Chapter Three

GROWTH OF FUNDAMENTALISM AND RADICAL GROUPS
IN CENTRAL ASIA
The great purges in the Muslim republics under the Soviets, which was to destroy the pre-Revolutionary Muslim intelligentsia, began in 1928. It started in Crimea with the execution of Veli Ibrahim, First Secretary of the Tatar Communist Party and the liquidation of Milli Firka. In Kazakhstan, the execution of Alash Orda coincided with the forced sedentarisation of the nomads, which was to ruin the country and cost thousands of lives. In Central Asia, all the leading members of young Bukharan movement and nearly all the pre-revolutionary intellectuals were eliminated from local Communist parties between 1922-1938.¹

The “Muslim National Communists” were liquidated by Stalin in the 1930s. With their demise also went the attempt at partnership with the Russians, which was seen by the Muslim leadership as the least painful means of throwing off foreign domination. One final attempt, however, was made to shake off the ‘infidel’ yoke, when during the World War II, the conservatives North Caucasian Mountaineers rose in armed revolt. But this attempt too was crushed.²

Under Khrushchev, the situation in Central Asian region remained the same. He had an uncompromising hostile attitude towards Islam and other religions. The anti-Islamic propaganda increased massively. He tried to portray the Soviet Union as a centre of the world Communist movement; especially during the Bandung Conference of 1955, the Soviet image makers were successful in portraying Soviet Union as an important Asian power and not just a country with large Muslim components.³ Until the early 1960s, the Soviet Muslims lived behind an iron curtain.⁴

¹ A. Yakabov, Muslims in the USSR, Moscow, Novosti Press, USSR, 1980, pp. 111-112
³ Ibid, p. 30
⁴ Mutahir Ahmed, op. cit., p. 73.
The period 1964-79 saw a major shift in the policies of the Soviet Union towards its Muslim population. During the 1960s, a new generation of young experts on Islam emerged from the Soviet educational establishment. They were totally different from the dogmatic experts of the Stalin and Khrushchev periods. These scholars were not only better equipped with secular knowledge but also were acquainted with Islamic traditional education. During this period, the activities of the Soviet Islamic establishments received wide media coverage. Several initiatives were taken, including organisation of conferences in Tashkent in 1970 and 1973, another in Samarkand in 1974 to commemorate the 1200th anniversary of Imam Ismail-al- Bukhari. Numerous visits to Muslim countries were arranged to project a favourable image of the status of the Muslims in the Soviet Union.

After 1985, the society in the former USSR diametrically changed. Gorbachev's 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' changed the entire scene. But prior to this, the religious policy of Soviet Russia, its policy towards the Muslims in particular had created a different phenomenon—the phenomenon of "unofficial Islam" that worked clandestinely and became root of the future radicalisation of Islam in Central Asia and elsewhere in the CIS.

Gorbachev was the only Soviet leader who did not have a well publicised anti-religious agenda as his preoccupation and the target of his over all planning was with economic health of the country. During the first couple of years of his rule he chose to maintain status quo as far as religious matter was concerned. After the 27th Party congress held in late February 1986, he reiterated the Brezhnevian anti-religious views saying, "the party will use all forms of

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ideological influence for the wider propagation for a scientific prejudices without permitting any violation of believer's feelings".6

For Gorbachev, however, the battle against Islam in Central Asia was more than a battle against a religion or a reactionary world view. As Olcott then pointed out, “the prevalence of Islam is viewed by (Gorbachev) as troublesome in so far as it undermines the regime's reform programme”.7 This general perception became Gorbachev's driving force in Central Asia.

By 1988, the Soviet policies towards Islam and for that matter other religions, began to show signs of positive change. It was the same time when Gorbachev's reform initiatives, in particular, glasnost, began to draw response in Central Asia. Groups and associations in informal way appeared with location specific agendas, some of which later evolved into political parties and monuments.

The second phase of Gorbachev's rule that roughly extended from 1988-1991 saw again major shifts in Gorbachev's policy orientation. The 1988 defeat of the anti-religious hardliners paved the way for religious reforms, which culminated in a new law on freedom of conscience on 1 October 1990. In the law containing 31 articles, article 3 professed the rights to freedom of conscience, placing "only those restrictions that are necessary for protecting public safety and order, life, health and morality, as well as the rights and liberties of other citizens", article 11 provided for establishment of religious educational institutions, article 13 extended legal statuses to religious organisations. By early 1989, Islam had joined the ranks of other free religions in the Soviet Union with enthusiastic reopening of old

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mosques and holy shrines, *madrassah*, collective Friday prayers, religious festivals and pilgrimage to holy place in Central Asia.

**Radical Islam in the USSR**

While the Sufi movement in Central Asia remained buoyant, it by no means represented the whole of 'parallel' or 'underground' Islam in the USSR. A number of other smaller but more militant movements were active in the Soviet Union since the 1930s. The Muslim brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Moslemeen*) had succeeded in creating a number of secret cells in Dagestan in 1920s. The Wahhabi movement had also established a presence, especially in Turkmenistan, in the 1930s. Wahhabism was brought to Central Asia in 1912 by Sayyed Sharie Muhammad, a native of Medina in Arabia. He created many circles some of which remain active. An important circle in Tashkent was named after Bahauddin Vaisov, a Wahhabi teacher who died in Moscow in 1950s. It is unlikely that the brotherhood was able to survive the period of Stalinist terror in the mid-1930s, but judging by the attacks made on it by the Soviet media during the 1970s and 1980s, the movement had almost certainly managed to retain some influence.

After Iranian Islamic Revolution, however, still more militant Islamic groups began to appear on the Soviet scene. Islamic 'Samizdat' (underground literature), generally known as 'Islamizdat' started from 1982 onwards was part of the initiatives taken by these new groups of Muslim radicals. Judging by their literature the groups were patterned after the *fidayeen* of Islam and Egyptian Taqfir

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wal-Higrah movements. They were committed to the eventual overthrow of the Soviet system which they described in their literature as ‘Shaytani’ (satanic) and taghuti (in revolt, against God). Because they operated in small secret cells often with little or no formal organisational contact with one another, the radical group cannot be described as a single movement. Nor can their exact numerical strength be ascertained. But through the attacks made on them by the official media and a survey of ‘Islamizdat’ available, it was clear that such groups were active in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Dagestan and Azerbaijan.

The new radical groups seemed to be specially strong in Tajikistan where over fifty Muslims were reportedly in prison in 1989. Those arrested belonged to five different cells dedicated to the propagation of a militant and combative version of Islam. Unlike ‘official’ Islam which attracts the older generation and the tariqats which have a special place among the middle-aged professionals, the new radical groups appeal to the young and the less favourite.10

The leader of one group, Ashghar Shah Jaberov, arrested in a raid on his home in 1986, was born in 1958. A native of Kulyab, he had turned his modest house into a meeting place for fellow Muslims. Another member of the same group, also arrested in Kulyab was Ne’matallah Inayatov, a mullah born in 1950.

A second group of Tajik militants dismantled in the Leningradsky district, was also led by a young mullah Abdul Rahim Karimov. This group included three university students and operated a clandestine press.

A third group discovered in the Vakhsh district of Tajikistan, consisted of the close supporters of Mullah Abdullah Ibn Nureddin Sa’idov who had emerged as a charismatic leader in the region. Another young mullah Rajab-Ali Sha’yev (born in 1955) was arrested in Doshanbeh as the head of a group of Muslim militants.

A fourth group headed by Imaduddin Ahmadjanov, a young engineer born in 1962, was dismantled in Doshanbeh in 1982. He was sentenced to nine years imprisonment, including three years in a labour camp.\textsuperscript{11}

Between 1982 and 1989, eight Muslim militant groups were broken up by the authorities in Uzbekistan. One group led by Sayyed Karim Khajov, was active in Tashkent and had produced the Smizdat' booklet \textit{Truth about Islam} in 1982. Khajov was in contact with another group of militants led by Piyar Jafarov, active also in Tashkent; Jafarov was arrested in the summer of 1982. A third Islamic militant group functioned under the leadership of Sayyad Karim Azymov in Tashkent, where it operated a clandestine Quranic school.

A fourth group had as its head, Mardan Puladov, a merchant who was arrested with his daughter Jamilah Qamtrova in 1985. They operated an Islamizdat Centre in the city of Samarkand, Abu Zakar Rahimov who led another radical group in Tashkent, was arrested in 1982 and sentenced to seven years detention in a labour camp. In August 1985 another group was discovered in Bukhara, and its leader Sayyad Gafur Usulev, was sentenced to four years hard labour. Two more groups were broken up by the police in Ugrench and Khiva and their leaders, Abul-Qassem Yadagarov and Ashraf Bassirev, were arrested.\textsuperscript{12}

In Turkmenistan, two clandestine cells were uncovered in Ashgabat and Charju in the winter of 1987.\textsuperscript{13} Their leaders, Arslan Salurbayev and Akbarkhaqaov were sentenced to three years of hard labour each.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. p. 190.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. p. 390.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. p. 391.
In Kazakhstan, a group of militants led by Kelim Qurbanov was broken up by the authorities in Jambul and its clandestine printing press seized in March 1988. This group was also accused of having organised an illegal school.14

Similarly, there were Islamic radical groups in northern Caucasus, fighting for an Islamic Dagestan and in Azerbaijan, which were crushed and dismantled by the Soviet authorities. The Soviet authorities had invoked a variety of laws in their campaign against Islamic radicals. Some militants were charged for anti-state activities and thus treated as political prisoners. A majority however, were tried and sentenced under criminal law and treated as ordinary felons.

There are different views forwarded by various scholars regarding the culmination of this radical and fundamentalist development in USSR. Amir Taheri opines that in the 1980s when religious groups were gaining ground, they were a long way from preaching terrorism as a means of achieving their secular goals. Throughout the 1980s, they tried to find ways to achieve a better understanding of the experience of other Muslim countries, especially Iran and Egypt, and to create the minimum of native literature needed for the future growth of the radical Islamic movement in the USSR. In other words, the best part of the energy of the clandestine groups was spent on theoretical work and education. At no point, did they try to take on the Soviet authorities in a direct confrontation and were content to allow official Islam and Muslim intellectuals associated with the Communist Party to recapture from the Soviets as much of the public space as possible. At best, the radicals acted as a pressure group militating for more decisive action by official Islam, student organisations, intellectuals associations and even sections of local party structures. The tactic of ‘leading from behind’- successfully tested by

Muslim radicals in Egypt, Algeria, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan—seemed to have been copied by many members of the radical Islamic movement in the USSR. The radicals were able to apply a certain degree of pressure, for example, during the Kazakhstan riots in 1986 or throughout the demonstrations leading to the resignation of Mufti Shamsuddin Baba Khan, without exposing themselves to the danger of being arrested.

It is difficult to gauge the effects of the anti-radical crackdown in the 1980s. However, judging from the fact that “Islamizdat” continued to thrive and expand, and that the number of Quranic schools did not diminish, it was possible to suggest that radical Islam had by no means been rooted out from the Soviet Union. As mentioned earlier, with the onset of the decade of 1990s, the scene in USSR and Muslim dominated Central Asia was much more different than the earlier one. The latent forces of radicalism and fundamentalism in the region assumed a force of greater magnitude when combined with violence and terrorism.

By October 1991, all the five Central Asian republics declared their independence. Like many post-colonial societies these republics were also faced with serious political uncertainties that have been brought about by the clash of the old Communist power structure, reorganised under a nationalist disguise, and the emerging new Islamic and democratic forces in each republic. Out of these two the former proved more formidable and lasting. Since 1980s, a number of Islamic parties, organisations, and movements with a variety of ideological orientations entered into the public arena of Central Asian republics. Driven by political objectives, these forces have presented a qualitatively different face of Central Asian Islam, which has been marked with fundamentalist and radical features and
some of them even have violently confronted the establishment resorting to terrorist tactics.

**Islam and Democracy in Uzbekistan (IDU)**

Two types of Islamic organisations have been active on the Central Asian political scene in recent years. The first is the republican parties that have so far exhibited weak to moderate organisational and mobilisation capabilities, encompassing a wide range of ideological tendencies. The most radical of these organisations have either gone underground or have been absorbed by other organisations during the last two years. One such organisation was Islam and democracy of Uzbekistan, which held its founding Congress in Alma-Ata (Almaty), the capital of Kazakhstan, on 28 October 1988. Though at first, it hoped to become an inter-republican party drawing its support from all over Central Asia, it failed to reach beyond Uzbekistan's cities and rural areas. According its Chairman, Almaz Estekov, the basic objective of the organisation was "the spiritual cleansing of people from the immortality and preaching of the Democratic principles of the Koran". The organisation was instrumental in forcing the removal of Mufti Babakhanov (Babakhan), in 1989 subsequent to a series of demonstrations on 3 February. The leading members of the party had apparently produced evidence attesting to the fact that Babakhan drank alcoholic beverage, womanised and lacked the necessary religious board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. The membership of the party was estimated at 2,500 in 1989, of whom the overwhelming majority came from Uzbekistan's cities of Andijan, Bukhara and Samarkand. Though it is not very clear what actually happened to the party towards 1996 but it is probable that, as a fundamentalist party, Islam and

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15 Mehrdad Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 85.
17 Mehrdad Haghayeghi, op. cit.
democracy may have been absorbed by larger organisations of the same ideological colourings in 1990.\textsuperscript{18}

**People's Front of Uzbekistan**

The People's Front of Uzbekistan is also a radical organisation operating out of Tashkent. Due to its clandestine nature, little has been publicised about its activities apart from the fact that it supports the establishment of an Islamic republic.\textsuperscript{19}

Similarly, the Islamic Democratic Party has been advocating the creation of a theocracy modelled after the Islamic Republic of Iran. In a 1999 interview, one of the party leaders, Dadkhan Hassan, had openly praised the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, indicating that "KFhemeini was very good for us". In its founding Congress, he called for veiling of women and the imposition of Islamic law on Uzbek society. Hassan, however, pointed out that "we will not attempt to seize power by force.... our strategy first is to unite all our Muslims.... and the then to educate the new generation in the spirit of Islam".\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, the party was to nominate candidates for local offices on an Islamic platform with the aim of replacing the secular Soviet laws with *Sharia* law. The party's objective was nothing short of a non-violent Islamic revolution in the region. The proceedings of the party congress were broadcast live by a local radio station in Namangan without government interference. Yet, the scope of the party's activities has been limited to the city of Namangan in Uzbekistan.

**Alash**

In Kazakhstan, an Islamic party named "Alash" for the National Independence of Kazakhstan was established in April 1990. Headed by Aron

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} *Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 1990.
Atabek and Rashid Yutoshev, the party had been pressing for the creation of an Islamic state in Kazakhstan. On 13 December 1991, the Alash party held a meeting during which a decision was to taken to remove the mufti of Kazakhstan, Nysnnbai Uly Ratbek, who had been accused of violating the Islamic sharia. Shortly thereafter, seven militant members of the Alash made their entry into the Muftiate in Almaty and demanded his resignation. Subsequently, a fight broke out during which the mufti was beaten and injured.21 The Muftiate, however, remained under siege until the government militia stormed the building and captured the assailants whose numbers had grown to 200.22 Forty one members of the Alash were arrested by the government militia. According to Kazakh Attorney General Tukakbayev, this act was designed to raise the confidence of the fundamentalist forces within the republic and strengthen the Alash position in this regard. Faced with dwindled support, the party had moderated its position by dropping its demand for the establishment of an Islamic republic and the expulsion of all Russians from Kazakhstan. But Alash has maintained its pan-Turkic demand that calls for consolidation of the Turkic peoples of the former Soviet Union in a peace loving republic of Great Turkistan.23 According to one government official, the party in 1997 had a total of 85 members in Almaty.24 Unconfirmed reports indicate a much larger following most of whom operate out of Chimkent bordering Uzbekistan. As an illegal party its leaders have been forced to exile in Baku, and their newspaper ‘Khak’ has been banned.25 In the summer of 1993, the party moved its

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24 Interview, Zhounisbek K. Soutanmuratov, Press Service Consultant to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 7 June 1993, cited in Mehrdad Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 86.
headquarters to Moscow in order to conduct its affairs without the fear of government reprisal.

Islamic Revival (Renaissance) Party

It emerged out of the inter-republican party of Islamic Revival or Islamic Renaissance - Partiya Islamskovo Vozrozhdeniya. In short it is also known as IRP. Islam was a natural way to encourage Tajik nationalism, for an underground political Islam had thrived in Tajikistan more than in any other Central Asian state, during the Soviet period. The most influential underground spiritual leader in the Soviet era was Mullah Muhammad Rustamov Hindustani, who had studied in the Madrasa in Deoband, India, before returning to home to open a clandestine madrassah in Dushanbe in the 1970s. Hindustani brought the new ideas shaping the Muslim world and the ideology of Islamic Fundamentalist movements in India, Pakistan and Arab states to Central Asia, spreading his message to both Tajiks and Uzbeks in the Fergana Valley. He died in 1981.26

One of Hindustani's students was Abdullah Saidov, known as Syed Abdullah Nuri, who was born in the town Tavildara in 1947. Along with other clans from the valley, Nuri's family was forcibly moved in 1953 by the Soviet authorities to the work in the cotton fields in the Vaksh Valley in the south. By 1974, Nuri had helped to form an illegal Islamic educational organisation, Nahzar-I-Islami (Islamic knowledge), while being trained to become a surveying engineer. In March 1987, at Panj, close to the border with Afghanistan, Nuri led the first public demonstration in support of the Afghan Mujahideen; a few weeks after guerrillas belonging to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami (Party of Islam) had launched a rocket attack on the city from the Afghan side of the border. Nuri was arrested along with four others on charges of circulating illegal Islamic literature and

organising a protest against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Released in 1988, Nuri continued his clandestine political activities, eventually becoming a founding member and leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party.\textsuperscript{27}

Another of Hindustani’s students was Muhammad Sharif Himmatzada, who became a leader of the military wing of the IRP. Nuri and Himmatzada helped found the Tajik branch of Islamic Renaissance Party.\textsuperscript{28} The IRP held its founding Congress in the city of Astrakhan (Russia) in the Soviet part of the north Caucasus on 10 June 1990. Attended by 150 delegates, the party’s initial goals revolved around “the revival of ideals of Islam”.\textsuperscript{29}

But from the outset, its objectives were political in nature. For instance, the party called for the establishment of Shariah courts and the teaching of Islam in secular schools and organise the Muslims within the Soviet Union. Although the creation of Islamic states was not explicitly addressed during the Astrakhan gathering, some members expressed their desire to move in that direction upon their return to their respective republics. Mullah Muhammad Abdullah Mirsaidov of Tajikistan, who later played a significant role as a local opposition leader to the Nabiyev government, had openly entertained such an idea in his sermons. It was also decided to let each Soviet republic set up its own, independent branch of the


\textsuperscript{28} Due to difference in the translation, the name of the party has been mentioned differently by different authors. While some write it as Islamic Revival Party, some others write it as Islamic Renaissance Party. Though etymologically ‘revival’ and ‘renaissance’ carry different connotations, literally they have been treated equal by these authors. As mentioned earlier the original name of the party was \textit{Partiya Islamskovo Vozrozhdeniya}.

party.\textsuperscript{30} With Glasnost in full swing under President Mikhail Gorbachev, the IRP registered as a political party in Russia, but it was banned in Central Asian republics by their ruling Communist Parties. Tajik representatives on their return faced an immediate ban.\textsuperscript{31}

The IRP continued its campaign through its newspaper Al-Wadah since January 1991, in order to shed its negative reputation. By 1992, the party’s fortunes had started declining with only 40 members in total attending its conference in Saratov.\textsuperscript{32} Leaving aside the declining status of the Central IRP in Moscow, the organisational reach and mobilisation capacities of the IRP branches had been relatively more advanced in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as compared to the rest of the Central Asian republics.\textsuperscript{33}

With support from Nuri’s youth organisation, however, as well as from clans in the Karategin Valley and Karategins who had been resettled in the Vaksh Valley around the town of Kurgan Tyube, a clandestine branch of the IRP did emerge in Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{34} With the support from the above mentioned quarters, two of the Tajik participants of Astrakhan Congress, Dawlat Usman and I. Gadoev, on 6 October 1990, organised the IRP branch in Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{35} The party’s founding Congress was held outside the city of Dushanbe at a place called Chartut where 300 delegates

\textsuperscript{30} According to Allen Hetmanek, Mullah Abdullah has been involved in clandestine activities, since early 1983, when he began creating the creation of an Islamic state. By 1986, he publicized his views in this regard, asking his followers to petition the 27\textsuperscript{th} Congress of USSR Communist Party to permit the formation of such a republic. When his request was denied, he called for a jihad or holy war, against the authorities, leading to his arrest and a six years jail sentence. He was, however, released in 1989, subsequent to Gorbachev’s reorientation of the Soviet religious policies. For more information, see Allen Hetmanek, “Islamic Revolution comes to the Former Soviet Central Asia: The Case of Tajikistan”, Central Asian Survey, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1993, pp. 370-371

\textsuperscript{31} Ahmed Rashid, Jihad, op. cit., p. 98
\textsuperscript{32} Central Asia Brief, No. 3, 1992, pp. 9-10
\textsuperscript{33} Mehrdad Haghighi, op. cit., p. 87
\textsuperscript{34} Ahmed Rashid, op. cit., p. 99
\textsuperscript{35} The spokesperson for the Democratic Party of Tajikistan pointed out that a clandestine Islamic Party had been operating in Tajikistan since 1977 with unofficial clergy conducting underground training of the young. Ahmad Rashid, “Tajikistan: State of Anarchy”, Karachi Herald, November, 1992, p. 68.
participated. A council of Ulema with a membership of 27 was created. Abdussamad Himmatov was elected Chairman.

Since its inception, the party emphasised the primacy of electoral means for achieving its basic political objectives. For instance, the party Secretary in charge of education and propaganda, Abdullah Dadkhuda stated that, “the only way to advertise Islam is to do it through a parliamentary and democratic political system.... We are against forcing people to accept our path but we rely on any means to awaken them”. He further indicated that, “by an Islamic government, we mean that a government where the orders of the God, the sacred Quran, the teaching and knowledge of the prophet are the principal elements. We must have a parliament because the Quran encourages collective consultations. Future leaders should be chosen by the people and judged by their world view, their scholarly enlightenment and their knowledge of Islam.

The IRP received official recognition on 26 October 1991 and declared its independence from the all-Union IRP in December 1992 under the name of Nehzat-e-Islami-ye-Tajikistan. S. Tajbakhsh has provided a summary of the basic objectives of the IRP as follows:

- a spiritual revival of the citizens of the republic;
- an independent economic and political system;
- a complete political and legal awakening with the aim of applying to the everyday life of Muslims of the republic the principles of Islam;

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39 Ibid.
• the spread and advertising of Islamic thought among different nationalities of the republic.40

Similar opinions were also given by the Chairman of the party, Himmatzada, who in a press conference reassured the country that the party’s aim was to establish a democratic state committed to the rule of law rather than an Islamic state.41

By 1991, the party had succeeded in developing an elaborate republican wide organisational network, expanding its membership through active involvement in mosques and prayer houses whose numbers had expanded significantly since 1989. Quite expectedly, the bulk of its support came from far regions with strongest Islamic proclivity: Maschah and Ura Tepeh in Khojand oblast, Dushanbe and the surrounding areas, Gharm (Gharatakin) and Gharghan Tepeh (Kurghan Tepeh) in Khatlon (Khatlan) oblast. Although the extent of the membership of the Tajik IRP had not been determined, a 1990 report in Izvestiya put the figure at 10,000. In 1992, it was reported that some 30,000 members had joined the party.42 Majority of the IRP members seemed to be from rural socio-economic background and much of its urban support came from unemployed youth and elderly men and women. It must be indicated, however, that the IRP, at least publicly, had denied that it was working towards the creation of an Islamic state. Its leaders Muhammad Sharif Himmatzada and Daulat Usman had frequently stated that the creation of an Islamic republic was an unattainable goal in the foreseeable future.43

Despite the party’s united leadership stance, the Tajik IRP had been plagued by ideological factionalism. There were Wahhabi tendencies, such as those that

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40 Ibid
41 S. Olimova, “Islam and the Tajik Conflict”, in Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (eds.), op. cit., p. 33
condemn Muslim celebrating feasting and other costly rites such as Kalym, or bride price, as well as the veneration of the saints and deities. Mullah Abdullah (Mir Saidov) was a strong proponent of this condemnation, arguing that such activities have reduced the purity of Islamic faith. The support for this view had been strengthened by exposure to Wahhabi literature smuggled through Uzbekistan and elsewhere into the republic. This faction was also more adamant about the establishment of an Islamic republic in Tajikistan. The second faction was influenced by the ideology of the Muslim brotherhood which has a strong pan-Islamic orientation. The third faction was a moderate Islamic faction whose ideology was more or less in line with that of Kazi Ali Akbar Turajonzada. This faction that had been advocating the revival of Islam in Tajikistan was effectively absorbed by the IRP subsequent to the Communist takeover in the fall of 1992 that led to the removal of Kazi Turajonzada from his past.

With the beginning of the civil war in Tajikistan, IRP played a crucial role in it. While the party was faction ridden it could not decide exactly the role it should be playing in the ensuing civil war. When the civil war engulfed the whole of Tajikistan, IRP also participated in it on many fronts. It took to violence and later became the lynchpin of the opposition to the government. This was the period when the terrorist activities of IRP came to prominence.

The party had already come out open in February 1990 after the Dushanbe housing riots, which were incited by fears that Armenian refugees, fleeing from the

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44 In the eighteenth century, against a background of general stagnation, a puritanical fundamentalist movement erupted in Arabia under Muhammad-ibn ‘Abd al- Wahhab (1703-1792). The movement called for a return to the purist Islam of the Quran and the Sunnah and its unadulterated monotheism, uncompromised by the popular cults of saints and their shrines. Ibn ‘Abd al Wahhab married into the family of the Sa’ud, a chieftain of Najd, who accepted his teaching and brought all Arabian under his ruling ideology. It is today the state religion of Saudi Arabia.

fighting in their region, would be resettled in the capital. Activists for the IRP managed to include Islamic demands amongst those of the masses surrounding headquarters of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPTJ). For several days, they staged sit-ins and put up banners demanding that more mosques be opened, that stores selling pork and alcohol be closed, and that Tajik street names replace the Russian ones.46

As the political situation deteriorated in late 1991, political infighting broke out within CPTJ, leading to several leadership replacements. Hardline Communists in the Tajik Parliament eventually forced through the election of 62 year-old Rahman Nabiyev as President in September. Mass protests at his election broke out in Dushanbe as tens of thousands of people camped out in Lenin Square- renamed Azadi (freedom) Square- in the centre of the city. This was the time when IRP tried to extend its base among the people.47

Meanwhile, an election took place and in a controversial election Rahman Nabiyev won which led to more demonstrations, more riots in March 1992, which were followed by a severe crackdown in which many people were killed. Anarchy broke out in Dushanbe, as assassinations, kidnappings and random killings became daily events. By now it was clear that a civil war was imminent and key IRP leaders took to the mountains to set up military bases in the Karategin and Tavildara valleys north of Dushanbe.

In the following events, violence dominated the scene from both government as well as IRP side. IRP launched guerrilla attacks on the government forces and the Kulyabi militants from its bases in Karategin and Tavildara valleys. Kurgan Tyube and Afghanistan, where they were joined by some 80,000 refugees. They

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established Kunduz and Talaquan in the north east with the support of the Kabul government, then controlled by the Afghan-Tajik leaders. Gradually the Tajik conflict became an international issue and a trans-national war. IRP leaders travelled to Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia seeking military and financial support.

In 1996, the regional equation changed dramatically when the Taliban captured Kabul and ousted the Afghan-Tajik government. Fearing greater isolation and decrease in the popularity of the party due to growing poverty and miserable economic conditions of the Tajik people, IRP and the government finally settled the issue under the mediation of UN that brought the war to an end.48

The inter-Tajik negotiations were periodically interrupted by military clashes. IRP was engaged in not only the direct military clashes with the government forces but also in bombing and hostage taking.

By 2000, the IRP had become one of the most powerful political parties in Tajikistan. Its members filled most of the government positions allocated to UTO and it has again become a parliamentary party committed to peaceful and legal political methods.49 As IRP has become a political party today and as a part of the government running the country, some believe that there has been a total decline of IRP, while some hardliner elements that had refused to join the Tajik army are still carrying on their disruptive activities. this time, under the patronage of IMU, operating from Uzbekistan. A small group of IRP men led by Rakhmov Sanginov, as recently as summer of 2001, was carrying on activities like kidnappings, robberies mostly bank robberies and occasional blasts, before he was killed by the Tajik army in an operation that lasted for more than a month.

48 Ibid.
Even when the party was at its peak of popularity, the debate over whether further radicalisation of the party should be carried out or stress on education and religious aspect of the organisation should be given, went on. This ideological confusion continued even after the party finally became a part of the government with the settlement of the Tajik civil war that also ended the activities of IRP. But being an inter-republican organisation, its Uzbek branch carried out its work in Uzbekistan to a great extent.

The IRP in Uzbekistan was established on 26 January 1992, in Tashkent, provoking a similar reaction to that of the Tajikistan authorities. The party was denied official recognition and due. Its activities of 1991 were banned under Uzbek law on public associations. Ever since that, the party has been conducting its affairs underground. A review of the party’s initial platform which was made public on 16 December 1990, clearly demonstrates its comprehensively religious orientation and its similarities with the Tajik IRP.\textsuperscript{50}

- to explain to the people the real meaning of the holy Koran an \textit{hadith} and to call the people to line and act according to \textit{Koran} and \textit{hadith}.
- to call to Islam by all means of mass media.
- to fight national and racial discrimination, impudence, crime, alcoholism, and all other things that are forbidden by \textit{sharia} through understanding and appeal.
- to educate young people on principles of Islam and for this purpose to create instruction and training centres and \textit{madrassahs}.
- to ensure that the right of all Muslims are exercised according to the Koran.

\textsuperscript{50} For a complete list of the items on the platform see, Abdujabar Abduvkhitov, "Islamic Revivalism in Uzbekistan", in Dale Eickelman (ed.), \textit{Russia's Muslim Frontiers}, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 96-97.
• to strengthen Islamic brotherhood to develop religious relations with the Muslim world, and to seek for a relationship of equal rights with representatives of other religions.

• to cooperate with other democratic parties and state organisations in all fields.

• to create philanthropic funds that will support any one in need of help.

• to strengthen the family according to the principles of Islam and to ensure the rights of women and children.

• to ensure the principles of an Islamic economy and regaining ecological purity.

• to ensure the distribution of food according to the Sharia.

• to solve the problems of people according to the Holy Koran and hadith.

The IRP had its stronghold in the densely populated Fergana Valley in particular the two cities of Namangan and Andijan. The party also enjoyed substantial support among the rural Uzbek population. Due to the government crackdown there are no verifiable sources of information on the membership of IRP. But there may be as many as 40,000 to 50,000 members most of whom operate out of the Fergana region. There are also reports of the IRP activities in Kara Kalpak Autonomous region, in the north western section of Uzbekistan.⁵¹ The organisational reach and mobilisation capacity of the IRP have been severely hampered by the geographical isolation of the Fergana, which can become inaccessible during the winter months and by its predominantly rural constituency.

⁵¹ Mehrdad Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 90.
In Kyrgyzstan, the IRP has had a considerably smaller following. Most of the IRP activities in Kyrgyzstan are limited to the Osh and Jalalabad oblasts, particularly among those with Uzbek origin. In Turkmenistan, on the other hand there are no visible signs of the party. One Turkmenistan expert has stated that the party has no organisation in Turkmenistan. 52

While the IRP branches had become increasingly independent they shared a number of functional and contextual characteristics. First, the most obvious was the overriding objective of creating an Islamic republic. Although in countries like Tajikistan IRP has dropped this objective from the main agenda for tactical reasons. In other countries, there is still a feeling that the party’s principles can only be fully realised when such an Islamic state is established. Second, all parties have tried to capitalise on the deteriorating economic conditions, albeit with very limited success, to delegitimise the Central Asian governments. 53

Going by the foregoing descriptions, one can definitely say that IRP as a party, though theocratically never believed in violence, had participated in the Tajik civil war violently that caused around 50,000 deaths. The methods that it adapted were all that of established terrorist ones including bomb blasts, kidnappings, hostage takings, armed fighting etc. The sole objective behind all this was the creation of an Islamic *Umma*.

**Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)**

Another organisation which like IRP took up the cause of organising the people of Islamic faith to work for the creation of an Islamic empire starting from Central Asia is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The relevance of this organisation herein lies the fact that, in its endeavour to establish the principles of

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Koran and *sharia*, it gradually took up arms to establish itself. Although their leadership still denies any such involvement, the Central Asian republics where IMU is still very much active, accuse it of indulging and fomenting terrorism in the region.

The revival of Islamic militancy in Uzbekistan began in Namangan, a small agricultural town in the heart of the Fergana Valley in 1991, a few months before the break-up of the Soviet Union. What started as a relatively peaceful attempt to raise Islamic consciousness in the community had already turned violent by December, when a handful of unemployed young men in Namangan seized the building which housed the headquarters of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan (CPU), after the mayor refused to give them land to build a mosque. That incident set in motion, events whose repercussion still reverberates.

The young men were led by Tahir Yuldeshev, 24 years old, a university drop-out and a local underground *mullah* who was a fine orator. At his side was Jumaboi Ahmadzhanovich Khojaev, 22, who later adopted the name of his hometown and became Juma Namangani and Abdul Ahad, 33, trained in Saudi Arabia, a militant Wahhabi. Yuldeshev began to impose strict Islamic practices in Namangan. Yuldeshev then demanded that President Karimov impose *sharia* in Uzbekistan. Karimov finally agreed to talk to him, but the talk turned into a fiery shouting match when Yuldeshev kept some impossible demands, for example, that Karimov declare Uzbekistan an Islamic state and open more *madrassahs* and

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54 Ahmed Rashid, op. cit., p. 137.
56 He insisted that people say their prayers regularly; women abandon coloured clothes and veil themselves from head to toe with white veils. He set up neighbourhood watch committees to combat crime; vigilantes patrolled the streets maintaining law and order and ensuring that shopkeepers did not raise their prices.
mosques. Karimov rejected these demands.\textsuperscript{57} Yuldeshev and his men attacked the CPU headquarters and set in motion a movement that they claimed was a \textit{jihad} to remove Karimov from the government of Uzbekistan.

All these leaders were the clandestine members of Uzbekistan’s IRP but disillusioned with its refusal to confront the authorities, they founded Adolat (justice) and demanded an Islamic revolution. Young men linked to Adolat set up mosques and \textit{madrassah} across the Fergana Valley, in Andijan, Margilan, Kuva, Fergana city and even Osh in Kyrgyzstan, undercutting the influence of the IRP. What differentiated them from the other militant Islamic groups was their disrespect for official Islam, for Central Asia’s liberal Islamic traditions, and for the regime.\textsuperscript{58} State authority was undecided on how to deal with this new threat, and for several months (1991-92) Adolat had a free hand to spread its message in the Fergana Valley.

Finally, the government cracked down, banning Adolat in March 1992, and arresting 27 of its members. The leaders fled to different neighbouring countries. From 1996-98, Yuldeshev stayed in Kabul and Peshawar where Afghan and Pakistani Islamic militant groups provided him with funding and recruited young men. During this period he also met the Saudi terrorist Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and got influenced by the extreme Deobandi and Wahhabi teachings on \textit{jihad}.

After visiting countries like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Turkey, he stayed in Peshawar in Pakistan from 1995-98 and 1998 onwards in Kabul. In

\textsuperscript{57} Yuldeshev is reported to have made the following demands: “we set fine conditions which must be fulfilled by the authorities. First, Islam Karimov must come here. Second, he must swear his faithfulness to Islam on the Koran here and now proclaim an Islamic state. Third, visiting mosques must become compulsory for all Muslims including the leaders of the state must pray together with the people. Fourth, Friday should be announced as a day off and fifth to open the religious schools immediately”. Cited in Olag Yakubov, \textit{The Pack of Wolves: The Blood Trail of Terror}, Moscow, Veche Publishers, 2000, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{58} Ahmed Rashid, \textit{Jihad}, op. cit., p. 139.
Peshawar, his Uzbek activists were trained in the madrassah. The students also included few from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uighurs from China.\textsuperscript{59}

Yuldeshev finally settled in Taliban controlled Kabul in 1998, where he set up the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). At home, the situation worsened. Namangani who had fled to Tajikistan to escape the government forces was disillusioned by the willingness of the Tajik Islamists to enter into peace talks with the government, but he maintained contacts with the UTO and continued to run his armed camp at Tavildara in the Garm Valley in Tajikistan. He maintained his forces by being involved in the lucrative and expanding heroin trade between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. But Namangani became now a liability to the UTO, as his presence annoyed Uzbekistan and Russia.\textsuperscript{60} Fearing that his forces would be forcibly disbanded, Namangani crossed into Kyrgyzstan in early August 1999. After that he got engaged with the Kyrgyz government in the Batken region where a series of hostage takings, incursions and terrorist activities took place.

In an interview with the Voice of America, Yuldeshev set out the IMU’s goals, “the goals of IMU activities are firstly fighting against oppression within our own country, against bribery, against inequalities and also the freeing of our Muslim brothers from prison... who will avenge those Muslims who have died in the prison of the regime? Of course, we will. We consider it our obligation to avenge them and nobody can take this right away from us. We do not repent our declarations of Jihad against the Uzbek government. God willing, we will carry out this jihad to its conclusion”.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} Both Pakistani intelligence officials and Uzbek diplomats claimed that Yuldeshev received funds from a variety of sources, cited in Ahmed Rashid, Jihad, op. cit., p. 256.
\textsuperscript{60} Ahmed Rashid, World Policy Journal, op. cit., p. 52.
\textsuperscript{61} Tohir Yuldeshev, interview on Voice of America, 6 October 2000.
Yuldeshev pledged to set up an Islamic state: "We declared a jihad in order to create a religious system, a religious government. We want to create a sharia system, a model of Islam which has remained from The Prophet, not like the Islam in Afghanistan or Iran or Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, these models are nothing like the Islamic model.... before we build an Islamic state we primarily want to get out from under oppression. We are therefore, now shedding blood, and the creation of an Islamic state will be the next problem". Yuldeshev also claimed that "we have a movement of one hundred thousand people. It takes only a spark to burn down a forest, and for that one match is sufficient. We have enough strength to settle the scores with Karimov, and God willing, there are a many more thousands of Mujahideen who share this dream". In the interview Yuldeshev traced the origin of IMU back to the Basmachis. Our "roots go back 70-80 years, when our grandfather Mujahideen fought against the communists. We compare ourselves to these ancestors and do not regret that we are continuing their work.... We do not need foreign contacts because our roots are deep and located in our homeland". 62

On 25 August 1999, the IMU issued an official communique declaring jihad on the Karimov regime and calling for its overthrow (see appendix). Although the IMU forces never posed a serious military threat to the armies of Central Asia and Russia, their tactics were infinitely superior, and they created terror amongst the Central Asian regimes.

The leadership of the IMU has felt it important to stress their terrorist nature for several reasons. First, given that majority of their members are Islamic militants for hire, espousing an Islamic fundamentalist line keeps the membership relatively complacent. Second, by instilling fear within society in general, the IMU has found it easier to extort money and traffic in illicit narcotics. Third, by

62 Cited in Ahmed Rashid, Jihad, op. cit, p. 149.
deterring public attention from the fact that the primary motivation are criminal in nature, the IMU has won popular support from sections of the Islamic communities within the region who believe that the IMU is fighting to free Muslims from government oppressions.63

Though the operation of IMU has been there for quite a long time, the doubt over its effectiveness in its objectives is still in the air. IMU, in the last so many years of its existence, has become a multi-national pan-Islamic force, and although it insists that its only aim is to topple the Karimov government in Uzbekistan, there is little doubt that it also seeks an Islamic revolution across Central Asia. Although IMU’s ideology is not pure Wahhabi, as Kaimov claims, its idea of a universal jihad is clearly rooted in Deobandi Wahhabi teachings. However, it remains localised in Fergana and has been unable to overcome the problem of regionalisation that confounds all Islamic movements in Central Asia, nor has it articulated the kind of Islamic state it envisages, which undercuts its appeal to Central Asians, who are unlikely to swap an authoritarian system they know for one and they know nothing about. The movements’ refusal to incorporate Uzbekistan’s Islamic history and traditions into its militant ideology makes it unlikely that it will gain greater public support beyond the Fergana valley, but its attacks will continue to destabilise the fragile Central Asian regimes. For the most part, the IMU remains an ‘outsider’ force, and as such it faces competition for the hearts and minds of the people of the region from a much more potent internal force.

IMU is at present a banned organisation by the US Department of State for being a terrorist organisation under its law on 25 September 2000. The Clinton

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administration referred at that time to armed incursions into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and taking of hostages including US citizens. In the late November 2001, a report said that the groups' leader, 32-year-old Juma Namangani died from wounds received during US bombing in the Mazar-e-Sharif region of Afghanistan, although accounts varied.

**Hizb-ut-Tahrir**

Though IMU has been one organisation put under maximum scrutiny in the Central Asian region, another organisation, known as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Hizb-ut-Tahrir-al-Islami), has become the most popular, widespread underground movement in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The challenge that the Hizb-ut-Tahrir-al-Islami poses to the regimes of these countries can be judged by the fact that there are more HT (Hizb-ut-Tahrir) members in the jails in Central Asia than those of any other movement, including the much better known IMU.

HT has a vision of uniting Central Asia, Xinjiang province in China, and eventually the entire *Umma* (Islamic World community) under a *Khilafat* (Caliphate) that would establish the Khilafat-i-Rashida, which ruled the Arab Muslims for a short time after the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 AD.

The HT was founded in Saudi Arabia and Jordan in 1953 by diaspora of Palestinians by Sheikh Taquiuddin al-Nabhani Filastyni (the Palestinians). “The

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65 General Tommy Franks, Commander of the US action in Afghanistan told journalists in Uzbekistan that Namangani was indeed dead although he did not receive the source of this information. “Uzbekistan Gets US Military Pledge”, Associated Press, 24 January 2002.
67 Under the Khilafat-i-Rashida, which lasted until 661AD, the message of Islam spread rapidly across the Middle East and Africa through conquest and conversions. This period is revered by many radical Islamic movements including the Taliban, as the only time in Islamic history when a true Muslim society existed.
point-in-hand is not establishing several states, but one single state over the entire Muslim world”, he wrote in 1962.  

Although the HT believes in Jihad as a means to mobilise supporters against non-Muslims it does not advocate a violent overthrow of Muslim regimes as do other extremist groups. HT believes in winning over mass support.

An-Nabhani’s concept of the future Islamic state promotes a utopian view of political Islam under which social problems such as corruption and poverty would be banished by the application of the Islamic law and government.

While HT believes in such a society, it strives for a political system in which a caliph elected by an Islamic shura (council) would have dictatorial powers in a highly centralised system. The caliph would control the army, the political system, the economy and foreign policy. Sharia (Islamic law) would prevail, Arabic would be the language of the state, and the role of the women would be severely restricted. The Defence Minister, whose title would be the Amir of Jihad, would prepare the people for jihad against the non-Muslim world. Military conscription and training in preparation for this jihad would be mandatory for all Muslim men above 15. Particularly, this is the reason which gives a ground to the local law enforcing organs to declare the HT as a terrorist organisation.  

Initially, HT was with Wahhabi but later it separated from them on several issues. As a leader of HT points out “we had a united plan with the Wahhabis but we soon developed differences and split. HT wanted to work with people in each country separately and bring about sharia in a peaceful manner, but the Wahhabis were extremists who wanted guerrilla war and the creation of an Islamic army”.  

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HT operates secret, decentralised, five-to-seven-man cells throughout Central Asia, making it extremely difficult for the authorities to penetrate the organisation. The cells called diara (circle) are study groups dedicated to the spread of Islam and the HT message.\textsuperscript{71} According to the statements of the arrested activists and members, the supporters' strength of HT is now something between fifty to sixty thousand.

Like the Wahhabi, the HT is virulently opposed to Jews and Israel and a lot of HT literature portrays Karimov as a Jew. HT believes that the Jews should leave Central Asia because they do not belong to Central Asia.\textsuperscript{72} Also like the Wahhabis, the HT is also anti-Shia even violently it is. The group would expel all Shia Muslim from Central Asia and if it came to power, a stance that would clearly alienate the Shia communities in southern Uzbekistan and eastern Tajikistan. The HT has imparted its beliefs from the Arab world and the debates and the conflicts within the Islamic radical camps there.

Most members of the HT came from the ranks of the young and unemployed given the lack of opportunity, many youths appear attracted to HT because of motivations as simple as boredom and dissatisfaction with their lot in life.\textsuperscript{73}

From its cells in Fergana Valley, the HT movement spread rapidly into adjacent areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The appeal of the HT in Kyrgyzstan appears to be growing because of the country's increasing poverty and public criticism that the government is incapable of solving the people's problems- and too corrupt to try.

\textsuperscript{71} Bakhtiyar Babadzhanov, op. cit., p. 14
\textsuperscript{72} Interview with Ali, an activist of HT by Ahmed Rashid, cited in Ahmed Rashid, \textit{Jihad}, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{73} For example, according to the materials from the Osh city court archives, of thirteen Hizb-ut Tahrir members sentenced in the Osh city courts in 2000, almost all were unemployed and had at most secondly education. Cited in \textit{ICG Asia Briefing Paper}, 30 January 2002.
The HT is also gaining popularity slowly in Kazakhstan where Islamic radicalism has so far not penetrated. In 2001, for the first time, Kazakh police reported the arrest of HT activists in the south of the country. On 6 July 2000, HT leaflets appeared in thousands of mailboxes in Kazakhstan’s largest city, Almaty, shocking the security forces and the local population.

The HT is becoming extremely popular in northern Tajikistan, despite the war weariness of the people. In 2000, more than a hundred alleged HT members were arrested in Tajikistan and put on trial.74

Though HT leaders deny that they have any formal links with other radical movements like Taliban, Al-Qaeda, or IMU, several hundred HT activists escaped to northern Afghanistan, where they were welcomed by the IMU. The HT leaders lived in IMU camps and received military training from the guerrillas. A Kyrgyz official reported that during the IMU offensive in the summer of 2000, they discovered HT literature on the dead bodies of several IMU militants.75 Clearly, there are strong links and cooperation between the rank and file of both groups especially when the members come from the same village or town.

Ali, the HT leader who was interviewed by Ahmed Rashid, a Central Asian expert, admitted that HT supported the Taliban movement in Afghanistan and many HT members fled to safety in Afghanistan to escape the crackdown in Central Asia. He also admitted that though HT does not have any relationship with Osama bin Laden, its members are full of admiration for him.76

Diplomats in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan strongly dispute these denials, claiming that all the Islamic groups are working closely together. They cite a

76 Ahmed Rashid, Jihad, op.cit., p. 144
meeting in Kabul in September 2000 where the Taliban, IMU and the HT, Chechen separatists and bin Laden held lengthy talks about future cooperation.

There still exists a great deal of debate over the nature and type of HT. Some opine that it is a radical religious organisation with terrorist leanings and linkages.\textsuperscript{77} There are others who say it is not a political but a social organisation based on religious principles,\textsuperscript{78} and there are also opinions which accuse it as it a radical terrorist organisation. Going by the methods adopted by HT to propagate its ideas it seems that the organisation has only adopted methods like pamphleteering, posterig, organisig discussions and personal contacts etc. modes to spread itself and its beliefs. Therefore, while method wise, it does not seem to be a terrorist organisation, it has definitely contributed to the radicalisation of Islam in the region thereby prompting the latent groups to carry on their agenda in a destructive manner.

Apart from these three main organisations which have been either involved directly in the ongoing militancy and terrorism in the region there are few other small organisations which have again either directly participated in terrorism or have contributed to it indirectly. Some of them are Islam Laskarlary which is a radical Islamic group in Fergana valley, Nahzar-i-Islami, Tauba, Hizb-i-Islami and Hizb-al-Nusra (a splinter group of HT).

\textbf{The Taliban}

Strictly speaking, Taliban never participated in any of the terrorist activity in Central Asia directly. But being a fundamentalist, radical organisation with aims much similar to those of the organisations functioning in Central Asia with terrorist

\textsuperscript{77} Kyrgyz lawmaker Tursunbay Bakir Uulu told the Moscovskiy Komsomolets newspaper that he did not agree that HT was a political party; it was a purely religious party consisting of underground groups. Cited in \textit{The Times of Central Asia}, 11 October 2001.

\textsuperscript{78} Sanya Sagnayeva in Alexy Sukhov, Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Kyrgyzstan, \textit{Central Asia Times}, op. cit.
tactics, Taliban during its rule in Afghanistan played the role of a co-operator and host to them. Therefore, it is quite essential to know the role played by Taliban in patronising and fomenting militancy and terrorism in the Central Asian region.

The world first became aware of the Taliban in 1994 when they were appointed by Islamabad to protect a convoy trying to open up a trade route between Pakistan and Central Asia.\textsuperscript{79}

The predominantly pushtun Taliban emerged in late 1994 as a messiahnic movement made up of \textit{Taliban} (literally, students), from Islamic \textit{madrassahs} (seminaries) who were living as refugees in Pakistan. They vowed to bring peace to Afghanistan, establish law and order, disarm the population and impose \textit{shari'ah} (Islamic law). The group which accompanied the convoy proved effective bodyguards driving off other Mujahideen groups who attacked and looted the convoy. They went on to take the nearby city of Kandahar, beginning a remarkable advance, which led to their capture of the capital, Kabul, in September 1996. Welcomed by war-weary Pushtuns, the Taliban were at first remarkably successful and popular. After the capture of Kabul in 1996 they did not show any desire to rule the country.\textsuperscript{80}

But abetted by their Pakistani and Saudi backers and inspired by ideological mentors such as Osama bin Laden, the Taliban committed themselves to conquering the entire country and more.

In 1998, the Taliban overran much of the northern Afghanistan and later almost 90 percent of Afghanistan. Only three nations, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE recognised Taliban and their leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, as the


legitimate government of Afghanistan. US, EU, and UN imposed sanctions on Taliban, mostly as a pressure tactic to have Osama bin Laden, the accused Saudi terrorist.

The Taliban claimed that their aim was to set up the world’s most pure Islamic state, banning frivolities like television, music, cinema, forbidding women to work and receive education, and forcing to cover themselves from head to toe. $^{81}$

Being situated on the border of Afghanistan, the five Central Asian republics were most affected by the growth of Taliban movement in Afghanistan. During the Afghan civil war, the newly independent Central Asian republics supported their ethnic kin in northern Afghanistan, who provided a buffer against the spread of Pushtun fundamentalism. But with the Taliban occupation of Afghanistan, that buffer vanished away and the Central Asian states started facing a strong wave of Islamic insurgency supported by Taliban.

The IMU militants after undergoing training in the Taliban camps, penetrated into the south of Uzbekistan, across Tajikistan and some of the groups even reached Tashkent. $^{82}$ Afghanistan which came under Taliban control was also inhabited by a large number of ethnic Uzbeks. This worked as a factor to improve the ability of the IMU, which largely depended on their logistical support, to recruit new members. The territorial gains also minimised the distance between the IMU sources of support in Afghanistan and their areas of military operation in Central Asia. $^{83}$

The other way in which Taliban promoted militant activities in Central Asia was by providing sanctuaries to dissident movements in countries around

$^{81}$ Ibid.
$^{83}$ Ibid.
Afghanistan which had been under Islamic influence in the past. In this respect, Central Asian region was quite vulnerable to the Taliban influence in its Islamic orientation. In 1999, Tahir Yuldeshev, the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan fled to Afghanistan. Yuldeshev is allegedly one of the masterminds behind the assassination attempt against Uzbek President Islam Karimov. In May 1999, the Taliban allowed Yuldeshev to set up a military training camp in northern Afghanistan, just a few miles from the border. Sources point out that he trained several hundred Islamist militants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan as well as Uighurs from Xinjiang province in China.\(^{84}\)

Though the Taliban officials then denied helping the IMU, in June 1999, the Taliban rejected a request to extradite Yuldeshev to Uzbekistan. Instead in August of the same year, Namangani entered southern Kyrgyzstan with 800 militants. Apart from this, Taliban also provided men and money for the militant movements that were going on in Central Asia till October 2001. Reports say that IMU was largely financed by Osama bin Laden and his host Taliban in Afghanistan.\(^{85}\)

It has been stated earlier that in September 2000 the Islamic militant leaders of various groups gathered in Kabul under the patronage of Taliban to discuss the future coordination among them in carrying out their activities. Taliban organised the meeting, and according to reports of the Uzbek intelligence, promised to help the militant organisations in its struggle materially and financially.\(^{86}\)

Thus, from the above illustrations it can be assumed that Taliban though never played any role directly in the Central Asia militancy, it nevertheless helped, cooperated and patronised such activities. In spite of the methodological

\(^{85}\) The Times of Central Asia, 11 October 2001.
\(^{86}\) Ibid.
differences all the organisations, including Taliban, shared a common objective, i.e., the establishment of pure Islamic states on the basis of the Koran and *sharia*.

In the foregoing descriptions it is evident that after 1991 several groups large and small cropped up in the region and almost all, including Taliban resorted to militancy as a method of operation to achieve their objective i.e. establishment of an Islamic state. There are several factors responsible for these organisations to opt for this means. The most important of them is the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the region especially after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

After the *Basmachi* revolt, till the collapse of the Soviet Union i.e. end of cold war, as discussed earlier, the ruling dispensation of the USSR had faced challenges from religious, political, ethnic and nationalist groups in many forms but most of them went either unnoticed or unpublished. Very often these groups resorted to terrorist methods to make their point public. But especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, such incidents have become frequent and most of them reported in different media. The most disturbed region from this point of view is the Central Asian region comprising of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Due to its geo-strategic importance, ethnic composition, religious diversity and economic backwardness, it has been the worst affected region of terrorism and militancy largely fuelled by religious fundamentalism.

**Islamic revivalism, Fundamentalism and Militancy in the Region**

The year 1991 marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the Central Asian republics when the dream of national independence was quickly transformed into a political reality. Interestingly enough, the Central Asian population as a whole played a marginal or at best, an indirect role in the
realisation of that dream. Rather, it was the breakdown of the Soviet central authority that provided an almost effortless opportunity for independence. Unfortunately, the rapidity with which the independence was brought to bear left these republics ill prepared to fill the ideological void created by the collapse of Marxism, leading to the proliferation of a variety of ideological trends, the roots of which were inadvertently nurtured by Gorbachev’s policy of glasnost. Of these, only the Islamic trends seem to have attracted considerable attention. These are, of course, a ground for concern especially when one considers the radical manifestation of Islam in the twentieth century and their practical implications, which have, among other things, given rise to the Islamic Republic of Iran and other forms of Islamic extremism elsewhere in the world. It is the availability of such Islamic doctrines to the Central Asian republics that has contributed to the over all uncertainty with regard to the future political development of these newly emerging states. 87 With initial euphoria that the Islamic revival in the Central Asian republics would be more of cultural and peaceful nature fading away, analysts now feel that the situation in Central Asia has transformed and Islamic radicalism has gained a toehold there. The Tashkent bombing in February 1999 followed by incursions into Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000 and into Uzbekistan in 2000 indicates this transformation. 88

Another aspect of the ongoing Islamisation is that Islam as a form of cultural, social, political and national identity acquired new scope. A phenomenal increase in the observance of Islamic rites, religious marriages, performance of daily prayers and attendance at mosques in society was noticed more mosques and madrassah began to open, more personnel entered into theological training

87 Mehrdad Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 72.
institutes, leading figures got elected into parliamentary bodies and made appearance in the media key religious feasts were turned into public holidays (except Kazakhstan). 89

Surveys conducted in Central Asia showed increased level of religiosity among Muslims, especially among younger generation and intellectuals. 90 An equally significant dimension of the ongoing Islamisation is that it has not been a monolithic phenomenon with uniform inter-republican socio-political manifestations. Quite to the contrary, proclivity towards Islam varies considerably from republic to republic, with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan having the weakest and Tajikistan and Uzbekistan having the strongest tendencies. Sizeable variations also exist at the intra-republican level. 91

It is worth mentioning that the degree of involvement in the Islamic faith at the civilisational level varies from place to place, depending on their socio-economic background and the period in which they were converted. 92 Much disparity exists between one state and another. Within a state, disparity in faith prevails between the settled and the formally nomadic people. For example, Uzbekistan has the strongest religious traditions with the Bukhara region having played a vital role in the development of Islamic theology and Sufi mysticism, than Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan where Islam has traditionally played a less dominant role. 93 Further, people in the Fergana valley are more Islamic in belief than in the northern and eastern parts near Issyk Kul area in the same state of Kyrgyzstan.

91 Mehrdad Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 72.
92 Poonam Mann, op. cit.
93 John Anderson, op. cit.
Secondly, at political level, the secular elite of Central Asia were faced with a dilemma. In order to retain Islam as an important component of the Central Asian identity, they showed great deference to Islam (For example, President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan performed the haj and took his oath of office with his hand on Koran. In his speech also he identified Islam as an integral part of Uzbek culture). 94 At the same time, it was made clear that religious institutions could neither aspire to play overt political role nor escape their duty to support state institutions. 95

Nonetheless, wary of the potency of the religion, the leaders of Central Asia took steps to ensure control over religious institutions and to prevent the politicisation of Islam. Each state has passed laws prohibiting political parties that are based upon religion and each has maintained some degree of state control over religion. 96

The concerns of the leadership also show that Islam has regained its importance in Central Asia, though popular knowledge of the religion of Islam was minimal and the information on political activism, ideas and debates in the Islamic world beyond Central Asia was almost non-existent.

Since 1989, a ‘popular Islam’ under the aegis of parallel mullahs re-emerged in Central Asia. The vast majority of the Central Asians are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi’i school (or mazhas), one of the four main branches of Sunni Islam. 97 but as discussed in the previous chapter Russian colonisation in the nineteenth century was driven primarily by geo-political, not religious concerns; and as a result, Russian colonial administrators, who already had centuries of experience

95 John Anderson, op.cit.
96 Ibid.
97 The three others are Shafi, Hanbali’i and Malini’i mazhas
accommodating Muslim peoples in the empire, were for the most part willing to allow local people to practice Islam in peace. The Soviets in contrasts launched a full scale assault on the Islamic institutions and practices in the mid-1920s, a campaign that intensified dramatically during Stalin’s “revolution from above and the purges of late 1920s and 1930s. The great majority of Mosques were destroyed as a result and most members of the Islamic clergy were imprisoned or shot”. The forced collectivisation of both nomads and peasants led to large-scale persecutions and the flight of Muslim population to China and Afghanistan. In 1917, there were some 20,000 mosques in Central Asia but by 1929 fewer than 4000 were working, and by 1935, there were only 60 registered mosques in Uzbekistan.

With the launching of Gorbachev’s reforms, the region began to witness an “Islamic revival”. The number of Central Asians making the haj to Mecca increased dramatically and many new mosques were built, much of it with funding from Islamic governments, charitable organisations and wealthy individuals abroad. Islamic literature and Korans were brought in from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and itinerant mullahs became overnight leaders. This religious resurgence revealed the depth of the roots of Islam, which had flourished underground in defiance of the repressive Soviet state.

The Islamic revival in Central Asia follows closely the general pattern of Islamic proclivity that existed prior to the communist take over, with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan leading the process. Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive data to present a complete quantifiable picture of Islamic revival in the region. The

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99 Ibid.
100 Ahmed Rashid, The fires of Faith in Central Asia, op.cit, p. 3.
following is thus an attempt to piece together the available information in order to provide an understanding of the scope of the ongoing revival.

As of 1994, an estimated 7,800 mosques and prayer houses have been opened in Central Asia, of which nearly half are located in Uzbekistan. An overwhelming number of these mosques are located in Fergana and Kara Kalpak regions. Between 1989 and 1991, the Uzbek government returned a number of religious sites to the believers, including the Abu Isha al Termezi Mausoleum in the republic's south, the Kalon mosque, the Ata Walikhai mosque in Namangan, the Imam al Bukhari mausoleum in Bukhara, and the Jami mosque in Kokand. In Tajikistan, 126 mosques and 2,870 prayer houses were established in the 1991-92 period. According to the Kazi of Kyrgyzstan, Kimshanbay Ben Abdurahaman, 1000 mosques have been operating in the republic, more than 60 percent of which are located in the Osh and Jalalabad oblasts. In Kazakhstan, 300 mosques had been officially registered by the Kazakh Religious Board, and as many as 200 were under construction in 1993. An estimated 80 mosques have been reopened in Turkmenistan, of which 20 are located in the capital city, Ashgabat. In 1994, the government reported that the construction of 180 mosques had been completed and that another 100 mosques were under construction.

In conjunction with the opening of mosques, Islamic education has been gaining popularity among young Muslims who wish to make a career in religion. An estimated 380 madrassahs have been operating in Uzbekistan since

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101 According to the Deputy Mufti, Shamsuddin Babakhan, an estimated 5,000 mosques and prayer houses have been opened in recent years. The numbers, however, seems to be exaggerated, as cited in Mehrdad Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 227.


104 Interview, Nysanbai Ulyratbek, President, Clerical Administration of Kazakhstan Muslims, 6 June 1993, cited in Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 96.

independence. The number of students enrolled in Barak Khan and Mir Arab, the
two major madrassahs, has nearly tripled. In addition, other religious schools have
been reopened, including the Kukuldash madrassahs which has started functioning
since 1991. The enrolment in Al-Bukhari Higher Islamic Institute has doubled
since independence. It is reported that as many as 5000 students have been
receiving Islamic education in various mosques. In 1990, the second largest
Islamic institute for higher education was opened in Dushanbe. One source says
that around 1700 students are receiving Islamic training by the mid 1990s.106

In addition to these scholars, several students have been despatched to
various Middle Eastern countries to receive Islamic training. For instance,
Kazakhstan has sent 100 students to Turkey, 40 to Egypt, and 40 to Pakistan. There
are also 96 Kyrgyz students in Turkey and 26 students in Egypt. Turkmenistan has
also sent some 200 students to Turkey to receive religious training in 1992.107

The Central Asian Islamic school curriculum cover courses in Arabic,
shariah law, Fiqh, Islamic history and civilisation, and Islamic culture. The most
comprehensive training is given in Uzbek schools, were Arabic language and
literature have been extensively taught. Besides Uzbekistan, shortages in Arabic
instructors have been a serious problem in providing an in-depth Islamic education.
In Kazakhstan, the mufti has recently translated the Koran into Kazakh, but most
Central Asian clerics agree that the meaning of Islamic precepts can only be fully
understood in Arabic.

Despite the availability of these institutions, the educational process has been
severely hampered by an apparent lack of Islamic literature. In 1990, Saudi Arabia
donated 10,000,000 copies of Koran to the religious Board of Uzbekistan for

106 Kamal Siddiqui, "The Call of the Taliban", The Indian Express, New Delhi, 2 June 1997.
107 M. Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 97.
distribution. Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan and Kuwait have also contributed literature, but the quantity of illegal literature that has been smuggled into Central Asia by fundamentalist organisations, which clearly underscores the need to overcome this deficiency if the impact of such radical literature is to be counteracted. The problem is especially serious in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley.108

The observance of the Islamic rituals has also been steadily on the rise, and on the whole it has followed the general, regional and republican patterns of proclivity discussed earlier. It is interesting that of all Islamic practices, the most widely observed are the rituals of circumcision, marriage, and burial which are in essence, the most marginal aspects of Islamic conduct. Circumcision is practised in almost all Muslim family in Central Asia. A study conducted in 1987 shows that Kalym (the bride price) was reported to be widely observed in the region.109 The Muslim burial practices have also been practised widely. The practice of placing the dead body in a traditional yurt for several days in a city street is no longer an unusual sight. Attendance at Muslim burial sites has shown a significant rise in recent years.

Participation in Friday prayers, one of the most significant acts of faith, has been on the rise in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.110 Fasting during the month of Ramadan has made a significant comeback especially in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek President issued a decree whereby working Muslims were permitted to miss work on the first day of Ramadan. Most rural Uzbeks and Tajiks fast for the entire month.

Muslim pilgrimage from Central Asia to Mecca has increased steadily since 1990. In 1992, 40 pilgrims made the trip to Mecca from Kazakhstan and in 1993, 300 were sent directly to Saudi Arabia. The Kyrgyz religious authorities in 1993 sent around 1000 pilgrims.\textsuperscript{111} The largest group of pilgrims from Central Asia belongs to Uzbekistan. In 1990, 500, in 1991, 1250, in 1993, 3500 pilgrims paid a visit to Mecca.\textsuperscript{112}

Other manifestations of the religious zeal and fervour like women using \textit{burqa}, men using white cap and growing beards have also been on rise in all over Central Asia in spite of the possible crackdown by the government authorities. In Fergana valley, this trend is remarkably high.

Although the various manifestations of the religious fervour discussed above show the degree and the extent to which Islam has percolated into the life of the people of this region, the observance of Islamic rituals and other manifestations can be just termed as ‘peripheral’, with limited contribution to the growth of religious fundamentalism. However, the \textit{madrassahs} and mosques really became a cause of concern especially after the emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan who also were products of \textit{madrassahs} in Pakistan. The basic spirit behind this kind of education is to create a section of people who would be conservative, radical and work for the spread and consolidation of Islamic values and practices and creation of an Islamic state.

Our discussions and analysis show that there was an upsurge in the religious sentiments of the Islamic people of Central Asia. This fact has been corroborated by several other prominent figures from the ruling dispensation also. One such

\textsuperscript{111} Interview, Himsanbay ben Abdurahaman, Kazi of the Religious Board of Kyrgyzstan, 18 June 1993, cited in Haghayeghi, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{112} Interview with Samsuddin Babakhan, Deputy Mufti, 24 December 1993, by M. Haghayeghi, op. cit., p. 99.
personality is Islam Karimov, the much discussed President of Uzbekistan. He in his book *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the 21st Century; Threats to Security and Stability* wrote, "In periods of stagnation, crisis and splits in the society, the populism of the outside Wahhabism demand strict observance of the Islamic ethics, rejection of luxury and greediness. Regretfully, such slogans received support and spread in separate areas of Central Asia recently and now a days. Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states constitute an integral part of the very complicated and multi dimensional Islamic world. It is a well known fact that in the world there exist many formal and informal movements which use Islam for their political purposes, some of them either recognise the exclusiveness of Islam or demonstrate intolerance towards all other regions, and use Islam as a platform to defend narrow-minded national interests. Intentions to involve the newly independent states of Central Asia into their political supporters and allies, to exercise their influence upon them are typical attempts for their ideological purposes, which are shaped and manifested in their definite action."  

Karimov further elaborates in his book, the Islamic fundamentalism manifested towards Uzbekistan. He writes, "first, in the attempt to disseminate fundamentalism to undermine the confidence of the faithful Muslims to the state reformer, to destroy stability, national civil and inter-ethnic harmony that are fundamental pre-conditions of the transformation for the better changes, Islamists target to discredit democracy, the secular state, the multi-national and multi-confessional society.

"Second, we must have a clear cut idea, particularly our youth, the younger generation, that those who follow populist attractive but entirely noisy and

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ungrounded slogans of the fundamentalists about justice turn out to be the hostages of the other’s will, that in the end, command not only their brains, but also their fate and destiny.”

“Third, in provoking confrontation among social groups an regions of population that is based on ‘true’ and ‘false’ principles of religiousness. This sort of activities led to the split of the nation in Algeria, Afghanistan.”

“Fourth, the situation of the never ending civil war on the southern borders of Uzbekistan, in neighbouring countries reproduces new generations of terrorists, armed militants who consider themselves to be true Muslims, fighters for faith, and those who are eager to impose their monstrous ideas on our people.”

“Fifth, in creating a repulsive image of Uzbekistan among both Muslim and non-Muslim states and their public opinion to which they want to present us either as anti-religious atheists or as the hidden supporters of the state Islamisation.”

“Sixth, in shaping a global confrontation between the Islamic and non-Islamic civilisations that has the most negative impact on the integration process within the world community that preserves the backwardness of the newly independent states. And what is worse, people’s expectation of the ‘civilisation clashes’ is based on the religious principles.”

“Seventh, in exerting influences on the mass mind, the concept of religion being a universal means to solve all economic political and international problems and contradictions, reflecting upon the Islamic fundamentalism threat, we are constantly compelled to look through its internal Islamic causes, but to the factors that provoke and stimulate it. These factors are well known colonialism and neo-
colonialism, great power chauvinism and anti-Muslim dictate in international relationships, the ‘divide and rule’ policy’.\textsuperscript{114}

In 1992, the then foreign minister of Uzbekistan Ubaidullah Aburazakov, while signing documents on establishing diplomatic relations between Iran and Uzbekistan, had warned the Iranian diplomats in Uzbekistan not to advocate any Iranian type of religious fundamentalism locally, signifying that even as early as 1992, fundamentalist tendencies had developed in Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{115} In the same year, in a press conference, President Islam Karimov was more straightforward. He said that, the danger of Islamic fundamentalism was existing in the country without any doubt.\textsuperscript{116}

During his visit to India in 1995, Imamali Rahmanov, the President of Tajikistan, said that Islamic fundamentalism was one of the main factors responsible for some of the problems being faced by the democratically run Central Asian republics formed after the break up of the erstwhile Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{117}

Muslim clerics in the southern Kyrgyz region of Osh, bordering Tajikistan, also expressed similar views in November 1995 when they said in a statement that “propagators of Islamic fundamentalism are not only going to the people with their sermons, but are also opening their own schools, in the south of the republic”.\textsuperscript{118}

One Kazakh English newspaper \textit{Ekspress-K} on 3 March 2000, reported that the south of Kazakhstan was being affected by Islamic fundamentalism and that many of the missionaries visiting the region are propagating “radical Islamic ideas”. The paper said the students who studied in the private religious schools

\begin{footnotes}
\item[114] Ibid.
\item[117] \textit{PTI News Agency} (henceforth PTI), New Delhi, 11 December 1995, rep. in \textit{SWB/SU/2485/G/1}, 13 December 1995.
\end{footnotes}
condemned secular society and the official clergy and cherish the idea of establishing an Islamic state. The newspaper also added that Kazakhstan with its ideological vacuum, unemployment and falling living standards was "still perfect testing grounds for Islamic missionaries to kick start the extremist mood".\textsuperscript{119}

On 12 September 2000, the foreign minister of Kazakhstan said in his speech at the 55\textsuperscript{th} session of the UN General Assembly in New York, "our young state has to face the challenges like international terrorism, extremism, illegal arms trade, drugs and organised crime, in the prime of its independence. We are seriously worried by the situation in Central Asia and regard the Afghan conflict, the intrusion of guerrilla units into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan as well as the situation in Chechnya as the links in one chain".\textsuperscript{120}

From the above analysis, the fact gets established that fundamentalism had gained ground in Central Asia almost immediately after the independence of the five republics. The manifestations, religious in nature, which occurred in the post-1991 period, were neither blank enthusiasm nor mere expression of the long subdued sentiments. They were carefully planned, properly executed, immensely abetted and were logically impregnated. The fundamentalist spirit with due religious sanction in an extremist radical form expressed itself in militants' terrorist methods.

Though, religious fundamentalism is the principal driving force behind the ongoing terrorism in the Central Asia region, it is being accelerated and pushed forward by several other factors such as the poor economic development and the huge narcotics trade along with proliferation and trading of small arms in the region, and the role that is being played by the external actors.


\textsuperscript{120} ITAR-TASS, Moscow, 14 September 2000, rep. in \textit{SWB/SU/3946/G/3}, 15 September 2000.
The Economic Factors

After the collapse of the command economic structure in 1991, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economies of the Central Asian economies were in complete disarray, resulting in growth of poverty and unemployment, the two very basic prerequisites for the proliferation of social tension in the form of terrorism, fundamentalism and militancy. A careful analysis of the economic indexes would substantiate the above arguments.

The collapse of the Soviet Union deprived the Central Asian region of huge central subsidies as well as a captive market for their products. Though some of the Central Asian republics are endowed with rich gas and oil reserves, they neither possess the technology nor capital to extract and process these resources. Therefore, all the countries of the region are facing the sharp deterioration in growth performances. During 1992-96, real GDP declined on an average by 37 percent cumulatively (though it varied from 16 percent in the case of Uzbekistan to 60 percent in Tajikistan).\(^\text{121}\)

However, positive growth trends have been visible since then, though they are still not out of the red and some of them have incurred heavy foreign debts and some like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were particularly badly hit by August 1998 financial crisis in Russia and other neighbouring CIS countries. The total external debt of the Central Asian states between 1992-98 increased nearly seven fold, reaching 10.5 billion US dollars by the end of 1998. This too has from a non-existent basis at the time of their independence since Russia undertook the foreign trade liability of the former USSR. The debt to GDP ratio has grown from 0.67 percent in 1992 to more than 54 percent by 1997 in Kyrgyzstan from 74.47 percent to 109 percent in Tajikistan from nil to 63.9 percent in Turkmenistan. Only

Kazakhstan brought it down from 43.27 percent to 20.6 percent. In the case of Uzbekistan, though it increased from 3.1 percent to 17.6 percent it is within reasonable limits.\footnote{122}

Inflation is still high though it has been brought down from dramatically high levels in 1992 (two digit levels by 1997 form four digit levels in 1992). For example, Kazakhstan whose inflation rate was 29.62 percent at the end of 1992 had brought it down to 11.3 percent by the end of 1977. While the economies of the countries of the region have more or less stabilised after near total disruption in the beginning of 1990s, the social sector affected by economic factors is still in a very bad shape. Unemployment, both official and disguised, is at a high level. Real wages plummeted and barring Uzbekistan, where it was more in 1997 compared to the beginning of 1993, and Kyrgyzstan, where it was roughly same, other states registered significant drops and in Tajikistan it was 95 percent less.\footnote{123} The fall in the employment and real wage, combined with declining spending in social sector and removal of subsidies have brought down the general living standard of the masses.\footnote{124}

Poverty manifests in a variety of ways that includes the lack of resources necessary to provide for a normal life, and to avoid hunger and malnutrition, weak health, limited access to education and other basic services. Poor are not those who are retired and unemployed but even those who subsist in lower wage conditions. Households try to deal with economic stress by borrowing and reducing consumption to depleting household assets through distress selling and sometimes, attempting to diversify into alternative sources of income generation by using

\footnote{122 Economic Reforms in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, International Monetary Fund, Occasional Papers, Washington DC, 1999.}
\footnote{123 Ibid.}
\footnote{124 Ibid.}
kinship and other social networks. The social networking has become crucial to
daily survival.¹²⁵

Further, the privatisation of Central Asia has not produced the expected
results, as successful enterprises have been transferred to narrow, powerful elite.
Growing disparities of income and wealth have introduced a series of social
tensions as the gap between average monthly wages and the minimum living
wages continues to widen. Supporting this opinion, Geoffery J. Jukes, Kirill
Nourzhanov and Mikhail Alexander have opined, “Poverty, like wealth, is seldom
shared out equally between or within ethnic groups, but inequality of poverty is
for harder to bear than inequality of wealth, and because Central Asia, like the rest
of the FSU, had become accustomed over several decades to a modest but
gradually improving or at worst stable standard of living backed by non-cash
benefits in the shape of comprehensive health, education and welfare services, the
decline which began in Perestroika period and accelerated after independence, has
accentuated inter-ethnic and inter-regional tensions”.¹²⁶

While all kinds of state subsidies have been withdrawn, the old pattern of
command and centrally planned economy is continuing for all practical purposes.
The impact of this is acute in the rural areas where the condition is miserable. The
collectives there are required to grow crops (cotton and wheat) which they must
sell to the government at well below market price. Even these market prices may
be paid late and in kind. As a result, in many rural areas, the population has very
serious problems maintaining basic sustenance.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Jeffery J. Jukes, Kirill Nourhanov and Mikhail Alexandrov, “Race, Religion, Ethnicity and
h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/sympo/97summer/jukes.html
¹²⁷ Abdumannob Polat, “The Islamic Revival in Uzbekistan: A Threat to Stability?”, in Roald
Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (eds.), Islam and Central Asia; An Enduring Legacy or an Evolving
Threat?, Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Washington DC, 2000, pp. 53-54.
Scarce jobs and lands, lack of opportunities and firm social framework coupled with extreme economic difficulties have left the people susceptible to radical influences. When the incursions occurred over the past years, the insurgents found support among the local population of the region.128

**Individual Freedom and State Repression**

Another factor which has greatly contributed to the growth of terrorism in the region is the policies of the governments of the various republics towards the political opposition and against practising Muslims not affiliated with officially recognised Islamic organisations. Though we will be dealing in detail on the various policies of the governments to curb the growth of religious fundamentalism and terrorism, here, the relevance lies in the effects of the policies, which rather than being helpful in curbing the menace, have contributed substantially to its growth and spread due to the reaction they generate among the suffering masses.

The government’s treatment of those, whom it identifies as enemies of the state on the basis of their affiliation with un-official Islamic organisations, is so severe that it is polarising a segment of the population in hard opposition to the state. In Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole, the general public is politically quite passive and inclined to accept established political authority and to support the status quo. However, since the government of Uzbekistan has resorted to putting pressure on entire families of its perceived opponents, it has succeeded in turning many against the state. When siblings or parents are detained or harassed for the alleged ideological crimes of their family members, the strength of extended family relationships and close knit quality of the communities results in an ever widening circle of individuals identifying themselves against the state. It is

not always clear on what basis individuals are targeted for persecution for ideological crimes, but it appears likely that local law enforcement officials are given quotas or plans to fill and rewards for bringing in more people. Consequently, the polarisation process now affects a segment of the population.\textsuperscript{129}

Yuldeshev’s mother, Karamat Asqarova, was forced to denounce her son in 1999, “May Tahir be swallowed up by the earth, may he and his accomplices rot in their graves. I blush before our President and all the people. May this rebellious Tahir, who made me feel like this, die”, she proclaimed in a public meeting.\textsuperscript{130}

Namangani’s sister Makhbuba Akhmedov and his brother Nasyr Khojaev also publicly disowned Namangani after constant harassment from the police. Later in March 2000, they travelled to Travildara to urge their brother to lay down his arms. “we went to tell him face to face about the suffering he was causing to his family”, explained Akhmadov.\textsuperscript{131} Nevertheless, on their return to Tashkent, both were arrested, and in June, Khojaev was sentenced to fourteen years in jail. Although Namangani’s sister is no longer in jail, the police regularly called her in for questioning. In August, Namangani’s mother was summoned to a public meeting at a school auditorium in Namangan, where her neighbours denounced her, and relatives of the soldiers killed fighting the IMU blackened her face with paint and condemned her for bringing Juma into this world. She broke down, tearfully apologized and cursed her son.\textsuperscript{132} The government appeared to have no compunction about targeting innocent relatives of known IMU militants or any one with radical Islamic connection. Karimov urged the young men not to let

\textsuperscript{129} Central Asia: Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security, ICG Asia Report, op. cit., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{130} Quoted in Ahmed Rashid, Jihad, op. cit., pp. 146-147.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, p. 147.
themselves to be brainwashed by the fundamentalists, warning, "trying to escape the subordination to authority may result in a personal tragedy".\textsuperscript{133}

Apart from such cases, the crackdowns on the general support to these fundamentalist groups have been severe. Anyone who exhibits any sign of devotion to radical Islam is the object of official suspicion. This applies especially to those who attend mosques that are not integrated into the government's Islamic administration, though association with the latter is increasingly a serious liability. Private mosques - in an increasing number associated with a particular kind of Islamic orientation - have become the targets of official disapproval and designated illegal. Those who were previously associated with the mosque later designated as illegal were particularly at risk. They may be called to account for their earlier association with an \textit{imam}, who has since been arrested. Given that in most parts of Uzbekistan association with a particular mosque reflects more one's place of residence than ideological orientation, to brand those who attended a particular mosque as subversives is in many cases highly arbitrary.\textsuperscript{134}

Virtually any young man who regularly attends mosque or who dresses in a manner which the police perceive as symbol of Islamic fundamentalism can recount repeated incidents of having been detained or brought in for questioning about his Islamic activities. Some have been forcibly shaved off their beards which are perceived as demonstrating an anti-government, Islamic orientation. Young women are likewise under pressure not to dress in an Islamic manner. Female students in high schools and universities are forbidden to wear \textit{hijab} (a headscarf that covers the hair and neck). Officials are generally perceived as having the

\textsuperscript{134} ICG Asia Report, op. cit.
capacity to act in an arbitrary and dominating manner in all spheres of life. However, this campaign against Islam, with sanction from the central governments, has given license for local police to harass the population in a manner considered particularly intrusive and in conflict with moral and traditional values. The effect is an increasingly sharp polarisation of the population against the government.\textsuperscript{135}

Vitaliy Ponomarev, the Director of the Information Centre for Human Rights in Central Asia, has underlined that human rights are being violated most of all, in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. According to him, there were more than 7,500 political prisoners in Uzbekistan by the middle of 2001. He further added that the increase in the political repression is only contributing to the destabilising of the situations in the region. The total persecution and destruction of the secular opposition in the early 1990s created a vacuum inside Uzbekistan, which has now been filled with Islamic radicals and According to him it is Karimov himself who is primarily to blame for this.\textsuperscript{136} Later, in a press conference he was more categorical when he said that the people of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan published have become extremists against their will because they have no other way of defending their freedom.\textsuperscript{137}

Similar views were also voiced by an international observer group. In their report, the International Crisis Group argued that, “the IMU did not spring up in Taliban Afghanistan but in Uzbekistan”. It also stated “political oppression frequently serves as the final straw that drives many young Uzbeks to turn to underground Islamic groups in the intensively formed and overcrowded Fergana Valley”. The abusive behaviour of the regime of Karimov is fuelling armed Islamic

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Quoted in “State Terror in Uzbekistan”, \textit{The Times of Central Asia}, 28 June 2001.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
extremism, severe economic dislocation and growing tensions with the
neighbouring states.\footnote{138}{Quoted in “Autocratic Uzbek Regime Fuels Instability a Decade after Independence”, The Times of Central Asia, 13 September 2001}}

Similar measures are also being increasingly employed in the neighbouring
states as well. In its report the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights
(IHF) recently, has said that in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan the
governments have focused on security issues and have failed to properly address
democratisation, human rights, economic issues and poverty. This failure ironically
leads to more support to Islamic movements and their radicalisation in exile. It is
feared that the government’s much publicised threat of religious extremism may
therefore eventually turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy, as repressive actions
creates insecurity in the country, contributing to increasing underground
opposition, victims of repression, torture and unfair trials and imprisonment.\footnote{139}{The
state human rights organisations also have reported similar incidences. The
independent human rights organisations of Uzbekistan have reported that the
number of political prisoners in Uzbekistan prisons and colonies stands at 7,600
men, of whom 7,400 are prisoners of conscience convicted for their membership in
outlawed religious organisations.\footnote{140}{In August 2001, hundreds of women relatives
of the political prisoners at a rally in Tashkent issued an appeal saying “we inform
you that in prisons, and colonies our relatives are being tortured; both physically
and mentally” and asked for amnesty for their relatives from the President.\footnote{141}{The
HRSU in its reaction said, “in absence of at least some amnesties or effective
political engagement, a new round of rallies and radicalisation of the affected

\footnote{138}{Quoted in “Autocratic Uzbek Regime Fuels Instability a Decade after Independence”, The Times of Central Asia, 13 September 2001}
\footnote{139}{Quoted in “Human Rights Violation in Central Asia: Dramatic Deterioration in HR Situation”, The Times of Central Asia, (hereafter TCA), Vol. 3, No. 30 (126), 26 July 2001}
\footnote{141}{Ibid.}
communities may be on the cards. Religious organisations are well placed to exploit the disaffection to the detriment of the security in the country".  

The religious policies of the governments of the Central Asian republics are also to a greater extent fanning the radicalism in the region. For example, government’s attempt to draw the clergy in its efforts to control Islam, meanwhile, can have the effect of worsening the situation, by developing a rift between the ‘loyal’ clergy, who are increasingly discredited in the eyes of the population, and the ‘popular’ clergy, who resist the government’s control. Thus, one Imam Alauddin Mansur, a prominent Islamic scholar regularly preaches that the supporters of Hizb-ut-Tahrir are ‘even more dangerous than atheists or communists…. they are not Muslims, the members of this party are like virus, and people should distance form them’. Many local Muslims whether or not they are supporters of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, consider Imam Mansur to be following directives of the Mufti of Uzbekistan when he does not allow Hizb-ut-Tahrir members to pray in his mosque. As the government seeks to co-opt a segment of the clergy, it drives the population away from those who might otherwise be identified simply as moderates, and towards those groups strongly opposed to the government.

Another major motivation of support for the radical opposition is the question of justice. Many who would be otherwise politically passive in Central Asia can be moved to action when they perceive infringement of justice, and this issue dominates the rhetoric of the Islamists. As the government is perceived as corrupt and abusive of its authority, as especially as people are persecuted for

\[142\] Quoted in ibid.

\[143\] These quotes derive from Imam Mansur’s teachings on Islam, which are distributed free on audio tape. Cited in ICG Asia Report, No. 14, op. cit., p. 17.
moral and religious convictions, the argument grows increasingly compelling that only a change of government will achieve justice.\textsuperscript{144}

Thus while the above mentioned factors have contributed to the perpetuation of radicalism in Central Asian societies and politics, it is also actively promoted by other factors, i.e. the narcotic drugs, small arms trade and the active involvement of surrounding external powers.

Table 2
Basic Macroeconomic Indicators (1999)

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<tr>
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<th>GDP Growth (%)</th>
<th>Inflation (%)</th>
<th>Fiscal Balance (% of GDP)</th>
<th>Current Account Balance (% of GDP)</th>
<th>Foreign Direct Investment (Million US$)</th>
<th>Exchange Rate (Na.cur/$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>-5.4</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
<td>1587</td>
<td>109.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>-13.0</td>
<td>-14.8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>-3.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1,237.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
<td>-17.3</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>*5.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (*) Official exchange rate.
Source: http://www.ecosecretariat.org/

\textsuperscript{144} ICG Asia Report, ibid.

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