CHAPTER IV

ISLAMIST EXTREMISM IN CENTRAL ASIA:
A SECURITY IMPLICATION FOR INDIA

Islam remained subdued in erstwhile Soviet Union although it had ancient origin. After independence it emerged with vehemence. Islamism has acquired a new status, undermining the traditional version, opening into radicalism. Many extremist organisations such as Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT) have sprang up. In this chapter, the causes and consequences of the rise of religious extremism in Central Asia have been discussed, and how far it is likely to persist. The security of the Central Asian region and that of India is threatened because of terrorism and religious extremism. To address this problem, regional security cooperation is imperative. Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) under the leadership of Russia, and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) under the combined leadership of Russia and China are lively organisations contributing to the stability of the region. India is also afflicted with the scourge of Islamic extremism / terrorism particularly in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Any emergence and success of Islamic extremism in Central Asia is bound to affect the stability of India as the perpetrators of the activities are interlinked. Cooperation between India and Central Asia thus becomes essential in mutual interest and stability of the region.

ORIGIN OF RADICAL ISLAM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Religious extremism has emerged as a serious concern in post-Soviet Central Asia. The independent states of Central Asia witnessed the resurgence of Islam on the one hand and the rise of extremism on the other. Ever since Islam entered the Central Asian region with the Arab invasion in the seventh century, its dissemination was not uniform. Its influence was higher amongst the sedentary people rather than the nomadic ones. Islamists entered the region in a significant way after the late 1980s. Previously, it had lost contact with the rest of the Islamic world by decades of stern Soviet rule, that was
regained after independence. Although Islamic revival has taken place across Central Asia, yet Soviet heritage of secularism has survived and is substantially at a higher level than in most other parts of the Muslim world.

The spread of Islamic radicalism has been uneven, depending upon: differing strength of Islamic traditions in a particular area, external factors such as foreign proselytizing, and domestic political and social developments. The influence of extremist organisations has been deeper, where traditionally Islam was strong. Ferghana Valley – densely populated, and politically divided between Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan – has been the focus of Islamic revival and of radical groups. This is an area where foreign radicals first established their presence, and it has been traditionally a hot centre of Islamic activities. In contrast, northern Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have found lower levels of Islamic activity.

Radical Islam, an ideological approach within Islam, is dogmatic, orthodox and conservative, seeking to revive the primacy of Sharia law and establishment of the religious-political structure called Islamic Caliphate based on the prophetic traditions. The adherents of this thought opines to ‘cleanse Islam from innovations’ and are critical of those who differs from them in ideology. The faith in primeval Islam comes at the core of their political, social and revolutionary goals. Radical Islam endorses a version of Islam based on two aspects: spiritual faith and involvement in politics with the ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic Caliphate. Their political view of Islam is derived through their belief in God: “Since God is absolutely sovereign so too should his sole representative on earth, the Caliph, who leads the Islamic state.” 1 All other systems of governments, democracy or socialism, are used by Islamists as fundamentally flawed because they are created by human beings and therefore are imperfect. Vijay Kapur states: “The belief in one community of Allah on earth continues to influence Muslim fundamentalists who believe that the non-believers (or Kafirs) have eroded Islamic discipline and attempted to impose a secular polity on an essentially proud and

nationalist Islamic core.”

Islam and Islamic values in Central Asia are rooted in its local traditions. Prior to the Arab invasions of seventh century, the Central Asian region was a cradle of many religions – Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism. The presence of other religions led to the development of several distinctive features that differentiated Central Asian Islam from the Arab variant. Firstly, it favoured Hanafi school of law, pragmatic and worldly system of regulating conduct. Secondly, it was opposed to formalism. Central Asian Islam reacted to imposition of Arab external rituals by developing the Sufi movements. The development of Sufism led to inner spirituality, mysticism and the cult of saints. The latter added distinctive features to Central Asian Islam with shrines of local saints widespread in the region, not found anywhere in the Muslim world.

Thus the Central Asian region has been the bastion of moderate and traditional Islam which is highly syncretic and believes in the philosophy of adaptation to contemporary conditions.

The roots of radical Islam in Central Asia germinated well before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Radical Islam in Central Asia, according to Martha Brill Olcott, represents two battles: one between, “Islam and the forces that seek to transform Islam’s socio-political role”, and second is the “doctrinal disputes within Islam that have been characteristic on the practice and teaching of the faith for more than five hundred years.”

With the advent of communism after the Bolshevik revolution, Islam was deprived of any formal and public role. In the early 1920s all the madrassas were eliminated and only a handful of mosques were allowed to function. ‘Sharia law’ as


basis of Islamic jurisprudence was banned. Thousands of believers of Islam fled from Central Asia and took shelter in other countries: a small number of them even went to Saudi Arabia. The majority of believers who remained in Central Asia had to bear untold hardships in the process of Stalin purges. But they got themselves involved in spiritual teachings (unofficially) and their efforts made religion survive.

During World War II a change in the religious policy of the Soviet authorities took place; steps to institutionalize Islam were taken. In consequence, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia (SADUM) was established in 1943, though the underpinned purpose was to have centralized control over the religious activities in Central Asia. Nikita Khrushchev’s policies facilitated renaissance of Islam. He believed that Soviet ideology had no current competitors, it had finally won and the religion posed no threat to Soviet rule.

Khrushchev’s policies brought about substantial linkages between SADUM and greater Muslim world. More intense informal contacts also grew between Central Asian Muslims and their brethren in other parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East. As a result, flow of spiritual content of sacred texts brought into Central Asia from other parts of the Muslim world presented another view of the world to them. Delegations from the Middle East invited to visit Soviet Union included clerics as well. Saudis, in particular, brought with them religious literature that was freely donated to the library of SADUM making them accessible to the people visiting the library. Moreover, opportunities were provided to SADUM clerics to study in the seminaries in the Middle East. All these developments brought the Soviet era clerics in contact with fundamentalist Salafi ideology. Some of them were greatly influenced and became less tolerant of Hanafi acceptance of local customs over time. Thus a niche was created to carry out radical Islamist ideology in Central Asia.5

Despite the atheist policy and strict control of the Soviet authorities, illegal underground official schools of Islamic learning continued to survive throughout the Soviet period, more particularly in Uzbekistan and Ferghana Valley. Most of these underground schools imparted instructions on traditions of Hanafi Islam as it was practiced in Central Asia since the middle ages. But the debate amongst the teachers in

---

5. Ibid pp.7-8
these schools over religious purification and the need for reform had been continuing. However, the contact with the outside world gave Islam political orientation. Ikhwan-al-Muslimun, the Muslim Brotherhood, was the first to come to Central Asia in 1970s. This group consisted of ethnically diverse collection of Muslim students from various countries such as Jordan, Iraq and Afghanistan. These students established the ‘Tashkent Group’ to create secret cells in the Central Asian universities with the ultimate goal of establishing a Caliphate. With the implementation of Perestroika reforms, these Islamists started their activities more openly. Thus it was during late 1970s that the clerics who came under the influence of Salafi-Wahhabi thought began to move away from traditional Hanafi school of Islam, mainly over the question of the relationship between Islam and politics. Rahmatullah-alloma and Abduhvali qori, who got religious education in the underground schools in the Andijan region, were greatly influenced by Abd Al-Wahhab’s at-Tawhid. They were the protagonists of Wahhabi ideology and focused on politicization of religion, considering that pure Islam could only be established if it were a state religion and that be pursued aggressively. A student of Rahmatullah stated:

Allah aided Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in his work because Wahhab set before himself the task that God wished: to cleanse Islam by any means necessary of intolerable innovations and the domination of unbelievers.

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan provided further stimulus to the radical Islamic movements in Central Asia. During the Soviet involvement in the Afghan civil war, a large number of Uzbeks and Tajiks were sent to Afghanistan to assist the pro-Soviet government. Some sections of these troops deserted the Soviet army after having

---


7. Both Rahmatullah-alloma and Abduhvali qori were the disciples of theologian Hakimjon qori Margilani. Margilani became the follower of Salafi tradition particularly under the influence of the works of Ibn Tayyimiya – ideologue of radical political Islam. Martha Brill Olcott “Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia” op.cit.

developed relations with Mujahideen, and fought alongside with them. Apart, those who returned from Afghanistan started working clandestinely for Islamic organisations. In Afghanistan Islamic radicalism was a key factor behind the resistance to the Soviet occupation. It had spillover effect on Tajikistan where important political movements on Islamic basis emerged. Southern Kyrgyzstan and neighbouring Uzbekistan could not escape from this spread.

GROWTH OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AFTER INDEPENDENCE

After independence Central Asian states adopted secularism as state policy, but they were not atheist rather promoted moderate Islam. Majority of the population has adhered to Hanafi school of thought. Only a small minority subscribes to Wahhabism, an alien doctrinal approach to Islam. Wahhabism advocates political Islam and even use of violence, when necessary, with a clear objective of capturing the state power based on Quran.

The radical groups which had been working underground became a little more open during Gorbachev’s period and then after independence. Ferghana Valley turned as a hub of radical Islamic activities in Central Asia. Wahhabites of Namangan (Ferghana Valley) established organisations called ‘Adolat’ and ‘Islam Lashkarlari’ under the leadership of Tahir Yuldash and Juma Namangani. They assumed the functions of parallel Islamic authorities: “From the members of these organisations were formed groups of an Islamic police force, who, on their own authority flogged petty thieves at the city bazaars, stopped women who were not wearing kerchiefs to give them to a strict warning, persecuted people who missed prayer services and so forth.” After a period of restraint the government of Uzbekistan cracked down on Wahhabites: mass arrests were made but some went into hiding, the leaders of Wahhabites who failed to emigrate

---

were prosecuted in trial courts.\textsuperscript{10}

The disintegration of Soviet Union brought to surface the destructive potential of political Islam. Shortly after independence, Tajikistan got embroiled in murderous civil war between the opposition actively supported by radical group Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and the communist elites. It had its spillover effect on radical groups operating in other Central Asian states, particularly, in the Ferghana Valley. Apart from the prominent groups IRP, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, there are about ten small but mobile terrorist groups that have been operating across the Ferghana Valley such as Tablígh (Mission), Uzun Sokol (Long Beard), Adolat Uyushmasi (Justice Society), Tawba (Repentance), Nur (Ray of light): their activities are similar to the IMU than to Hizb-Tahrir, ready to take up arms against the state.\textsuperscript{11}

**Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan**

The Islamic Renaissance (Revival) Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) grew out of the all-Soviet IRP which was established on June 9, 1990 in Astrakhan, Russia, prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The unified IRP had three structures: Central Asian, North Caucasian and Europe. IRP was opposed to the disbanding of the Soviet Union, rather advocated for more rights and freedom for Muslims within the Soviet Union. The organisation was professed as a religious organisation to unite Muslims, actively propagating Islam and taking part in the cultural and socio-political sphere following the basic principles of Islam. After the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991, the unified structure of the IRP was fragmented along regional lines; IRPT was officially registered in Tajikistan in December 1991, the only legitimate Islamic party in Central Asia.

The most prominent figure of IRPT, Syed Abdullo Nuri, headed the party for 13 years till his death on August 9, 2006. He preached Islamic fundamentalism ever since


the Soviet era which had earned him several arrests. After independence, Nuri adorned the idea of an Islamic state in Tajikistan.12

Keeping in view the political expediency, the IRPT joined hands with Democratic Party and the nationalist Rastokhez Popular Movement. This unlikely alliance of IRPT with democratic parties, Olivier Roy states, “was not only a coalition of those excluded from the power. It also had a common basis, which made it a rather lasting alliance. The basis was a common Tajik nationalism”13 which rested on the foundation of common Tajik Identity, being the descendants of Islamic Persian culture. This alliance was also based on shared political interests, against the communists, for the establishment of democracy and egalitarianism. However, gradually ethno-regional and political interests overshadowed and dominated national and ideological factors.

The IRP of Tajikistan got prominence in the Tajik civil war which was not a conflict simply between Islamic and secular forces, rather a conflict between regions and clans of Tajikistan. The causal factors that ignited the civil war in Tajikistan are stated to be the wide gap in economic development and power sharing amongst different regions. The regions, comprising northern province of Leninabad (Khozand) and the southeastern province of Kulyab, enjoyed the fruits of economic development whereas eastern autonomous region of Badakshan and the central valleys of Garm and Karategin faced deprivation. The political power was also enjoyed by the former.14 Barnett R. Rubin negates that Islam was the sole factor for this civil war. It was simply used for mobilisation and legitimization, “it would be quite misleading to call it a religious


157
conflict. The mullahs belonging to the regional groupings of northern Tajikistan and the other group, the Kolabis, who were in power and supplied the troops, did not support the Islamic party because it was Islamic. They supported the leaders of their own region.”

Syed Abdullo Nuri entered into an armistice with Rahmonov’s People’s Front in 1997, as he probably realized that Tajikistan cannot be consolidated on the ideology of Islam and that the civil war has also proved that Tajikistan is utterly fragmented on clan, ethnic and regional lines.

From quite some time Rahmonov has tightened the rules on religious activities and practices. The Tajik government has imposed certain restrictions on personal religious freedoms. The government issued regulations banning hijab at universities in April 2007, which was later on, in 2008 extended to public schools as well. Rahmonov has described ‘hijab as a foreign culture for Tajiks.’ The male students at the Islamic University of Tajikistan are required to put on suits and ties and shave their beards. The Tajik government has also been attempting to undermine the role of Islam in politics. The law on religion and religious organisations passed in 1994 delineates the right of religious organisations. Imams can neither participate in politics nor can issue fatwas, all religious organisations are required to be registered. As a result, the government has closed down hundreds of unregistered mosques. Those heads of mosques are appointed who adhere to the government line on Friday sermons. The call to prayers using a loudspeaker is restricted. The use of Arabic script in public and Arabic language instructions is forbidden. These sort of sanctions are implanted to discourage religious foothold in Tajikistan.

The IRPT has failed to confront the government’s anti-Islamic stance due to its weakened position. The IRPT had espoused political Islam and fought against the government. Later on, after the peace accord, it accepted the secular nature of the state and toned down its rhetoric on political Islam. The government has made efforts to weaken the status of IRPT by linking it to extremist and other illegal activities. In 2003, two IRPT senior leaders were convicted of murder and rape. President Rahmonov


hinted in a speech in 2002 that two Tajik prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay were connected to the IRPT. In spite of all this, there was no strong protest launched by IRPT. Even Nuri, the deceased chairman of IRPT, praised President Rahmonov for achieving peace and stability in Tajikistan.¹⁷ Many people have started viewing the party as a satellite of the government. After Nuri’s death the party got split up in two factions: one under the leadership of Muhiddin Kabiri (moderate pro-western) and the other under Nuri’s son Muhammad (fundamentalist). The falling graph of IRPT has made many people disillusioned with the party. Out of frustration, people have started turning to Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a banned political organisation that aims to establish a Caliphate through non-violent means.

**Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islamic (The Party of Islamic Liberation)**

Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a transnational political movement with radical Islamic ideology, active in over 40 countries is a potential threat to Central Asia. It has been able to attract increasing number of adherents to its ideology as it adapts to conveying different political messages in different political environments keeping in view the local conditions and problems. In Western Europe, it seeks justice for Muslims eliminated from mainstream society which it views as anti-Islamic and imperialist. In Central Asia it considers establishment of Caliphate an alternative to secularist repression and dismal socio-economic conditions. An International Crisis Group report puts it succinctly: “Hizb-ut-Tahrir has used a blend of indigenous history, arguments about local socio-economic and political conditions and calls for international Islamic solidarity to advance its case for a struggle against authorities and establishment of a more egalitarian Caliphate.”¹⁸ Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT) has been banned throughout Turkey, the...
Middle East, North Africa, Russia, Pakistan and Germany. In Central Asia also, this group has been outlawed but still it has been quite active and operating clandestinely in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and some parts of Kazakhstan.

**Ideology**

Hizb-ut-Tahrir was founded by Sheikh Taqiuddin an-Nabhani al-Falastani (1909-1977) in 1952 in Jordanian ruled East Jerusalem. An-Nabhani thought Islam and Western civilization as two separate entities having mutually exclusive ideological standings. He rejected to compromise Islam with Western ideas of constitutionalism or nationalism. Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s ideology is based on theology. It is an elitist movement based upon radical Islamist ideology making use of theology to justify its position.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir claims to be a ‘Pan-Islamic’ movement. It stands unique compared to other radical Islamist movements by its apparent opposition to the use of violence. But its views are highly radical with the ultimate goal of establishing a universal Caliphate throughout the Muslim world by overthrowing the existing regimes.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s doctrines stipulates re-establishment of Islamic society on the pattern established by Prophet Mohammad. It stands for the liberation of Muslims from the thoughts, systems and laws of Kufr or Kafir (non-believers), and replacement of the Judo-Christian dominated nation-state system by a world Caliphate. Hizb-ut-Tahrir rejects democracy as godless: “Democracy---- is considered a Kufr system. It is in clear contradiction with the Qu’ran and Sunnah.” Hizb-ut-Tahrir considers that there is an ideological clash between the secular democratic ideology and the God given system of Caliphate. It believes that propagation of democracy by the West and its promulgation, just as in the Middle East and Central Asia, is a United States driven conspiracy to dominate the Muslim lands. The organisation wants the fellow Muslims to condemn those government leaders who act at the behest of Western imperialism. Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov is placed in the category of Kufr by Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Abu Yusuf Abdul Qadim Zallum, the successor of An-Nabhani, believes that Muslims live in a state of ignorance as a result of the fall of the Caliphate. They can retrieve their

---

position by ending their “subjugation and collaboration” to the West and thus regaining their collective identity and re-establishing the Caliphate.20

Along with democracy, Hizb-ut-Tahrir also rejects Western economic model of capitalism as exploitative. Yet, the organisation has failed to offer, if it comes to power, any concrete alternative economic system that can provide employment, tackle rampant poverty, remove corruption and ethnic strife that is so prevalent in some states as in Central Asia. Hizb-ut-Tahrir considers An-Nabhani’s book, ‘The Economic System of Islam’, a comprehensive guide to its economic policy. Commenting on the work, the International Crisis Group report states that “the main planks of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s economic policy are a return to the gold standard and a distaste for capitalism, but what would replace it is very vague------ somewhat Islamacized socialism, it is not clear how the state would finance its wide-ranging responsibilities to provide health, education and so forth.”21 This vision of an economic model by Hizb-ut-Tahrir though appears unrealistic in the present times, but in part is based on an-Nabhani’s own priori conviction that Islam is the only valid thought system. Jalaluddin Patel, leader of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Britain, states: “The Islamic economic system comes from the Creator. And of course, the Creator has a better insight into the human condition than humans.”22

Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s vision of an Islamic state is an absolute one in which Sharia must be applied completely. No compromise on other forms of political structures or legal provisions is permissible:

For a land to be considered an Islamic state, every single article of the country’s constitution, every rule and law must emanate from the Islamic Sharia.23

Hizb-ut-Tahrir rejects attempts of existence of those Islamic states which do not follow the true vision of Islam. Iran and Saudi Arabia, the existing states which consider

23. International Crisis Group “Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb-ut-Tahrir” op.cit. p.4
themselves Islamic, are rejected because they fall short of set up ideals. It opposes the
government of Saudi Arabia as it sees its rulers as secular, but call themselves Islamic
only to gain legitimacy. Saudi leadership does not follow Wahhabi ideology closely; they
externalize it and have exported it, but did not internalize it. Hizb-ut-Tahrir similarly
does not approve Iran as it was established as a republic with a constitution whose
political structure was derived on the pattern of France.

Methodology

The emphasis on the methodology of political struggle adopted by Hizb-ut-Tahrir
for the establishment of the Caliphate makes it distinctive from the other radical Islamic
groups. The pattern adopted by Hizb-ut-Tahrir is the interpretation and emulation of the
steps followed by Prophet Mohammad in establishing the first Islamic state. These are
broadly divided into three stages:

Stage One: Building a Party

The first stage is engaged in the cultivation of Islamic personalities who adhere to
Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s principles. Those who accept the basic philosophy are imparted
intensive study and are purified in thoughts and rules of Islam adopted by the party. Thus
they become fully qualified to be the members of the group capable of carrying out the
party’s mission.

Stage Two: Interacting with Society

The second stage is of collective culturing by interacting with the Muslim
community, “to let the Umma embrace and carry Islam, so that the Umma takes it as its
issue and thus works to establish it in the affairs of life.” This state is employed to seek
an intellectual transformation of the Umma (wider Muslim community) through political
and cultural interaction to prepare them for Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s revolution. In this stage
Hizb-ut-Tahrir members indulge in open propaganda against the governments that create
aversion in the people against them.

---

    op.cit. p.20
25. Ibid pp.20-23
Stage Three: Seeking Power

The third stage is reached when the mass of Umma has embraced Hizb-ut-Tahrir's interpretation of Islam and its political objective, and that is the proper time when the environment is ripe for establishing Caliphate by political revolution in a broadly non-violent manner “through the penetration of government institutions and the recruitment of key officials who could turn the government in favour of Hizb-ut-Tahrir.” Hizb-ut-Tahrir recognizes that force should be avoided as far as possible but be used as a last resort against the state’s action to protect itself.

The theoretical base of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s ideology rests upon the historical example of Prophet Mohammad. Prophet Mohammad during his early life in Mecca did not use force and instead raised objections regarding the misdeeds of the rulers, and thus was able to gather followers around him. Hizb-ut-Tahrir replicates the same technique to overthrow the regimes in Islamic countries and their replacement by an Islamic Caliphate. In the initial stage, it strives to achieve mass following for its ideas before seeking power. It is against the seizure of power and then forcing the society to accept an Islamic order, rather it believes in shaping the ideas of society first which would ultimately lead to a change in regime.

Concept of Non-Violence

The question arises how far it is practical to change the recalcitrant regimes without the use of violence. An-Nabhani argued that “a regime could be brought down through acts of civil disobedience such as strikes, non-cooperation with the authorities or demonstrations or through a procession to the palace or Presidential residence, provided that the movement enjoys exclusive control and leadership . Alternatively, it could be toppled through a military coup executed by forces that have agreed to hand over power to the movement.” But how the party avowed to non-violence can justify


163
involvement in a military coup:

Internal sources argue that groups pledging the party their back-up can use arms—-if society stands against the regime its removal even by military force does not constitute an act of violence: this would be the case only if the party were to kill its opponents to arrive in power, for example. 27

The above statement shows ambiguity of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s concept of non-violence. As of how military coup can be executed or military force applied without abetment by the party, if it is not so, how the power so called can be handed over to the movement. So it appears that the movement seeks support of the people by advocating pursuit of non-violent means in its initial stages but does not hesitate to support the use of force or violence in the final stages. There are ample evidences of its involvement in a series of failed coups attempted to overthrow governments in the Middle East for example in Jordan in 1960s and early 1970s.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Central Asia

The independent Central Asian states provided new space for the expansion of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s ideology. The inroad was created in late 1970s, when Jordanian and Palestinian students studying at the region’s higher institutions brought Hizb-ut-Tahrir material for the first time. The process of expansion started in 1992 but it gathered momentum when Salahuddin, a Jordanian, disseminated Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s literature to the ethnic Uzbeks in the Ferghana Valley, which became the focal point of Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s activities in Central Asia. But overtime it has successfully spread its influence in the rest of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. February 1999 explosions in Tashkent were wrongly attributed to Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Later on the charges were retracted. Thereafter, the activities of Hizb-ut-Tahrir increased in Uzbekistan: Hizb-ut-Tahrir published its first leaflet about Uzbekistan in April 1999, denying the charges. Since then the publication of leaflets became a routine affair. Subsequently, due to excessive repression resorted to by the Uzbekistan authorities, many Hizb-ut-Tahrir

27. Ibid
members left the country. They became excellent missionaries for the movement to spread its ideology. Initially, Hizb-ut-Tahrir operations were confined to areas with large Uzbek populations of northern Tajikistan, Osh area of Kyrgyzstan and southern Kazakhstan, later on its activities expanded to northern Kazakhstan, Bishkek area of Kyrgyzstan and Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan – these areas have no significant number of ethnic Uzbeks and are away from Uzbekistan border. 28

It is difficult to estimate precisely the size of Hizb-ut-Tahrir membership in Central Asia but their number has constantly been on the rise. According to official statistics, in Kyrgyzstan alone the membership has increased as high as 10,000. 29 M.K. Bhadrakumar notes that “according to Western think tank Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s hard core would be in the region of 20,000 cadres. Central Asian security agencies put the figure as 60,000. By either reckoning, Hizb-ut-Tahrir is indisputably the single biggest cadre based political movement in the region.”30

Uzbeks from the Ferghana Valley constitute the group’s core membership and majority of them are young people, especially the unemployed youth. Vitaly Panomaryor, who runs a human rights monitoring programme, states: “If we look at trials and also based on my own meetings (with Hizb-ut-Tahrir members) most members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir are young people who do not see future of their country within the system created by (Uzbek) President Islam Karimov.”31 Many prominent people are also becoming the members of this political movement in Central Asia. Toigubek Kalmatov, head of the Kyrgyz governmental agency on religions affairs, states: “They have attracted many members of Parliament, well known businessmen and government

28 Zeyno Baran “Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency” op. cit. pp. 77-78
29 Gulnoza Saidazimova 2007 “Central Asia: Banned Islamic Group Hizb-ut-Tahrir Continues to Gain Members” August 14,
30 M.K. Bhadrakumar 2005 “Religion and Politics in Central Asia” The Hindu May 12; Delhi p.10.
31 Gulnoza Saidazimova 2006 “Central Asia: Suppressing Hizb-ut-Tahrir Could Radicalize Youth” July 29, 
officials and thus (they have) gained financial, moral and other support for their activity." As Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s goal is to stage coup through penetration to political power centres, even small number in hundreds can make a big difference.

Unlike other Islamist movements, Hizb-ut-Tahrir is not averse to women as being members of the movement. Women constitute 10 per cent of Hizb-ut-Tahrir worldwide membership. In Central Asia also more and more women are coming forward for recruitment in this movement. Ikbal Mirsaidov, an expert at the Presidential Centre for International Strategic Studies in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, says that “with thousands of people being arrested and imprisoned for alleged membership in Hizb-ut-Tahrir over the past decade, it is inevitable that the group would find support among women. Most of these women who have now become politically active have seen their husbands, brothers or fathers being prosecuted for Hizb-ut-Tahrir membership.”

Several factors have contributed to Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s success in its mobilization efforts in Central Asia:

- After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian states have faced a large number of socio-economic problems such as extreme poverty, high unemployment, corruption, drug addiction and prostitution. Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s ideology provides a holistic solution to all these challenges. It blames the governments and the system that has led to the situation, and exhorts the people to overthrow their governments and resurrect the Caliphate to bring an end to all their problems.

- There are psychological gaps of loneliness and aimlessness in the lives of many Central Asians, particularly the young. There is a general feeling amongst the people regarding loss of social status, lack of belief in future and desire to do something about changes in society that deeply affect people’s lives. Hizb-ut-Tahrir fills the hole by providing them ground for social network and inculcating

32. Gulnoza Saidazimova “Central Asia: Banned Islamic Group Hizb-ut-Tahrir Continues to Gain Members” op.cit.
• The present borders of the Central Asian states, arbitrarily drawn during the Soviet era, have given rise to economic, social and humanitarian problems amongst the peoples. Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s goal of Caliphate solicits public support. Anara Tabyshalieva notes: “The idea of unified state reminiscent of the Soviet era with no national border between Central Asian states, is supported by traders, customers and many others involved in cross-border trade which supplies the livelihood of a significant part of the Central Asia’s population.”

• Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s ideology provides people of Central Asia a connection to the global *Umma*. The membership of Hizb-ut-Tahrir creates a sense of belonging and feeling as being part of the great *Umma* and as copartner in their sufferings. A report of International Crisis Group states: “The notion of worldwide Muslim unity has been a central element in its mobilization efforts, and it has tried to use its international character to lend its cause moral authority. For example, leaflets will commonly argue that all Muslims have common problems and that conflicts in Chechnya, Israel and Afghanistan are relevant to Central Asian Muslims.”

Hizb-ut-Tahrir draws a parallel to the problems between the Middle East and Central Asia. They dub them as creations of American foreign policies, and is construed as an attack against Islam. This approach has gained appeal amongst the Central Asians. The anti-American bent of the present dominant Russian mass media in Central Asia has further strengthened the hold of these perceptions.

• The role of political parties are marginal. Some are not granted registration, while others are dominated by handful of individuals or controlled by powerful elites or business groups to serve particular interests. People do not get any opportunity to express their grievances and press for change of government. So in the absence of the political parties, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir fills the vacuum in disseminating public grievances through its clandestine network based upon

34. Zeyno Baran “Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency” op.cit. p. 79
35. Ibid p.80
publishing and distribution of pamphlets, internet\textsuperscript{17} and small meetings, escaping the government’s radar screen. Thus it is able to solicit some support for its ideology of establishment of Caliphate with a promise to provide them justice and fairness. Sheikh Sadiq Q. Kamal Al-Deen, the director of the Islamic centre of Islamic cooperation in Osh and the former Mufti of Kyrgyzstan, states: “Minimal political participation of the population, the growth of distrust of authority and scepticism about the utility of democratic institutions are key factors in the growth of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir.”\textsuperscript{38}

Hizb-ut-Tahrir has been able to portray itself as a non-violent movement due to its communication skills, thereby convincing the United States of its not being a militant organisation. Even steps taken by Uzbekistan government to tackle radicalism are not acknowledged by the United States as genuine, rather are considered as repressive acts to suppress the opposition.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir professes itself as a peaceful group that is simply engaged in the battle of ideas against repressive regimes of Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan. The Uzbekistan government holds a different view. Uzbekistan President Karimov accused Hizb-ut-Tahrir and its ideology as a source of inspiration for July 30, 2004 suicide bombings in Uzbekistan. In a broadcast address on July 31, he asked: “If the religious movement Hizb-ut-Tahrir intends to set up a Caliphate in our Uzbekistan, overthrow the current system, give up the modern style of life and create a state based on Sharia law than how will they be able to do this in a peaceful way.”\textsuperscript{39} That way President Karimov accused Hizb-ut-Tahrir of abetment to violence, but the Western media and governments thought that Karimov was trying to use the terrorist incident for repression. The statement released by Tajikistan Hizb-ut-Tahrir presented a better understanding of

\textsuperscript{37} There are several websites related directly to Hizb-ut-Tahrir–Hizb-ut-Tahrir.org, 1924.org and hilafet.com to name a few.


168
Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s motives and activities in Uzbekistan: “If we ever decide to include violence in our programme, we shall not blow up things here and there; we shall go directly to his (Karimov’s) palace and liquidate him because we are not afraid of anyone but God Almighty. Karimov himself understands that we can do it. He can find from his security services that it is in our power to crush or to liquidate him. Should our chosen path allow us to act in this manner------- however we are preparing a terrible death for this tyrant under the Caliphate that is approaching near everyday – with the permission of Allah. Thus this tyrant would get just punishment in this life. The Allah’s punishment in the hereafter would be stronger many times more.” 40 This statement clearly indicates that while Hizb-ut-Tahrir is hopeful of establishing the Caliphate by peaceful means, but further admits that, if necessary, its membership will use force to achieve their objective.

There is no formal declared alliance between Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, but both have a common goal of establishing a Caliphate; the main difference between them is regarding the way of achievement. While the IMU advocates and carries out militant operations, Hizb-ut-Tahrir focuses on phased ideological battle to achieve its goal. Both the entities admit that their end goals are the same and gets closer to the achievement with the weakening of the state authority. Local experts believe that “IMU wanted to overthrow the Karimov regime and unite Uzbekistan with Afghanistan under Taliban rule, a union which would be the first step in the creation of worldwide Caliphate.” Although several meetings have been held between the leadership of IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, but one held in 1997 near Islamabad (Pakistan) between Yuldashev (representing IMU) and Hizb-ut-Tahrir Uzbekistan discussed on ways of establishing an Islamic regime in Tashkent. Yuldashev reportedly held that the use of armed force would be absolutely necessary to realize the aim, and expressed its confidence that Hizb-ut-Tahrir would soon do this. 41 Ahmed Rashid reported, a group from Hizb-ut-Tahrir Uzbekistan was trained in terrorist tactics in

---

41. Zeyno Baran “Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency” op.cit. p.90
Mazar-i-sharif, Afghanistan, at a camp directed by the late Juma Namangani.42 According to Talant Razzakov, Kyrgyz National Security Service Official, there is an implicit and ideological link between Hizb-ut-Tahrir and IMU and that the police have found weapons in Hizb-ut-Tahrir hideouts in southern Kyrgyzstan.43

In spite of clear links between these organisations and their public denials to this effect, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has been able to show it as a non-violent movement, simply providing an ideology. But its acts of abetment to violence cannot be condoned, so an international awareness requires to be developed bringing forth the dangers Hizb-ut-Tahrir presents, and development of essentialities to address this menace.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a group of radical Islamic militants formally came into being in 1998 at Kabul with the express goal to overthrow the secular regime of Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan and to establish an Islamic state based on ‘Sharia law’. The origin of IMU can be traced back to 1990s when its precursor organisations Adolat and Islam Lashkarlari were founded by Tahir Abdouhalilovitch Yuldashev, a cleric of the Islamic underground movement, and Jumaboi Ahmadzhanovitch Khojaev, who later adopted the alias Juma Namangani, a former Soviet paratrooper, who had served in Afghanistan and from there got influenced from the ideology of Mujahideen. According to Vitaly V. Naumkin: “Adolat gained broad support in the densely populated cities of the Ferghana Valley through its high level of religiosity. Their contribution to the promotion of the idea of Islamic state was immense. They performed all necessary Islamic rituals and were devoted to Islamic traditions and

moral values. In early 1992, the group was banned by the Uzbekistan government and crackdown ensued thereafter, as a result prominent leader of the group and others fled to Tajikistan. In Tajikistan, Yuldashev and Namangani fought alongside the radical forces in Tajik civil war. Namangani, a military strategist, took the Tavildara Valley in north-eastern Tajikistan as his base.

During the civil war, Yuldashev’s radical message, in his absence from the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan, continued to be disseminated clandestinely through the network of mosques and madrassas. Moreover, he travelled to a number of Islamic countries Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and United Arab Emirates. He established contacts with intelligence agencies of various countries and Islamic movements requesting financial support and sanctuary; he received both from Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Between 1995 and 1998, Yuldashev was based in Peshawar – “the centre not only of Pakistani and Afghan Islamic activism but also of Pan-Islamic Jihadi groups.” After the Taliban rule in Afghanistan in 1996, IMU developed extensive connections with Al-Qaeda and Taliban and secured political support and financial backing from Osama bin Laden. A number of IMU members got training in Al-Qaeda run camps in Afghanistan. Three such IMU camps were located in Rishkor (near Kabul), Kunduz and Mazar-i-sharif. After getting disillusioned with the signing of armistice between Tajikistan government and opposition forces in 1997, Yuldashev and his associates joined forces with Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. Later on in 1998, Adolat, Baraka, Tawba and Islam Lashkarlari were brought together under the title of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Namangani became the military commander of IMU, whereas Yuldashev was the chief ideologue. It was during this period that IMU jihadis started operating in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The IMU was allegedly found involved in a number of violent activities in Central Asia.

45. Ibid p.25
46. Zeyno Baran “Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency” op.cit. p.75
The IMU on 16 February, 1999 made a failed attempt to assassinate Karimov when its members detonated six car bombs in Takshkent. As a result of the explosions, 13 people were reported to have been killed and 128 wounded. A total of 22 people were found guilty on charges of attempt to assassinate Karimov and overthrow the government by the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan. The court pronounced in its judgement that the defendants were connected with foreign extremist groups whose purpose was to seize power and establish an Islamic state in the republic.

In August 1999, IMU fighters carried out armed incursions in the Batken region on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. A group of IMU fighters entered into Batken region in south Kyrgyzstan from Tajikistan and took a General of the Interior Ministry of Kyrgyzstan, ten workers of a meteorological station, and later on, a group of four Japanese geologists as hostages. Tahir Yuldashev demanded a free passage to Uzbekistan through the territory of Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz security agencies refused to allow the militants a passage into Uzbekistan, rather launched military operations against them; the battle lasted for three months. However, ultimately the mediating intervention of Tajik Minister of Emergencies, Mirzo Zioev, IMU’s ally of the civil war period, and the ensuing threat of the blocking of mountain passes due to increased snowfall, made the rebels to retreat to Tavildara. A ransom of $ 2 to 5 million – though not officially reported – was also paid for the release of Japanese hostages. Under pressure from the Uzbekistan authorities, Tajikistan airlifted IMU contingent from Tavildara to the camps in Kunduz and Mazar-i-sharif in Afghanistan.


In the successive year in August-September 2000, detachments of IMU insurgents launched a series of attacks in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. This time incursions covered a wide geographical area than it was in 1999. About 100 IMU guerrillas entered the mountains of Sukhankarya province of southern Uzbekistan, and a group of rebels also penetrated close to Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan; they attacked Uzbek units in the area of Janjiabad and Bostanlyk, quite near Tashkent. According to Uzbek authorities, these guerrillas crossed over to Uzbekistan from Tajikistan. The Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov alleged: “The rebels were receiving support and assistance from unnamed members of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) — similarly elements, which are not integrated (with the power structures of Tajikistan) have strong links with the extremists in Afghanistan and these elements which secretly give assistance and aid to rebel and terrorists group.” Nevertheless, these allegations were denied by the Tajik authorities: Major-General Safaroli Saifullaev, a senior officer in the Tajik border guards, stated that “it was impossible for such a group to have crossed either the Tajik-Uzbek or Tajik-Afghan border undetected.”

Simultaneously, several coordinated diversionary offensives in units of 50 to 100 each were launched by the rebels across the mountains separating Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan towards Batken, and also Sokh and Vorukh enclaves; these enclaves located in Kyrgyzstan but are territories of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan respectively, with little or no road communication to their respective homelands. Both these enclaves are considered to be the centres of Islamic radicalism – Ahmed Rashid calls them “hotbeds of IMU support.” Further during the incursions, a group of six German, six Russian, Vitaly V. Naumkin “Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” op.cit. p.40


Svante E. Cornell “Narcotics, Radicalism, and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” op.cit. p.58

Vitaly V. Naumkin “Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” op.cit. p.40
and American mountain climbers were taken as hostages, but later on rescued from the rebels.

Both these IMU incursions of 1999 and 2000 were of too small a scale to threaten the governments and territories of Central Asian states. The intentions of IMU in carrying out these incursions are nebulous.

One view, that IMU sought to force the Uzbek government to negotiate with it and share power on the Tajik model, is not plausible. The rebels did not enter the Ferghana Valley in 1999, even when the Kyrgyz army was not strong enough to stop the well armed militants entering into it. Moreover, it would have been naive, for the rebels to have thought themselves powerful enough to take control of the Ferghana Valley with their sleek numerical strength and thus forcing the Uzbek government into negotiations. The scale of militant operations in Uzbek territory in 2000 indicated that their main purpose was to show to the people that they had the ability to embarrass Karimov government, while acting close to the capital Tashkent. Since the hostages were released by accepting ransom clearly indicates that IMU had no serious political intentions.

The explanation that the IMU was helping covertly the Taliban, who were vigorously trying to wipe out the Northern-Alliance in Afghanistan, seemingly appears to be more logical. The timing of the incursions supports this view. The Northern-Alliance mostly relied on assistance supplied through Central Asian states, specifically Tajikistan. It appears that IMU guerrillas were enforcing the success of Taliban’s big offensive against Northern-Alliance by trying specifically to destabilize the southern frontiers of Central Asian region. The Taliban had already captured strategically important supply routes to Ahmad Shah Masoud’s forces particularly via Tajikistan. The disruption of supply routes through Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to Northern Alliance’s forces could have certainly helped in Taliban’s offensive. This view could have been held true in entirety, had the rebel’s offensive continued throughout the winter or until

---

54. Svante E.Cornell “Narcotics, Radicalism, and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” op.cit. p.586
the Taliban defeated Masoud completely. So this logic also fails to cover the hypothesis completely.

The ready acceptance of ransom by the rebels for the release of hostages, going back to Afghanistan after 1999 incursions, and resuming the same again in 2000 when Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan’s military forces were comparatively in a much higher state of alertness and readiness, suggests that there were certain other objectives behind the rebel’s activities. The nature of insurgencies, the geographical areas targeted, and the timings of the operations seem to indicate that the driving motivation was to destabilize border areas in order to maintain and secure narcotics transportation routes. General Bolot Djanuzakov, Secretary of the Kyrgyz Security Council, stated: “The guerrillas main aim was to expand drug trafficking routes to the north through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The routes through Batken are the shortest.” The highway linking – Khorog, situated on the Tajik-Afghan border, and Osh, the largest city in the south of Kyrgyzstan – was the major transit route for drugs in Central Asia in the late 1990s. The Kyrgyz government, aided by the United Nations Drug Control Programme, identified Osh as the major drug transshipment point and took several measures to limit the smuggling through this route. Besides Khorog-Osh route, the traffickers found a new route through Batken, whereby drug crossed from Jirgatal and Garm in Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan. The two armed incursions were launched from Jirgatal and Tavildara, the strongholds of IMU, which lay along this route.

This region suited the traffickers because of its mountainous character and remoteness. The existence of Vorukh and Sokh enclaves as well as smaller enclaves

such as Qalacha and Khalimion areas in Kyrgyzstan, administered by Uzbekistan, and Choruku, administered by Tajikistan, were of particular interest to the traffickers. These enclaves suffer from power vacuum as they are not located in the states legally administering them, which, therefore, are unable to exert strong government authority there. All this makes these enclaves major centres of illegal drug activity.\footnote{69}

The incursions of 1999 and 2000 took place barely after a month of the last opium harvest in Afghanistan. The launching of incursions by small group of fighters into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan can be seen as diversionary measures to create instability, confuse law enforcement agencies, and military structure, and thus facilitating use of several mountain passes for drug trafficking. There has emerged an increasing consensus that the IMU was strongly involved in the drug trafficking from Afghanistan towards Osh in Kyrgyzstan, to be further shipped north-west probably with the help of trafficking networks. Bolot Djanuzakov, head of the Kyrgyz Security Council, asserted in 2000 that the IMU controlled the majority, perhaps up to 70 per cent, of the heroine entering Kyrgyzstan.\footnote{60} Drug control experts concurred with this figure. Ralf Mutschke, of the Criminal Intelligence Directorate of Interpol, labeled the IMU a “hybrid organisation in which criminal interests often take priority over political goals, adding that, IMU leaders have vested interests in ongoing unrest and instability in their area in order to secure the routes they use for the transportation of the drugs.”\footnote{61} Regional crime expert,

\footnote{59} Ibid

\footnote{60} “Narcotic Flood Threatens to Wash Away Central Asian Stability” \textit{Times in} Svante E. Cornell

“Narcotics, Radicalism, and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” \textit{op. cit.} p.589

\footnote{61} Ralf Mutschke “The Threat posed by the Convergence of Organized Crime, Drugs Trafficking and Terrorism” Testimony to the Sub Committee on Crime of the Judiciary Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, December 2000. Also Testimony to the Same Hearing of Donnie R. Marshall, Drug Enforcement Administration Administrator, \url{http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terrors/00131213d.htm}
Tamara Makarenko has noted that:

The primary motivation of the IMU, under the leadership of military commander Juma Namangani were criminal. Since 1999 the IMU was predominantly under the control of Namangani. Although he has been described as a “born again” Muslim, there are no indications that he was a strict Muslim with any associated allegiances. On the contrary, prior to dedicating his life to the IMU, it is believed that Namangani was involved in the drugs trade. As such, under his leadership, it is not surprising that the IMU was focused on securing its role as a leading trafficker of opiates into the Central Asia.

So it can be said that the upsurge in IMU activity in Central Asia appears partly for money from drug trafficking needed to run the organisation, and to create destabilization in the short run.

The possibility of the intentions of rebels capturing the mountainous and impoverished south-western Kyrgyzstan around Batken region, favourably inclined towards Islamic fundamentalism, from where they could get recruits cannot be ruled out. According to Ahmed Rashid, the rebels apparently had planned to establish basis in the Ferghana Valley in order to gather recruits and wage a protracted insurgency against the Uzbek government; but because of the largest military strength of Uzbekistan amongst the Central Asian states, the fruition of this idea appeared difficult.

Whatever may be the motivation of the IMU in launching these incursions, but certainly, it has exposed the weaknesses of the affected Central Asian states and the damaging potential it possesses. No doubt, they could not achieve their goal of establishing a Caliphate with skirmishes of such a minor scale, but they gave a clarion call to the Central Asian states to shore up their defences, and act collectively to ward off any possible future desperate action of IMU. The things would have had been different, had there been no Operation Enduring Freedom, an attack led by the United

---

62. Svante E. Cornell “Narcotics, Radicalism, and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” op.cit. p. 590.
States and its allies against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In a speech to Congress on September 20, 2001 President Bush identified IMU as one of the terrorist movements, having connections with Osama bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda network. The regional and Western intelligence sources estimated the number of IMU militants in the range of 3000-5000 at that juncture. Even the pegged IMU militants at lower level were capable enough to overwhelm the ill-equipped and poorly trained Central Asian militaries. The IMU seemed ready to create violent and unstable situations in Central Asia, as persisted in Afghanistan, with potentially disastrous consequences. The United States intervention in Afghanistan brought about a change. The IMU’s military commander, Namangani, was reportedly killed in November 2001 during the US bombing in the Mazar-i-sharif, and its political leader, Yuldashev, fled to Waziristan in Pakistan. The defeat of the Taliban weakened the power of IMU by the depletion of its infrastructure and manpower. To some extent, its diminished strength had a beneficial effect on the security of the Central Asian states. However, the United States failed to obliterate the IMU completely. General Tomy Franks, Commander in-Chief of the Central Command of the United States army, stated in February 2002 that United States led anti-terrorist operation had failed to eliminate the threat to Uzbekistan from IMU completely and warned that the threat from the terrorist group is still alive: “I believe the IMU could cause tension and danger and we will do everything we can to stop the fighters of this movement.”

The fears of recovery of IMU became brighter with the statement of Kyrgyz Deputy Interior Minister, Rasulberdi Raimberdiyev, on May 12, 2003 in Osh that IMU was involved in the bomb explosions in Bishkek’s Dordoy market on December 27, 2002, and the Osh currency exchange office on May 8, 2003. On May 6, 2003 the US State Department, expressing concern that Islamic groups could attack American nationals or its interests in Kyrgyzstan, stated: “The US government has learnt that the IMU has become increasingly active in Central Asia.” First Deputy Interior Minister of


178
Uzbekistan, Bkhadir Matliubov, expressed in an interview to the Russian news agency Nezavisimaya Gazeta on July 29, 2003 that “followers of radical Islamist organisations (were) spread to all countries of Central Asia after the defeat of the Taliban.”

Events such as explosions in Bukhara and Uzbekistan’s capital Tashkent, killing over 44 people, led to the belief that IMU was still alive. On July 30, 2004 explosions took place in a suicide bomber attacks outside the United States and Israeli embassies in Tashkent killing 6 people. Some of the terrorist incidents having IMU involvement are:

- Bomb attacks against the Ministry of Emergency Situations in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on 31 January and 12 June, 2005
- 25 January, 2006: armed attack on prison in an attempt to free a prisoner (having ties with the IMU) resulting in the death of the chief of the detention centre in Kairakum, Tajikistan; 12 May, 2006: IMU members were involved in armed attacks on border and custom posts in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

All this suggests that IMU is still active, although it may not present a military threat to the regimes of Central Asian states but presently, nevertheless, it is likely to remain ‘a disruptive but manageable force in the region’. The public support that the IMU once enjoyed, has to some extent waned because of its violent approach, and its place has been taken by Hizb-ut-Tahrir, gaining strength at the expense of IMU. There are certain other factors which are favourable to IMU, although it has depleted strength of scattered fighters at present. The IMU’s active engagement in drug smuggling, because of increasing production of opium in Afghanistan, may give it access to funds that could help to rebuild its military strength. Unless the source of funding of IMU activities is dried up, the threat to the region’s stability remains intact. Moreover, the statement of Yuldashev, made at the fifth anniversary of the terrorist act in New York on September 11, 2001, supports this apprehension; Yuldashev maintains that IMU has not

67. Zeyno Baran “Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency” op.cit. p.76
given up and would not give up. He further states:

The Mujahedin haven’t forgotten the Moslems executed in Andijan last year. We will avenge Moslems in Central Asia or in Russia. We insist that all regimes in the region put an end to the practice of persecution of Moslems, the practice of harassment and terror------Karimov, Rakhmonov and Bakiyev had better remember------that they will be punished for the crimes they are committing. 69

The statement indicates that IMU remains committed to its ideology. In June 2001, it changed its name to the Islamic Party of Turkestan, thus expanding its original goal of establishing an Islamic state not only in Uzbekistan but in the whole of Central Asia and including China’s Xinjiang province.

ISLAMIST EXTREMISM: THE CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The long seventy years of Soviet rule left a distinctive influence on Islam in Central Asia. It transformed itself due to the moderation process carried out with a high literacy rate, gender equality in education and employment opportunities. It inculcated secular and modern values and non-prohibitive life style. The religiosity is more prevalent in sedentary and rural people than urban and nomadic ones, and even in sedentary areas Sufism rather than orthodox Islam largely influence the religious practices. The political, social, and economic landscape of the region has changed after independence which makes Islam vulnerable to extremist forces, slowly gathering momentum. But the moot question is, that despite the moderate orientation of Islam in Central Asia, what facilitates the spread and growth of militant Islam? In fact, there are two factors, external as well as internal that have contributed to its strength.

Internal Factors

Central Asia has been facing a wide range of social, political and economic problems. Various explanations, centred around economic and political situations, have been advanced to explain the development of radical extremism. Vitaly Naumkin, leading authority on Islam in Central Asia, has noted: “Poverty, unemployment, relative deprivation, social inequality, the collapse of the welfare system, corruption and harsh authoritarianism have created fertile ground for converting new members to the ranks of Islamic radicals who offer simple solutions to everyday problems.”70 Further discussion will be carried out to find the extent to which these factors contribute to the spread of extremism.

Socio-Economic Factors

In the West, a repeated claim is made that the militant Islam in Central Asia is the product of poor socio-economic conditions prevailing there. Richard A. Boucher, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs stated before the United States Congress: “Central Asia faces numerous threats to its stability, including Islamic extremism, a population that remains poor and has little economic opportunity, the post-Soviet legacy of authoritarianism, public perceptions of injustice and high levels of corruption.”71

Ferghana Valley is one of the most unstable regions of Central Asia and happens to be the hub of radical Islamic activities. The region is relatively poor, and the Central Asian governments have failed to create economic opportunities to remove poverty and destitution from the area. Jorabekov of the Kyrgyz government agency for religious affairs, pointed out: “The Ferghana Valley is the most densely populated region in the world. The paucity of land and social problems provide fertile ground for religious

---


71. Ibid.
extremism to emerge."72 This proves the hypothesis that poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment give birth to extremism. It is a fact that the governments have failed to alleviate poverty on which extremism thrives, yet the hypothesis that only the economic deprivation is an incubator of Islamic extremism does not stand scrutiny to existing realities. The city of Khojand (or Khojent) in Tajikistan is far poorer than any other city in either Uzbek or Kyrgyz parts of the Ferghana Valley, but it has not produced the same level of extremism.73 Saudi Arabia is one of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East but the Saudis are, nevertheless, the strongest protagonists of Islamic radicalism. Poverty in itself does not nurture extremism, rather creates circumstances by which the disgruntled and frustrated poor are tempted to become criminals and terrorists. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, stated in the report ‘In Larger Freedom’: “While poverty and denial of human rights may not be said to ‘cause’ civil war, terrorism or organized crime, they all greatly increase the risk of instability and violence.”74 Although it becomes incumbent on the governments to address the issue of removal of poverty, yet automatically it can not be construed to have solved the problem of extremism.

**Political Participation and Repression**

The veracity of the hypothesis, that authoritarianism and repression is a direct cause of Islamic radicalism, is discussed. It is argued that when the medium of expression of discontent, and political activity are prohibited, and option of an alternative rule is ruled out, then the opposition-minded young individuals are driven into the lapse of radical groups because that remains the only alternative to them. But this hypothesis, though appears to have some merit, does not express fully the ground realities. Southern Kyrgyzstan, having a relatively liberal political atmosphere as compared to

73. Baran, Zeyno, S.Frederick Starr and Svante E.Cornell “Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU” op.cit. p.43.
Uzbekistan, has seen more growth of radicalism than that in Uzbekistan. There is no link between repression and Islamic radicalism can be borne out from the fact that in Iraq religious extremism entered after the demise of the authoritarian rule of Saddam Hussain. Although there is authoritarian/repressive regime in Turkmenistan, yet the rise of militant Islam is bare minimum there as compared to other Central Asian states. So it can not be generalized that repression/authoritarianism is the only cause for the growth of militant Islam.

The argument that relative power deprivation, neglect of regional intelligentsia in sharing power in the governance creates opposition to the ruling regimes and ultimately evolves into Islamic extremism, is not tenable. The Tajikistan civil war ended by entering into peace agreement on sharing of power between warring factions but did not result in the spread of Islamic extremism – confirming the above assertion.

**Drugs-Crime, Radical Islamists Nexus**

There is a close link between drug traffickers, criminal groups in general and radical Islamists. Their activities mutually reinforce their interests. But it is far from clear that drug trafficking and criminality is the cause for the spread of radical Islamism. However, it is undeniable that IMU has been widely engaged in major drug dealing enterprises and has close links with those groups in Central Asia. The worldwide scenario has changed and so too in Central Asia. The traditional division of non-state armed groups – the ideological and the criminal – which are of mutually exclusive ideal types do not exist. Shirin Akiner, a known Central Asian scholar, puts forward his explanation how proliferation of the drug trade and religious extremism are connected with each other: “What exactly the cause for this militancy? Well, I think there are two extremes. At one extreme certainly there is Islamic radicalism. At the other extreme there is drug smuggling and organized crime------- some people may both be drug smugglers and extremely devoted Muslims. Some people may be more inclined to use whatever methods there are at their disposal to spread Islam. Others may be interested simply in using Islam to further their criminal activities. I think we simply do not know where to draw the boundary.”

---

75 V.Nagendra Rao “Religious Extremism in Central Asia: Towards a Conceptualization” op.cit. p. 114
is clearly visible in the activities of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. IMU needs funds to carry out its protracted movement. So it becomes incumbent for the movement to add anchors to its support base. S.C. Cornell states: “The organisation or movement either gradually shifts its nature to a predominantly criminal one or acquires a criminal nature alongside its ideological nature. Profit through crime, and often specifically the drug trade, becomes a motivation in its own right for the existence and cohesion of the movement.”

Religious Oppression

There is a dialectical relationship between increasing extremism and religious oppression. According to one view, the state repression of Islam increases mobilization of Islam and Islamic groups. The Central Asian regimes put restrictions on the observance of religious practices and resort to repression to justify their aggressive policies. Anybody who acts against the state sponsored Islam is considered an enemy of the state. M. B.Olcott, in a testimony before the United States Committee on International Relations, stated that in Central Asia, “Many people jailed for treason or sedition have been guilty of little more than wearing Islamic clothes or having a beard…….” Thus it is alleged that the shortsighted policies of the ruling regimes are creating fertile ground for the growth of radical Islamists movements. Contrary to this view, the regimes of Central Asia forward the plea that they have to resort to repressive policies to stem the creation of Caliphate. The most active radical groups Adolat and Islam Lashkarlari started operations in the Namangan region immediately after independence. The Uzbekistan government waited to take any decisive action. In the meantime, the radicals arrested the local Mayor and assumed powers of governance ordering people to observe Sharia laws. They tortured people under the pretext of fighting alcoholism, and Adolat members were accused of burning the houses of local Jews and attacking women wearing ‘un-Islamic’ clothing. The Uzbekistan government was forced to quell these unlawful activities of the groups ascertaining that repression was the consequence of the

---

76. Svante E.Cornell “Narcotics, Radicalism, and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” op.cit. p.582.
77. V.Nagendra Rao “Religious Extremism in Central Asia: Towards a Conceptualization” op.cit. p.115
radical acts of Islamist organisations. So it is difficult to draw a line between cause and consequence of repression on militant Islam.

**External Factors**

*Outside Influence on Religion*

During the Soviet period, most of the time, Central Asia remained closed to the outside influence. In the later period, it was opened a bit. After independence the situation changed, contacts with the outside Muslim world started growing. The region received funds from outside, especially Saudi Arabia, to build mosques and propagate Wahhabi version of Islam. Zeyno Baran states: “The radical Islamists were most concerned with fighting the Sufis, their archenemy. Since many Central Asians did not know about their culture and identity, it was essential for the radicals to prevent the rekindling of this tolerant form of Islam in order to achieve their own goals. For Sufis, Jihad is an internal striving for personal spiritual purification, while for Wahhabis, it represents the struggle for the worldwide victory of Islam. Therefore, to get Central Asian Muslims to join their causes ---- radical Islamist movements wanted to eliminate any traces of Sufism and focus primarily on politicized Islam.”

*Spillover Effect of Afghanistan*

The influence of Islam started creeping in Central Asia from 1980s, when thousands of Central Asian Muslims recruited in the Red Army, were sent to fight the Afghan Islamist warriors; some of the Muslim soldiers, impressed by the Mujahideen devotion to Islam, deserted the army and joined the Mujahideen to fight the Soviet army. The 1978-89 was a period when Islamic militants fought and defeated the pro-Soviet government. It was followed by years of civil war that ended with the capture of power by the Taliban in 1996. Afghanistan emerged as a safe haven for the global Islamic militant movements and the centre of regional Islamic networks linked to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The ideology (Wahhabism) followed by them influenced the Islamic oriented segments of Central Asian populations. The time was propitious for its spread in Central Asia. The Islamic radicals from abroad provided an extremely effective

---

78. Zeyno Baran “Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency” op.cit. pp. 73-74
mobilizing ideology of Wahhabism to fill the gap created by collapse of value system of communism and socialism and the failure of liberalism and democracy to provide answers to region’s profound problems. The Taliban provided Central Asian militants access to terrorist and guerrilla training camps to enable them to wage jihad for the establishment of Caliphate. Central Asia’s long porous border with Afghanistan facilitates Islamic radicals to sneak into Central Asia and indulge in propaganda and acts of sabotage.

After 9/11 event, during the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan Taliban were defeated. Their infrastructure was smashed, and were compelled to seek haven in Pakistan bordering Afghanistan. It appeared that Al-Qaeda and Taliban are decimated to the extent that they would be incapable of resurgence in the foreseeable future. But the reverse has happened. The Taliban have managed to regroup and reorganize themselves. The Taliban by all accounts have established a viable territorial foothold in Federally Administered Tribal Area of Pakistan, bordering Afghanistan. The radicals are having a free run in the area. The Sharia law has been imposed by the Taliban. Girls are forbidden from going to schools and children from learning mathematics, science and English. Religious indoctrination for the young has been introduced at various levels. Talibanisation phenomenon is spreading even to the settled districts of North Western Frontier Province – Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu and Tank. In Peshawar also, the influence of Taliban is being felt. Dwelling upon the deteriorating situation in this area and its impact on Pashtun society, Sushant Sareen states: “The entire face of the Pashtun society is changing. The Pashtun society is becoming increasingly arab-ised. Never during the two decades and more of the Afghan jihad against the Soviets and during the internecine fighting between the various Mujahideen groups was suicide bombing a factor. But today, young Pashtuns are lining up to blow themselves up. This is a massive change in the Pashtun culture. Suicide attacks are seen as a legitimate tactic in the fight against the infidels. What is more scary is that the deaths of these young men are celebrated by their families! This trend is also sweeping through rural Punjab and helping in the Talibanisation of the entire region.”

The terrorist activities have upsurged in Pakistan, even Benazir Bhutto became the victim of its violence, indicating the gravity

---

of the situation. Ultimately Frankenstein monsters, Al-Qaeda and Taliban, have started devouring their own master, Pakistan. The entrenchment of Al-Qaeda and Taliban is fraught with danger not only for Afghanistan, Pakistan and coalition forces but for the whole world, and more particularly the neighbouring countries.

In the present globalised world, crisis no longer remain confined to the place of their origin but have spillover effect on near and distant lands. The seemingly irretrievable situation in Afghanistan, Pan-Islamic ideology of the Taliban, the participation of IMU well trained fighters in Taliban movements forebode ill of the impending danger to Central Asia. In October 2007, North Atlantic Treaty Organization Defence Minister’s conference was held, it concluded that: “The insurgency has years to run.” The ultimate stand of the West in this regard will have a great bearing to the situation in Afghanistan. It is very difficult to predict at this stage because of the involvement of many improbables. But the fact remains that the withdrawal of US-led coalition forces without finding any amicable solution to the imbroglio in Afghanistan will have widespread consequences.

The internal and external factors that may be instrumental in producing Islamic extremism have been discussed so far. The internal factors – such as poverty, unemployment, political and religious oppression, drug trafficking, authoritarian rule stymieing expression of discontent, regional disparities in sharing power and non-redressal of widespread grievances – cannot alone give birth to extremism unless they are coupled with external factors in the form of import of militant ideology (Wahhabism). Islamic extremism and terrorism cannot develop without outside influence, support (material or otherwise) and abetment. The internal factors provide propitious ground for the spread of extremism. Without the coordination of internal as well as external factors there is a rare possibility of incubation of Islamic extremism.

---

80. A.G. Noorani 2008 “Grounded Realities” Hindustan Times January 15: Chandigarh p. 10
RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM IN CENTRAL ASIA: POSSIBILITY OF SPREAD

There are certain factors which provide powerful obstacles for the spread of religious extremism in Central Asia. These can be narrated as:

- The Islam practiced in Central Asia is traditional. It is neither puritanical nor fundamentalist. The great majority of political and economic elites, as well as traditional Muslim establishments are opposed even to fundamentalist Islam, not to mention of militant Islam. They view it as a challenge to their position and influence.
- Society in Central Asia is divided on the basis of ethnic, clan and regional lines, which stands against the concept of religious fundamentalism.
- Wahhabi style fundamentalism is considered as non-indigenous, Arabic form of Islam, that is different from Central Asia’s Turko-Persian traditions.
- Unlike Afghanistan, the Central Asian region, with the partial exception of Tajikistan, is under one central command, and have been able to maintain internal order by and large. Warlords virtually are non-existent, with a little bit exception of Tajikistan, who could challenge the central authority in exercise of their powers.

All these factors may not be complete antidote to the growth of extremism. Only a fraction of population indulges in extremism, whereas a great majority are desirous to lead a peaceful stable life steeped in old traditions. The people are made to join the ranks of extremism either due to fear or economic compulsions. The situation in Afghanistan and tribal belt of Pakistan strengthens this point. Elections were held in Pakistan on 18 February, 2008. Terrorist outfits like Al-Qaeda and Taliban have deep roots in Pakistan tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. In the election, most of the candidates sympathizing with the extremist forces have been rejected by the electorate in these areas, establishing that the great majority have no sympathy for them. In spite of this, there is no respite in the terrorist activities in Pakistan. In an incident on March 2, 2008 an anti-Al-Qaeda meeting of tribal elders in Darra Adam Khel was attacked by suicide bombers.
leading to the death of 40 persons. So it is conclusively proved that only miniscule of population are engaged in extremist activities, rejecting the view that it needs mass support for its perpetuation and execution. Thus it is fallacious to conclude that because of the presence of moderate and syncretic form of Islam practiced by majority of population, there would be no religious extremist threat in Central Asia.

Before September 11, 2001 sword of damocles hanged over Central Asian countries; they were faced with a constant possibility of the march of Taliban troops northward to support terrorist forces in Central Asia. With the defeat of the Taliban and presence of the United States and its allied forces in Afghanistan, the chances of Taliban moving towards Central Asia almost receded. But with the resurgence of Taliban and ineffectiveness of Karzai regime in Afghanistan, the scope of terrorist activities in Central Asia has increased. So a renewed terrorist threat, not a threat of ground forces, is looming large over Central Asia.

REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION

Islamic terrorism and extremism have global dimensions. Global and regional cooperation is essential to tackle them effectively. The Central Asian countries are weak in military strength and lack self protection capabilities. So what’s called for, is the regional security mechanism to guarantee peace against terrorist and extremist forces. An attempt has been made to meet these objectives at the regional level through Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

Collective Security Treaty Organisation

In 1992, a Collective Security Treaty was signed within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The treaty did not spell out any particular threat which could emerge in the post-Soviet era, but was based on the perception of possible external threats.

---

aggression from outside the CIS territory. Art. 4 of the treaty maintains: “If one of the member states is attacked from the side of another state or a group of states this will be regarded as aggression against all other member states of the present treaty.” The members of the treaty were Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Moldova, Turkmenistan and Ukraine did not join the treaty. Its sole purpose was defence from foreign aggression, and there was no mention of measures that the group as a whole would take to combat terrorism, religious fundamentalism or separatism.

The threat perception in the region was changed in 1999. Uzbekistan withdrew from the treaty the same year and became the member of GUUAM, a US supported group of countries – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. In October 2002, Collective Security Treaty was transformed into Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) on the Russian initiative. It ceased to be a forum for military cooperation only, rather became an institution. The CSTO got a boost when Uzbekistan rejoined it on June 23, 2006. The CSTO pledges to fight against terrorism. It has opened up an anti-terrorist centre with local branch in Bishkek. The centre gathers data regarding local terrorists and organisations; and further, the treaty itself ensures support in the event of aggression.

The February 1999 bombings in Tashkent and event in Batken clearly proved that the security system in the region was lacking in effectiveness. It was realized that prevalent, neither national nor regional defence mechanism, could provide protection from well organized and well equipped extremists. Terrorists are invisible enemies and the present security system, that was in place, would not be sufficient enough to deal with them. It was identified that terrorism, separatism and religious extremism are their chief priorities and certain structures – Collective Security Rapid Response Force for Central Asia and an anti-terrorism centre – were set up to achieve the desired goals. It is a well known fact that Central Asian armies need modern weapons and communication technology, which could be procured from Russia. The CSTO will be successful to meet its desired goals if the Central Asian states place aside their mutual political,

---

economic and border problems, and work whole heartedly and collectively for its success; and take measures to retard the growth of drug trafficking, terrorism and other criminal activities at their respective state levels.

**Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a regional organisation comprising four of the Central Asian states – Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan along with Russia and China – came into being in June 2001 as an institution to address the new security challenges being faced by the region. Apart from declared objectives of “encouraging effective cooperation among the member states in political, economic and trade, scientific and technological, cultural, educational, energy, communications and environmental fields,” it also signaled commitment of the member states to fight three axis of evil defined as “terrorism, separatism and extremism.” After years of pioneering discussion amongst the member states, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) was established in 2004 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The thirty members RATS staff included seven each from China and Russia, six from Kazakhstan, five from Uzbekistan, three from Kyrgyzstan and two from Tajikistan. The activities of RATS are mandated to be developed in the collection of a shared data bank on terrorists, separatists and other extremist organisations regarding their structures, leaders, members, operation channels and financial resources, helpful to conduct operations against them. The effectiveness of RATS depends upon the quantity and quality of information contributed by its members.

Information communication technology has become a global information system. There is a possible danger of using information communication technology for criminal, terrorist and military purposes, inimical to the maintenance of peace and security. The

---

SCO member states identifying this danger, decided in SCO summit on 15 June, 2006: to establish an international information security expert group to formulate a plan of action and to find ways and means to solve problems concomitant to international information security. In annual summit of SCO on 16 August, 2007, an action plan to ensure international information security was approved.\textsuperscript{85}

There are certain glaring characteristics to be worth noting regarding the draft of SCO convention:

- There is no explicit agenda for military modernization. The Central Asian states are much below internationally accepted standards in both military know-how and material inputs; to increase their efficiency and to overcome the most basic shortcomings, outside help is required.
- The SCO is not a defence pact. The organisation has never characterized itself as a military alliance comparable to the former Warsaw pact, NATO or even the CSTO.

Although SCO members have repeatedly denied any plan to transform this group in a defence alliance, yet the security component of the organisation has been moving with an alarming speed. Initially, the SCO had set up a moderate Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure for information exchange and joint training of national security services. Two years later, a Defence Ministers Council was set up to seek cooperation between the Defence Ministries of the member states. Earlier in 2007, Russia circulated a draft agreement to formalize closer military ties amongst the SCO states. After initial hesitation, China is wearing around to Moscow’s proposal to establish a partnership between the SCO and the CSTO, strictly a military alliance. Chinese Ambassador to Russia, Liu Guchang said in a run up to the Bishkek summit 2007: “I think the SCO and the CSTO can and must cooperate.” The CSTO Secretary-General, Nikolai Bordyuzha,

had also announced: “The two organisations would shortly sign a protocol on cooperation.”

All the member states apply militarized approach to combat these new threats – terrorism, separatism and extremism. SCO has involved itself in military exercises on ways to combat anti-terrorist or similar activities. In 2002, a China-Kyrgyzstan joint border security exercise involving hundreds of troops on each side were conducted. In 2002, multilateral exercises in eastern Kazakhstan and Xinjiang in western China with over 1000 personnel representing all SCO members except Uzbekistan were held. Again in 2005, large Chinese-Russian exercise and in 2006, multilateral exercise – East Anti-terror 2006 – were held.

Peace Mission 2007 war games to show military muscle were held in Chelyabinsk region of Russia in western Siberia. It was a week long anti-terrorist drill in which about 6000 soldiers, more than 1000 combat vehicles and scores of aircraft practiced combat skills. The idea of the Peace Mission 2007 – freeing a town captured by terrorists – was based on the 2005 armed revolt in Uzbekistan, when radical Islamists captured provincial capital Andijan for several hours. Russian President Putin said: “The Peace Mission 2007 war games were part of a joint system of rapid reaction to regional threats that is being set up to enhance the SCO potential in the sphere of security.”

The SCO cooperative activities – by way of frequent trans-border military exercises and formation of RATS – with the object of ensuring security in the region have been successful in curbing internal dissent, but so far has not shown any worthwhile results in suppressing Islamic extremism. The effectiveness of SCO measures is doubtful as is evident from the Andijan revolt 2005. P. Stobdan has stated:

88. Vladimir Radyuhin “Setting up SCO as a Counter to NATO” op.cit.
The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure established in Tashkent in 2004 failed to act when Hizb-ut-Tahrir and IMU struck in Andijan in May 2005.\textsuperscript{89}

**ISLAMIST EXTREMISM: INDIA AND CENTRAL ASIA**

The emergence of Islamic extremism and terrorism based on the concept of *Ummah* transcending all national boundaries with the aim of creating turmoil for the establishment of Caliphate is posing the gravest challenge to the preservation of secularism, culture and civilization, both in India and Central Asia. It has been creating a great obstacle for the functioning of pluralistic social order, maintenance of inter-religious harmony and in the construction of secular and democratic polity in the region, as it is viewed as ‘un-Islamic’ by the radicals.

Islamic extremism presently pose a great challenge to the stability and security of India. The Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has been suffering on account of the activities of Islamic extremists, terrorists and foreign mercenaries since 1989. All these activities have been carried out in a pre-determined phased manner.

The first phase comprised of decrying the present system and creating a propitious atmosphere for a change. The ground was created amongst the people to carry out extremist activities by the dissemination of fundamentalist Wahhabi ideology, imported from outside through a well funded network of Jammat-e-Islami institutions, mosques, madrassas and through placards bearing their literature in mohallas and streets throughout the valley. The purpose was to decry Indian system of multi-ethnic secular democracy and development works as ‘un-Islamic’. They criticized the richness and benefits of economic development going into the pockets of corrupt Muslims comprising a class serving the interests of bureaucrats, politicians, big contractors and businessmen. The Wahhabi and Jammat-e-Islami ideologues offer to people egalitarianism and delivery of quick justice through the establishment of government based upon Sharia law.

The second phase started in the destruction of indigenous culture and tolerant view of Islam in the valley. In the mid-1988 Allahwale (the Islamic fundamentalist group based in northern India) along with Jammat-e-Islami held a conference in

Srinagar. The Muslim delegates from various parts of India and from some West Asian countries participated in it. The delegates emphasized on the doctrinal purity of Islam and the inexorability of carrying out Jihad. Hundreds of local Kashmiri Muslim Imams (believer of tolerant view of Islam) were replaced by Imams from Allahwale group subscribing to fundamentalist views for religious indoctrination. So a wide network of mosques was taken over by the extremists to spread their ideology and prepare Kashmiri Muslims for Jihad. How the Islamic transformation wage jihad has been well elucidated in a report titled ‘The New Islamist International’, prepared by the United States Republican Research Committee: “Kashmir was the only area in India where, as of the mid-1980s, Islamic revivalism had ‘taken a radical political stance’ and where, the slogans of the Islamic state have been publicly raised and had been received with growing popularity. The population was increasingly adopting the leadership of Jama’at-i- Islami of Pakistan and Komeynists.” Two events of 1979, revolution in Iran and Soviet armed intervention in Afghanistan has had a great impact on the Muslims in the valley. The former produced in them the sense of rightness of Islamic ideology, whereas the latter exhorted them to work unitedly to face the looming threat over the Islamic countries. In a few years time, that is by mid-1980s, Kashmiri Muslim culture and faith in secularism was overtaken by fundamentalist ideology. The two movements of Jammat-e-Islami and Aljihad – the latter a clandestine organisation, being influenced by the ideology of Iranian revolution – emerged as strong rallying point amongst the people.

Various Islamist militant groups sprang up which sought to Islamcize the socio-political set up in the valley. A campaign was launched to clean the valley of un-Islamic elements. The extremist organisations such as Hizbul-Mujahideen, Jamait-ul-Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Ansar, Lashkar-e-Toiaba waged a religious crusade against the non-Muslim minorities and took pride in killing them. A systematic malicious campaign

---


against the Kashmiri Hindus was launched by the extremists through sermons in mosques and periodic write-ups in local newspapers; and ultimately on April 14,1990 an ultimatum was given to them to leave the valley within two days or face destruction and death. The entire community of about 3,50000 was forced out of their homes with 1000 members brutally murdered. Houses belonging to Kashmiri Pandits, educational, cultural and religious institutions, their business establishments were either burnt or destroyed with the purpose of effacing the cultural identity of non-Muslim minority in Kashmir and to create mono-ethnic Islamist political order.2

Another sinister design of the terrorists was to destroy the composite socio-cultural set up and secular polity in Kashmir. Islamists tried to bring the media under their control, Hizbul-Mujahideen ordered national Jammu newspapers to stop their circulation in Kashmir Valley. Some militant organisations forced through terror the local newspapers to highlight their activities. Offices of daily newspapers such as Aftab, Alsaia and Srinagar Times came under bomb attacks and even set on fire. Some media persons, who refused to toe the militant line, were gunned down. They included prominent persons: Mohammad Shaban Vakil, editor of Alsaia and Lassa Kaul, Station Director of Doordarshan. So the coercive methods of militant groups forced the newspapers to project the Islamist viewpoint on society, politics and governance as superior to corrupt and anarchic practices of democracy and secularism, and thus jeopardized their independent working. To thwart the process of restoration of democracy and to destroy the established political structures in the state many political activists, belonging to the secular and liberal section of Muslim society, were killed. The Amir of Lashkar-e-Toiba, Hafiz Mohammad Khan said: “Democracy is among the menaces we inherited---- these are all useless practices and part of the system we are fighting against. God gives us a chance we will try to bring in the pure concept of Islamic Caliphate.” The Islamist groups Jammat-e-Islami and Jamait-Ahl-e-Hadith made all efforts to force local Muslims to abjure traditional social and religious practices prevalent amongst them such as visiting ancient holy shrines of Sufis and Rishis, which was even resisted by the local people at their personal risk and damage to shrine.93

Geographical location and history have contributed greatly to make this region a single largest hub of Islamic terrorism as well as its major victim. Islamic zealots from all parts of Islamic world were brought to Pakistan with the connivance of the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to fight Soviet forces in Afghanistan. They were ready to die for the cause that they considered Islamic. They were provided funds, weapons and training in military, subversive and guerrilla activities. The geo-political and geo-strategic interests of Pakistan and Western powers converged and reigned supreme. Eventually the Soviet Union was made to retreat from Afghanistan, but in the process the Islamists got aware of the potential of jihad and forged multiplication effect of networking. Afghanistan got embroiled in civil war and saw the ascendancy of the Taliban that got full military back-up from Pakistan in training and weaponization. Ultimately, Afghanistan was converted into a breeding ground of Islamic terrorists with training bases and infrastructure support to extremists throughout the world. It gave impetus to the Islamic extremists to pursue its global agenda with impunity.

The Islamic extremists have evil designs of establishing an Islamic Caliphate running from Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan to Central Asia. Even the idea was discussed by the Islamic extremists groups after Soviet troops had withdrawn from Afghanistan, and Central Asian Republics emerged as independent states. The idea was echoed by the chief of Jammat-e-Islami Pakistan, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, who declared in Rawalpindi in February 1992 that “a great Islamic state, spreading from Kashmir to Central Asia would emerge after the independence of Kashmir.” Terrorism blended with Jihad is a big threat to the security of the region extending to the South and Central Asia. The situation in the region would have been different, had the United States and its allies not ended the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Masood Khalili, the ambassador of Afghanistan in India, stated in an interview to Delhi newspaper: “By end 2001, entire Afghanistan would have been captured by Taliban. By now most of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan would have been run over by Al-Qaeda. Afghanistan would have become a Khilafat (Caliphate), training and exporting 50,000 terrorists. The people

---

Presently, the threat of cross-border terrorism in South and Central Asia still persists. The greatest threat to the security of both the regions is especially from the terror camps being run on Pakistan-Afghanistan border by Al-Qaeda and Taliban, where religious outfits are well organized, interlinked and have the latest hardware and communicative equipment.96

Islamic extremism and terrorism is a grave international challenge claiming no boundaries. It is a long drawn out battle which can be won only by concerted, sincere and cooperative efforts of all nations, rising above political and strategic considerations. If it is not stemmed, it will have gigantic adverse effect in many regions and nations, creating instability and turmoil. It is a Frankenstein that kills the creator along with others. During the period 2000-mid 2001, Western countries including the United States viewed the Taliban as a legitimate authority in Afghanistan. Even Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had recognized the Taliban government. The silent majority of traditional, moderate and liberal Muslims, who adhere to the principle of tolerance and coexistence with other religions, need to assert and organize themselves so as to create a shield against Islamic extremism. In turn, the governments, particularly the secular ones, should lend them a helping hand.

CENTRAL ASIA AND INDIA: COOPERATION TO COMBAT TERRORISM

Taliban-Al-Qaeda nexus has disturbed peace in Central Asia and India. Both are victims of cross-border terrorism and Islamic extremism which have been posing a great threat to the stability and security of the region. These threats can be met by sustained and serious efforts on international, regional and bilateral levels. Therefore, cooperation from all these quarters is called for to fight this menace. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee


addressing the Millennium Summit at the United Nations in September 2000 stated:

Of the many other threats to peace, democracy and development, none has become as dangerous as international terrorism, with its links to religious extremism, drug trafficking and the commerce in illicit arms. Plural and open democracies are the target of the scourge of terrorism that strikes at the very root of tolerance, the mainstay of civil society in free world. The world must see the reality as it is. The acid test of sincerity of purpose is not words, but deeds. Terrorism and dialogue do not go together. Countries should cooperate and work closely to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons by adopting an International Programme of Action of Agreed Measures.

It is a logical consequence for India to have forged cooperation with Central Asian Republics to combat terrorism. External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha in a keynote address at the Third India-Central Asia conference in Tashkent, 2003 stated:

Unfortunately, both India and Central Asia have been victims of terror for a long time. Hizb-ut-Tahrir, IMU, Lashkar-e-Toiba and others who threaten Central Asia or India, represent a transnational threat. Terror-trained, financed and sponsored – is now striking globally with no desire to negotiate. The current circumstances are even more alarming when one considers the bumper drug crop and resurgence of Al-Qaeda and others. For us in the region, the concern is even greater because the epicentre of terror lies in our common neighbourhood. India is ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with its Central Asian neighbours in confronting an overcoming this menace.

India’s close historical, cultural and political ties since antiquity with Central Asia have been strengthened by friendly relations with the erstwhile Soviet Union. Both

India and Central Asia profess secularism, any threat to this ideology provides a firm foundation for mutual cooperation. A ground of cooperation was laid during the Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov’s visit to India in May 2000. Various agreements were signed during the visit that were concerned with combating terrorism. In fact, it indicated a common political understanding on ways and methods to combat terrorism. From the Indian point of view, it has been essential to contain the strategic depth of terrorism so as to avoid its additional pressure on Jammu and Kashmir. During the visit, a joint declaration on Principles of Cooperation was signed between India and Uzbekistan, which would form the basis for future relationship. The declaration has indicated the urgency felt by both the states to form joint front to counter the threat of terrorism in Central and South Asia. Apart from other agreements and extradition treaty, a legal assistance pact on criminal matters was also signed between the two countries. The visit of President Karimov has to be seen as a part of his effort to form coalition with like-minded countries to counter terrorist threat. Top specialist of the Institute of Strategic and Regional Studies of Uzbekistan said, “India is quite experienced in handling fundamentalism and religious extremism and since we are faced with identical problems, we will be glad to have the benefit of this knowledge.”

Uzbekistan is viewed as ‘a natural ally’ of India as is clear from the statement of President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov issued on 2 May, 2002 during his visit to India: “Afghanistan has become a hot bed and training ground of international terrorism. Such activities are absolutely unacceptable to us. We cannot accept the policies of certain countries supporting the Taliban.”

Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev visited India in April 1999. He expressed the seriousness of Islamic fundamentalist threat especially in its Osh region, situated in volatile Central Asia’s Ferghana Valley, which could serve as a bridge for the movement of religious extremism in the region, having the potential to destabilize the whole of Central Asia.

---


100. Ibid
From 2003 to 2005 India signed bilateral anti-terrorism agreements with Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, proposing setting up of Joint Counter-Terrorism Working Groups to share information input on terrorism and to crackdown on narcotics trafficking.

India has set up an air base at Ayni, 15 km from capital Dushanbe, which signifies India and Tajikistan’s intense cooperation. The Ayni airbase will station Indian trainer aircraft, which will be used for training the Tajik Air Force personnel under a 2002 defence cooperation agreement. The Ayni airbase is immensely useful for India’s security. The place, where it is situated, is close to areas where scores of camps for Jihadists and anti-India terrorist groups are based; India can keep an eye on them. Lack of intelligence was cited as one of the reasons of Pakistani incursions at Kargil in 1999. Indian air establishment at Ayni can keep a watch on this area. Otherwise also, it has a strategic importance vis-à-vis defence security from Pakistan.101

India can help Central Asian Republics in combating terrorism in the following manners:

- Activating joint working groups to counter terrorism with Central Asian Republics, to hold regular meetings, to share information, to devise effective mechanism and intensify cooperation in combating terrorism.
- By providing Central Asian paramilitary forces with arms and equipments, if necessary, to create mechanism of defence against infiltrators and terrorists.
- Intelligence information regarding terrorist groups, their camps and their activities are needed to be exchanged on regular basis so as to enable them to assess the impending terrorist threats and to take effective counter measures.

The security situation is extremely volatile: the Taliban’s resurgence with a vengeance, spurt in terrorist activities in Pakistan, deficient writ of Karzai government are all ominous portents; what’s required is sustained, cooperative and self effort to combat cross-border terrorist menace in the long run.

---