups and over 80 nationalities. Religion has laid the foundation of their new spiritual values, while this process is being accelerated by the CASAM reforms. New mosques and madrasahs appeared everywhere; many more Kyrgyz students enrolled in Islamic institutions at home and abroad; religious traditions and feasts were revived, missionaries from Muslim states arrived; books and other publications printed at home and abroad became available to all.

In the spring of 1991, Muslims of all nationalities gathered for a congress to set up the Islamic Center of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan; in June the "Turkestan" Spiritual Charity Center appeared.⁵

⁴ See: A. Malashenko, *Islamskoe vozrozhdenie v sovremennoy Rossii*, Moscow Carnegie Center, Moscow, 1998.

⁵ See: B.A. Maltabarov, "Islam kak religia monoteisticheskogo kredo," *Materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii "Islam v istorii Kyrgyzskoy gosudarstvennosti"*, Bishkek, 2003, pp. 17-27.

In 1993, the system of Islamic religious organizations was restructured. As a result, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK) appeared, which began publishing the *Islam Madaniyaty* newspaper in Russian and Kyrgyz. On 26 December, 1996, on the demand of the regional kaziats and the majority of the members of the Ulema Council, the First Kurultay of the Muslims of the republic, which brought together over 450 delegates, was convened. The congress adopted a charter regulating the activities of all the Islamic religious organizations, including the Ulema Council and the Central Auditing Commission. The Kurultay elected Moldo Abdusatar Majitov (the candidate was approved by the Ulema Council) Azreti Mufti. It also elected the Ulema Council, consisting of the republic's 25 most prominent theologians, to supervise religious life in the periods between kurultays.

Qualitative, Quantitative, and Structural Changes

The growing number of Muslim communities and mosques is the most obvious sign of Islamic resurrection in the republic and in other post-Soviet countries. Today, there are 1,613 mosques in Kyrgyzstan (compared with 39 cathedral mosques in 1991). Islamic revival is especially evident in the South, the population of which has, at all times, been more religious than in the North due to its geopolitical situation and ethnic composition. By early 2005, there were 1,598 registered mosques. In 1998, there were 464 mosques; in 1999, 765; in 2001, 924; in 2002, 975; in 2003, 1,144; and on 15 April, 2004, 1,588. The Osh Region leads in terms of the number of mosques (545); until 1989 there were only 10 of them, dating from 1943-1947; there are 440 mosques in the Dzhahalal-Abad Region, 219 in Batken Region; 161 in the Chu Region; 73 in the Talas Region; 56 in Issyk Kul Region; and 52 in the Naryn Region.

Some of them belong on the republic's list of historical and cultural monuments: the Ravat-i Abdullakhan mosque was built in the 16th century; the Takht-i-Sulayman, Muhammed Iusuf Baykhodji oglu, and Bokiy mosques date to 1909; the Shahid-Tepe, to 1909-1910; the Sadykbai mosque in Osh, the mosques in Karakol and in the villages of Kalininskoe and Zhayylgan (Manas District) were built early in the 20th century; and the mosque in the village of At-Bashi (At-Bashi District) late in the 19th century.

New and reconstructed Islamic religious facilities undoubtedly help satisfy the nation's spiritual requirements, yet the process no longer takes into account the real demands. On many occasions new mosques, which cost a lot and required other investments, stand idle without either imams or the faithful (this is especially typical of the Chu Region). Sometimes, new mosques and madrasahs are located haphazardly: there are settlements or even urban neighborhoods with several mosques in them; and there is a new trend toward performing religious rites according to ethnic and cultural specifics. Here is how a newspaper commented on this: "In a small village in the Talas Region, there are four (!) mosques. People who pass through the village invariably marvel at the local people's piety. Each of the mosques belongs to a clan and is attended solely by its members. The local people have grown accustomed to this; the number of imams is the only inconvenience."⁶ Another author has written: "There are several mosques in some villages because tribes and clans want to pray in their own mosques. They compete among themselves by hastily erecting beautiful buildings. I am afraid, however, that haphazard mosque-building will cause clan clashes or even serious clan conflicts."⁷

⁶ R. Rakhimov, "Veruiul," *Argumenty i fakty Kyrgyzstan*, No. 1, 2001.

⁷ V. Djumataeva, "Problemy islamizatsii v Kyrgyzstane," *Delo No. ...*, No. 30 (448), 3 October, 2001, p. 5.

Analysts expect that the non-registered Islamic facilities might cause problems: certain forces could use them to meet and ideologically justify their anti-democratic actions. According to President of Tajikistan Rakhmonov, mosques are used for extremist propaganda. By way of example, the president pointed to one of the largest districts, the Isfara District, which lies between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.⁸ At the same time, experts fear that the money certain mosques and Muslim communities receive from abroad is making the local clerics and the faithful dependent on foreign “investors.” This creates conditions for unlimited propaganda of religious ideas and madhabs alien to Kyrgyzstan.

This may cause religious tension and threaten society and the state. The republican clergy should decide how to develop Islam in full accordance with the local mentality, traditions, and historically shaped canonical ideas. We have to study in detail the interaction among all kinds of religious schools (Andijan, Namangan, Ferghana, Khujent, etc.) and the local type of Islam and their influence on the religious situation in the Central Asian countries.

It is believed that a serious analysis of the religious situation should be launched; that alternative approaches to religious education should be sought; and that the state should adequately respond to the confessional changes in the local countries. We should take into account, however, that because the faithful move from one madhab to another, the traditional Hanafi madhab is ceding its place to Hanbali madhab, Wahhabism, and certain other radical Islamic trends.

Problems of Religious Education

Before 1991, the republic had no Muslim educational establishments of its own; today there is one Islamic university, as well as 6 colleges, and 43 madrasahs. At the same time, increasingly larger numbers of young people are seeking religious education abroad. According to the local media, there are about 600 young men from Kyrgyzstan studying in Islamic educational establishments abroad. The SAMK offers the following figures: in Pakistan there are over 50 Kyrgyz students; in Turkey, 76; in Egypt, 185 (all of them students of the Al'Azhar International Islamic University); in Syria, 17, Kuwait, 7; Saudi Arabia, 43 (7 of them studying in Mecca, others in Medina); Jordan, 3; the UAE, 1; Libya, 1; Iran, 10; the Russian Federation, 20. The list is not complete since many of those studying abroad found their own illegal ways to get there.

In the 1990s, the Islamic education system in the republic consisted of three stages: madrasahs at village or cathedral mosques (hujira), which provided basic information about Islam; independent madrasahs with fixed terms of study; and higher educational establishments. The Soviet Muslims were isolated far too long (seventy years) from the rest of the Islamic world to maintain an adequate educational level; and the Islamic legal culture and spiritual roots were lost.⁹ The majority of the religious educational establishments are unable to properly organize the teaching process due to an inadequate material and technical base and insufficient experience, as well as a shortage of trained teachers and religious teaching aids. In many of the republic's madrasahs and colleges, teaching is limited to Koranic studies and religious rites. On the one hand, there are not enough trained teachers prepared to work on teaching curricula; while on the other, the majority of the local Muslims are convinced that the ability to read and understand the Koran, perform the rites, and explain the basic Surahs is more than enough for any Muslim.

⁸ See: V. Volkov, N. Khorunzhiy, “Rossia sokhraniaet svoe prisutstvie v Tsentral'noy Asii,” *Izvestia*, 5 December, 2002.

⁹ See: D.B. Malysheva, “Postsovetkiy Vostok v poiskakh religioznoy identichnosti,” *NG-Religii*, 18 September, 2002, p. 3.

However, the clergy believes that religious education should be better organized to cover Islamic theology and law, as well as secular subjects such as management, marketing, computer skills, history of religions, and foreign languages.

At the same time, in many madrasahs study courses are prolonged without good reason; some of them teach a narrow circle of theological subjects, thus making it hard for their graduates to find employment and become socially adapted. Today, the integration of the young madrasah graduates into civil society and their development into socially active individuals is one of the most urgent problems. They cannot be employed by secular organizations since the republic still lacks a system for licensing religious educational establishments, as well as certifying and accepting their graduation documents. (It should be added that religious education is not covered by the Law on Education.) This makes young graduates unemployable: nearly all imams are old people who prefer to transfer their posts to relatives.

The ICG analysts believe that religious education is one of the major problems of Islam in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰ Recently, experts have pointed out that this problem has not been resolved in any of the Central Asian republics; their state structures are just as concerned with it as the clerics. They believe that secular education and the principle of separation of religion from the state should become part of the country's legal system (that is, what we should expect from the Law on Religious Education). There is the opinion that religious extremism and terrorism are, in some way, products of an inadequate religious education and that it should be improved and upgraded to contribute to the common counterterrorist efforts.¹¹

The revived religious activities have created a shortage of well-educated clerics in Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere. According to the media, this was one of the reasons why all manner of foreign funds and missions were able to flood post-Soviet republics with their teachers, missionaries, and publications. It can be said that they were partly responsible for the destructive trends and groups that made their appearance in the republic, as well as for religious extremism. Some of the religious centers are using religious education to turn young men into radical fanatics who, it is reported, may join the ranks of religious extremists. This is very probable in the CIS. Rector of the Moscow Islamic University Imam-Khatyb Marat Murtazin pointed out that in the early 1990s, spiritual revival of the Muslims across the former Soviet Union created a shortage of educated imams, teachers, theologians, and experts in the Shari'a and other Islamic sciences. He said that the Arab Muslim world was expected to supply the post-Soviet countries with purely religious ideas devoid of political overtones and admitted: "The process of spiritual revival through the import of religious ideas turned out to be a painful one."¹²

We must point out that the majority of those who went abroad to receive Islamic education brought back not only Islamic theological knowledge, but also religious ideas and teaching which had nothing in common with the local traditions. Some of the former students are actively disseminating extreme Islamic trends; and their activities are negatively affecting local Muslim communities.

It should be said that the Law on the Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations, which speaks about separating the state educational system from religious organizations, says nothing about religious educational establishments; the law even permits lessons on spirituality and morals in secondary schools without specifying their content. This made it possible to teach the basics of certain religions and to invite clerics to do this in violation of the principles of separation of the state educational system from religion. Indeed, the law stipulates independence of education from the political and religious institutions, as well as the secular nature of education in state schools.

¹⁰ *Tsentrāl'naia Azia: Islam i gosudarstvo. ICG, doklad po Azii*, No. 59, Osh-Brussels, 10 July, 2003.

¹¹ See: K.K. Mamataliev, K.S. Murzakhalilov, "Obshchie problemy religioznogo obrazovaniia v Kyrgyzstane," *Materialy Mezhdunarodnoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii "Svoboda veroispovedaniia i obespecheniia mezhreligioznogo vzaimoponimaniia v stranakh Tsentrāl'noy Azii*, Bishkek, 2004, pp. 150-159.

¹² V. Volkov, N. Khorunzhiy, op. cit.

Many countries around the world are familiar with these and similar problems, yet each of them has specifics of its own. This calls for an analysis of the state of religious education in Kyrgyzstan, its normative and legal base, instances of illegal interference of religious organizations in the functioning of state educational establishments, and the relations between the state and religious associations in the sphere of education. The time has come to draft another Law on Religious Education in order to remove the present misunderstandings. In so doing, we should keep in mind that Kyrgyzstan is a secular state and that religious education is slowly but surely developing into an inalienable part of the general education process.

Specific Features of Islamic Missionary Activities

Attracted by the Islamic revival, construction of new cultic facilities, and rebirth of religious education, Islamic missionaries from the Middle East started coming to the republic to spread Islam among the local people. Between 1996 and 2004, 243 missionaries were re-registered in Kyrgyzstan with a corresponding state structure. In 2003 alone, 60 of them were working in the republic; while in 2004 there were 43. They come mainly from Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Jordan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and other countries; most of them are employed by Islamic educational establishments where they teach Arabic, the Shari'a fundamentals, and purely theological subjects.

Since some of foreign missionaries prefer to illegally spread religious ideas, rules, and customs which contradict those commonly accepted in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the traditional madhab, the SAMK leaders kept the services and the number of such people to the minimum. Still, the activities of those who continue promoting a one-sided and destructive approach to Islam should be given a principled assessment, while their negative influence should be cut short. According to A. Kniazev, missionaries from many religious-political groups have been illegally working in the republic since the 1990s. They were sent by Jamiat-ul-Islami and Jamiat-ul-Ulema (Pakistan), Daavat-ul-irshat, Sunni-Tehrib and Hara Qatur-ansar (the Liberation Army) of unknown affiliation; Islami Jamiat-ul Tuliaba (Afghanistan, the Taliban), and others.¹³

We are convinced that Pakistani missionaries and students from Pakistani educational establishments (the SAMK officially sent 51 young men there to be educated) represent the greatest danger to the republic. According to information obtained from indirect sources, there are at least 300 young Kyrgyz studying in that country, who left the republic through unofficial channels. Certain media warn that there are numerous religious extremist organizations engaged in training Islamic missionaries functioning in Pakistan. Their students are then sent illegally to the Muslim countries to preach reactionary Islam.

The ICG has reported that all kinds of Islamic groups have been appearing in Kyrgyzstan under the influence of people who received their religious education abroad: the Tablikh, made up of young men who studied in Pakistan, is the most active among them. The group is engaged in what its members call "daavat."¹⁴ The combination of destructive Islamic trends and daavat-ists is causing concern. This applies not so much to daavat itself as to the methods and forms used by the daavat-ists to profess Islam, even though the SAMK issued a fatwah against them.¹⁵ The type of Islam they are out to im-

¹³ See: A. Kniazev, "Afghanskiy faktor dlia Tsentral'noy Azii," *Afghanskiy konflikt i radikal'ny islam v Tsentral'noy Azii*, Collection of documents and materials, Ilim Publishers, Bishkek, 2001.

¹⁴ *Tsentral'naya Azia: Islam i gosudarstvo*.

¹⁵ See: O.Sh. Mamaiusupov, *Voprosy (problemy) religii na perekhodnom periode*, Bishkek, 2003.

pose on the faithful causes rejection and frequently destabilizes the situation. For example, the daavat-ists call on the people to stop paying state land and water taxes, they ban TV watching, announce that women should perform namaz five times a day under the threat of divorce, that children should receive education in mosques rather than in secular schools, etc.

The daavat-ists are focusing their attention on young people; they are planting the idea that daavat is the duty of each Muslim and creating a negative opinion about those who disagree with this. This is creating fertile ground for propagandizing religious extremist ideas supported by Hizb ut-Tahrir, disseminating extremist writings, and organizing special events under the guise of daavat designed to attract new members.

Realization of Religious Rights and Freedoms

Hajj to Mecca holds a special place among the restored Islamic rituals. In Soviet years, hajj was reduced to a minimum. According to the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, in 1989, 31 Soviet Muslims went to Mecca to fulfill their spiritual duty, compared to the 9,000 to 10,000 who performed hajj before the 1917 revolution.¹⁶ During the period of independence, hajj was been revived as a new public phenomenon accepted by the wide masses. Today, over 2 million Muslims go to Mecca every year; in the 10-odd years of independence over 20,000 people have undertaken hajj to Mecca and over 500 citizens of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan have undertaken umra, also known as “smaller hajj.” In 1990, 40 people from Kyrgyzstan performed hajj, in 1991 their number was 350;¹⁷ in 2003, 3,000; and in 2004, over 4,000. This shows that the republican state structures and the clergy have established good contacts and understanding with their colleagues in Saudi Arabia.

As soon as Kyrgyzstan joined the WTO it became much easier to get visas, which allows the local people to individually organize their trips. Starting in 2003, hajj became much better organized; many problems and obstacles were eliminated. The SAMK alone has the right to organize such trips.

Veneration of the holy places (mazars)—mausoleums, cemeteries, and natural objects, such as springs and rivers, groves, trees, mountains and stones, and unusual buildings—is common among the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan. Pilgrimages to such places have been very popular among them at all times, women playing an especially active role in maintaining this tradition. It seems that in Kyrgyzstan there are many more such places than anywhere else in Central Asia.¹⁸ Some areas abound in such places: the Buran Tower in Tokmak, Gumbaz Manas. The south, where non-Muslims account for a mere 3 to 4 percent of the total population and where the share of the faithful among the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks is especially high, is rich in holy places. The most important places of veneration are located there, such as Ydyrys Paygambar, Shah Fazil, Pach-Ata, Khoja-Bilial, Kadamjay, Abshyr-Ata, Sakhabalar, Kojokelen, Aiup Paygambar and Taht-i-Sulayman, which attract large crowds in the month of Ramazan and Kurban-ayt. Osh is often called the second Mecca.

Hizb ut-Tahrir

There are religious political organizations prepared to carry out clandestine propaganda by distributing leaflets and other publications to plant the ideas of jihad in the minds of people in Central

¹⁶ See: M. Zargishev, “S pomoshch’iu Allakha po puti Koranicheskoy istiny,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 April, 1993.

¹⁷ See: B.A. Maltabarov, *Religia i sotsial’no-politicheskie protsessy v Kyrgyzstane*, Bishkek, 2002.

¹⁸ See: A. Tabyshalieva, “Vzgliad na religioznuu situatsiyu v Kyrgyzstane,” *Tsentrāl’naia Azia*, No. 11, 1997.

Asia. The illegal Hizb ut-Tahrir party has shouldered the burden of what is called “religious enlightenment” of the local peoples, especially of the Kyrgyz, who it believes are not yet ready to embrace its radical ideas. The party declares it is out to revive the Islamic community and Muslim lifestyle in the form of a worldwide Caliphate.¹⁹

According to the media, the U.S.-led international coalition acting in Afghanistan forced the terrorist structures (al-Qa’eda, the Taliban, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) to use the latter’s clandestine network to destabilize the situation in Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus. (Significantly, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan now calls itself the Islamic Movement of Turkestan to demonstrate that it is not limiting itself to one country and is resolved to dominate the entire region.) Sh. Akmalov, deputy rector of the Tashkent Islamic University, has pointed out that the defeats the Taliban suffered in the successful counterterrorist operation in Afghanistan made Hizb ut-Tahrir even more belligerent.²⁰

As an ultra-reactionary extremist party, Hizb ut-Tahrir is outlawed in the Middle East and Central Asia (including Kyrgyzstan). Due to contradictions among its leaders, two groups recently detached themselves from Hizb ut-Tahrir in Central Asia—Hizb an-Nusra and Akramiyya. In many of the Muslim countries, Hizb ut-Tahrir remains on the periphery of political activities because the mainstream Muslims normally view its ideology as non-orthodox. However, in Central Asia, where theological knowledge is fairly superficial, the party finds it easy to convince people, primarily young people, with the help of theoretical postulates and the latest information technologies.

According to ICG analysts,²¹ Hizb ut-Tahrir is spreading utopian approaches to political Islam, under which many of the social evils (primarily corruption and poverty) will be uprooted by the Shari‘a and Muslim governance. The organization has failed so far to publicly explain how this can be achieved. This is confirmed, in particular, by the fact that when talking to ICG people, many of the party members failed to explain how the Caliphate would deal with the social problems, how it would treat the followers of other religions, and how it would manage the economy.

An analysis of political publications and other sources shows that in Central Asia the Hizb ut-Tahrir leaders identified the population groups which might potentially support the idea of the Islamic Caliphate (even if it took time to convince them). They were the socially vulnerable groups (unemployed, pensioners, students, and large families); members of local executive structures who have the power to protect party cells against persecution; and people employed by the law enforcement bodies, who if need be could extend real support. The party leaders rely on the ayats of the Koran and the hadiths while openly calling for civil disobedience, fanning religious fanaticism and ethnic intolerance, and supplying very specific advice on how to change the constitutional order. Naturally enough, they select those Islamic postulates that coincide with their intentions. This selective treatment of the main Islamic sources makes it possible to dupe ignorant readers and audiences.²² The party concentrates on the socially vulnerable groups and on mountain dwellers as potential party members, while piedmont and mountainous regions are regarded as suitable guerilla terrain.

The above testifies that Hizb ut-Tahrir is acting according to a well-substantiated strategic program; this is further confirmed by the stores of explosives and weapons found up in the mountains in 2002.

¹⁹ See: O. Moldaliev, *Sovremennyye vyzovy bezopasnosti Kyrgyzstana i Tsentral’noy Azii*, Bishkek, 2001.

²⁰ See: Sh. Akmalov, *Hizb ut-Tahrir—kak istochnik ugroz regional’noy bezopasnosti* [ЦентрАзия. <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1057154700>], 2 July, 2003.

²¹ See: “The IMU and the Hizb ut-Tahrir: Implication of the Afghanistan Campaign,” *ICG Asia Briefing Paper*, 30 January, 2002.

²² See: A.K. Zayfert, A. Kraykemayer, *O sovmestimosti politicheskogo islama i bezopasnosti v prostranstve OBSE*, Sharki Ozod Publishers, Dushanbe, 2003, pp. 211-224.

While following the general trend of intensified terrorism and extremism around the world, the religious extremist party is stepping up its activities in Kyrgyzstan where its ideas were readily accepted by the socially vulnerable groups in the Kara-Suu, Bazar-Kurgan, Suza, Aravan, and Uzgen districts, and in Osh and Dzhahal-Abad. The party entered a new stage of its propaganda efforts by reaching the Chu and Issyk Kul regions. Leaflets and other extremist publications have been appearing more frequently in crowded places, while in some places people are becoming open about their support of the party and trying to impose its ideas on their neighbors. The party mostly attracts uneducated unemployed youth from rural areas. In the north, the party's ideas are mostly promoted at the Bishkek markets—the points of convergence of young people flocking to the capital in search of employment. Away from their parents and deprived of family control, they fall easy prey to the party's propaganda.

Islam and Democracy

In 2002, the Ulema Council of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan held a special meeting to discuss issues that the faithful, the clerics, and the theologians found urgent. This applied to the tasks posed by the First Kurultay of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, which elected a new mufti. The umma hailed the first statements of the new SAMK leaders, while the measures they took gave hope of consolidation inside the SAMK and among the Muslims.

Today, the SAMK structures (the kaziats) are functioning in all regions, there are also district and city mosques headed by chief imam-khatybs whose task is to coordinate all religious activities on their territories. The cathedral mosques that gather people for namaz on Fridays are headed by imam-khatybs; smaller local mosques which do not conduct Friday services are headed by imams. The SAMK and the regional kaziats are responsible for the Islamic educational establishments on their territories.

The Azreti Mufti has four deputies (naibs); the SAMK has the following departments: the fatwah; the daavat; the mosques and educational establishments; foreign relations; construction; press services, office, and bookkeeping department. The new SAMK leaders streamlined the documentary flow and the archives. In fact, in the past the SAMK had no archives to speak of, which made it impossible to carry out scholarly investigations on the history of Islam in the republic. Today, the new leaders are concentrating on the latest information and communication technologies supplied to all departments and local structures.

The Second Kurultay of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan held on 2003 analyzed Islam's confessional development in the republic, and its problems and prospects in light of the democratic changes taking place in the country. The Kurultay pointed out in particular that ordinary Muslims were sometimes pushed toward extremism by the ill-considered actions of non-conscientious imams.²³ In the last two years, the SAMK has done a lot to bring order to the Islamic structure in the republic and to assess the clerics. An Islamic University was opened in 2003 to educate knowledgeable theologians and provide scholarly and methodological assistance for the republic's Muslim educational establishments. It should be said that the local system of Islamic religious education has changed for the better, and that there are obvious efforts to raise its standards and quality with the help of the latest technologies and by familiarizing students with generally accepted democratic values.

To help heal social wounds, the SAMK has established partner relationships with international Islamic sponsors and other organizations; today the SAMK leaders and local clerics are actively coop-

²³ See: O.Sh. Mamaiusupov, K.S. Murzakhilov, K.K. Mamataliev, *Islam v Kyrgyzstane: tendentsii razvitiia*, Bishkek, 2004.

erating with the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) and the U.N. Development Program (UNDP). In 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 these two organizations, working together with the religious leaders and clerics, conducted a series of seminars on reproductive health and a proper attitude to a healthy lifestyle. The republic has still be unable to cope with the problems created by infant and mother mortality, the growing number of sick children, including those born sick, prostitution, drug addiction, AIDS, etc. Islamic theologians are convinced that they cannot remain indifferent to these social evils.

According to foreign experts, the pilot forms of involvement of Islamic clerics in socially important projects have no analogies in Central Asia or elsewhere in the world.